

high fantastical

it ain't been in vain for nothing...

deirdre burton ~ tom davis

dramatis personae

There are two ways of casting this play. The first, which is challenging for the actors, but more fun, and what the writers had in mind both for dynamic theatrical effect and to underscore the content, would be to have just two actors (one male and one female):

Male actor: Orlando and voice of Albert/Brecht/Clarence/Chronos/husband

Female actor: Rosalind/Virginia Woolf/Mnemosyne/wife

However, if the director prefers, it could be cast with six actors (three male and three female) in this way:

Male actor 1: Orlando, husband and voice of Albert

Male actor 2: Brecht and Clarence

Male actor 3: Chronos

Female actor 1: Rosalind and wife

Female actor 2: Virginia Woolf

Female actor 3: Mnemosyne

There are four songs. Recordings are attached. Backing tracks can be provided if required.

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synopsis

Orlando, a busking out of work actor, falls in love with Rosalind, an intense Shakespeare scholar. It is not going well. This is largely because the two characters are the invented playthings of Bertolt Brecht and Virginia Woolf. What happens when Mnemosyne (goddess of words and memory) and her brother Chronos (god of time) step in? We fast forward and see the possible plots that might have unfolded. No-one is satisfied with these. A more radical solution (love), is required, and manifests lightly.

characters

Orlando: a young, out of work actor, busking in Stratford upon Avon. Gauche and optimistic. Ready for Romance.

Albert (a skull): a ventriloquized voice of jokes and wisdom. Orlando's sidekick.

Brecht: the playwright. Sophisticated and Teutonic. Teams up with Virginia Woolf.

Clarence: the announcer at a bar, he introduces Rosalind when she sings.

Chronos: the god of time. Brother to Mnemosyne. Enigmatic and powerful

Husband: plays in different versions of what might happen to Orlando and Rosalind in middle age.

Rosalind: A young Shakespeare scholar by day. A singer in a bar by night. Looking for Romance.

Virginia Woolf: the novelist. Aristocratic and sharply observant. Teams up with Brecht.

Mnemosyne: the goddess of memory and language. Sister to Chronos. Superficially fluttery. Deeply powerful.

Wife: plays in different versions of what might happen to Orlando and Rosalind in middle age.

set

Set and props are designed to be minimal and simple. But feel free to go wild if it suits you better. Clothing and accessories are described in the script. Many things could simply be mimed.

Essentials: A Brechtian screen for projecting information - above head height.

A guitar.

A skull.

A couple of chairs

In the script, exits and entrances are kept to a minimum, since we're imagining two actors in tight turn-around action. Scene shifts are similarly not described in a naturalistic way. The director may decide to do things differently.

1 Literary critical blues

*The stage is bare except for a guitar case and, close to it, some colourful accessories (see *Rainy Tuesday Blues*). The screen (lowered only to above head height) is blank. A photo of BRECHT appears on screen plus his name and dates.*

BERTOLT BRECHT

1898-1956

Enter BERTOLT BRECHT in mac and cap (as in the famous photo on screen). He points a remote at the screen. His photo disappears and these words appear:

Stratford upon Avon. Summer 2006.

Early Tuesday morning. Not yet raining.

BERTOLT:

In Stratford upon Avon, on a grey Tuesday, an out of work actor is busking. He is expecting to make some money; expecting to spot a famous name or two; expecting, of course, that he will be seen by someone important. He is a confident musician; a spirited actor who has played some significant roles. He is somewhat surprised to find himself, temporarily, without a job.

BERTOLT takes off his mac and cap, goes over to the guitar case and turns into the busker. He noodles for a bit and then sings:

Woke up this morning

I got those literary critical blues

Woke up this morning

I got those literary critical blues

Looked over in the corner

Virginia had them too.

On screen a photo of VIRGINIA WOOLF, in a hat.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

1882-1941

Enter VIRGINIA, in the hat, and a long skirt and coat. Other actor freezes.

2 Virginia

VIRGINIA:

Since my death, I have become rather famous. I loom over syllabuses. Students worry about me. This is nice, but disconcerting. You can't imagine how strange it feels. Well, you can't imagine anything at all about me, actually, can you, because being dead is not imaginable. I rather like it.

I have come to tell you a story. Now, what shall it be about? Well, let us start with a hero, that's essential, isn't it. Here he is. I think we have to call him, let me think, yes: obviously: ORLANDO. And look, he has a guitar. And, to make him interesting, he has a skull. The skull is his imaginary friend. His name is ALBERT. We'll come to that later.

Now. We need another actor. We need a difference. And of course there is only one difference of any importance, only one other kind of human being (unless you count the difference of death, of course) (which is unimaginable). So this other being will be: a female.

She takes off the hat, adds some spectacles and turns into ROSALIND.

Who walks past Orlando without noticing him. She circles round and resumes her VIRGINIA role.

VIRGINIA:

She walks past him, intent on her thoughts. What is she thinking about? It is of no importance. She is there in this narrative to be seen, to have an effect, to attract a look. And, because of that look,

something happens. In his heart, it happens, in his intimate self. a feeling, a sunshine, a starburst, a cataclysm. All change, all change now. His breath stops, for a moment, he staggers a little, he is, as you (but not I) would say, gobsmacked.

ORLANDO: (To ALBERT) I think I'm in love.

ALBERT: Don't be bloody ridiculous.

VIRGINIA: And now, you see, we have a story. Whereas before he was just a young man, with a guitar, and a skull, a perfectly ordinary person, now he is a hero. Defined by desire, wrapped up in narrative, he is everything that is interesting.

ORLANDO: I am, I am, I'm in love.

ALBERT: How do you know?

ORLANDO: I feel – terrible! (*big smile*). I feel – fantastic! I am so – happy! I feel like a handkerchief sandwich! I feel like a night at the opera! Look at the colours of things! Just look! They are so – colourful!

ALBERT: You need to get a better scriptwriter.

ORLANDO: I feel like a sad song, a long song, softly, in the night.

VIRGINIA: So now he is a poet. He can't help it. He feels, in fact, as you (but not I) would say, he feels a tune coming on.

ORLANDO: Listen to this, it's come to me, out of nowhere--

ALBERT: Do I have to?

ORLANDO: Yes, you bloody do.

it's a rainy Stratford Tuesday
I'm wearing second hand shoes
I'm all dressed down to go, and going
nowhere
got nothing in my pocket
got something up my sleeve
it's the rainy Tuesday

grainy Tuesday

blues

VIRGINIA: And there we are: a skull, a song, a sad guitar, and love. Now, some background. Tell us, my dear, about yourself.

ORLANDO: Well, I'm an actor.

ALBERT: You know, I think they might have guessed that.

ORLANDO: Be quiet, this is my monologue. I am—what am I? I am – I am ambitious of a motley coat. I put myself together, out of bits and pieces, shreds and patches, quotes and notes. I stand up in front of people who are all staring at me, and I make them love me, or hate me, or laugh at me. I always wear second hand clothes. I borrow voices everywhere. I am the author's child.

VIRGINIA: You are: you were. But now, it's different, isn't it?

ORLANDO: Oh yes, now, everything has changed. I'm in love. I am reinvented, my heart shines in my eyes, and I find, all of a sudden, I have a stunning and sensational personality.

ALBERT: Dear god.

VIRGINIA: And a narrative, too, is that right?

ORLANDO: Oh yes, absolutely. I have direction, I know where I'm going, I will do whatever it takes, whatever at all, to win her love.

VIRGINIA: And what do you want?

ORLANDO: To see her again. To sing her my song.

VIRGINIA: Well, you may. Because here she comes.

ORLANDO: (*sings*)

it's a rainy Stratford Tuesday

I'm wearing second hand shoes

I'm all dressed down to go, and going
nowhere

got nothing in my pocket

got something up my sleeve
it's the rainy Tuesday
grainy Tuesday
blues

*Rosalind enters and walks straight past him,
without appearing to notice him.*

ALBERT: That went well.

3 And so love

VIRGINIA: And so love, that enigmatic character, has entered the theatre, has blessed us with its interesting presence. A one-way kind of love, of course, a strange attraction, but love, definitely, nonetheless. And our hero will do anything, to make her love him, won't you, my dear?

ORLANDO: I will, I really will!

VIRGINIA: Purpose, meaning, direction, a wonderful thing. What will you do?

ORLANDO: I'll use my acting skills, shouldn't be a problem. I will be anything and everything to her, I will surround her with images of my love, it will be my greatest performance: magical. That's what it will be.

ALBERT: I'm not saying a word.

ORLANDO: I shall be all in all for her. I shall be – Romeo, Antony, all the great lovers, I shall be (*reverently*) Hamlet.

ALBERT: He wasn't a great lover. He was crap, actually.

ORLANDO: how do you know?

ALBERT: I knew him.

ORLANDO: Really?

ALBERT: Of course. We used to chat. In graveyards.
Mournful bugger, he was. Always mooning about.
Listen, I said, Hamlet, my son, I said, here's the
bottom line: are you going to top yourself or not?
That's the question, I said.

ORLANDO: And what did he say?

ALBERT: He said: "to lie in cold obstruction, and to rot,
like?" Exactly, I said. I know all there is to know
about rotting, my lad, and believe me, the
alternative is better.

VIRGINIA: If you can tear yourself away from the subplot, I
believe she is about to walk by again.

4 Rainy Tuesday Blues

On the screen it says:

Tuesday late morning. Still not yet raining.

ORLANDO:

(sings)

my coat comes from the jumble
my jeans are patched and mended
my sweater redefines the concept charity
in the high street rough and tumble
people walk away offended

I'm treated with disdain and some hilarity

*ROSALIND comes bustling past on her way to work
at the Shakespeare library. She is intent and
preoccupied, with furrowed brow; she doesn't
notice him.*

On screen it now says:

Tuesday early afternoon. Still not yet raining

it's a small town gruesome Tuesday

I'm in these second hand shoes
I'm all dressed down to go, and going
nowhere
got something here to tell you
got nothing left to lose
it's the rainy Tuesday
grainy Tuesday
blues.

Orlando is still singing:

ORLANDO: even though my socks don't
match
and I've got a tie-dye vest
and my bargain buy umbrella's without style

*ROSALIND goes by as before; ORLANDO still
singing his song; she doesn't notice him.*

On screen it now says:

Tuesday late afternoon. It will rain quite soon.

I'm really quite a catch
I'm second hand not second best
and I'm the best dressed guy around here
when you smile

it's a rainy high street Tuesday
I'm wearing second hand shoes
I'm all dressed down to go, and going
nowhere
got nothing in my pocket
got something up my sleeve
it's the rainy Tuesday
grainy Tuesday

blues

ROSALIND goes by as before; as he's nearing the end of the song. She doesn't look at him, but throws some coins into the guitar case. ORLANDO picks up the skull and addresses it:

ORLANDO: Yes! Result! She loves me!

ALBERT: She gave you three pennies, one of them Irish. You call that love?

On the screen it says:

It starts to rain.

ORLANDO packs up and leaves the stage.

5 Song in my head

ROSALIND enters singing bits of Rainy Tuesday Blues. She dials phone.

ROSALIND: Hi, Celia? Listen, I've got this song in my head, I don't know where it came from, it keeps following me around. Yes, spooky isn't it? Listen:

got something here to tell you
got nothing left to lose
it's the rainy Tuesday
grainy Tuesday
blues.

Yes, it's quite cool, isn't it? No, I didn't write it, at least I don't think I did. But I might start using it in the act, if I can come up with some more.

Anyway, what are you doing tonight? Do you want to go for a drink or something? Oh. Oh, no, never mind, no, it's fine, really, I have plenty of other things to do. No, Celia, really, I'll be fine. Got loads of stuff to do. Deadlines, you know. The guy in

charge of the series is getting pretty heavy. I need to finish off the notes. Have a lovely time.

Puts away phone, sings, wistfully:

got something here to tell you
got nothing left to lose
it's the rainy Tuesday
grainy Tuesday
blues.

6 Most efficient

BERTOLT: Ah. We meet again.

ROSALIND: I'm sorry? Do I know you?

BERTOLT: Your lecture. At the Shakespeare Library. "The textual history of *As You Like it*; some preliminary observations."

ROSALIND: Oh. Yes.

BERTOLT: Most. Er, most - efficient.

ROSALIND: Thank you. *(pause)* Thank you?

BERTOLT gives an enigmatic head gesture. He makes a little bow and leaves.

7 statue scene

ORLANDO is standing on a box, absolutely still, pretending to be a statue. He is holding ALBERT in a picturesque pose. ROSALIND goes past, ignoring him.

ALBERT: This isn't going to work, you know.

ORLANDO: Trust me, I'm a professional.

Same again, she ignores him.

ALBERT: I'm not saying anything.

Same again, she ignores him.

ALBERT: What sort of professional are you, anyway?

ORLANDO: I am an actor, darling.

ALBERT: God give me strength. Oh, and one more thing.

ORLANDO: What's that?

ALBERT: You're a rotten ventriloquist.

8 How did it go?

ROSALIND is on the phone.

ROSALIND: Hi, how did it go? Are you engaged yet? Yes, I know, only joking. But you had a nice time? Wonderful! Me? Oh, you know, read some books, made some notes, stared at the screen a bit, drank some hot chocolate, that sort of thing. Yes, we call it research. It can be exciting, if the boredom doesn't get you first. Hey, by the way, did you see that new statue down in the High Street? Hamlet it must have been, you know, with a skull. Alas poor Yorick. Quite dishy, actually. For a statue, that is. Yes, I know, that does sound desperate, doesn't it. I ought to find a man. Someday. Someday my prince will come. With or without a skull.

Can you come along to the gig tonight? I'm on quite early. 10.30. Got a couple of new songs. There's a new waiter who's rather sweet – no, not my type, but I'll introduce you if you like? Oh good. I'll try and keep that table near the front for you.

9 Fantastical World

The scene is a piano bar. Not many people are in the audience. The pianist leans over the keyboard into the mike, speaking softly, breathily, heavily amplified. As he speaks he accompanies himself with little riffs and chords on the piano. The word BARdolatry flashes overhead.

CLARENCE:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'd like to introduce our next act. During the day, she is Doctor Rosalind, and she spends her time in the Shakespeare library, going courageously where few would venture (because it's so boring), writing brilliant footnotes. But by night, when all good academics are asleep, she haunts the low gin joints of Stratford, well, this one, anyway, hitting the high notes with effortless coloratura, remembering her musical childhood in the misty hillsides of Balsall Heath. She is, Ladies and Gentlemen, how many of you are there out there? Fourteen, hey, we've got a seminar! She is, our very own, put your hands together please, all you bardolaters: our very own Rosie O'Neill!

ROSALIND:

Hello ladies and gentlemen. Good to see you all - lovely to see some new faces and some old faces. And tonight I'll be doing some new songs and some old songs for you. I'm going to start with a new song that's inspired by my day job that some of you know about—and by the kind of day I've just had! Here we go: take it away, Clarence, and remember, the high notes are the ones on the right...

it's a high fantastical story

on a high fantastical day
got a high fantastical song to sing you
in my own fantastical way
are you just imaginary?
are you fanciful or real?
though it's undeniably scary
can't deny the way i feel

is this really love
or a comedy of errors?
is this really love
or so much ado?
is this really love
with unaccustomed terrors?
Is this really love
will we see it through?

if this is love
i hope it's as you like it
if this is love
i hope it's what you will
if this is love
all's well that ends well
cos if this is love - this is love - this is love
i'll be here still

is this really love
or an improbable fiction?
is this really love
or just so much ado?
is this really love
or just a work of friction?
if this is love
can we see it through?

cos if this is love
it's as i like it
if this is love

it's what i will
if this is love
all's well that ends well
cos if this is love - this is love - this is love
i'll be here till . . .

we have a high fantastical ending
to this high fantastical play
i'll have a high fantastical song to sing you
in my own fantastical way
you may be just imaginary
and more fanciful than true
though it's undeniably scary
can't deny that i love you

it's undeniably, most reliably, certifiably true
and though it's undeniably hard to say
i hope that you love me too.

10 charisma thing

Back in the street.

VIRGINIA:

It's a strange thing. Letting the characters speak for themselves. Painful often. Especially in your Nowadays. Not like the old days. No, not at all. They seem to have forgotten how to speak poetry. They don't even seem to think in it. Oh yes, I know what they're thinking. It's like that in my Now.

Being dead, of course, it's not really my place to tutor them. But I die in hope. A skilful editor would be useful to them. A godsend in fact. Maybe this love that he thinks he's in will heighten his sensitivities, nurture his developing gifts, allow for

nuance, subtlety, depth of meaning, complexity of structure?

ORLANDO to ALBERT: Well, bugger me backwards.

VIRGINIA: Ah.

ALBERT: Well. What did you expect?

ORLANDO: I expected her to stop and pay some attention. I'm an actor. I'm skilled at holding people's attention. I have charisma, damn it. I've got reviews to prove it.

ALBERT: Review.

ORLANDO: What?

ALBERT: Just one. The charisma thing.

ORLANDO: How do you know? You don't read the papers.

ALBERT: No, but you do. And I'm your constant companion. I hear everything.

ORLANDO: Everything?

ALBERT: I even hear what you're saying in your dreams.

ORLANDO: But you're my imaginary friend. You don't exist. I even do your voice.

ALBERT: Who does yours?

ORLANDO: What?

VIRGINIA: Watch out, my friend. Here she comes again.

ALBERT: Watch out my friend. Here she comes again.

ORLANDO: Who said that?

ALBERT: I did, of course. You got a problem with that?

ORLANDO: Of course I've got a bloody problem. You know I have.

ALBERT: Yeah. The love thing. The unrequited love thing. Just the sort of delicious problem this narrative needs.

ORLANDO: I'm not talking about that. You're avoiding the issue.

ALBERT: Ah.

ORLANDO: Yes. Ah. Whose voice was that?

VIRGINIA: Ah.

ORLANDO: You're hiding something from me. I know it. Are you someone else's imaginary friend as well? You've been listening to another person. Who is it?

ALBERT: Never mind that, sunshine. Here she comes. Do the charisma thing.

11 missed opportunity

Enter ROSALIND

ROSALIND: Excuse me, haven't we met somewhere?

ORLANDO: Er.

ROSALIND: Oh. Oh no. I'm so sorry. I was thinking of someone else.

She rushes off.

ORLANDO: *(to thin air)* Oh, thank you. Thank you for talking to me. Thank you for blessing my life. Thank you for being, thank you for existing, thank you for—

ALBERT: You blew it. You missed it. You screwed up.

ORLANDO: I only just missed it.

VIRGINIA: If that's the kind of thing you're going to say to her, it's probably just as well you missed it.

ORLANDO: Do you think I'll ever have another opportunity?

VIRGINIA: I'll see what I can do. But is there any way you could find something - anything - more interesting to say? I'm not sure I can see this project through.

ORLANDO: Do you have a choice?

VIRGINIA: Oh yes. Even when you're dead, you always have a choice.

ORLANDO: Well, maybe the problem's with her. Not me?

VIRGINIA: That's what they all say.

ORLANDO: Do they?

VIRGINIA: Oh yes.

ORLANDO: Dead people too?

VIRGINIA: You ask too many questions.

ORLANDO: Do I?

She gives him a withering look

VIRGINIA: Have you thought of this, by any chance? It's a tried and tested strategy. It's also—Shakespearian.

She hands him a song on a sheet of paper. And leaves.

He reads the song, ah! a good idea, and pins it up for Rosalind to find. He lingers see what happens, unseen and unnoticed by Rosalind in the next scene.

12 Rosalind my rose

Rosalind enters and looks around. Sees a piece of paper pinned to a wall/tree. Realises it has her name on it. Takes it down. Reads it. Smiles. Immediately calls her friend.

ROSALIND: Hey Celia. Call me back as soon as you can. This really weird thing's just happened. Really. Really weird. I've just found this song about me. Yes, really, music and everything. Pinned to a tree. Pretty terrible song, but hey, someone must love me.

*She sits down. Looks at the piece of paper again.
Still smiling. And then sings what's written there.*

Oh Rosalind, my rose
If I could I'd send you prose
But I think that I suppose
a rhyme scheme matters
Won't you stop and hear my song
I've loved you for so long
Oh Rosalind
Oh Rosalind
My rose.

Oh Rosalind, my rose
If I could I'd send you prose
Please don't think that I propose
My rhyme scheme flatters
Won't you stop and hear my song
I've loved you for so long
Oh Rosalind
Oh Rosalind
My rose.

*She laughs. Checks her phone to see if Celia has
called her back. Puts the piece of paper in her bag.
Leaves.*

13 BERTOLT and the gods

*ORLANDO checks his watch - it's nearly time for
ROSALIND to come by. Deliberately takes his wallet
out of his pocket and puts it on the ground.*

ALBERT: Are you crazy? It's taken us all week to earn that.
ORLANDO: Trust me.
ALBERT: It'll never work. Not in a million years.
ORLANDO: Ssh. She's coming.

Rosalind comes walking past. She sees the wallet on the ground. Hesitates - starts to say something, but thinks better of it and carries on walking past.

ALBERT: There you are. What did I tell you? Pick it up before someone else sees it.

ORLANDO: Ssh. She'll hear you.

Rosalind hears something. Hesitates and turns back to Orlando.

ROSALIND: Excuse me. I think you've dropped this.

ORLANDO: Oh my goodness. Thank you so much. How can I thank you enough? How can I repay you?

ROSALIND: Oh there's no need. No need at all.

She rushes off.

ORLANDO: *(to ALBERT)* Don't say it. Whatever it is. Just don't say it.

Exit ORLANDO

VIRGINIA: What is it with these characters? Why are they so inarticulate? So emotionally illiterate? So lacking in drama? Wit? Poetry? So... so... lacking. He's an actor. She's studied Shakespeare. They sing. Surely they can do better than this! I think it's catching. I'm beginning to get as dull as they are. I need some help here.

Enter BERTOLT

BERTOLT: Well, that's progress

VIRGINIA: Who are you?

BERTOLT: Who do I look like?

VIRGINIA: Well you look a little like BERTOLT BRECHT. But you're somewhat taller than you used to be.

BERTOLT: It's symbolic.

VIRGINIA: Really?

BERTOLT: Yes. In life I was used to big cities, big theatres - Berlin, New York, Moscow - This place is pretty small for me. Come to think of it, you used to be a very tall person

VIRGINIA: I still am.

BERTOLT: Really?

VIRGINIA: Yes, it's a matter of perspective. I'm actually a lot further away than you think.

BERTOLT: Ah. And, if you don't mind me saying so, the famous nose? It looks a great deal smaller.

VIRGINIA: Tact was never your strong point, BERTOLT. I'd like to lie and say it looks smaller because it's even further away than the rest of me, but the truth is, I had cosmetic surgery.

BERTOLT: What?

VIRGINIA: Yes, I know. I know. Your priorities change after you're dead. And the facilities are much better. But what are you doing here? This is my gig.

BERTOLT: I'm here to turn this into theatre, liebchen. You can't rely on this lot to get a show on the road.

VIRGINIA: But that's why I'm here. That's supposed to be my job

BERTOLT: But you're a novelist, for god's sake - ok, not a bad novelist, I'll admit that. But this is theatre. What were they thinking of?

VIRGINIA: They?

BERTOLT: Ah. Ah yes. You've forgotten haven't you. The plot gods. The holders of all stories. Just watch!

VIRGINIA: The plot gods?

They leave. Effects on screen fill the pause before the entry of MNEMOSYNE.

14 Mnemosyne

MNEMOSYNE:

Darling what a marvellous venue! Where did you find all these extraordinary people? Yes, actually, I do know most of them - well, all of them, in a way. Do you remember me? We first met a long time ago. A very long time ago indeed. And I have been with you, on an off, ever since.

I move unnoticed through your waking day, and flounce lightly through your sleep, and tease you. Oh yes - I do enjoy a good wheeze. Since I can be everywhere and anywhere at the same time, I accompany others too - all others. Well, almost all. There are a special few who no longer need me. So I leave them in peace. But apart from them - the fortunate few - I whisper differently to each and every one of you. Oh what fun I have - watching you argue my stories - thinking they are yours.

It's not malicious, what I do. Not at all. If there is suffering then it's down to you my dears - your choices - all of it. I merely provide possibilities for recalling the past, you see, the wherewithal and the whenwithal. What you do then, with your writing and re-writing of the past, has nothing to do with me. Nothing whatsoever. I take no responsibility for your joys or your heartaches, your grievances, your treasures, your complexities of plot, your biographical fictions, your nostalgia, your regrets.

Who am I? Oh - you have forgotten me after all. I am Mnemosyne. Goddess of memory and inventor of all words. Mother of the nine muses - yes, I have nine divine daughters. All doing terribly well. Terribly well. I love them all equally of course. But I am closest of all to my brother. Have you seen him? I'm sure he's here somewhere. Oh yes - over

there look - him and me we're like that - thick as thieves - without him - well I don't know where I'd be without him. Where would any of us be?

Yes, honestly, it's a marvellous venue.

15 Chronos

CHRONOS:

Don't listen to her. She's not what she seems. She's notorious, she is, for the words. She makes it all up, you know, she's a makeup artist, that's what she is.

Me? Oh, me.

You have to guess my name.

Are you listening, are you ready?

I am your father, and your enemy. I will eat you all. Think about it.

I was there before anything was. I am what you think you have a lot of, all of me in the world, you think you have.

Sometimes I'm on your hands, sometimes I seem to hang heavy, through a slow afternoon.

I think you know my name.

I fly, I do; and when I do, which I always do, you wonder where I've gone. She says I'm on your side, sometimes, but she talks such balls, darlings, really, she does.

I was there before she was, before anything was. She came along later, and decided she was a relative. Of mine! Such a nerve! She is my fool, my plaything, my distraction, my charming bit of nonsense. Sometimes I listen to her, and quite

forget myself, she beguiles me, wastes me, spends me like a paltry penny, she does.

Sometimes, you know, don't tell anyone, she makes me think, sometimes, dreaming, that I don't exist. Listening to her lies, sometimes, there only seems to be some sort of now, and no me at all.

I think you know my name.

Don't waste me, darlings, don't let me go by, unconsidered, but do remember you can't stop Time, not for a moment, no. Each mortal moment of your life is mine, my dears, mine, all those innocent instants, one two three, look at them go.

You know me, but you will forget me. Listening to her, you hear the stories, those little excitements, and for you I am no more. But I will however always be there, as long as I do live. Which is, in fact, always. Unlike you.

16 A job to do

MNEMOSYNE:

Well, sweetheart, we have a job to do.

CHRONOS:

I don't do jobs. What am I, some kind of worker? I don't do; I am.

MNEMOSYNE:

Now, darling, don't let's get above ourselves, shall we, you need me, and I need you, how many times have we had this conversation?

CHRONOS:

I need you for what? To while away myself? Be silent, woman.

MNEMOSYNE:

You make me, and I make you. We need each other. If you don't behave, darling, (*hard edge in voice*) I will stop imagining you, and your life will

get a lot less interesting very fast indeed. Right?
Right. I thought you would agree. Now, the job.

CHRONOS: What job?

MNEMOSYNE: Well, I thought it might be really rather fun to write a play. I am, after all, memory, language, mother of all the muses, a play would be such a nice thing for me to do, wouldn't it, dearest, or so I thought.

CHRONOS: But actually...

MNEMOSYNE: But actually, it doesn't seem to be going anywhere. What I did was, you'll love this, I know you will, I dreamed up, out of memory and language, a wonderful novelist, the very best, now unfortunately dead, so sad; and in case that wasn't enough, I dreamed some more, and up popped, bless his little marxist heart, one of the world's greatest playwrights, also very sadly dead, but never mind, and away they went. They got to work straight away, what treasures they are, I expect they were relieved not to be dead any more, such sweethearts. But.

CHRONOS: Something lacking, maybe, some little unconsidered trifle that seemed to be missing, perhaps?

MNEMOSYNE: How wise you are.

CHRONOS: Yes. I am. And older than God.

MNEMOSYNE: Almost. Not quite.

CHRONOS: Now, my fluttery friend, what exactly was it that was lacking?

MNEMOSYNE: Well, maybe I didn't quite imagine my writers enough.

CHRONOS: Because?

MNEMOSYNE: Well, silly of me, I know, but I haven't really *read* much of what they've written. Actually. Or, really,

anything. Actually. But I have heard a lot about them, of course—

CHRONOS: Gossip? You reconstructed two major modernist giants out of rumours and chit chat?

MNEMOSYNE: Yes, well, that's what I do, isn't it, you know that; I like to call it memory and language, but yes, actually, I suppose I did.

CHRONOS: So what happened?

MNEMOSYNE: Well, they created these two characters, who are really very sweet, and some songs got sung, very nice songs, because they are in love, you see, with one another—

CHRONOS: Love? You mean it? Love?

MNEMOSYNE: Well, no, god forbid, no, not that, don't mention that, please, you know I'm prone to palpitations-- more a sort of jump through some hoops and then slide between the sheets kind of thing. A pastime. To while away the time. To make time fly. To make things just a little bit strange, and then not strange at all, and then, after the play ends I suppose, they can get tired of each other and fall for someone else and a whole new drama can happen, I mean, the play's the thing, after all, isn't it?

CHRONOS: Enough!

MNEMOSYNE: Yes I do go on, don't I, a bit, when I'm nervous, I'm so sorry, I—

CHRONOS: Like: now?

MNEMOSYNE: Yes. Sorry. OK.

CHRONOS: Right. Thank you. Now, a little substrate of truth, I think: let us do the basics, shall we? You are playing this game because you have to. Because if you don't chat, you die. But if all you do is chat, then you run out of words, don't you, and find yourself staring at silence, so big, so empty, and

then you die. So, you need something more. And, lucky for you, I can provide it. And do. And will, because—well, never you mind. My business, that is.

MNEMOSYNE: Because, if you do, then what you and I can create is better and bigger than both of us. It can stop time. And transcend language. And pierce the heart, and make joy tangible, and heal the wounds of the world.

CHRONOS: You wish.

MNEMOSYNE: I know.

CHRONOS: Do you? Now. Leave me be. I have a play to write. Just watch.

17 Memory and desire

ROSALIND is combing her hair, as if she were sitting at a dressing table, staring at her reflection.

ROSALIND: I remember, I remember, on a Tuesday afternoon.

*It's the rainy Tuesday
grainy Tuesday
blues.*

HUSBAND: Are you ready yet?

ROSALIND: Yes, nearly, I was just thinking about something...

HUSBAND: Don't think. Get ready. It's very important not to be late. A lot depends on it.

ROSALIND: A lot depends on memory, too; on memory and desire.

HUSBAND: What did you say?

ROSALIND: Nothing, dear; nothing.

Nothing will come of nothing.

Sings:

Nothing will come of nothing
in the rainy Tuesday blues
the rainy Tuesday Stratford Shakespeare
blues

He was so sweet, standing there, with his skull and
his guitar, desire in his eyes, hoping, hopeless, so
sweet.

I wonder where he is now? Where do actors go,
when you haven't heard of them for a while? Do
they stop being actors? I wonder how we would
have been together. I wonder what I have lost. I
wonder about all the things I've lost, over the
years, all the turns not taken, so many, I did not
think death had undone so many.

Burning, burning. It is said that they walked
singing into the fire. Sometimes I think my hair is
on fire. I just sit, and watch it, burning, burning,
because I don't know what to do.

I don't know what to do.

HUSBAND:

Darling, are you ready yet?

She's neurotic. Highly strung. Nerves on edge. She
sits and combs her hair and talks to herself, she
will not, she will not, just, get a *grip*. That's all it
takes. And she won't.

ROSALIND:

(sings)

The rainy Tuesday longing for what might
have been blues.

18 Seven (or so) ages

WIFE:

Oh, I do love you. *She turns away.*

ORLANDO:

I love you too.

*During the speech, ORLANDO takes ALBERT out of
a box where he has been stowed for some years.*

One man in his time has seven ages. But what happens, what actually *happens*, is this.

When we make our first appearance, when we first set foot upon the world's great stage, we burst into tears. If not, they hit us until we do. That's just in order to breathe, isn't it, that's the essential, before you can get started on *anything*. Christ.

Act 2. They make us learn a lot of things that we don't need to know. Day after day, up early, every morning, they wrench you out of bed, they force down the fucking cornflakes, and then off, on your bike, on the bus, get walking, don't come back till you've learned something useless, off you go.

Boyle's law. Deuteronomy. Quadratic equations. The geography of Innsbruck airport. Thanks a lot.

And then, act 3, desire arises, hello desire, hello interesting stranger, are we going to be friends? I don't think so. Lust, like a madwoman in the attic, always threatening to burst out and set the whole house on fire. And, maybe, if you're one of the really lucky ones, love, love, love. Perhaps, one rainy Tuesday, you see some woman walking by, and something happens to your heart. She may, of course, be a bitch, a bore, a bimbo, who knows, you don't, though you think you do, and so you fall and fall and she walks past again and maybe you exchange a word, or two, and she walks on, leaving you gasping with desire, and then she doesn't walk by again, and then, my dears, you have blown it. Sky high. And what happens? Well, you just keep falling.

And you fall into marriage with someone or other, and you fall into a job, and you wrench yourself out of bed, and force down the fucking cornflakes, and then you go and do something that you don't want to do. For eight hours. When you would rather be

somewhere else. Someone else. Anyone,
anywhere, just as long as it's elsewhere.

And then you die. Obviously. And as for what
happens immediately before that happens, well,
I'm not going to go there for a moment. Sans eyes.
Sans teeth. Sans, whatever it is, I can't remember.
Sans everything.

And that's it. The seven ages of man.

WIFE: I love you so much.

ORLANDO: I love you too.

ALBERT: I'm not saying a word.

19 Next

*It is as if they are on a couch talking to friends,
maybe with a pre-dinner drink each, chewing
peanuts.*

ROSALIND: Well, he looked so sweet, with his guitar and his
skull.

ORLANDO: And she waltzed by, with her nose in the air,
thinking about literature, head full of quotations—

ROSALIND: Listen, I had a really expensive education, got to
use it for something—

ORLANDO: And you certainly do, sweetheart—

ROSALIND: And *proud* of it.

ORLANDO: OK, OK. Anyway, we started talking, and went and
had a drink, and neither of us went to work that
day—

ROSALIND: We walked. By the river. In the rain, it was raining.

ORLANDO: I kissed her. Her face was wet with raindrops. And
I went along that evening, with her, to see her
show, it was brilliant—

ROSALIND: It was crap, actually, I was all over the place—

ORLANDO: It was love, you see. It was love. I couldn't believe it. You read about it, you sing about it—

ROSALIND: All the *time* you sing about it, makes me sick, sometimes, why do people want to hear songs about *love* all the time, tell me that, why don't they just get out and *do* it, get a life, get a love—

ORLANDO: Because you have to be lucky. Because you have to be unbelievably lucky.

ROSALIND: And I guess we were. Of course, there were the ups and downs, the little deviations—

ORLANDO: Which we will not go into at this point—

ROSALIND: No, we won't. But we could—

ORLANDO: But we won't. We've been happy.

ROSALIND: Yes. It's true. Happy. And when you wrote that stupid song—

ORLANDO: It wasn't a *bad* song—

ROSALIND: it was a lovely song, darling, a lovely stupid song and it made us an absolutely ludicrous amount of money, and still does, god bless it, that ridiculous lovely stupid song—

ORLANDO: And we're happy. With the money. Or without it. Really. Sounds unbelievable, doesn't it. But it's true. It really is true.

ROSALIND: Yes. It's true.

She freezes, a fixed smile that gradually fades on her face.

ORLANDO: It was smoke, in the cabin, they said. And then fire, they said. I don't much like to think about it. There were no survivors. She was flying to a gig in Paris. Goodbye, I said, and she smiled, and said, Goodbye, and walked into Departures, not looking back, and departed. And then hours later my mobile rang, and I pressed a button, and listened,

and someone told me. Pressing that button, in that moment, in that microsecond, everything changed. I threw it away, you know. Threw my fancy phone away. Couldn't stand it. With its little smug fucking buttons.

So what I want to know is, what do I do now?

He freezes; during the following scene he enacts the death that she describes.

ROSALIND:

Cancer. I don't really like to think about it. I used to give him the morphine. Tablets, it was. God, they helped. But there was the fear, and the tears, and the waiting, and the hoping, and the no more hope, and more tears, much more fear, and the pain. And then he turned into a goblin, that beautiful man. So *ugly*. And then, after a time, after too much time, it all stopped, thank god, thank god he died, thank god.

And, you know, what I want to know is, what do I do now?

Blackout.

20 The fiction business

MNEMOSYNE:

That's no good.

CHRONOS:

What do you mean, it's no good? It's the truth. That's what happens. Either they fail to meet, and are miserable, or they meet, and fall in love, and then one or the other of them dies. That's what happens. That is *the whole story*.

MNEMOSYNE:

Yes, it's the truth, but it's not enough.

CHRONOS:

You wish.

MNEMOSYNE:

Yes, I wish. I do. And also, I know. It's not enough.

CHRONOS: Go on then.

MNEMOSYNE: Go on what?

CHRONOS: Just – go on. If you think you can. If you think it’s not enough. If you think there’s somewhere else to go. Go on.

MNEMOSYNE: I – can’t. I don’t know how to.

CHRONOS: Right. There you are then. There’s nothing else. You don’t know how to.

VIRGINIA: I do.

CHRONOS: You do?

VIRGINIA: I do. And my friend Bert does. We can do it. Together.

CHRONOS: But you’re just imperfectly recollected modernist giants!

VIRGINIA: Maybe we are, but we, my dear, are in the fiction business. You are not.

CHRONOS: But you still need time—

MNEMOSYNE: And you still need language—

CHRONOS: And language is mere chatter—

MNEMOSYNE: And time ends in death—

BERTOLT: Listen to me. Just listen. There are no more gods. We have dethroned you.

MNEMOSYNE: You have?

BERTOLT: We have. We have burned down your palaces—

VIRGINIA: And stopped imagining you.

BERTOLT: So leave us alone. Go. We don’t need you. All that there is, all that really exists, is time and language—

VIRGINIA: And humanity; the sad music of humanity.

BERTOLT: Go. Just go.

VIRGINIA: Go.

21 Cutting loose

BERTOLT: Have they gone?

VIRGINIA: I think so... Yes, they have.

BERTOLT: What now?

VIRGINIA: Well, we could cut loose from time entirely.

BERTOLT: What?

VIRGINIA: All of reality, properly speaking, is the focussed point of consciousness, moment by moment, a dancing atom, always now; we could write that.

BERTOLT: Cut loose from the future, cut loose from the past?.

VIRGINIA: Yes. Dethrone all the gods. Burn down their temples. Cut loose from language, too, it is just grief, it is nothing but grief. Promises and regrets, fictions and failures, it is language that locks us into the past, that frightens us with the future. Cut loose. Burn down the temple.

BERTOLT: All that is true, my dear friend, my so intelligent friend, but it is not true enough.

VIRGINIA: It isn't?

BERTOLT: It is not. It is bourgeois truth. It is a truth reserved for those who have too much time on their hands; who have time to think about such things.

VIRGINIA: Then that means..

BERTOLT: Yes?

VIRGINIA: That means we must abdicate, too.

BERTOLT: Yes. And leave it to humanity, to muddle through.

ROSALIND: You mean—us?

ORLANDO: But we're just fictional characters!

ROSALIND: With these ridiculous Shakespeare names!

ORLANDO: You invented us!

pause

ORLANDO: Hello?

ROSALIND: Hello?

ORLANDO: I think they've gone.

ROSALIND: What are we going to do?

pause

ORLANDO: Well, we'll just have to invent ourselves. Play the part. That's what we do, isn't it? At least we know we're playing the part.

ROSALIND: What about the truth? What about the meaning of it all?

ORLANDO: Play the part. Who knows? Play the part. Now they've gone we can do what we like.

ROSALIND: That's easy enough for you to say. You're an actor.

ORLANDO: Well, you're a singer. Sing me a song.

ROSALIND: What? The sad music of humanity?

He offers her his hand, tenderly. After a hesitation, she takes it, equally tenderly.

ORLANDO: It's also the food of love, you know. Sing me a love song.

ROSALIND: What?

ORLANDO: Make me laugh. Make me cry.

ROSALIND: Make you think that you can fly?

ORLANDO: Exactly! Away you go...

22 It ain't been in vain for nothing

it ain't been in vain—it ain't been in vain
no it ain't been in vain
for nothin'
this lovin'—it ain't been—it ain't been in vain
for nothin'
lovin' you—will see me through—my life.

made you laugh babe, made you cry
made you think that we could fly
made you see we could defy—gravity
that gravity—the gravity—of life.

it ain't been in vain—it ain't been in vain
no it ain't been in vain
for nothin'
this lovin'—it ain't been—it ain't been in vain
for nothin'
lovin' you—will see me through—my life.

in the sunshine, in the rain
through the heartache, through the pain
you and I we still defy—gravity
that gravity—the gravity—of life.

so it ain't been in vain—it ain't been in vain
no it ain't been in vain
for nothin'
this lovin'—it ain't been—it ain't been in vain
for nothin'
lovin' you—will see me through—my life.

Exeunt, leaving Albert centre stage looking at the audience. Spotlight on him.

23 Sans everything

ALBERT:

Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. It's not bad, actually, being sans everything. In the eternal, permanent now. That's the real happy ending, you know. And, in any case, I've still got all my teeth.

Spot goes out. Blackout.