

## Exercise 9

*As You Like It* is a play that is full of songs and poems. Choose one, and in a 700-word essay, explore its meaning in the context of the play. You should combine analysis of the song or poem itself with attention to who speaks or sings or writes it, to whom, and how it is communicated.

*As You Like It* is a pastoral comedy, set in the rustic world of shepherds and shepherdesses; one of the characteristics of a pastoral is to be full of songs and poems (on the assumption that the watchful labor of tending sheep still leaves leisure for singing, scribbling, wooing and so on). This exercise asks you to choose one of these inset forms and consider it in relation to the dramatic situation in which it arises.

A few questions to consider about the poems.

- To whom is the poem written? Is it read by anyone else? (By permission? Or not?) What difference does the audience make? What impact does it make on its intended hearer?
- Does the poem have any of the characteristics of the Petrarchan idiom we have considered in other plays? If so, what is Petrarchism doing in Arden?
- How do hearers (and over-hearers) respond to the poem? If they criticize, what are the motives of that criticism? Is it just?

A few questions to consider about the songs.

- Is the song you choose sung solo, or by a group? What does it express about the social situation of the singer or singers? Songs (because they can be sung together) are often occasions for particular meditation on forms of solidarity or solitude.
- To whom is it sung? Did someone ask for it? Why? Does it answer the hearer's desires?
- Is the performer a musician, or one (or more) of the regular characters? What difference might that make?
- Is the song spontaneous, or is it a song everyone knows? Does that difference make a difference here?
- Can a song do something that ordinary speech cannot? What, why?
- Is there an idea about the nature and effects of music implicit in the song or the circumstances of its performance? What is music in the world of Arcadia, anyway?