



Love's Victory is a pastoral tragi-comedy which stages a plot by the goddess **Venus** and her son **Cupid** to make the shepherd and shepherdesses realise and respect the power of love. Like Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, it follows four pairs of lovers. **Philisses** and **Musella** have both been reticent about declaring their love for each other. Philisses believes she loves his best friend **Lissius**, while Musella is bound by the early modern conventions of female modesty and by another tie that is revealed in Act 5 to thwart their love, with potentially tragic effects. **Lissius** scorns love altogether and has scorned the love of **Simeana**, sister to **Philisses**, so is a natural target for Cupid's arrows. An outspoken outsider, **Climeana** is also in love with Lissius. A third couple are the **Forester**, a model of unrequited courtly love and his beloved, **Silvesta**, who has dedicated herself to Diana, the goddess of chastity. **Silvesta's** own unrequited love for Philisses has made her renounce love as 'folly' and vow to live independently, 'free and untouched of thought but chastity'. The shepherdess **Dalina** who has been fickle in love in the past, needs to find a husband. The clown **Rustic** is interested in Musella, though mainly as another asset among his farm animals. He is clearly out of place in the poetic games of wit played by the other shepherds and shepherdesses. Nevertheless, he poses a threat to Musella and Philisses's romantic attachment. While the shepherds and shepherdess including Lacon and Fillis sing songs, play a game of fortune telling and make up riddles, Cupid, who doubles as the villain **Arcas** in our production, puts them through experiences of pain and loss to make them feel the power of love. The action is interspersed with songs throughout which highlight the emotions. The plot comes to a climax when the star-crossed lovers Musella and Philisses vow to sacrifice themselves in the Temple of Venus. This is where the Huntington Manuscript breaks off, tantalisingly, but our production stages the fuller Peshurst Manuscript in which *Love's Victory* is achieved.