

As You Like It (Fall 2013)

As You Like It probably gets the prize for my least-favorite Shakespearean masterpiece. I can understand its appeal and admire its design: the countless fine threads that hold seamlessly together. But it doesn't thrill me and often fails even to keep my interest. Duke Senior, philosopher of silver linings, bores me. (If his underdeveloped subplot is any indication, I suspect he also bored Shakespeare.) Touchstone answers the question of why more romantic comedies aren't written about jesters. And—this probably says something damning about me, but I must nevertheless confess—I'm not in love with Rosalind, though I do enjoy her company.

More critically, I find *As You Like It* undramatic—I think because, as far as is possible onstage, it exists outside of time.¹ “Time travels in divers paces with divers persons,” Rosalind (disguised as the boy Ganymede) lectures Orlando:

Rosalind: Marry, he trots hard with a young maid between the contract of her marriage and the day it is solemnized. If the interim be but a sennight, Time's pace is so hard that it seems the length of seven year.

Orlando: Who ambles Time withal?

Rosalind: With a priest that lacks Latin and a rich man that hath not the gout; for the one sleeps easily because he cannot study, and the other lives merrily because he feels no pain ...

Orlando: Who doth he gallop withal?

Rosalind: With a thief to the gallows; for though he go as softly as foot can fall, he thinks himself too soon there.

Orlando: Who stays it still withal?

Rosalind: With lawyers in the vacation; for they sleep between term and term, and then they perceive not how time moves.

[III.ii.301–24]

¹ Or I may simply not be the audience for parodies of Renaissance pastoralism.

To this last quip she might have added: *And with exiles in the Forest of Arden*. Granting that Arden is not quite an unspoiled Eden—among its dangers are icy winds [II.i.6–7] and snakes and lionesses [IV.iii.106–15]—we encounter little evidence of the Fall.

Somewhere an arrow-pierced deer dies a slow death, moving a melancholic poseur to tears, but we neither see nor hear the suffering: we hear *of* it through the report of an anonymous lord [II.i.25–63].

The absence of Time—and its attendant pains—grants Rosalind and Orlando the leisure to grow as people and lovers, untouched by the pressures of the “real world” (as romantic love is itself a holiday from the world). Even villains such as Oliver and Duke Frederick may redeem themselves, sacrificing without fear of loss. In Arden, life pauses as characters try on their fantasy selves. This makes for lovely atmosphere but not particularly compelling drama: the stakes are never higher than in Act I. Though Shakespeare lavishes tremendous care on Rosalind and her courtship with Orlando—and these are mighty pillars—he seems content to leave most of the rest of the play two-dimensional. No one suffers more from this neglect than the first character I shall examine:

Celia

When *As You Like It* begins, Celia is still more girl than woman; the contrast with her maturing cousin appears in their very first lines:

Celia: I pray thee, Rosalind, sweet my coz, be merry.

Rosalind: Dear Celia, I show more mirth than I am mistress of, and would you yet I were merrier? Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father, you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure.

Celia: Herein I see thou lovest me not with the full weight that I love thee. If my uncle, thy banished father, had banished thy uncle, the duke my father, so thou hadst been still with me, I could have taught my

love to take thy father for mine. So wouldst thou, if the truth of thy
 love to me were so righteously tempered as mine is to thee.
Rosalind: Well, I will forget the condition of my estate to rejoice in yours.
 [I.ii.1–15]

In *yours*, Rosalind is careful to say, not *ours*, though the difference between
 Rosalind and Celia cannot be reduced to the fact of whose father has been banished—
 never mind whether Celia truly believes she could so easily trade fortunes and fathers
 with Rosalind. (Considering what an ogre Duke Frederick is, she may want to believe it.)
 When Rosalind signals her transition to adolescence, Celia cannot follow:

Rosalind: Let me see, what think you of falling in love?
Celia: Marry, I prithee do, to make sport withal; but love no man in good
 earnest, nor no further in sport neither than with safety of a pure
 blush thou mayst in honor come off again.
 [I.ii.24–28]

No surprise who is smitten when, a hundred lines later, they meet Orlando—
 presumably stripped to the waist in anticipation of his wrestling match. Though his spirit
 impresses both girls, only Rosalind falls for him—Celia fixates instead on her father’s
 “rough and envious disposition” [I.ii.228], for Duke Frederick has reason to hate
 Orlando’s deceased father, Sir Rowland de Boys. Alone with Rosalind following
 Orlando’s victory, Celia senses the change in her cousin, though she cannot fully
 comprehend it:

Celia: Why, cousin, why, Rosalind! Cupid have mercy, not a word?
Rosalind: Not one to throw at a dog.
Celia: No, thy words are too precious to be cast away upon curs; throw
 some of them at me; come, lame me with reasons.
Rosalind: Then there were two cousins laid up, when the one should be
 lamed with reasons and the other mad without any.
Celia: But is all this for your father?
Rosalind: No, some of it is for my child’s father.
 [I.iii.1–11]

Rosalind's frank acknowledgment of her desire is breathtaking. After several punning attempts to jest away the topic, Celia ventures to "talk in good earnest," though her words hint at jealousy—not that Orlando loves Rosalind, but that Rosalind loves someone other than Celia:

Celia: Is it possible on such a sudden you should fall into so strong a liking with old Sir Rowland's youngest son?
Rosalind: The duke my father loved his father dearly.
Celia: Doth it therefore ensue that you should love his son dearly? By this kind of chase, I should hate him, for my father hated his father dearly; yet I hate not Orlando.
Rosalind: No, faith, hate him not, for my sake.
Celia: Why should I not? Doth he not deserve well?

[I.iii.26–35]

Why should I not *hate him* is the implication—Celia cannot entirely escape her father.

But she rises magnificently to the occasion when he enters to banish Rosalind:

Celia: Dear sovereign, hear me speak.
Duke Frederick: Ay, Celia. We stayed her for your sake,
 Else had she with her father ranged along.
Celia: I did not then entreat to have her stay;
 It was your pleasure and your own remorse.
 I was too young that time to value her,
 But now I know her. If she be a traitor,
 Why, so am I. We still have slept together,
 Rose at an instant, learned, played, eat together;
 And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,
 Still we went coupled and inseparable.
Duke Frederick: She is too subtle for thee; and her smoothness,
 Her very silence and her patience,
 Speak to the people, and they pity her.
 Thou art a fool. She robs thee of thy name,
 And thou wilt show more bright and seem more virtuous
 When she is gone. Then open not thy lips.
 Firm and irrevocable is my doom
 Which I have passed upon her; she is banished.
Celia: Pronounce that sentence then on me, my liege;
 I cannot live out of her company.

[I.iii.64–84]

Celia's vision of enchanted childhood, though heartfelt, is nostalgia; even if Rosalind could remain at court, she has already coupled herself to another. The irony of Duke Frederick's warning is that it comes true: in Act One, Celia speaks more lines than Rosalind, and their wits (if not wisdoms) are evenly matched; in the four remaining acts, the opposite happens. Rosalind becomes the genius of Arden—her disguise as the youth Ganymede, named for “Jove's own page” [I.iii.122], only heightens her charms—while Celia diminishes and dulls: her own disguise as Aliena—her “poor and mean attire,” her umber-smirched face [I.iii.109–10]—scarcely distinguishes her from Phebe and Audrey. Indeed, Shakespeare gives the natural rustics considerably more to do.

Though Celia proposes fleeing to Arden—“To liberty, and not to banishment” [I.iii.136]—by the time she and Rosalind (accompanied by Touchstone) reach the forest, only Rosalind's enthusiasm has increased; Celia is so exhausted she can hardly use proper grammar:

Rosalind: O Jupiter, how merry are my spirits!

Touchstone: I care not for my spirits if my legs were not weary.

Rosalind: I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman; but I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat. Therefore, courage, good Aliena!

Celia: I pray you bear with me; I cannot go no further.

[II.iv.1–9]

Shepherds Corin and Silvius enter, and Celia begs her companions to buy food (“I faint almost to death” [II.iv.59–61]). Corin's gracious welcome seems to refresh Celia, however: “I like this place,” she declares, “And willingly could waste my time in it” [II.iv.92–3]. For the next two acts, this is precisely what she does—little more than play chorus to Rosalind and Orlando's courtship.

In fact, Celia sees Orlando in the forest before Rosalind does, and her teasing attempt to deliver the news offers one last opportunity for the cousins to match wits.

Celia holds her own, though Rosalind gets better lines:

Celia: But didst thou hear without wondering how thy name should be hanged and carved upon these trees?

Rosalind: I was seven of the nine days out of the wonder before you came; for look here what I found on a palm tree. I was never so berhymed since Pythagoras' time that I was an Irish rat, which I can hardly remember.

Celia: Trow you who hath done this?

Rosalind: Is it a man?

Celia: And a chain that you once wore, about his neck. Change you color?

Rosalind: I prithee who?

Celia: O Lord, Lord, it is a hard matter for friends to meet; but mountains may be removed with earthquakes, and so encounter.

Rosalind: Nay, but who is it?

Celia: Is it possible?

Rosalind: Nay, I prithee now with most petitionary vehemence, tell me who it is.

Celia: O wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful wonderful, and yet again wonderful, and after that, out of all hooping!

Rosalind: Good my complexion! Dost thou think, though I am caparisoned like a man, I have a doublet and hose in my disposition? One inch of delay more is a South Sea of discovery. I prithee tell me who is it quickly, and speak apace. I would thou couldst stammer, that thou mightst pour this concealed man out of thy mouth as wine comes out of a narrow-mouthed bottle; either too much at once, or none at all. I prithee take the cork out of thy mouth, that I may drink thy tidings.

Celia: So you may put a man in your belly.

Rosalind: Is he of God's making? What manner of man? Is his head worth a hat? or his chin worth a beard?

Celia: Nay, he hath but a little beard.

Rosalind: Why, God will send more, if the man will be thankful. Let me stay the growth of his beard, if thou delay me not the knowledge of his chin.

Celia: It is young Orlando, that tripped up the wrestler's heels and your heart both in an instant.

[III.ii.168–208]

I have quoted so much of this conversation (and I considered quoting more) because it is so enjoyable. Rosalind knows exactly which man Celia means, and Celia

knows she knows; they take great pleasure in the game, even as it suggests how anxious Rosalind is to meet Orlando undisguised. Yet if Orlando's entrance exhilarates Rosalind, it literally silences Celia: she does not speak again in the scene after Rosalind orders her to "[s]link by, and note him" [III.ii.247].²

When next we see Celia, she is already tiring of her cousin's obsession. Orlando is late for a rendezvous, and Rosalind makes a show of disconsolation. At first, Celia humors her:

Rosalind: Never talk to me; I will weep.

Celia: Do, I prithee; but yet have the grace to consider that tears do not become a man.

Rosalind: But have I not cause to weep?

Celia: As good cause as one would desire; therefore weep.

Rosalind: His very hair is of the dissembling color.

Celia: Something browner than Judas's. Marry, his kisses are Judas's own children.

Rosalind: I' faith, his hair is of a good color.

Celia: An excellent color. Your chestnut was ever the only color.

[III.iv.1–12]

Rosalind continues to press, however, and Celia nearly snaps:

Rosalind: But why did he swear he would come this morning, and comes not?

Celia: Nay, certainly there is no truth in him.

Rosalind: Do you think so?

Celia: Yes; I think he is not a pickpurse nor a horse stealer, but for his verity in love, I do think him as concave as a covered goblet or a worm-eaten nut.

Rosalind: Not true in love?

Celia: Yes, when he is in, but I think he is not in.

Rosalind: You have heard him swear downright he was.

² Ensuing lines confirm that Celia remains onstage through her silence: Rosalind introduces Orlando to "this shepherdess, my sister" [III.ii.326], and the scene ends with Rosalind's "Come, sister, will you go?" [III.ii.418–9]. What to do with Celia during these scenes—whether to move her out of sight or keep her hovering on the periphery, "commenting" through sounds, expressions, and gestures—poses an interesting challenge for a director.

Celia: “Was” is not “is.” Besides, the oath of a lover is no stronger than the word of a tapster; they are both the confirmer of false reckonings. He attends here in the forest on the duke your father.

Rosalind: I met the duke yesterday and had much question with him. He asked me of what parentage I was. I told him, of as good as he; so he laughed and let me go. But what talk we of fathers when there is such a man as Orlando?

Celia: O, that’s a brave man; he writes brave verses, speaks brave words, swears brave oaths, and breaks them bravely, quite traverse, athwart the heart of his lover, as a puny tilter, that spurs his horse but on one side, breaks his staff like a noble goose. But all’s brave that youth mounts and folly guides.

[III.iv.18–42]

Rosalind is not the only tutor in Arden; she briefly adopts Celia’s argument when Orlando finally appears: “No, no, Orlando; 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” [IV.i.136–9]. Meanwhile, Celia again finds herself in the awkward position of spectator—silent except when Rosalind orders her to “be the priest and marry us” [IV.i.115]. As Rosalind falls ever deeper in love, Celia remains skeptical, if not baffled:

Rosalind: O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love! But it cannot be sounded. My affection hath an unknown bottom, like the Bay of Portugal.

Celia: Or rather, bottomless, that as fast as you pour affection in, it runs out.

Rosalind: No, that same wicked bastard of Venus that was begot of thought, conceived of spleen, and born of madness, that blind rascally boy that abuses every one’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, and sigh till he come.

Celia: And I’ll sleep.

[IV.i.192–205]

They make a fascinating pair: young Celia, growing jaded and brittle, is as crucial a foil to Rosalind as is the deeply scarred Jaques or the rancid Touchstone. But whereas Rosalind easily dispatches the men, her “pretty little coz” casts a potentially darker

shadow. I say potentially, because Shakespeare chooses not to develop Celia further. Instead, he sticks her with a “brave man” of her own: the improbably reformed Oliver. Though actors may color their first—and only—conversation with the marks of love (meaningful pauses, shy smiles), the text itself contains little sign that either Celia or Oliver particularly notices the other:

Oliver: Good morrow, fair ones. Pray you, if you know,
Where in the purlieus of this forest stands
A sheepcote, fenced about with olive trees?

Celia: West of this place, down in the neighbor bottom.
The rank of osiers by the murmuring stream
Left on your right hand brings you to the place.
But at this hour the house doth keep itself;
There's none within.

Oliver: If that an eye may profit by a tongue,
Then should I know you by description,
Such garments and such years: “The boy is fair,
Of female favor, and bestows himself
Like a ripe sister; the woman low,
And browner than her brother.” Are not you
The owner of the house I did inquire for?

Celia: It is no boast, being asked, to say we are.

[IV.iii.74–89]

Oliver then gives “Ganymede” Orlando’s message: a lioness has wounded him, and he cannot make their appointment. Rosalind swoons, and Celia and Oliver help her offstage, where presumably they get better acquainted, for in his next appearance Oliver announces their engagement. Rosalind confirms the news to Orlando:

There was never anything so sudden but the fight of two rams and Caesar’s thrasonical brag of “I came, saw, and overcame”; for your brother and my sister no sooner met but they looked; no sooner looked but they loved; no sooner loved but they sighed; no sooner sighed but they asked one another the reason; no sooner knew the reason but they sought the remedy: and in these degrees have they made a pair of stairs to marriage, which they will climb incontinent, or else be incontinent before marriage: they are in the very wrath of love, and they will together; clubs cannot part them.

[V.ii.28–39]

Should we believe Shakespeare—who has spent the better part of his play developing, by true “degrees,” his greatest comic heroine and most amiable hero—forgot to extend the same courtesy to their friends? If we desire a psychological reason for so “incontinent” a marriage, we might infer that Celia, sick of merely hearing about love, has grabbed an eligible man for herself. (That he is Orlando’s elder brother is a bonus.) A more prosaic explanation is that Shakespeare did not have the pages to craft another love plot.

Regardless, the result is that Celia and Oliver resemble Bianca and Lucentio, or Hero and Claudio, far more than Rosalind and Orlando. Like Hero, Celia is further silenced by her engagement: she does not speak once in Act Five—not to Rosalind, not to Duke Senior, and not to her future husband. If we may justly doubt the marital prospects of Audrey and Touchstone or Phebe and Silvius—an uncontroversial assumption, I think—we may equally doubt those of Celia and Oliver. Before people marry, *As You Like It* suggests, they ought to become friends: envy, lust, and pity are poor grounds for “a world-without-end bargain,” to quote an earlier play with a similar theme.³ To be reduced to another variation on this theme is a disappointing end for a young woman who began with such spirit and charm.

Oliver

Celia’s engagement is unsatisfying not because Oliver used to be a jerk but because she knows even less about him than we do. In another story this might be a virtue—plenty of leading men get by on mystique—but in Rosalind’s world the greater good is knowledge, of one’s partner as well as oneself.

³ *Love’s Labor’s Lost* [V.ii.779]

Self-knowledge may be transformative, yet for Oliver—like many of the play’s characters—it cannot compete with the mysteries of Arden. Oliver has been playing the villain at least since his father’s death; Orlando’s opening lines, spoken to his family’s servant, Adam, bitterly recount the matter:

As I remember, Adam, it was upon this fashion bequeathed me by will but poor a thousand crowns, and, as thou sayest, charged my brother on his blessing to breed me well: and there begins my sadness. . . . For my part, he keeps me rustically at home or, to speak more properly, stays me here at home unkept: for call you that keeping for a gentleman of my birth that differs not from the stalling of an ox? . . . Besides this nothing that he so plentifully gives me, the something that nature gave me his countenance seems to take from me: he lets me feed with his hinds, bars me the place of a brother, and, as much as in him lies, mines my gentility with my education.

[I.i.1–19]

Unfortunately for Oliver, his youngest brother has grown strong and begun “to mutiny against this servitude” [I.i.21–2]. Once Oliver realizes he can no longer physically check Orlando, he plots with a wrestler at court to kill him:

I tell thee, Charles, it is the stubbornest young fellow of France; full of ambition, an envious emulator of every man’s good parts, a secret and villainous contriver against me his natural brother: therefore use thy discretion. I had as lief thou didst break his neck as his finger. And thou wert best look to’t; for if thou dost him any slight disgrace, or if he do not mightily grace himself on thee, he will practice against thee by poison, entrap thee by some treacherous device, and never leave thee till he hath ta’en thy life by some indirect means or other; for I assure thee, and almost with tears I speak it, there is not one so young and so villainous this day living.

[I.i.133–45]

In pretending to describe Orlando, of course, Oliver is really describing himself, though he misses the resemblance. Left to brood in private, he seems confused by the ferocity of his passions:

I hope I shall see an end of him; for my soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than he. Yet he's gentle, never schooled and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved; and indeed so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprised.
[I.i.153–9]

This is not the self-conscious villainy of a Richard III or the lurking malignance of a Don John. Oliver suffers from a very familiar poison—indeed, the same poison that Duke Frederick pressed on Celia: envy of a brighter peer. When next we see Oliver, Orlando has escaped to Arden, and Duke Frederick—who suspects Oliver of assisting his brother's flight—confiscates his lands.⁴ When *next* we see Oliver, Orlando has saved him from wild beasts, the brothers have reconciled, and Oliver has found his inner peace and goodness.

Thus, between his appearance in Act One and his reformation in Act Four, Oliver speaks exactly two lines—both to the raging Duke Frederick: “O that your highness knew my heart in this! / I never loved my brother in my life” [III.i.13–4]. Yet compared to the duke's sudden redemption, Oliver's is fairly coherent, if undramatic: like his wooing of Celia, it happens entirely offstage. To make sense of Oliver (and Shakespeare may have intended us *not* to make sense of him), we must consider his ego-shattering fall and near-death: offered a new chance at life, Oliver, to his credit, accepts. Sometimes the best response to a wonder is simply not to question it: “’Twas I. But ’tis not I” [IV.iii.134]. To re-quote Celia: “‘Was’ is not ‘is.’” Perhaps their future together is not hopeless after all.

⁴ The same lands, incidentally, that Oliver shall later “estate upon” Orlando in exchange for him blessing Oliver and Celia's engagement [V.ii.9–12]. While I don't doubt Oliver's sincerity, it requires considerably less sacrifice to give away what has already been lost.

Orlando

Much of what I wish to say about Orlando I shall reserve for my discussion of Rosalind, for his role in their courtship cannot be considered independently of hers. As in other Shakespearean comedies, the male lover proves the weaker wit, though—like Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*—Orlando rises easily above his fellows, beginning with Oliver. Despite his lack of formal education, Orlando bests his elder brother both physically and verbally:

Oliver: Now, sir, what make you here?

Orlando: Nothing. I am not taught to make anything.

Oliver: What mar you then, sir?

Orlando: Marry, sir, I am helping you to mar that which God made, a poor unworthy brother of yours, with idleness.

Oliver: Marry, sir, be better employed, and be naught awhile.

Orlando: Shall I keep your hogs and eat husks with them? What prodigal portion have I spent that I should come to such penury?

Oliver: Know you where you are, sir?

Orlando: O, sir, very well: here in your orchard.

Oliver: Know you before whom, sir?

Orlando: Ay, better than him I am before knows me. . . . I have as much of my father in me as you, albeit I confess your coming before me is nearer to his reverence.

Oliver: What, boy!

Orlando: Come, come, elder brother, you are too young in this.

Oliver: Wilt thou lay hands on me, villain?

Orlando: I am no villain. I am the youngest son of Sir Rowland de Boys; he was my father, and he is thrice a villain that says such a father begot villains.

[I.i.27–55]

Initially Orlando's strength is his patrimony. "I am more proud to be Sir Rowland's son, / His youngest son, and would not change that calling / To be adopted heir to Frederick" [I.ii.219-21], he bravely (if foolishly) declares at court. In *Rosalind*, however, he finds a living idol. "But what talk we of fathers when there is such a man as Orlando?" we have heard Rosalind wonder [III.iv.35–6], and Orlando may well ask a

similar question, for after meeting Rosalind he scarcely mentions Sir Rowland again. Instead romantic love inspires him, though a sampling of his poetry reminds us, for all his great strength, he is at heart a child:

Therefore heaven Nature charged
 That one body should be filled
 With all graces wide-enlarged.
 Nature presently distilled
 Helen's cheek, but not her heart,
 Cleopatra's majesty,
 Atalanta's better part,
 Sad Lucretia's modesty.
 Thus Rosalind of many parts
 By heavenly synod was devised,
 Of many faces, eyes, and hearts,
 To have the touches dearest prized.
 Heaven would that she these gifts should have,
 And I to live and die her slave.

[III.ii.138–51]

Like a schoolboy, Orlando has memorized old names and rhymes and fashioned from them a goddess. But one cannot marry a goddess—one can only “live and die her slave.” Regardless, Rosalind is much too self-aware for pedestals: she determines not only to learn about her lover but to teach Orlando about his. Only then can she accept him as husband—and offer herself as wife.

Rosalind

For me the most interesting thing about Rosalind is how much Arden enhances her. Her father, Duke Senior, pontificates about “tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones, and good in everything” [II.i.16–7]; Rosalind intuits the forest's wisdom and becomes its vessel. We have already heard her melancholy at court,⁵

⁵ After completing *As You Like It*, Shakespeare may have turned next to *Hamlet*. Both Rosalind and the Prince of Denmark suffer the stultifying effects of corrupt societies. (They also lose fathers to the machinations of uncles, though perhaps this is mainly

due mainly to her uncle's cruelty but also to her growing awareness of her cousin's immaturity. Celia shows no interest in love—she would rather laugh with Touchstone; occasionally, Rosalind plays along:

Celia: Here comes Monsieur Le Beau.
Rosalind: With his mouth full of news.
Celia: Which he will put on us as pigeons feed their young.
Rosalind: Then shall we be news-crammed.
Celia: All the better; we shall be the more marketable. *Bonjour*, Monsieur Le Beau, what's the news?
Le Beau: Fair princess, you have lost much good sport.
Celia: Sport; of what color?
Le Beau: What color, madam? How shall I answer you?
Rosalind: As wit and fortune will.
Touchstone: Or as the destinies decree.
Celia: Well said; that was laid on with a trowel.
Touchstone: Nay, if I keep not my rank—
Rosalind: Thou lovest thy old smell.
Le Beau: You amaze me, ladies.

[I.ii.86–102]

Le Beau is a good man—later he shall warn Orlando of Duke Frederick's bad intentions—and he deserves more respect than the girls and their fool show him. Curiously, though Celia convinces Touchstone to join them in exile [I.iii.130–1], it is Rosalind's idea to invite him, as “a comfort to our travel” [I.iii.129]; yet by the time they reach Arden Rosalind seems already to have wearied of the jester. The entrance of Corin, gracious and simple, provokes an immediate contrast:

Touchstone: Holla, you clown!
Rosalind: Peace, fool! he's not thy kinsman.
Corin: Who calls?
Touchstone: Your betters, sir.
Corin: Else are they very wretched.
Rosalind: Peace, I say! Good even to you, friend.
Corin: And to you, gentle sir, and to you all.

[II.iv.62–8]

coincidence—villainous uncles are useful plot devices.) Rosalind escapes to the woods; Hamlet, confined in a tragedy, escapes only through death.

Touchstone holds his peace as Corin leads Rosalind (disguised as Ganymede) and the famished Celia (disguised as Aliena) to his master's cottage, which they promptly buy. When next we see Rosalind, she is master-mistress of paradise, a point reinforced by Orlando's lame verses:

From the east to western Ind,
No jewel is like Rosalind.
Her worth, being mounted on the wind,
Through all the world bears Rosalind.
All the pictures fairest lined
Are but black to Rosalind.
Let no face be kept in mind
But the fair of Rosalind.

[III.ii.85–92]

Rosalind finds this poem hanging from a tree. “Truly the tree yields bad fruit,”

Touchstone cracks, and she demolishes him:

I'll graft it with you and then I shall graft it with a medlar. Then it
will be the earliest fruit i' th' country; for you'll be rotten ere you
be half ripe, and that's the right virtue of the medlar.

[III.ii.113–7]

Touchstone hangs around long enough to “make an honorable retreat” [III.ii.157–8]; he then scurries to another corner of the forest, where Jaques waits to fawn on him, and Audrey to tempt him, leaving Rosalind in blessed peace to woo and be wooed.

This wooing, of course, requires Orlando, who initially experiences Arden as an “uncouth forest” [II.vi.6]. Seeking “savage” things to eat, Orlando stumbles instead upon Duke Senior's camp, where he finds the necessary sustenance to devote the remainder of his exile to romance.⁶ When Celia spots him “under a tree, like a dropped acorn” or “wounded knight,” Rosalind—for the first time in the play—happily loses her cool:

⁶ That is, when he is not battling hungry snakes and lions. In contrast, the forest is only benevolent toward Rosalind.

Rosalind: Though it be pity to see such a sight, it well becomes the ground.

Celia: Cry “holla” to thy tongue, I prithee; it curvets unseasonably. He was furnished like a hunter.

Rosalind: O, ominous! he comes to kill my heart.

Celia: I would sing my song without a burden. Thou bringest me out of tune.

Rosalind: Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak.

[III.ii.229–45]

These last lines offer a clue to Rosalind’s decision to remain disguised: if she cannot speak calmly of Orlando to Celia, how can she trust herself in his presence? Orlando’s poems, papering the trees, have surely reminded her of his previous, awkward attempts at conversation—at the time he seemed more “lifeless block” than lover [I.ii.238]. Therein lies the tension: a woman who cannot wait passively for a man who doesn’t know how to lead. The virtue of “Ganymede” is that he allows Rosalind to reverse the traditional roles without threatening Orlando’s manhood; she can lead, and he can safely follow.

The crucial question, then, is not why Rosalind pretends but whether Orlando knows she is pretending—and if so, when does he learn? The easy answer—that he remains ignorant until she reveals herself, late in Act Five—has the unfortunate effect of making Orlando laughably dense; suspension of disbelief notwithstanding, the audience always knows it is Rosalind beneath the cap, and so we could not help but feel superior to Orlando—if we didn’t dismiss him as a mere simpleton. In contrast, the sooner Orlando senses the truth, the more pleasure he—and Rosalind, and the actors playing them—can take in their game.

I generally find Shakespearean characters more compelling the longer they can delay crucial decisions—we saw this in *Merchant* with Shylock, and we shall see it again

with Brutus, Hamlet, and the procession of tragic heroes who follow. Yet Shakespeare's best characters are also marvelously aware—those who grasp more of their condition make greater use of the rich store of ironies Shakespeare provides. Rosalind has mastered this, and it would be strange if her lover did not at least approach her level of understanding. When, then, is the earliest that Orlando might recognize her?

Let us begin with their first conversation in Arden. They have previously spoken only once, at court, where Rosalind did everything to signal her desire but declare it (“Did you call, sir? / Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown / More than your enemies” [I.ii.240–2]); then, Orlando could only curse the “weights” upon his tongue [I.ii.244]. When next they meet, Rosalind leads him by more roundabout ways:

Rosalind: Do you hear, forester?

Orlando: Very well. What would you?

Rosalind: I pray you, what is't o'clock?

Orlando: You should ask me, what time o' day. There's no clock in the forest.

Rosalind: Then there is no true lover in the forest, else sighing every minute and groaning every hour would detect the lazy foot of Time as well as a clock.

[III.ii.290–8]

From clocks to lovers in a line! One suspects Rosalind's heart has briefly overruled her head—is she perhaps rebuking Orlando for not immediately knowing her? Regardless, he does not take the bait, instead pursuing for some 25 lines the idea of Time. I have quoted much of this section already, so I shall note only that Rosalind proves very witty, and Orlando is charmed:

Orlando: Where dwell you, pretty youth?

Rosalind: With this shepherdess, my sister; here in the skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat.

Orlando: Are you native of this place?

Rosalind: As the cony that you see dwell where she is kindled.

Orlando: Your accent is something finer than you could purchase in so removed a dwelling.

[III.ii.325–32]

Were I to direct *As You Like It*, I would point to these lines as the moment when Orlando first becomes conscious of Rosalind’s presence. He cannot yet articulate this consciousness—beyond remarking on the pretty youth’s incongruous accent—but it shall ripen as the play progresses. For now, he seems content to hear “Ganymede” talk—for Rosalind dominates their conversations—about love and women and one woman in particular:

Rosalind: There is a man haunts the forest that abuses our young plants with carving “Rosalind” on their barks, hangs odes upon hawthorns, and elegies on brambles; all, forsooth, deifying the name of Rosalind. If I could meet that fancy-monger, I would give him some good counsel, for he seems to have the quotidian of love upon him.

Orlando: I am he that is so love-shaked. I pray you tell me your remedy.

Rosalind: There is none of my uncle’s marks upon you. He taught me how to know a man in love; in which cage of rushes I am sure you are not prisoner.

Orlando: What were his marks?

Rosalind: 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: but I pardon you for that, for simply your having in beard is a younger brother’s revenue. 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 another.

[III.ii.348–71]

May we assume Orlando has never heard anything like this before? Not from old Adam, and certainly not from Oliver. Ganymede offers himself as an equal, a friend, which—even more than love—is what Orlando most needs. For Rosalind’s part, her observations

serve a twofold purpose: they point out the absurdities of romantic clichés, at least as applied to men; more urgently, they push Orlando to reaffirm his love:

Orlando: Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love.

Rosalind: Me believe it? You may as soon make her that you love believe it, which I warrant she is apter to do than to confess she does; that is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their consciences.

[III.ii.372–7]

To facilitate this confession, among other things, Rosalind proposes a plan whereby Ganymede will “cure” Orlando of his lovesickness by pretending to be Rosalind. As evidence the plan is not totally bizarre, she describes how Ganymede once cured a similar man:

Rosalind: He was to imagine me his love, his mistress; and I set him every day to woo me. At which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles; for every passion something and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this color; would now like him, now loathe him; then entertain him, then forswear him; now weep for him, then spit at him; that I drove my suitor from his mad humor of love to a living humor of madness, which was, to forswear the full stream of the world and to live in a nook merely monastic. And thus I cured him; and this way will I take upon me to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep’s heart, that there shall not be one spot of love in’t.

Orlando: I would not be cured, youth.

Rosalind: I would cure you, if you would but call me Rosalind and come every day to my cote and woo me.

[III.ii.392–411]

Rosalind intends to cure Orlando not of love but of idolatry. By pretending to be Ganymede pretending to be Rosalind, she grants herself permission to be what Orlando’s goddess is not: “proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant,” and most crucially, “changeable.” By pretending with her, Orlando likewise grants permission. Again, we may debate how much of the truth he comprehends. The scene ends with Orlando

enthusiastically accepting Ganymede's challenge; it is difficult to believe he has not on some level guessed his new friend's identity. Yet that level remains buried, for Orlando comes late to their next meeting—he does not even bring an excuse:

Rosalind: Why, how now, Orlando, where have you been all this while?
You a lover? An 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 part of a
minute in the affairs of love, it may be said of him that Cupid hath
clapped him o' th' shoulder, but I'll warrant him heart-whole.

Orlando: Pardon me, dear Rosalind.

Rosalind: Nay, an you be so tardy, come no more in my sight. I had as lief
be wooed 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, I think, than you make a woman.
Besides, he brings his destiny with him.

Orlando: What's that?

Rosalind: Why, horns; which such as you are fain to be beholding to your
wives for; but he comes armed in his fortune and prevents the
slander of his wife.

Orlando: Virtue is no horn-maker, and my Rosalind is virtuous.

Rosalind: And I am your Rosalind.

[IV.i.36–60]

Though he apologizes for his fault, Orlando does not sound much like a man with a serious purpose. In contrast, Rosalind seems genuinely hurt; she tweaks him with the standard Elizabethan horn-speak until his tone changes. Unable to challenge his defense of her virtue, Rosalind softens:

Rosalind: Come, woo me, woo me; for now I am in a holiday humor and
like enough to consent. What would you say to me now, and I were
your very very Rosalind?

Orlando: I would kiss before I spoke.

Rosalind: Nay, you were better speak first, and when you were graveled
for lack of matter, you might take occasion to kiss. Very good
orators, when they are out, they will spit; and for lovers, lacking—
God warn us!—matter, the cleanliest shift is to kiss.

Orlando: How if the kiss be denied?

Rosalind: Then she puts you to entreaty, and there begins new matter.

Orlando: Who could be out, being before his beloved mistress?

Rosalind: Marry, that should you, if I were your mistress, or I should think my honesty ranker than my wit.

Orlando: What, of my suit?

Rosalind: Not out of your apparel, and yet out of your suit.

[IV.i.63–82]

Good actors can have great fun with these lines, their glittering surfaces covering sexual pun after pun. Orlando might lean in for a real kiss, and Rosalind might nearly reciprocate, only to retreat at the last moment into banter. Thus denied, Orlando succumbs to a darker spirit:

Rosalind: Am not I your Rosalind?

Orlando: I take some joy to say you are, because I would be talking of her.

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

Orlando: Then, in mine own person, I die.

Rosalind: No, faith, die by attorney. The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love cause. Troilus 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, 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 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.

[IV.i.82–100]

Shakespeare’s own works provide ample evidence that love—at least, the passions love arouses—is not always so harmless. Yet within the context of her play, Rosalind knows best: in Arden, men do not even die from wild animals. (Deer are less fortunate.) Regardless, Orlando misses the point, and Rosalind graciously changes topic:

Orlando: I would not have my right Rosalind of this mind, for I protest 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?

[IV.i.101–115]

Having baffled Orlando, Rosalind abruptly orders Celia (who remains onstage throughout) to pretend to marry them. Truthfully, I do not understand her motivation—perhaps Orlando’s entreaties and hyperboles prompt her to escalate the pace, as though to say: *So you want to go fast?* Orlando actually keeps up for a time, though Rosalind does her best to disorient him:

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

Orlando: For ever and a day.

Rosalind: Say “a day,” without the “ever.” No, no, Orlando; 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. I 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.

Orlando: But will my Rosalind do so?

Rosalind: By my life, she will do as I do.

Orlando: O, but she is wise.

Rosalind: Or else she could not have the wit to do this; the wiser, the waywarder. Make the doors upon a woman’s wit, and it will out at the casement; shut that, and ’twill out at the keyhole; stop that, ’twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney.

[IV.i.133–54]

At last, and just as abruptly, Orlando excuses himself; he “must attend the duke at dinner” [IV.i.168], though one suspects he also wants to escape the barrage of unpleasant ideas about “his” Rosalind: that she may not always be perfectly wise, or worse, that her wisdom might justify actions that disturb him, or smother him, or simply annoy him. Reluctantly, Rosalind allows Orlando to leave, though she warns, “if you break one jot of your promise or come one minute behind your hour, I will think you the most pathological 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” [IV.i.178–82].

Two hours later, Orlando again has missed his cue. Rosalind distracts herself by meddling in the affairs of Silvius, who loves Phebe, who has fallen for Ganymede and ordered Silvius to bear him a love letter. It is interesting to consider how Rosalind treats these silly shepherds in light of her own situation. Celia—though she has grown very frustrated by Rosalind and Orlando—cannot help but pity Silvius, reduced to serving a scornful mistress. Rosalind, still pretending to be Ganymede, feels otherwise:

Celia: Alas, poor shepherd!

Rosalind: Do you pity him? No, he deserves no pity. *[to Silvius]* Wilt thou love such a woman? What, to make thee an instrument, and play false strains upon thee? Not to be endured! Well, go your way to her, for I see love hath made thee a tame snake, and say this to her: that if she love me, I charge her to love thee; if she will not, I will never have her unless thou entreat for her.

[IV.iii.64–71]

Does Rosalind lose patience with Silvius because she fears love has made her just as big a fool? For all she knows of Orlando, he has rejected her. (If nothing else, Orlando is developing a reputation for unreliability—hardly the mark of a good husband.) Rosalind never comes closer than this moment to losing her faith. Fortunately, as Silvius exits Oliver enters with incredible news: Orlando is no “break-promise” but a genuine

hero, risking his own life to save his unworthy brother's. As proof, Oliver displays Orlando's bloody handkerchief, whereupon Rosalind faints. "Many will swoon when they do look on blood," Oliver notes, but Celia is correct when she replies, "There is more in it" [IV.iii.157–8]. Surely Rosalind has swooned as much from relief, to learn Orlando has not jilted her, as from squeamishness.

Even so, as Celia and Oliver help her offstage, Rosalind frets that Orlando shall hear of her unmanly display. "But I pray you commend my counterfeiting to him," she presses Oliver [IV.iii.179–80], and when she finally sees Orlando she repeats the message: "Did your brother tell you how I counterfeited to swoon when he showed me your handkerchief?" [V.ii.25–6]. Since entering Arden, Rosalind has controlled the action by convincing others to pretend with her. Now a power greater than her own—inscrutable fortune—has brought Orlando to a crisis. He has fled a wicked brother only to rescue him, and his reward for virtue is to watch this brother stumble into love and marriage:

Orlando: But, O, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes! By so much the more shall I tomorrow be at the height of heart-heaviness, by how much I shall think my brother happy in having what he wishes for.

Rosalind: Why then, tomorrow I cannot serve your turn for Rosalind?

Orlando: I can live no longer by thinking.

[V.ii.41–8]

No amount of pretending can hide the blatant unfairness of this twist: if the universe contained any justice, Orlando would be enjoying *his* deserts. Yet Rosalind asks for patience—and one more act of faith:

Rosalind: Believe then, if you please, that I can do strange things. I have, since I was three year old, conversed with a magician, most profound in his art and yet not damnable. If you do love Rosalind so near the heart as your gesture cries it out, when your brother marries Aliena shall you marry her. I know into what straits of fortune she is driven; and it is not impossible to me, if it appear not

inconvenient to you, to set her before your eyes tomorrow, human as she is, and without any danger.

Orlando: Speakest thou in sober meanings?

Rosalind: By my life, I do, which I tender dearly, though I say I am a magician. Therefore put you in your best array, bid your friends; for if you will be married tomorrow, you shall; and to Rosalind, if you will.

[V.ii.56–70]

As she did previously after fainting, Rosalind dwells on what seem like minor details: does anyone *really* think that Orlando, fearing “damnable” magic, shall not joyfully embrace her when she reveals herself? I find such worries endearing; they humanize Rosalind—on the verge of her triumph, she is valiantly battling butterflies—and give the scene a giddy energy that only heightens when Silvius and Phebe race onstage, the former still chasing the latter, the latter still chasing Ganymede:

Phebe: Youth, you have done me much ungentleness
To show the letter that I writ to you.

Rosalind: I care not if I have. It is my study
To seem spiteful and ungentle to you.
You are there followed by a faithful shepherd:
Look upon him, love him; he worships you.

Phebe: Good shepherd, tell this youth what ’tis to love.

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.

[V.ii.72–83]

This chant continues for two more rounds until everyone finally bursts:

Phebe: If this be so, why blame you me to love you?

Silvius: If this be so, why blame you me to love you?

Orlando: If this be so, why blame you me to love you?

Rosalind: Why do you speak too, “Why blame you me to love you?”

Orlando: To her that is not here, nor doth not hear.

Rosalind: Pray you, no more of this; ’tis like the howling of Irish wolves
against the moon.

[V.ii.98–105]

The howling ends; Rosalind, her plan still evolving, promises to satisfy everyone tomorrow; and Shakespeare segues into the final scene. (Technically not quite: first we must endure another Touchstone-Audrey spectacle.) Orlando enters with Duke Senior, and we remember that father and daughter have not truly been reunited. (The duke has conversed offstage with Rosalind-as-Ganymede.) We might wonder why Rosalind conceals her identity for so long from her father: between her arrival in Arden and the play's final scene she mentions him only once, at Celia's prompting, and then—as we have heard already—promptly dismisses him.⁷ The simplest answer is that romantic love takes precedence. When she invites the duke to her *coup de théâtre*, Rosalind is careful first to extract from him a crucial promise:

Rosalind: Patience once more, whiles our compact is urged.

You say, if I bring in your Rosalind,
You will bestow her on Orlando here?

Duke Senior: That would I, had I kingdoms to give with her.

[V.iv.5–8]

After confirming the rest of her plan—Orlando vows to marry Rosalind, and Phebe Silvius—Rosalind disappears to shed her costume. Duke Senior nearly identifies her, but Orlando contradicts him ... forcing me to wonder if he really has been dense all along:

Duke Senior: I do remember in this shepherd boy
Some lively touches of my daughter's favor.

Orlando: My lord, the first time that I ever saw him
Methought he was a brother to your daughter.
But, my good lord, this boy is forest-born,
And hath been tutored in the rudiments
Of many desperate studies by his uncle,
Whom he reports to be a great magician,
Obscured in the circle of this forest.

[V.iv.26–34]

Yet again Touchstone delays Rosalind's re-entrance, to the delight of Jaques, at

⁷ “But what talk we of fathers when there is such a man as Orlando?” [III.iv.35–6]

least. They riff off-topic—in addition to stages of man, apparently there are seven causes of quarrel and degrees of lie—before Touchstone mercifully concludes, “Your If is the only peacemaker. Much virtue in If” [V.iv.101]. Touchstone’s conclusion leads back to Rosalind, who more than anyone understands the virtue of pretense, of “If.” As music plays and Hymen, the ancient god of marriage, narrates, Rosalind appears as herself to resolve the several conflicts into unions:

Rosalind: To you I give myself, for I am yours.

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.

Phebe: If sight and shape be true,

Why then, my love adieu!

Rosalind: I’ll have no father, if you be not he.

I’ll have no husband, if you be not he.

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

[V.iv.114–22]

The parallel lines further suggest some ritual or charm invoked by Hymen, who leads the cast in one last song. So lovely is the effect, we may miss that Rosalind, like Celia before her, falls dutifully silent as the men take charge. A new character, Jaques de Boys—Oliver and Orlando’s brother—appears as though by magic to announce the inexplicable religious conversion and abdication of Duke Frederick. His title and lands restored, Duke Senior leads everyone offstage dancing. The play seems over, when Rosalind—more precisely, the actress (or actor) playing Rosalind—reappears to speak one of Shakespeare’s few epilogues:

It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue, but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue. If it be true that good wine needs no bush, ’tis true that a good play needs no epilogue; yet to good wine they do use good bushes, and good plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues.

[Epilogue, 1–6]

In my discussion of *The Taming of the Shrew*, I noted how that play's induction explicitly reminds us that Kate and Petruchio are merely actors. In contrast, Rosalind's epilogue expands, rather than constrains, her character—partly because even here we, like Orlando, cannot be certain who is speaking. She (he?) sounds like a member of the acting company, tasked with coaxing from us applause, yet she sounds equally like Rosalind—no surprise, for Rosalind is herself a master performer. Regardless, though she insists on humility (a good policy when dukes and queens may attend one's performance), the speaker cannot resist hints of pride:

What a case am I in then, that am neither a good epilogue, nor cannot insinuate with you in the behalf of a good play! I am not furnished like a beggar; therefore to beg will not become me. My way is to conjure you ...

[Epilogue 6–10]

Orlando, Phebe, and the countless readers and playgoers who have fallen for Rosalind can attest to this. To *conjure* means to practice magic, especially by summoning spirits, but it also means to urge. Rosalind urges our compliance, and we are enchanted. It's surely no coincidence that her final words begin with Touchstone's virtuous "peacemaker":

If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, complexions that liked me, and breaths that I defied not; and I am sure, as many as have good beards, or good faces, or sweet breaths, will, for my kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell.

[Epilogue, 16–21]

The speaker exits, but Rosalind lingers in whichever form we desire: male, female, princess, shepherd, lover—always seemingly within reach, and always elusive. I've been struggling for days with this epilogue, and I'm still not sure how to unpack it. Why does Rosalind, of all Shakespeare's heroines, need one last speech to "conjure"

applause? Simply to grant her, in spite of convention, the last word? (Rosalind is the only woman in Shakespeare to speak her play's final lines.) Regardless of the answer, she never fails to reward our attention.

Various Thoughts

- About Dukes Senior and Frederick, I have much less to say. The good duke, Rosalind's father, lacks the self-knowledge to make his sermons anything but tiresome:

Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
 Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
 Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
 More free from peril than the envious court?
 Here feel we not the penalty of Adam;
 The seasons' difference, as the icy fang
 And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
 Which, when it bites and blows upon my body
 Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say
 "This is no flattery"; these are counselors
 That feelingly persuade me what I am.

[II.i.1–11]

Rhetoric like this comes easily to Duke Senior and goes mostly unchallenged—by the courtiers who have followed him into exile and by Shakespeare, who consistently tells rather than shows the forest's less-pleasant elements. Indeed, the lines that best describe life in Arden come from Charles the wrestler, who says of the exiles, "there they live like the old Robin Hood of England ... and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world" [I.i.110–3]—hardly images of stoicism.

- As for the usurping duke, Frederick, he seems genuinely pained by the loss of his daughter; his rebuke to Celia, previously quoted, ranks among the play's more

intense moments⁸ and suggests what Shakespeare, in another context, might have made of their relationship. Yet Frederick appears in only two more scenes; so incredible is his fate at play's end, Shakespeare doesn't even bother to dramatize it. Per young Jaques de Boys:

Duke Frederick, hearing how that every day
Men of great worth resorted to this forest,
Addressed a mighty power, which were on foot
In his own conduct, purposely to take
His brother here and put him to the sword;
And to the skirts of this wild wood he came,
Where, meeting with an old religious man,
After some question with him, was converted
Both from his enterprise and from the world,
His crown bequeathing to his banished brother,
And all their lands restored to them again
That were with him exiled.

[V.iv.152–63]

The crown—that symbol of worldly gain—proves an unwelcome prize. Why should we believe Duke Senior shall make better use of his second chance to rule? Shakespeare kicks this question to the end of his career, when he places an infinitely more interesting duke at the center of his final masterpiece. Unlike *The Tempest*, *As You Like It* still derives its energy from youth, when every experience—and especially love—seems new.

- This sentiment applies even to Jaques (the courtier, not the brother), who wears his melancholy like a newfound costume, though he would happily play straight man to Touchstone. Alas, Touchstone seems more interested in poor Corin, whose name, at least, he recalls. “Good even, good Master What-ye-call’t” is all the courtesy Jaques gets from the professional fool [III.iii.68]. (If it were not already

⁸ “Thou art a fool. She [Rosalind] robs thee of thy name, / And thou wilt show more bright and seem more virtuous / When she is gone.” [I.iii.78–80]

obvious, I dislike Touchstone, who embodies the worst impulses of my least-favorite Shakespearean type: the cynical clown.) I would rather hear Jaques pontificate any day, and it is with him that I shall close.

Jaques

In some ways, Jaques is surprisingly easy to measure. Duke Senior supplies all the backstory we need:

Jaques: ... give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and through
Cleanse the foul body of th' infected world,
If they will patiently receive my medicine.

Duke Senior: Fie on thee! I can tell what thou wouldst do.

Jaques: What, for a counter, would I do but good?

Duke Senior: Most mischievous foul sin, in chiding sin.
For thou thyself hast been a libertine,
As sensual as the brutish sting itself;
And all th' embossed sores and headed evils
That thou with license of free foot hast caught,
Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world.

[II.vii.58–69]

Criticisms aside, Duke Senior clearly likes Jaques, whose “sullen fits” the duke finds “full of matter” [II.i.67–8]. Orlando is less impressed (though Jaques insists the feeling is mutual):

Jaques: I thank you for your company; but, good faith, I had as lief have been myself alone.

Orlando: And so had I; but yet for fashion sake I thank you too for your society.

Jaques: God b' wi' you; let's meet as little as we can.

Orlando: I do desire we may be better strangers.

Jaques: I pray you mar no more trees with writing love songs in their barks.

Orlando: I pray you mar no more of my verses with reading them ill-favoredly.

[III.ii.248–57]

Jaques may protest, but someone has been spurring this conversation, and I doubt it's been Orlando, whom I envision in some lonely glade, composing a poem, when Jaques stumbles upon him. Seizing the fresh grist, Jaques grinds and grinds:

Jaques: Rosalind is your love's name?

Orlando: Yes, just.

Jaques: I do not like her name.

Orlando: There was no thought of pleasing you when she was christened.

Jaques: What stature is she of?

Orlando: Just as high as my heart.

Jaques: You are full of pretty answers. Have you not been acquainted with goldsmiths' wives, and conned them out of rings?

Orlando: Not so; but I answer you right painted cloth, from whence you have studied your questions.

Jaques: You have a nimble wit; I think 'twas made of Atalanta's heels. Will you sit down with me? and we two will rail against our mistress the world and all our misery.

[III.ii.258–73]

Misery, of course, loves company, but Jaques misreads Orlando, whom love has not made miserable:

Orlando: I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I know most faults.

Jaques: The worst fault you have is to be in love.

Orlando: 'Tis a fault I will not change for your best virtue. I am weary of you.

Jaques: By my troth, I was seeking for a fool when I found you.

Orlando: He is drowned in the brook. Look but in and you shall see him.

Jaques: There I shall see mine own figure.

Orlando: Which I take to be either a fool or a cipher.

Jaques: I'll tarry no longer with you. Farewell, good Signor Love.

Orlando: I am glad of your departure. Adieu, good Monsieur Melancholy.

[III.ii.274–88]

Having failed to convert Orlando, Jaques next targets Rosalind. She immediately perceives his hollow philosophy:

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 of either are abominable fellows,
and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than
drunkards.

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

Rosalind: Why then, 'tis good to be a post.

[IV.i.1–9]

To his credit, Jaques grabs the rebound and runs with it:

I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor
the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is
proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's,
which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's,
which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own,
compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and
indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, which, by often
rumination, wraps me in a most humorous sadness.

[IV.i.10–19]

Rosalind then demolishes him even more thoroughly than she did Touchstone:

Rosalind: A traveler! 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.

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.

[IV.i.20–7]

Yet unlike Touchstone, Jaques cannot be reduced to his caricature. This is not
because his lines are very wise—however readily we may quote them—but because they
are so lively. Consider our first impression: two anonymous lords describe “the
melancholy Jaques” mourning a deer that has been wounded by a hunter and left to die.⁹

Duke Senior can guess what follows:

Duke Senior:

But what said Jaques?

⁹ This last fact is important, for it implies the exiled lords are not living harmoniously
with nature, taking only what they need to survive; they have merely transferred their
court to Arden. Duke Senior confesses this “irks” him [II.i.22], yet he makes no apparent
effort to change his or his followers' habits.

Did he not moralize this spectacle?
First Lord: O, yes, into a thousand similes.
 First, for his weeping into the needless stream:
 “Poor deer,” quoth he, “thou mak’st a testament
 As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more
 To that which had too much.” Then, being there alone,
 Left and abandoned of his velvet friend:
 “’Tis right,” quoth he, “thus misery doth part
 The flux of company.” Anon a careless herd,
 Full of the pasture, jumps along by him
 And never stays to greet him; “Ay,” quoth Jaques,
 “Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens,
 ’Tis just the fashion; wherefore do you look
 Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there?” . . .
Duke Senior: And did you leave him in this contemplation?
Second Lord: We did, my lord, weeping and commenting
 Upon the sobbing deer.

[II.i.43–66]

This is the caricature; if it contained Jaques, I should, like Orlando, gladly be rid of him. When the duke finally locates him, however, Jaques forgets to be dour:

Duke Senior: Why, how now, monsieur, what a life is this,
 That your poor friends must woo your company?
 What, you look merrily.
Jaques: A fool, a fool! I met a fool i’ th’ forest,
 A motley fool! a miserable world!
 As I do live by food, I met a fool
 Who laid him down and basked him in the sun
 And railed on Lady Fortune in good terms,
 In good set terms, and yet a motley fool.

[II.vii.9–17]

As Jaques describes this delightful meeting, we may wonder if the two lords had hallucinated the episode with the deer:

“Good morrow, fool,” quoth I. “No, sir,” quoth he,
 “Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune.”
 And then he drew a dial from his poke,
 And looking on it with lackluster eye,
 Says very wisely, “It is ten o’clock.
 Thus we may see,” quoth he, “how the world wags.
 ’Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,
 And after one hour more ’twill be eleven;

And so, from hour to hour,¹⁰ we ripe and ripe,
 And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot;
 And thereby hangs a tale.” When I did hear
 The motley fool thus moral on the time,
 My lungs began to crow like chanticleer
 That fools should be so deep contemplative;
 And I did laugh sans intermission
 An hour by his dial.

[II.vii.18–33]

I much prefer this Jaques (this Touchstone also): he is like a boy wearing grownup’s clothes and giggling at obscenities. Yet this analysis too is superficial. As usual, Rosalind’s lead is best: Jaques has traveled the world and gained nothing (except perhaps venereal disease). Upon returning home, he finds himself on the wrong end of a coup that dumps him, his friends, and their lord in a forest. These outcomes must have impressed upon Jaques his grand insignificance; to cope with the shock, he has turned philosopher. Unfortunately, as we have seen, the former libertine lacks the wit to match even Orlando. Jaques’s most enduring speech tells us nothing about the world beyond his own distorted view; its key word is *merely*:

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 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. . . .

[II.vii.138–48]

In his darkest moments, Jaques denies self-worth. A person is not an individual but a succession of parts, each characterized by its most ridiculous traits: the puking

¹⁰ Pronounced like “whore”

infant, the whining schoolboy, the sighing lover, the rash soldier, the corrupt justice, the doddering old man:

Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

[II.vii.162–5]

One suspects Jaques has spent hours polishing this set piece, only to see it shattered by the entrance of Orlando carrying Adam. Orlando selflessly urges his servant to eat first, and the old man, though helpless now, retains his dignity.

Not only Adam and Orlando but Rosalind, Celia, Duke Senior, even Jaques himself—who has stuck with his friends despite their troubles—stand as counterexamples to the play’s bits of cynicism. Rather than sigh or quarrel, they mainly choose to live well within the paradise Shakespeare provides (no small provision, to be sure). Again, the unanswerable question is who shall continue to live well *without* Arden. Rather than risk disappointment, Jaques remains in the forest, apparently to join Duke Frederick’s hermitage. (“Out of these convertites,” he argues, “There is much matter to be heard and learned” [V.iv.182–3], though if Frederick had anything profound to say, Shakespeare would surely have given him more stage time.) The rest return to court—wiser, I want to believe, than when they left. That is, Rosalind is wiser, but about the others—even Orlando—I have my doubts.

In this respect *As You Like It* resembles most of Shakespeare’s plays. Their pervasive ambivalence—the sense that even in comedies no one makes it through undamaged—is one source of their enduring fascination. Yet *As You Like It* stumps me, at least partly, because I do not know how much of my response—what I perceive as

ambivalence—is really just disappointment that so many characters seem underdeveloped. From a play with so wonderful a heroine, I want more.

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