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## *As You Like It*

### **Plot:**

Sir Rowland de Bois has recently died, and, according to the custom of primogeniture, the vast majority of his estate has passed into the possession of his eldest son, Oliver. Although Sir Rowland has instructed Oliver to take good care of his brother, Orlando, Oliver refuses to do so. Out of pure spite, he denies Orlando the education, training, and property befitting a gentleman. Charles, a wrestler from the court of Duke Frederick, arrives to warn Oliver of a rumor that Orlando will challenge Charles to a fight on the following day. Fearing censure if he should beat a nobleman, Charles begs Oliver to intervene, but Oliver convinces the wrestler that Orlando is a dishonorable sportsman who will take whatever dastardly means necessary to win. Charles vows to pummel Orlando, which delights Oliver.

Duke Senior has been usurped of his throne by his brother, Duke Frederick, and has fled to the Forest of Ardenne, where he lives like Robin Hood with a band of loyal followers. Duke Frederick allows Senior's daughter, Rosalind, to remain at court because of her inseparable friendship with his own daughter, Celia. The day arrives when Orlando is scheduled to fight Charles, and the women witness Orlando's defeat of the court wrestler. Orlando and Rosalind instantly fall in love with one another, though Rosalind keeps this fact a secret from everyone but Celia. Orlando returns home from the wrestling match, only to have his faithful servant Adam warn him about Oliver's plot against Orlando's life. Orlando decides to leave for the safety of Ardenne. Without warning, Duke Frederick has a change of heart regarding Rosalind and banishes her from court. She, too, decides to flee to the Forest of Ardenne and leaves with Celia, who cannot bear to be without Rosalind, and Touchstone, the court jester. To ensure the safety of their journey, Rosalind assumes the dress of a young man and takes the name Ganymede, while Celia dresses as a common shepherdess and calls herself Aliena.

Duke Frederick is furious at his daughter's disappearance. When he learns that the flight of his daughter and niece coincides with the disappearance of Orlando, the duke orders Oliver to lead the manhunt, threatening to confiscate Oliver's lands and property should he fail. Frederick also decides it is time to destroy his brother once and for all and begins to raise an army.

Duke Senior lives in the Forest of Ardenne with a band of lords who have gone into voluntary exile. He praises the simple life among the trees, happy to be absent from the machinations of court life. Orlando, exhausted by travel and desperate to find food for his starving companion, Adam, barges in on the duke's camp and rudely demands that they not eat until he is given food. Duke Senior calms Orlando and, when he learns that the young man is the son of his dear former friend, accepts him into his company. Meanwhile, Rosalind and Celia, disguised as Ganymede and Aliena, arrive in the forest and meet a lovesick young shepherd named Silvius who pines away for the disdainful Phoebe. The two women purchase a modest cottage, and soon enough Rosalind runs into the equally lovesick Orlando. Taking her to be a young man, Orlando confides in Rosalind that his affections are overpowering him. Rosalind, as Ganymede, claims to be an expert in exorcising such emotions and promises to cure Orlando of lovesickness if he agrees to pretend that Ganymede is Rosalind and promises to come woo her every day. Orlando agrees, and the love lessons begin.

Meanwhile, Phoebe becomes increasingly cruel in her rejection of Silvius. When Rosalind intervenes, disguised as Ganymede, Phoebe falls hopelessly in love with Ganymede. One day, Orlando fails to show up for his tutorial with Ganymede. Rosalind, reacting to her infatuation with Orlando, is distraught until Oliver appears. Oliver describes how Orlando stumbled upon him in the forest and saved him from being devoured by a hungry lioness. Oliver and Celia, still disguised as the shepherdess Aliena, fall instantly in love and agree to marry. As time passes, Phoebe becomes increasingly insistent in her pursuit of Ganymede, and Orlando grows tired of pretending that a boy is his dear Rosalind. Rosalind decides to end the charade. She promises that Ganymede will wed Phoebe, if Ganymede will ever marry a woman, and she makes everyone pledge to meet the next day at the wedding. They all agree.

The day of the wedding arrives, and Rosalind gathers the various couples: Phoebe and Silvius; Celia and Oliver; Touchstone and Audrey, a goatherd he intends to marry; and Orlando. The

group congregates before Duke Senior and his men. Rosalind, still disguised as Ganymede, reminds the lovers of their various vows, then secures a promise from Phoebe that if for some reason she refuses to marry Ganymede she will marry Silvius, and a promise from the duke that he would allow his daughter to marry Orlando if she were available. Rosalind leaves with the disguised Celia, and the two soon return as themselves, accompanied by Hymen, the god of marriage. Hymen officiates at the ceremony and marries Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Phoebe and Silvius, and Audrey and Touchstone. The festive wedding celebration is interrupted by even more festive news: while marching with his army to attack Duke Senior, Duke Frederick came upon a holy man who convinced him to put aside his worldly concerns and assume a monastic life. -Frederick changes his ways and returns the throne to Duke Senior. The guests continue dancing, happy in the knowledge that they will soon return to the royal court.

## **CHARACTERS:**

### **ORLANDO**

According to his brother, Oliver, Orlando is of noble character, unschooled yet somehow learned, full of noble purposes, and loved by people of all ranks as if he had enchanted them (I.i.141–144). Although this description comes from the one character who hates Orlando and wishes him harm, it is an apt and generous picture of the hero of *As You Like It*. Orlando has a brave and generous spirit, though he does not possess Rosalind's wit and insight. As his love tutorial shows, he relies on commonplace clichés in matters of love, declaring that without the fair Rosalind, he would die. He does have a decent wit, however, as he demonstrates when he argues with Jaques, suggesting that Jaques should seek out a fool who wanders about the forest: "He is drowned in the brook. Look but in, and you shall see him," meaning that Jaques will see a fool in his own reflection (III.ii.262–263). But next to Rosalind, Orlando's imagination burns a bit less bright. This upstaging is no fault of Orlando's, given the fullness of Rosalind's character; Shakespeare clearly intends his audience to delight in the match. Time and again, Orlando performs tasks that reveal his nobility and demonstrate why he is so well-loved: he travels with the ancient Adam and makes a fool out of himself to secure the old man food; he risks his life to save the brother who has plotted against him; he cannot help but violate the many trees of

Ardenne with testaments of his love for Rosalind. In the beginning of the play, he laments that his brother has denied him the schooling deserved by a gentleman, but by the end, he has proven himself a gentleman without the formality of that education.

## **ROSALIND**

Rosalind dominates *As You Like It*. So fully realized is she in the complexity of her emotions, the subtlety of her thought, and the fullness of her character that no one else in the play matches up to her. Orlando is handsome, strong, and an affectionate, if unskilled, poet, yet still we feel that Rosalind settles for someone slightly less magnificent when she chooses him as her mate.

Similarly, the observations of Touchstone and Jaques, who might shine more brightly in another play, seem rather dull whenever Rosalind takes the stage.

The endless appeal of watching Rosalind has much to do with her success as a knowledgeable and charming critic of herself and others. But unlike Jaques, who refuses to participate wholly in life but has much to say about the foolishness of those who surround him, Rosalind gives herself over fully to circumstance. She chastises Silvius for his irrational devotion to Phoebe, and she challenges Orlando's thoughtless equation of Rosalind with a Platonic ideal, but still she comes undone by her lover's inconsequential tardiness and faints at the sight of his blood. That Rosalind can play both sides of any field makes her identifiable to nearly everyone, and so, irresistible.

Rosalind is a particular favorite among feminist critics, who admire her ability to subvert the limitations that society imposes on her as a woman. With boldness and imagination, she disguises herself as a young man for the majority of the play in order to woo the man she loves and instruct him in how to be a more accomplished, attentive lover—a tutorship that would not be welcome from a woman. There is endless comic appeal in Rosalind's lampooning of the conventions of both male and female behavior, but an Elizabethan audience might have felt a certain amount of anxiety regarding her behavior. After all, the structure of a male-dominated society depends upon both men and women acting in their assigned roles. Thus, in the end, Rosalind dispenses with the charade of her own character. Her emergence as an actor in the

Epilogue assures that theatergoers, like the Ardenne foresters, are about to exit a somewhat enchanted realm and return to the familiar world they left behind. But because they leave having learned the same lessons from Rosalind, they do so with the same potential to make that world a less punishing place.

## Themes

### The Delights of Love

*As You Like It* spoofs many of the conventions of poetry and literature dealing with love, such as the idea that love is a disease that brings suffering and torment to the lover, or the assumption that the male lover is the slave or servant of his mistress. These ideas are central features of the courtly love tradition, which greatly influenced European literature for hundreds of years before Shakespeare's time. In *As You Like It*, characters lament the suffering caused by their love, but these laments are all unconvincing and ridiculous. While Orlando's metrically incompetent poems conform to the notion that he should "live and die [Rosalind's] slave," these sentiments are roundly ridiculed (III.ii.142). Even Silvius, the untutored shepherd, assumes the role of the tortured lover, asking his beloved Phoebe to notice "the wounds invisible / That love's keen arrows make" (III.v.31–32). But Silvius's request for Phoebe's attention implies that the enslaved lover can loosen the chains of love and that all romantic wounds can be healed—otherwise, his request for notice would be pointless. In general, *As You Like It* breaks with the courtly love tradition by portraying love as a force for happiness and fulfillment and ridicules those who revel in their own suffering.

Celia speaks to the curative powers of love in her introductory scene with Rosalind, in which she implores her cousin to allow "the full weight" of her love to push aside Rosalind's unhappy thoughts (I.ii.6). As soon as Rosalind takes to Ardenne, she displays her own copious knowledge of the ways of love. Disguised as Ganymede, she tutors Orlando in how to be a more attentive and caring lover, counsels Silvius against prostrating himself for the sake of the all-too-human Phoebe, and scolds Phoebe for her arrogance in playing the shepherd's disdainful love object. When Rosalind famously insists that "[m]en have died from time to time, and worms have eaten

them, but not for love,” she argues against the notion that love concerns the perfect, mythic, or unattainable (IV.i.91–92). Unlike Jaques and Touchstone, both of whom have keen eyes and biting tongues trained on the follies of romance, Rosalind does not mean to disparage love. On the contrary, she seeks to teach a version of love that not only can survive in the real world, but can bring delight as well. By the end of the play, having successfully orchestrated four marriages and ensured the happy and peaceful return of a more just government, Rosalind proves that love is a source of incomparable delight.

### **The Malleability of the Human Experience**

In Act II, scene vii, Jaques philosophizes on the stages of human life: man passes from infancy into boyhood; becomes a lover, a soldier, and a wise civic leader; and then, year by year, becomes a bit more foolish until he is returned to his “second childishness and mere oblivion” (II.vii.164). Jaques’s speech remains an eloquent commentary on how quickly and thoroughly human beings can change, and, indeed, *do* change in *As You Like It*. Whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually, those who enter the Forest of Ardenne are often remarkably different when they leave. The most dramatic and unmistakable change, of course, occurs when Rosalind assumes the disguise of Ganymede. As a young man, Rosalind demonstrates how vulnerable to change men and women truly are. Orlando, of course, is putty in her hands; more impressive, however, is her ability to manipulate Phoebe’s affections, which move from Ganymede to the once despised Silvius with amazing speed.

In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare dispenses with the time--consuming and often hard-won processes involved in change. The characters do not struggle to become more pliant—their changes are instantaneous. Oliver, for instance, learns to love both his brother Orlando and a disguised Celia within moments of setting foot in the forest. Furthermore, the vengeful and ambitious Duke Frederick abandons all thoughts of fratricide after a single conversation with a religious old man. Certainly, these transformations have much to do with the restorative, almost magical effects of life in the forest, but the consequences of the changes also matter in the real world: the government that rules the French duchy, for example, will be more just under the rightful ruler Duke Senior, while the class structures inherent in court life promise to be

somewhat less rigid after the courtiers sojourn in the forest. These social reforms are a clear improvement and result from the more private reforms of the play's characters. *As You Like It* not only insists that people can and do change, but also celebrates their ability to change for the better.

### **City Life Versus Country Life**

Pastoral literature thrives on the contrast between life in the city and life in the country. Often, it suggests that the oppressions of the city can be remedied by a trip into the country's therapeutic woods and fields, and that a person's sense of balance and rightness can be restored by conversations with uncorrupted shepherds and shepherdesses. This type of restoration, in turn, enables one to return to the city a better person, capable of making the most of urban life.

Although Shakespeare tests the bounds of these conventions—his shepherdess Audrey, for instance, is neither articulate nor pure—he begins *As You Like It* by establishing the city/country dichotomy on which the pastoral mood depends. In Act I, scene i, Orlando rails against the injustices of life with Oliver and complains that he “know[s] no wise remedy how to avoid it” (I.i.20–21). Later in that scene, as Charles relates the whereabouts of Duke Senior and his followers, the remedy is clear: “in the forest of Ardenne . . . many young gentlemen . . . fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world” (I.i.99–103). Indeed, many are healed in the forest—the lovesick are coupled with their lovers and the usurped duke returns to his throne—but Shakespeare reminds us that life in Ardenne is a temporary affair. As the characters prepare to return to life at court, the play does not laud country over city or vice versa, but instead suggests a delicate and necessary balance between the two. The simplicity of the forest provides shelter from the strains of the court, but it also creates the need for urban style and sophistication: one would not do, or even matter, without the other.

### ***As You Like It* as a Comedy**

Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is a finest kind of romantic comedy. A romantic comedy is a play in which violates the classical or neo-classical rigid rules and norms and deals with love at first sight, unbridled emotions and passions, imagination and fancy, fun and laughter. We need to

discuss various element and aspects of the play *As You Like It* to justify how far it is a romantic comedy.

The mingling of comic and tragic incidents in *As You Like It* is romantic. In this play the banishment of Duke Senior and Rosalind, Oliver's plan to set fire to Orlando's lodging are sad happenings. But the play in its total effect is a comedy which provides much amusement and mirth to us.

*As You Like It* is romantic comedy in the sense that it does not follow the classical; three unities of time, place and action. The action of the play occurs over a period of at least ten days instead of 24 hours; the scene of this play shifts from the city to the forest of Arden, from the forest of Arden back to the city, and then again to the forest of Arden instead of centering round the same place; and here we find three sub-plots besides the main plot.

However, the most striking romantic element in the plot is the theme of youthful love. In this play, Rosalind and Orlando fall in love with each other at first sight. Then we find Orlando in the Forest of Arden composing verses in praise of her beauty and virtue; and Rosalind disguised as Ganymede induces Orlando to make love to her saying: "Come, woo me, woo me; for now I am in a holiday humor and like enough to consent." The sudden love of Celia and Oliver is a romantic affair too. Phebe's love for Ganymede has also a romantic basis.

There is something romantic about the attachment of Celia to Rosalind. Celia is so attached to Rosalind. Similarly, there is something romantic even about the loyalty and devotion of Adam to Orlando.

The play is romantic also in its setting. In the city life, Rosalind's and Orlando's virtues arouse so much envy that both must flee to avoid being murdered. In the country, these two noble characters prosper. Virtuous Duke Senior seems to be happier in exile than he was at court. Country folk like Corin and Audrey are simple, hardworking people. Silvius and Phebe may



seem silly, but they are harmless and rather charming. Finally both villains (Oliver and Duke Fredrick) renounce evil as soon as they arrive in the forest.

*As You Like It* is a romantic comedy in its treatment of some sweet songs that add special charm and melodious atmosphere in the play. William Shakespeare wrote a number of romantic comedies of which *As You Like It* is the finest. A romantic comedy is a play in which the romantic elements are mingled with comic elements. While the romantic elements like delight and thrill enchant us; the comic elements make us laugh. Thus a romantic comedy is a marvelous kind of play which appeals greatly to our emotions, our imagination, and our fancy and which at the same time appeals to our risible faculty.

The romantic elements in this kind of play transport us to a new world which is more pleasing than the actual world in which we live, and the comic elements make us laugh and forget our cares and anxieties. *As You Like It* keeps us laughing most of the time, despite saddening incidents, the laughter is aroused in us by Rosalind, Celia, Touchstone, Jaques, William, and Audrey.

There are several features of the play which justify the description of it as 'romantic'. The very mingling of serious and sad events and situations with amusing scenes and situations is romantic. The ancient classical plays and the neoclassical plays of the later time were either purely tragic or purely comic. But Shakespeare did not hesitate to introduce comic situations and comic characters in his tragedies, and sad happenings and pathetic characters in his comedies. Thus in *As You Like It* the banishment of Duke senior, the no lent quarrel between Orlando and Oliver. Duke Frederick's shabby treatment to Orlando and the banishment of Rosalind are all sad happenings. But the play creates an outstanding effect of comedy which provides much amusement and mirth to us.

*As You Like It* is a romantic play also by virtue of the fact that it does not observe any of the three dramatic unities namely the unity of time, the unity of place and the unity of action. The unity of time demands that the action of a play should cover not more than twenty-four hours while the action of *As You Like It* occurs over a period of at least days. The unity of place demands that the entire action of a play should occur in the same town or a place or any other place. But in *As You Like It* the scenes shift from the city to the forest of Arden, from the forest of Arden back to the city, and then again to the forest of Arden. The unity of action demands that

a play should have a single plot and should not contain any subplots or under plots, in *As You Like It* we have as many as three sub-plots, besides the main plot. In other words, *As You Like It* has a loose structure.

However, the most striking romantic element in the play is its theme of youthful love and the passion of love that has a universal appeal. Rosalind falls in love with Orlando at first sight and he falls in love with her at the same instant. The love of Celia and Oliver too is a romantic affair. They too fall in love with each other at first sight. Phoebe's love for Ganymede has also a romantic basis.