



EVERYMAN
AS YOU LIKE IT
 William Shakespeare

Edited by John F. Andrews
 former editor of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*
 Foreword by Michael Kahn

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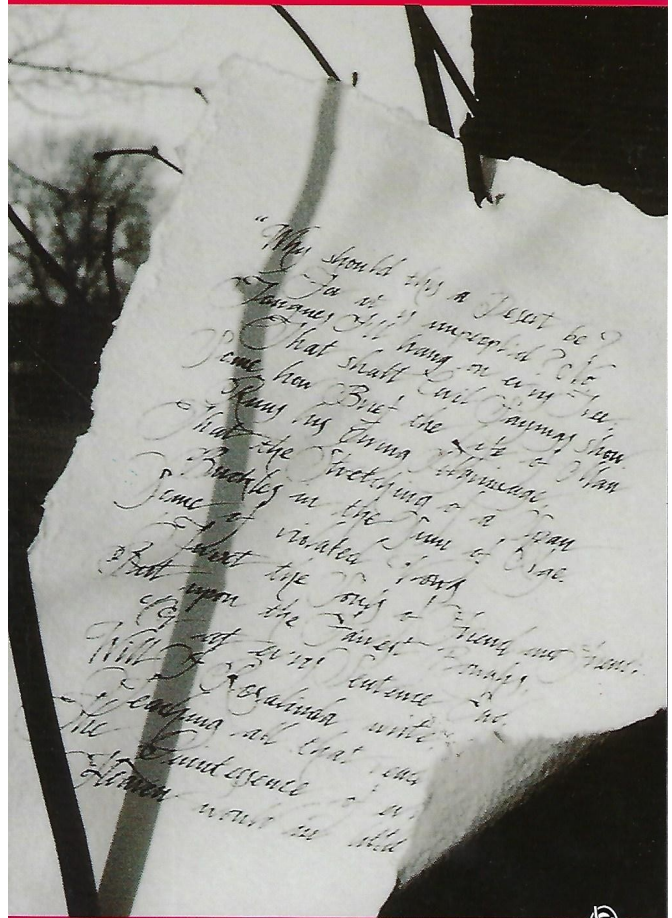
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AS YOU LIKE IT



THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

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FOREWORD TO *As You Like It*

As You Like It is one of Shakespeare's most sweetly deceptive plays. Its effortless comedy and accessible romantic appeal often cause it to be regarded and produced as the playwright's concession to popular taste. But remove this preconception, and an examination of the text reveals Shakespeare brilliantly using this popular form to explore the themes that inform all his major work: life, honour, the nature and regenerative power of love, illusion and reality, the breakdown of the natural order and its restoration, and, indeed, the very Nature of Man.

The play begins in a world informed by usurpation and loss; a world where children are fatherless and brothers are at war; a world where the only goal is power and where the only punishable crime is to be good and 'enchantingly beloved'. Orlando, nobly born but deprived of his inheritance and education, and Rosalind, educated but female and powerless, are, as a result of the innate goodness of their natures, forced to flee and take refuge in the Forest of Arden.

But contrary to the pastoral convention, this Arden is not an idyllic fantasy. It is a very real place where the 'Icy Fang and churlish Chiding of the Winter's Wind' chill the bones and remind its inhabitants of the precarious frailty of man and suggest the hard lesson that 'Sweet are the Uses of Adversity'. Described most often by its new inhabitants as a 'desert', it becomes a testing ground for previously accepted values as the social codes and set roles of a dangerous and superficial world are examined and transformed.

Rosalind changes her banishment into liberty by assuming male disguise. With the freedom to approach Orlando as an equal, she provides his education and discovers her power. Proposing to cure Orlando of love, she submits him to self-analysis. Intending to test

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his ardor, she witnesses his anguish. But in the process she does not spare herself. The young woman who early in the play considered the act of falling in love a sport, now uncovers and rejects all the superficial and socially acceptable feminine responses to the emotion and finds that love is so deep it cannot be sounded – but like man himself it must be stripped of all false notions to allow it to mature and endure.

As Touchstone learns the essential nature of honour and behaviour, as Jaques moves from an easy cynicism to understanding, as Oliver accepts the depth of brotherhood, as the banished Duke discovers his true power in the acceptance of himself as a fallible man, the communal values emerging from shared hardship are absorbed by all.

And as the characters emerge from their winter of discontent and trial into the spring of renewal and reconciliation, these newly acquired values are restored to the temporal world and we see that Shakespeare might well have entitled this wise and moving comedy, 'As It Really Is'.

Michael Kahn

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO *As You Like It*

As You Like It is often referred to as a 'festive' comedy, and there can be no doubt that it is among the happiest of Shakespeare's theatrical accomplishments.

The date usually assigned to the script is 1599, when the dramatist was entering his thirty-sixth year. It displays the gifts of an artist in the prime of his creative life, and it shows him experimenting with a genre in which he had already demonstrated unprecedented mastery. It introduces two character types, the court jester and the melancholic malcontent, who would proceed to more serious roles in Shakespeare's major tragedies. It focuses on how men and women think and feel. And it delves into what different personalities do to attain the things they most desire.

When you're fortunate enough to experience a capable performance of this sprightly revel, you realize that it engages your imagination with uncommon directness. Like *Twelfth Night*, it places you in a position to ponder 'what you will'. In the process it encourages you to puzzle over the problematic relationships between the 'real' world it reflects and the 'fictional' world it conjures into the magic circle, the 'Wooden O' (*Henry V*, Prologue.13), for which it was originally devised. When all's said and done, it leaves you meditating on the elusiveness of such concepts as Nature and Art, Fate and Freedom, and Wisdom and Folly.

As You Like It derives much of its plot, and a foretaste of its title, from a prose romance by Thomas Lodge. In his preface to *Rosalynde, or Euphues' Golden Legacy* (1590), the popular Elizabethan writer tells readers 'If you like it, so'. We know that at least one of Lodge's contemporaries did like what he encountered in those evocative pages, and he raided *Rosalynde* for many of the incidents in what some regard as his most skilfully crafted play. What we discern if we set Shakespeare's work and its forebear side

by side, though, is that as usual his modifications were at least as significant as his borrowings.

In Lodge, for example, the conflict that opens the story is grimmer than the one we observe in Shakespeare's handling of a similar situation. In Lodge, the first-born who becomes Oliver in Shakespeare's comedy has subverted his father's will in order to cheat his youngest brother out of a bequest that was larger than Saladyne's own. In Lodge, rather than merely authorize the Duke's wrestler to use his full might against an Orlando who has rashly challenged him, as happens in *As You Like It*, Saladyne instigates the combat himself and then secretly bribes the gladiator to grant Rosader no mercy. In Lodge, the main event is preceded by preliminary bouts in which the wrestler kills rather than maims his opponents. And in Lodge, the youngest brother does more than silence his overconfident adversary with a stunning 'Fall' that resembles a 'Thunderbolt' (II.ii.214, 224); unlike Orlando, the Rosader of Lodge's *Rosalynde* keeps fighting until he slays a brute with none of the appeal we witness in our initial meeting (I.i.161–72) with Shakespeare's Charles the Wrastler.

What the playwright does here is soften the harsh edges of the tale he read in his source. But some of his other revisions are of another sort. His Oliver may appear just as mean-spirited as the oldest brother in Lodge's narrative, for example, but in fact the malice of *As You Like It*'s cruel sibling is prompted, not by greed or by an understandable sense of injured merit, but by an irrational 'humour', an envious obsession with his youngest sibling's innate goodness. At the same time, as compared to his counterpart in Lodge, the 'Last and Least' (*King Lear*, I.i.84) in Shakespeare's play has little basis for attributing all his woes to the first-born; no, Orlando's deprivations owe as much to an inflexible system of primogeniture as they do to Oliver's refusal to yield the pittance his youngest brother has been bequeathed by Sir Rowland de Boys. In any case, as discordant as they seem, the confrontations between the two brothers in *As You Like It* prove far less violent than the ones to be found either in Lodge or in the poem from which Lodge himself had drawn, a fourteenth-century *Tale of Gamelyn* in which the youngest brother becomes an

outlaw, a 'Prodigal' and a 'Robin Hood' (I.i.40, 123) who finally reaps his revenge when the sibling who had oppressed him expires at the end of a hangman's rope.

What Shakespeare does to the Oliver and Orlando story is analogous to what he does with the relationship between the two dukes. He alters Lodge's narrative by making the noblemen brothers. To reinforce the parallel with Oliver, moreover, he portrays the usurping Frederick as a 'humorous' tyrant, arbitrary and menacing but not so reprobate that he must ultimately be put to the sword in battle, as in Lodge. Rather than attempting to 'motivate' either the reprehensible crimes or the remarkable conversions of the wicked Oliver and Frederick, however, Shakespeare simply represents them as phenomena of the kind of cosmos in which 'strange Events' (V.iv.135) will have their way. The net effect of these and other changes is to render *As You Like It* less realistic and more allegorical in spirit than Lodge's *Rosalynde*.¹

Since much of what transpires in *As You Like It* would seem too implausible to accept if it occurred in an ordinary setting, Shakespeare induces us to suspend our disbelief by moving the action almost immediately from a familiar if constraining environment at court to a liberating, and at times exotic, forest where virtually anything becomes conceivable. Commentators sometimes speak of Arden as a benign, garden-like demesne with affinities to the Eden of biblical lore and the Golden Age of classical antiquity. This is how it is depicted in the play's first allusion to a 'Golden World' in which men 'fleet the Time carelessly' (I.i.125–26) without concern for the hypocrisy and 'Peril' (II.i.4) of Duke Frederick's court. But once everyone gets to the forest, even such cheerful figures as Old Adam perceive that it offers something quite distinct from the ease and plenty that had long been celebrated in myth and romanticized in pastoral poetry. To be sure, Arden has its literary lads and lasses, its Silviuses and

¹ For a more extended discussion of this topic, see the excerpt by Sylvan Barnet in the 'Critical Perspectives' section. For other comments on Shakespeare's treatment of the sources and traditions he echoed, see the selections by William Warburton, Walter White, G. G. Gervinus, Frederick S. Boas, John W. Draper, Harold Jenkins, Helen Gardner, Harry Morris, Alan Taylor Bradford and Louis Adrian Montrose.

Phebes; but it also has its crude and inarticulate rustics, its Audreys and its Williams. This forest may provide a context for friendly shepherds, like the sensible, well-meaning Corin, but the playwright emphasizes that it also contains its share of unreasonable, stingy landowners, like the churlish overlord who has decided to sell his faithful tenant's sheepcote. And far from supplying limitless abundance and perpetual sunshine, the Arden we tour in *As You Like It* appears to be a cold and largely 'desert' expanse, uncultivated and almost completely uninhabited, where food and comfort are hard to come by. In short, Shakespeare's Forest of Arden is an uninviting locale with few of the advantages of civilization and more than the normal admixture of 'Winter and rough Weather' (II.v.8). The lot it fosters may be 'sweet' for Duke Senior and his band of loyal followers, but the blessings it affords are reserved for those rare philosophical characters who can 'translate the Stubbornness of Fortune' into a 'Stile' that enables them to surmount, and find profitable 'Uses' for, 'Adversity' (II.i.1–20).

For two of the court denizens this proves difficult. The dyspeptic Jaques complains that the banished Duke is abusing the forest, expropriating it from its 'native Burghers', the poor deer whose 'round Haunches' must be 'goar'd' to maintain a human 'City' in exile (II.i.23–28). In comparable fashion the unimpressible Touchstone says 'now I am in Arden, the more Fool I: when I was at home, I was in a better place' (II.iv.16–17). Notwithstanding the poses with which he satirizes the sentiments of others, Touchstone eventually accommodates himself to the imperatives of his rural surroundings; at the end of the play he presses in 'amongst the rest of the Country Copulatives' (V.iv.57–58) for the wedding feast that promises 'to make all this Matter even' (V.iv.18). But the contemplative Jaques insists on marching to another 'Measure' (see V.iv.180–87, 201); in the final reckoning 'Monsieur Melancholy' (III.ii.313) knows that he is not destined to couple and then go 'Dancing' back to court, so he resolves to stay and converse with the 'Convertites' on 'the Skirts of this wild Wood' (V.iv.192–204).

For the remainder of its visitors, Arden turns out to be a restorative, if temporary, retreat. Here an Orlando who 'cannot

speak' (II.ii.268) to his Rosalind at court finds 'Tongues in Trees' (II.i.16) and counsel from a disguised 'Ganimed' (II.iii.129) who prepares him for matrimony with warnings about the worst that may befall him if he persists in his pursuit of the woman he woos. Here an Oliver who is hell-bent on becoming another Cain discovers what it really means to be a brother's keeper. Here a Celia disposed to renounce any inheritance she receives from her father and return it to the cousin from whom it has been withheld is rewarded with wedlock to a gentleman who pledges to cherish her as his princess. And here a Rosalind who enters the forest bearing little more than her wit and resourcefulness emerges as the presiding genius over a sylvan realm that she alone sees steadily and as a whole. Her prize is a Hercules whose patient labours have certified him both as a worthy husband for herself and as a proper heir for her father, a benevolent patriarch who's just been reinstated as duke.

Rosalind may be the most sane and balanced of Shakespeare's heroines. She embodies the tenderness and sensitivity of humanity's 'weaker vessels' (see II.v.6). She loves ardently and cares profoundly: at a key moment in her pilgrimage she faints at the sight of her future spouse's blood. To her credit she recognizes and acknowledges her vulnerability, but for much of her sojourn in Arden she masks this consciousness with a sagacious 'Counterfeiting' (III.iv.172) that enables her to explore her deepest self while she guides her companions to a better understanding of their own natures.

As You Like It concludes with 'Music' and with an 'Epilogue' in which Shakespeare's surrogate 'Magician' solicits her audience to 'like as much of this Play as please you' (V.i.186, 208, 34, 220–21). Another mature comedy, *Twelfth Night*, draws to its close with a Clown telling us that 'Man's Estate' is a steady diet of 'the Wind and the Rain' (V.i.399–402). Feste's words sound a more sombre note than do Rosalind's; but like the sentences that round off *As You Like It*, they keep us aware that, whenever we need a respite from our travels and travails, we can look for solace in the company of a troupe who will 'strive to please' us 'every Day' (*Twelfth Night*, V.i.414).