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INTERPRETATIONS

Edited and with an Introduction by HAROLD BLOOM

William Shakespeare's
As You Like It

Modern Critical Interpretations

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Editor's Note

This book brings together a representative selection of the best modern critical interpretations of Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*. The critical essays are reprinted here in the chronological order of their original publication. I am grateful to John Rogers for his assistance in editing this volume.

My introduction meditates upon Rosalind's immense superiority to everyone else in her play. C. L. Barber begins the chronological sequence of criticism with his exegesis of Shakespeare's humorous recognition in *As You Like It* of the dramatic limits of representing "love's intensity as the release of a festive moment."

In Thomas McFarland's study of the play's complications, character interactions are seen as leading to an equivocal conclusion. Perspectives on pastoral are provided for us by Rosalie Colie, who presents the forest of Arden as "a countersociety, idyllic and playful, offering a model of possibility to the real world."

Existence in Arden is Ruth Nevo's subject, and informs her argument that Shakespeare attempted to replace Falstaff by the new combination of Rosalind and Touchstone. The play's social dimension is emphasized by Louis Adrian Montrose, who sees *As You Like It* as centered upon "intense and ambivalent personal bonds—between brothers and between lovers."

Sexual politics, one of our obsessive current concerns, is analyzed in its social aspects in the play by Peter Erickson. The same emphasis is taken up by this book's concluding essay, Barbara J. Bono's feminist reading of the play, in which *As You Like It*'s mixed genre is related to its plot of mixed or simulated gender.

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Introduction

As You Like It is Rosalind's play as *Hamlet* is Hamlet's. That so many critics have linked her to Hamlet's more benign aspects is the highest of compliments, as though they sensed that in wit, intellect, and vision of herself she truly is Hamlet's equal. Orlando is a pleasant young man, but audiences never quite can be persuaded that he merits Rosalind's love, and their resistance has its wisdom. Among Shakespearean representations of women, we can place Rosalind in the company only of the Portia of act 5 of *The Merchant of Venice*, while reserving the tragic Sublime for Cleopatra. All of us, men and women, like Rosalind best. She alone joins Hamlet and Falstaff as absolute in wit, and of the three she alone knows balance and proportion in living and is capable of achieving harmony.

That harmony extends even to her presence in *As You Like It*, since she is too strong for the play. Touchstone and Jaques are poor wits compared to her, and Touchstone truly is more rancid even than Jaques. Neither is capable of this wise splendor, typical of Rosalind's glory:

> 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 dash'd 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 liv'd many a fair year though Hero had turn'd 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 drown'd; 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.

It seems a miracle that so much wit should be fused with such benignity. Rosalind's good humor extends even to this poor world, so aged, and to the amorous heroes she charmingly deromanticizes: the wretched Trolius who is deprived even of his honorable end at the point of the great Achilles's lance, and Marlowe's Leander, done in by a cramp on a hot midsummer night. Cressida and Hero are absolved: "men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." Heroic passion is dismissed, not because Rosalind does not love romance, but because she knows it must be a sentimental rather than a naive mode. In the background to *As You Like It* is the uneasy presence of Christopher Marlowe, stabbed to death six years before in a supposed dispute over "a great reckoning in a little room," and oddly commemorated in a famous exchange between Touchstone and Audrey:

> TOUCHSTONE: When a man's verses cannot be understood,
> nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child,
> understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great
> reckoning in a little room. Truly, I would the gods
> had made thee poetical.
> AUDREY: I do not know what "poetical" is. Is it honest in
> deed and word? Is it a true thing?
> TOUCHSTONE: No, truly; for the truest poetry is the most
> feigning, and lovers are given to poetry; and what they
> swear in poetry may be said as lovers they do feign.

Touchstone is sardonic enough to fit into Marlowe's cosmos, even as Jaques at moments seems a parody of Ben Jonson's moralizings, yet Rosalind is surely the least Marlovian being in Elizabethan drama. That may be why Marlowe hovers in *As You Like It*, not only in the allusions to his death but in an actual quotation from *Hero and Leander*, when the deluded shepherdess Phebe declares her passion for the disguised Rosalind:

> Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might,
> Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?

Marlowe, the dead shepherd, defines *As You Like It* by negation. Rosalind's spirit cleanses us of false melancholies, rancid reductions,

corrupting idealisms, and universalized resentments. An actress capable of the role of Rosalind will expose both Jaques and Touchstone as sensibilities inadequate to the play's vision. Jaques is an eloquent rhetorician, in Ben Jonson's scalding vein, but Arden is not Jonson's realm; while Touchstone must be the least likeable of Shakespeare's clowns. I suspect that the dramatic point of both Jaques and Touchstone is how unoriginal they are in contrast to Rosalind's verve and splendor, or simply her extraordinary originality. She is the preamble to Hamlet's newness, to the Shakespearean inauguration of an unprecedented kind of representation of personality.

Richard III, Iago, and Edmund win their dark if finally self-destructive triumphs because they have quicker minds and more power over language than anyone else in their worlds. Rosalind and Hamlet more audaciously manifest the power of mind over the universe of sense than anyone they could ever encounter, but their quickness of thought and language is dedicated to a different kind of contest, akin to Falstaff's grosser agon with time and the state. It is not her will but her joy and energy that Rosalind seeks to express, and Hamlet's tragedy is that he cannot seek the same. Richard III, Iago, and Edmund superbly deceive, but Rosalind and Hamlet expose pretensions and deceptions merely by being as and what they are, superior of windows, more numerous of doors. We could save Othello and Lear from catastrophe by envisioning Iago and Edmund trying to function if Rosalind or Hamlet were introduced into their plays. Shakespeare, for reasons I cannot fathom, chose not to give us such true clashes of mighty opposites. His most intelligent villains are never brought together on one stage with his most intelligent heroes and heroines. The possible exception is in the confrontation between Shylock and Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, but the manipulated clash of Jew against Christian there gives Shylock no chance. Even Shakespeare's capacities would have been extended if he had tried to show Richard III attempting to gull Falstaff, Iago vainly practising upon Hamlet, or Edmund exercising his subtle rhetoric upon the formidably subtle Rosalind. Poor Jaques is hopeless against her; when he avers "why, 'tis good to be sad and say nothing," she replies: "why, then, 'tis good to be a post," and she sweeps away his boasts of melancholy experience. And what we remember best of Touchstone is Rosalind's judgment that, like a medlar, he will be rotten ere he is ripe.

Perhaps Rosalind's finest remark, amid so much splendor, is her reply when Celia chides her for interrupting. There are many ways to

interpret: "Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak. Sweet, say on." We can praise Rosalind for spontaneity, for sincerity, for wisdom, and those can be our interpretations; or we can be charmed by her slyness, which turns a male complaint against women into another sign of their superiority in expressionistic intensity. Rosalind is simply superior in everything whatsoever.

The Alliance of Seriousness and Levity in *As You Like It*

C. L. Barber

In a true piece of Wit all things must be
Yet all things there agree.
Cowley, quoted by T. S. Eliot
in "Andrew Marvell"

Then is there mirth in heaven
When earthly things made even
Atone together.
As You Like It

Shakespeare's next venture in comedy after *The Merchant of Venice* was probably in the Henry IV plays, which were probably written in 1597–98. Thus the Falstaff comedy comes right in the middle of the period, from about 1594 to 1600 or 1601, when Shakespeare produced festive comedy. *Much Ado about Nothing, As You Like It,* and *Twelfth Night* were written at the close of the period, *Twelfth Night* perhaps after *Hamlet*. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, where Shakespeare's creative powers were less fully engaged, was produced sometime between 1598 and 1602, and it is not impossible that *All's Well That Ends Well* and even perhaps *Measure for Measure* were produced around the turn of the century, despite that difference in tone that has led to their being grouped with *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida*. I shall deal only with *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*; they are the two last festive plays, masterpieces that include and extend almost all the resources of the form whose development we have been following. What I would have

From *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom*. © 1959 by Princeton University Press.

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to say about *Much Ado about Nothing* can largely be inferred from the discussion of the other festive plays. To consider the various other sorts of comedy which Shakespeare produced around the inception of the period when his main concern became tragedy would require another, different frame of reference.

As You Like It is very similar in the way it moves to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, despite the fact that its plot is taken over almost entirely from Lodge's *Rosalynde*. As I have suggested [previously], the reality we feel about the experience of love in the play, reality which is not in the pleasant little prose romance, comes from presenting what was sentimental extremity as impulsive extravagance and so leaving judgment free to mock what the heart embraces. The Forest of Arden, like the Wood outside Athens, is a region defined by an attitude of liberty from ordinary limitations, a festive place where the folly of romance can have its day. The first half of *As You Like It*, beginning with tyrant brother and tyrant Duke and moving out into the forest, is chiefly concerned with establishing this sense of freedom; the traditional contrast of court and country is developed in a way that is shaped by the contrast between everyday and holiday, as that antithesis has become part of Shakespeare's art and sensibility. Once we are securely in the golden world where the good Duke and "a many merry men . . . fleet the time carelessly," the pastoral motif as such drops into the background; Rosalind finds Orlando's verses in the second scene of act 3, and the rest of the play deals with love. This second movement is like a musical theme with imitative variations, developing much more tightly the sort of construction which played off Costard's and Armado's amorous affairs against those of the nobles in Navarre, and which set Bottom's imagination is juxtaposition with other shaping fantasies. The love affairs of Silvius and Phebe, Touchstone and Audrey, Orlando and Rosalind succeed one another in the easy-going sequence of scenes, while the dramatist deftly plays each off against the others.

THE LIBERTY OF ARDEN

The thing that asks for explanation about the Forest of Arden is how this version of pastoral can feel so free when the Duke and his company are so high-minded. Partly the feeling of freedom comes from release from the tension established in the first act at the jealous court:

> Now go we in content
> To liberty, and not to banishment.
> (1.3.139–40)

Several brief court scenes serve to keep this contrast alive. So does Orlando's entrance, sword in hand, to interrupt the Duke's gracious banquet by his threatening demand for food. Such behavior on his part is quite out of character (in Lodge he is most courteous); but his brandishing entrance gives Shakespeare occasion to resolve the attitude of struggle once again, this time by a lyric invocation of "what 'tis to pity and be pitied" (2.7.117).

But the liberty we enjoy in Arden, though it includes relief from anxiety in brotherliness confirmed "at good men's feasts," is somehow easier than brotherliness usually is. The easiness comes from a witty redefinition of the human situation which makes conflict seem for the moment superfluous. Early in the play, when Celia and Rosalind are talking of ways of being merry by devising sports, Celia's proposal is "Let us sit and mock the good housewife Fortune from her wheel" (1.2.34–35). The two go on with a "chase" of wit that goes "from Fortune's office to Nature's" (1.2.43), whirling the two goddesses through many variations; distinctions between them were running in Shakespeare's mind. In act 2, the witty poetry which establishes the greenwood mood of freedom repeatedly mocks Fortune from her wheel by an act of mind which goes from Fortune to Nature:

> A fool, a fool! I met a fool i' th' forest,
> . . . . . .
> Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun
> And rail'd on Lady Fortune in good terms,
> . . . . . .
> '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 lack-lustre 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 more hour 'twill be eleven;
> And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
> And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot;
> And thereby hangs a tale.'
> (2.7.12–28)

Why does Jaques, in his stylish way, say that his lungs "began to crow like chanticleer" to hear the fool "thus moral on the time," when the moral concludes in "rot and rot"? Why do we, who are not "melancholy," feel such large and free delight? Because the fool "finds," with wonderfully bland wit, that nothing whatever happens under the aegis of Fortune. ("Fortune reigns in gifts of the world," said Rosalind at 1.2.44.) The almost tautological inevitability of nine, ten, eleven, says that all we do is ripe and ripe and rot and rot. And so there is no reason not to bask in the sun and "lose and neglect the creeping hours of time" (2.7.112). As I observed [previously], Touchstone's "deep contemplative" moral makes the same statement as the spring song towards the close of the play: "How that a life was but a flower." When they draw the moral, the lover and his lass are only thinking of the "spring time" as they take "the present time" when "love is crowned with the prime." (The refrain mocks them a little for their obliviousness, by its tinkling "the only pretty ring time.") But Touchstone's festive gesture is *not* oblivious.

The extraordinary thing about the poised liberty of the second act is that the reduction of life to the natural and seasonal and physical works all the more convincingly as a festive release by including a recognition that the physical can be unpleasant. The good Duke, in his opening speech, can "translate the stubbornness of fortune" into a benefit: he does it by the witty shift which makes the "icy fang / And churlish chiding of the winter wind" into "counsellors / That feelingly persuade me what I am" (2.1.6–11). The two songs make the same gesture of welcoming physical pain in place of moral pain:

> Come hither, come hither, come hither!
> Here shall he see
> No enemy
> But winter and rough weather.
>
> (2.5.5–8)

They are patterned on holiday drinking songs, as we have seen [elsewhere] in considering the Christmas refrain "Heigh-ho, sing heigh-ho, unto the green holly," and they convey the free solidarity of a group who, since they relax in physical pleasures together, need not fear the fact that "Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly."

Jaques's speech on the seven ages of man, which comes at the end of act 2, just before "Blow, Blow, thou winter wind," is another version of the liberating talk about time; it expands Touchstone's

"And thereby hangs a tale." The simplification, "All the world's a stage," has such imaginative reach that we are as much astonished as amused, as with Touchstone's summary ripe and rot. But simplification it is, nevertheless; quotations (and recitations) often represent it as though it were dramatist Shakespeare's "philosophy," his last word, or one of them, about what life really comes to. To take it this way is sentimental, puts a part in place of the whole. For it only is *one* aspect of the truth that the roles we play in life are settled by the cycle of growth and decline. To face this part of the truth, to insist on it, brings the kind of relief that goes with accepting folly—indeed this speech is praise of folly, superbly generalized, praise of the folly of living in time (or is it festive abuse? the poise is such that relish and mockery are indistinguishable). Sentimental readings ignore the wit that keeps reducing social roles to caricatures and suggesting that meanings really are only physical relations beyond the control of mind or spirit:

> Then a soldier,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Seeking the bubble reputation
> Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
> In fair round belly with good capon lin'd.
>
> (3.7.149–54)

Looking back at time and society in this way, we have a detachment and sense of mastery similar to that established by Titania and Oberon's outside view of "the human mortals" and their weather.

Counterstatements

That Touchstone and Jaques should at moments turn and mock pastoral contentment is consistent with the way it is presented; their mockery makes explicit the partiality, the displacement of normal emphasis, which is implicit in the witty advocacy of it.

> If it do come to pass
> That any man turn ass,
> Leaving his wealth and ease
> A stubborn will to please.
>
> (2.5.52–55)

The folly of going to Arden has something about it of Christian humility, brotherliness and unworldliness ("Consider the lilies of the

field . . ."), but one can also turn it upside down by "a Greek invocation to call fools into a circle" and find it stubbornness. Touchstone brings out another kind of latent irony about pastoral joys when he plays the role of a discontented exile from the court:

> CORIN: And how like you this shepherd's life, Master Touchstone?
>
> TOUCHSTONE: Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach.
>
> (3.2.12–22)

Under the apparent nonsense of his self-contradictions, Touchstone mocks the contradictory nature of the desires ideally resolved by pastoral life, to be at once at court and in the fields, to enjoy both the fat advantages of rank and the spare advantages of the mean and sure estate. The humor goes to the heart of the pastoral convention and shows how very clearly Shakespeare understood it.

The fact that he created both Jaques and Touchstone out of whole cloth, adding them to the story as it appears in Lodge's *Rosalynde*, is an index to what he did in dramatizing the prose romance. Lodge, though he has a light touch, treats the idyllic material at face value. He never makes fun of its assumptions, but stays safely within the convention, because he has no securely grounded attitude towards it, not being sure of its relation to reality. Shakespeare scarcely changes the story at all, but where in Lodge it is presented in the flat, he brings alive the dimension of its relation to life as a whole. The control of this dimension makes his version solid as well as delicate.

Although both Jaques and Touchstone are connected with the action well enough at the level of plot, their real position is generally mediate between the audience and something in the play, the same position Nashe assigns to the court fool, Will Summers, in *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. Once Jaques stands almost outside the play, when he responds to Orlando's romantic greeting: "Good day and happiness, dear Rosalind!" with "Nay then, God b'wi'you, and you

talk in blank verse!" (4.1.31). Jaques's factitious melancholy, which critics have made too much of as a "psychology," serves primarily to set him at odds both with society and with Arden and so motivate contemplative mockery. Touchstone is put outside by his special status as a fool. As a fool, incapable, at least for professional purposes, of doing anything right, he is beyond the pale of normal achievements. In anything he tries to do he is comically disabled, as, for example, in falling in love. All he achieves is a burlesque of love. So he has none of the illusions of those who try to be ideal, and is in a position to make a business of being dryly objective."Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune." Heaven sends him Audrey instead, "an ill-favour'd thing, sir, but mine own" (5.4.60)—not a mistress to generate illusions. In *As You Like It* the court fool for the first time takes over the work of comic commentary and burlesque from the clown of the earlier plays; in Jaques's praise of Touchstone and the corrective virtues of fooling, Shakespeare can be heard crowing with delight at his discovery. The figure of the jester, with his recognized social role and rich traditional meaning, enabled the dramatist to embody in a character and his relations with other characters the comedy's purpose of maintaining objectivity.

The satirist presents life as it is and ridicules it because it is not ideal, as we would like it to be and as it should be. Shakespeare goes the other way about: he represents or evokes ideal life, and then makes fun of it because it does not square with life as it ordinarily is. If we look for social satire in *As You Like It*, all we find are a few set pieces about such stock figures as the traveller and the duelist. And these figures seem to be described rather to enjoy their extravagance than to rebuke their folly. Jaques, in response to a topical interest at the time when the play appeared, talks a good deal about satire, and proposes to "cleanse the foul body of th' infected world" (2.7.60) with the fool's medicine of ridicule. But neither Jaques, the amateur fool, nor Touchstone, the professional, ever really gets around to doing the satirist's work of ridiculing life as it is, "deeds, and language, such as men do use." [Ben Jonson, *Every Man in His Humour*]. After all, they are in Arden, not in Jonson's London: the infected body of the world is far away, out of range. What they make fun of instead is what they can find in Arden—pastoral innocence and romantic love, life as it might be, lived "in a holiday humour." Similar comic presentation of what is not ideal in man is characteristic of medieval fool humor, where the humorist, by his gift of long ears to the long-robed dignitaries, makes

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