



AS YOU LIKE IT



Edited by LOUIS B. WRIGHT and VIRGINIA A. LaMAR
Illustrated with material in the Folger Library Collections

The Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare

AS YOU
LIKE IT

by

WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE

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THE FOLGER LIBRARY SHAKESPEARE

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Louis B. Wright, General Editor, was the Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library from 1948 until his retirement in 1968. He is the author of *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, *Religion and Empire*, *Shakespeare for Everyman*, and many other books and essays on the history and literature of the Tudor and Stuart periods.

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Preface

This edition of *As You Like It* is designed to make available a readable text of one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. In the centuries since Shakespeare many changes have occurred in the meanings of words, and some clarification of Shakespeare's vocabulary may be helpful. To provide the reader with necessary notes in the most accessible format, we have placed them on the pages facing the text that they explain. We have tried to make these notes as brief and simple as possible. Preliminary to the text we have also included a brief statement of essential information about Shakespeare and his stage. Readers desiring more detailed information should refer to the books suggested in the references, and if still further information is needed, the bibliographies in those books will provide the necessary clues to the literature of the subject.

The early texts of all of Shakespeare's plays provide only inadequate stage directions, and it is conventional for modern editors to add many that clarify the action. Such additions, and additions to entrances, are placed in square brackets.

All illustrations are from material in the Folger Library collections.

L. B. W.

V. A. L.

June 15, 1959

Woodland Magic

As You Like It appeals to the perennial love of the English-speaking peoples for the open country, for the glades and woods of a country perpetually green. On every holiday the towns and cities of England empty as the inhabitants stream outward in search of greenswards, meadows, parks, and forest paths. For the city dweller a touch of nature at Whitsuntide or on August bank holiday means a return to quiet and sanity not to be found in the roar of cities. Shakespeare's Englishmen were as appreciative as their descendants of the countryside, and Shakespeare wrote into *As You Like It* his own poetic tribute to the attractions of the woodlands of Warwickshire. For the Forest of Arden, where he set the play, is Warwickshire, however many olive trees and lionesses the players might discover therein.

In the prose romances of chivalric adventure, the settings were usually in some unreal land of Arcady where one found lovelorn maidens in the company of shepherds and shepherdesses. The forests most likely were inhabited by giants, dwarfs, hermits, and enchantresses, not to mention troublesome or strange fauna that included dragons, cockatrices, and an occasional unicorn. Although Shakespeare took his story from a popular romance, he managed

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to domesticate his setting, and, as absurd as the plot is, one somehow feels that the scenery is not far from something he has seen and experienced. To the Londoner who saw the play at the Globe, it must have smelled of the woods to the north of the city on a May day.

As Shakespeare sat in his London lodgings writing these swift-moving lines, his mind was far away in the woodlands north of the Avon, which bore the name of Arden. Scholars have learnedly argued that the setting is clearly in some French duchy and it must be in the Ardennes near the Flanders border. Whatever may be the nominal location, and whatever incongruities remain from the romance that was the source of the play, the atmosphere is that of the English countryside.

Shakespeare himself, like most Englishmen of the time, was not far removed from the country. Stratford-upon-Avon, then a country town of about two thousand people, nestles in one of the most beautiful counties of England, a well-watered land of forests, farms, and sheep pastures. The sheepcote that Rosalind set out to buy could have been a stone's throw from Shakespeare's father's farm at Snitterfield. Shakespeare always displayed the common sense and balance that one frequently finds in men brought up in the country, and in *As You Like It* he exhibits in marked degree qualities that indicate a man in harmony with nature.

The theme of the play is love in various aspects, but Shakespeare never lets his treatment of the

subject drift into absurdity, as so often happened in the romances. He can laugh gaily and happily at the perplexities that love can bring, but he is neither sentimental nor cynical. Even Rosalind in love is able to display a sense of humor about love and lovers, including herself. In this play, Shakespeare is not concerned with profound overtones and cosmic truths. He is writing a play of merriment and good humor, and audiences have liked it from his day until our own.

Shakespeare derived the plot and most of the incidents in *As You Like It* from a prose romance, a short novel by Thomas Lodge entitled *Rosalynde, or Euphues' Golden Legacy* (1590). Lodge, writing in the elaborate and somewhat artificial "euphuistic" manner popular at the time, told his tale in a high and serious style without any humor. Fantastic romances were popular in the Elizabethan period and no one asked for verisimilitude. Some of these romances, in cheap editions, delighted apprentices and others besides. Everyone knew about *Palmerin of England*, *Amadis of Gaul*, and a score of other chivalric romances of the kind that were the undoing of Cervantes' knight, Don Quixote. Like Cervantes, Shakespeare could utilize the themes of romance for gently satiric purposes, and in *As You Like It* he introduces characters that would have jarred in Lodge's story. Shakespeare's additions include the comic parts of Touchstone and Audrey, William, and Jaques. Someone has observed that Touchstone serves as a foil to Rosalind

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and the highborn characters in the play, as Sancho Panza provided homely humor to contrast with the high-flown notions of Don Quixote.

Although Shakespeare took over the absurd conventions of romance in plot and incident, he gave so much life and reality to his principal characters that his audience is willing to grant the illusions required of the plot. Readers of pastoral romances were accustomed to shepherds and shepherdesses wandering about rather aimlessly and penning sonnets to the objects of their affections. If these love-lorn folk encountered a dragon, a lion, or a unicorn, that was never surprising. If the villain met a saintly hermit and suddenly changed his way of life after a sermon from the holy man, that too was conventional and usual. It was never considered strange for maidens to go masquerading as pages or young warriors, and always disguises were so perfect that no father could tell his own daughter, nor a lover his own lady, though he might have spent the previous soliloquy mooning over the quality of her voice, the loveliness of her lips, or the color of her eyes. Such conventions Shakespeare took over part and parcel, but they do not trouble us any more than they troubled the author's contemporaries. We are concerned with other more compelling elements in *As You Like It*.

The modern reader or spectator still delights in the atmosphere of the play. He too smells the woods, the flowers, and the fresh fields of Arden or of whatever locality his imagination provides. It

is a play for springtime and youth. Perhaps that is why it has been popular in schools and colleges for open-air performance.

The play is also filled with gaiety and humor of a quality that does not stale. Touchstone the fool is one of Shakespeare's most amusing comic characters and one that has given scope to many stage comedians. The first actor to play this part was Shakespeare's colleague Robert Armin, and Shakespeare obviously wrote the part for him. Armin had succeeded Will Kemp, the previous actor of clowning roles in Shakespeare's company, and some stage historians have seen a shift in the quality of the clowns with this change. The later fools or clowns are more intellectualized and wittier than the parts played by Kemp, who himself was famous for buffoonery and slapstick comedy.

Touchstone serves as a sort of chorus or a commentator on the action and the behavior of the other characters. When conversation becomes too lofty, especially when the sentiments of the lovers begin to soar away into metaphor, it is Touchstone who brings the tone down to earth with his homespun comments. When others talk of ethereal love, he exemplifies the physical desires felt by ordinary folk. He recognizes that "wedlock would be nibbling," and he remarks to Audrey: "Come, sweet Audrey./ We must be married, or we must live in bawdry."

Rosalind is typical of the heroines of pastoral romance only in external appearance, because her



I was a louer and his lass, With a haye.with a hoc and a haye nonic

no and a haye nonic nonic no, That o're the green corne fields did passe in spring time, ij, ij.

the only pretiring time whē birds do sing, hay ding ading ading ij, ij. sweete

louers loue the springe in spring time, ij. The onely pretiring time whē birds do sing, Haye

ding ading ading, ij. ij. sweete louers loue the spring.

Thomas Morley's musical setting of "It Was a Lover and His Lass."
From *The First Book of Ayres* (1600).

manner is too genuine and lifelike for the usual romance. Though she is madly in love with Orlando, she can play a practical joke upon him and make witty jests about lovers, a trait not characteristic of the weepy maidens in most of the prose tales. Not one of them, even masquerading as some other character, would have said, as Rosalind commented, that "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." Rosalind is one of Shakespeare's most attractive women—witty, frank, generous, and courageous. The role has been a favorite with many of the most attractive actresses of the past century and a half.

Shakespeare exhibits assurance, ease, and originality in *As You Like It*. He was a successful playwright and he was conscious of his own ability to handle the theme with professional skill. But the play represents more than a new height of professional competence. It shows an adjustment to the world in which the author lived and a wholesome delight in the universe around him. Although critics have speculated on the significance of the melancholy Jaques and the possible reflection in his commentary of personal attitudes of the author, such speculation is beside the point. Jaques is of a type fashionable on the stage at that moment. Although he is not the typical malcontent whose cynicism was a popular theatrical convention in the last decade of the sixteenth century, he does represent a rather conventional type that affected a melancholy and dyspeptic attitude toward the world. As such he

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was amusing to the audiences of the time, but from the happy tone of the play there is no suggestion that Shakespeare meant Jaques to speak the author's own sentiments. Indeed, the spirit of the play is that of wholesome satisfaction with a world that is essentially good. Even the usurping Duke in the end undergoes a conversion and surrenders his lands to the rightful owner, and it is significant that Shakespeare is too charitable to have him killed in battle as Lodge had done in his novel.

In *As You Like It* Shakespeare studied the effects of love as it manifested itself in a variety of individuals: spirited and highborn Rosalind; brave and desperate Orlando; earthy Touchstone, content for a time with Audrey, "an ill-favored thing . . . but mine own"; selfish and thoughtless Phebe; faithful and loyal Silvius; and all the rest who are touched with an emotion universal in its influence upon men and women. Nowhere in the play does the treatment of this theme suggest anything but a healthy attitude. Shakespeare had looked on love and been content with what he found.

DATE, TEXT, AND STAGE HISTORY

The best evidence indicates that *As You Like It* was first performed between 1598 and 1600. It is not mentioned by Francis Meres in an enumeration of plays popular in 1598, but there is an entry in the *Stationers' Register* for August 4, 1600, of "As you like yt, a booke, to be staid." This would suggest a

performance between these dates, probably close to the time that someone forbade its printing. The dating of about 1600 is as accurate as we can come to the first performance.

No quarto edition is known and the play originally saw print in the First Folio of 1623. This version presents a fairly good text with relatively few misprints. It is of course the basis of all modern editions. Since the Folio text contains few stage directions, modern editors have added enough to make the action understandable.

Where the play was first performed the text does not indicate. It was probably the Globe, which Shakespeare's company had opened in 1599. Their rivals, the Lord Admiral's Men, had attracted attention in 1598 with plays on the Robin Hood theme, and perhaps *As You Like It* was Shakespeare's effort to supply a competing play with a pastoral setting, which Henslowe's actors had found popular. The motion-picture companies in Hollywood are not the first dramatic groups to follow one another like sheep in trying to capture the public interest.

We can surmise that Shakespeare's play was a success, but direct evidence is lacking. A nineteenth-century historian, William Cory, claimed to know about a letter describing a performance of *As You Like It* at the Earl of Pembroke's house at Wilton in 1603 before King James I, but no one since has seen the letter and this may be a myth.

When the theatres reopened after the Restoration



Mrs. Siddons as Rosalind.
From an undated acting version of *As You Like It* used by the
Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, London.

of King Charles II, *As You Like It* was one of the plays allowed to be acted in 1669 at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. This comedy, however, was too fresh and clean for the jaded appetites of Restoration courtiers, and there is no record that it was popular until many years later.

In 1723, Charles Johnson produced at Drury Lane a hodgepodge from *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which he called *Love in a Forest*, but it was not until 1740 that Drury Lane got around to producing the play in its original form. This time it appeared with musical settings for the songs by Thomas Arne.

The spirit of romanticism was beginning to sweep the stage and *As You Like It* came into its own. Many of the most famous actresses played the part of Rosalind: Peg Woffington, Perdita Robinson, and Mrs. Sarah Siddons. During the nineteenth century, *As You Like It* was one of the most popular of Shakespeare's plays and it saw constant revivals. Among the famous Rosalinds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been Charlotte Cushman, Helen Faucit, Ellen Tree, Ada Rehan, Mrs. Pat Campbell, Viola Allen, Julia Marlowe, and Edith Evans. The leading actors have taken the roles of Orlando and Jaques, and some of the best comedians have played Touchstone. *As You Like It* provides an opportunity for many good roles in addition to Rosalind, always the star part.

Operatic versions were popular in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and these musical