OXFORD SCHOOL SHAKESPEARE

# AS YOU LIKE IT

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# Contents

# Introduction

## About the Play

*As You Like It*! The title promises everything—and gives away nothing: the master craftsman of the Elizabethan theatre knew how to keep his audiences guessing—and knew exactly how they like their comedies, whether at the end of the sixteenth century or the beginning of the twenty-first. Romance without sentimentality but with a hint of danger; satire without cruelty; topical relevance which will not be too controversial; and something to think about on the way home that won't lead to argument and civil disturbance. Add a song or two perhaps—and certainly a good measure of double entendres (which can be enjoyed or ignored as you please).

And the main theme? Women in Love.

This seems to have been Shakespeare's personal recipe for success, explored and perfected through eight early comedies which all centre on the love affairs of two young women and their chosen partners—men who are usually far less dynamic, less individualized, than these spirited and resourceful girls. Their parts are some of the most attractive roles for women in all English drama. But in Shakespeare's theatre there were no female actors, and not for another hundred years would it be socially acceptable for women to perform on public stages in England. The female parts were originally played by young boys, their voices not yet broken, who were apprenticed to older actors in the dramatic company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, for which Shakespeare was what we would now call the 'resident dramatist'.

This convention of boy-plays-girl was of course accepted without question by all who wrote for the Elizabethan theatre, but Shakespeare took a particular delight in *doubling* this cross-dressing—so that his boys-as-girls quickly become girls-as-boys, offering endless opportunities for joking, dramatic irony, and sexual double entendres.

In *As You Like It* Rosalind (who has suddenly fallen head-over-heels in love with Orlando) is driven from her cruel uncle's court to take refuge in the Forest of Arden, disguising herself as a boy to protect herself and her cousin Celia. But the doublet and hose of her gender-swapping must conceal her emotions as well as her person in her next encounter with Orlando—who has also escaped into the Forest to avoid his brother's murderous intentions.

The plot is pretty, not profound; and the outcome is predictable from the beginning. The Forest may be a lonely, 'desert' place, but it is here that lovers are united, enmities reconciled, and the true values of civilization are restored.

The play might well have been intended as some kind of showpiece for the opening of the new Globe Theatre in 1599, demonstrating the many talents of the Chamberlain's Men as well as the magnificence of their playhouse. A new comedian, Robert Armin, had just joined the company, bringing a sophisticated wit well suited to the role of Jaques—and that character's famous oration ('All the world's a stage . . . ' 2, 7, 139–66) could easily be an eloquent gesture in the direction of the motto now waving proudly above the heads of audience and actors alike: *Totus mundus agit histrionem* (all the world plays the actor).

## Leading Characters in the Play

**Duke Senior** The rightful duke, who has been deposed by his younger brother and now lives in exile in the Forest of Arden with a number of lords who have also been deprived of their estates.

**Duke Frederick** The younger brother of Duke Senior, who now rules over his court and is feared rather than loved by those who serve him.

**Rosalind** The daughter of Duke Senior who has remained at court as a companion for Celia. When Duke Frederick suddenly becomes suspicious of her, she disguises herself as a boy (calling herself 'Ganymede') and goes to find her father in the Forest.

**Celia** Duke Frederick's daughter, who accompanies her banished cousin into the Forest disguised as a country girl called 'Aliena'.

**Oliver** The eldest son of Sir Roland de Boys, who has inherited the greatest part of his father's property. Without any reason but jealousy, he is plotting to kill his younger brother

**Orlando** who has all the excellent qualities of a gentleman, despite the fact that Oliver has prevented him from being properly educated.

**Touchstone** A professional jester who accompanies Rosalind and Celia into the Forest.

**Jaques** A melancholy traveller who has followed Duke Senior into the Forest and entertains the lords with his criticism of society.

**Adam** An old servant of Sir Roland de Boys. He represents the honesty and loyalty which the modern world (represented by Oliver de Boys) does not value.

**Corin** A wise old shepherd; although he is simple, he is by no means foolish.

**Silvius** A silly young shepherd, whose only desire in life is to win the love of Phoebe.

**Phoebe** A young shepherdess. She is cruel to Silvius and mocks his poems, until she falls passionately in love with 'Ganymede' (who of course is Rosalind in disguise).

# Synopsis

## Act 1

**Scene 1** Sibling rivalry: Orlando decides to leave home to escape the unkindness of a brother who plots his death, and we learn that Duke Senior has been banished from the court by his younger brother.

**Scene 2** Rosalind and Celia try to persuade Orlando not to risk his life in a wrestling-match, but his determination and skill overcome the professional fighter—and conquer Rosalind's heart.

**Scene 3** Rosalind takes Celia into her confidence, but Duke Frederick banishes Rosalind from his court. Together the girls plan to disguise themselves and escape into the Forest.

## Act 2

**Scene 1** Duke Senior rejoices in his rural exile.

**Scene 2** Duke Frederick organizes a search for his daughter.

**Scene 3** Orlando must escape from his brother, and Adam volunteers his service.

**Scene 4** Rosalind and Celia meet Silvius and arrange to buy a cottage.

**Scene 5** Amiens sings while preparing a banquet for the Duke.

**Scene 6** Orlando comforts the exhausted Adam.

**Scene 7** Conversation is interrupted when Orlando breaks into the gathering of Duke Senior and his lords, but he is received with courtesy and kindness.

## Act 3

**Scene 1** Duke Frederick orders Oliver to search for Orlando, and confiscates his possessions.

**Scene 2** Orlando hangs his poem on a tree.

Scene 3 Town life versus country life: Corin and Touchstone debate. Rosalind and Celia read Orlando's verses, and Rosalind (in her disguise as Ganymede) offers to cure Orlando of his love.

Scene 4 Touchstone wants to get married in the Forest to Audrey, a simple country girl, but Jaques insists they must have a proper wedding.

Scene 5 Celia teases Rosalind about her love for Orlando, and Corin tells them of Phoebe's unkindness to Silvius.

Scene 6 Phoebe mocks Silvius and his romantic love, but falls in love herself when Rosalind appears (as Ganymede).

ACT 4

Scene 1 Disguised as Ganymede, Rosalind flirts with Orlando.

Scene 2 In an interlude occupying the two hours of Orlando's attendance on the Duke at dinner, the lords celebrate their hunting success.

Scene 3 Rosalind is amused when she finds that Phoebe has fallen in love with 'Ganymede', but faints with shock when she hears that Orlando has been injured while saving his brother's life.

ACT 5

Scene 1 Touchstone easily defeats William in a dispute over Audrey's love.

Scene 2 Oliver is now in love with 'Aliena', and Orlando agrees that he shall marry her. The lovers meet together, and 'Ganymede' promises that all their wishes will be satisfied the next day.

Scene 3 A little song to mark the passing of time.

Scene 4 The lovers assemble and all is revealed; the weddings are celebrated by Hymen, and Duke Senior with his lords can return to the court.

EPILOGUE

The boy actor's farewell to the audience.

## Act 1

**Scene 1** Orlando opens the play with a long speech addressed to Adam. It is a clumsy way of giving information to an audience, but the information is essential, not only for understanding the plot. Orlando introduces one of the play's important themes, the nature of a gentleman. As the son of Sir Roland de Boys, Orlando is a gentleman by birth, but he has been deprived of a gentleman's education by his brother. When Orlando and Oliver confront each other, there is no doubt about which is the true heir to Sir Roland. Oliver possesses his father's lands, but there is no trace of Sir Roland's honourable nature in his character. When he slanders Orlando to Charles, the duke's wrestler, and urges Charles to kill him in the wrestling match, Oliver shows how malicious and unnatural he is. At the end of the scene he admits that he has no cause to hate his brother, and then reveals his motive for wanting Orlando to be killed: Orlando has many virtues, and is very popular,

> and indeed so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprized. (1, 1, 151–3)

Shakespeare is very interested in jealousy arising out of such a situation; he studies it again in this play, and in a later play, *King Lear*, he shows how it can bring about a tragic catastrophe.

Another theme is introduced in this scene when Charles tells Oliver that the outlawed Duke Senior and his loyal supporters have gone into the Forest of Arden,

> and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world. (1, 1, 108–9)

The Golden Age (or 'world') was created by Greek and Latin poets. They claimed that it existed many thousands of years ago, before men lived in cities and were cruel. It was a pastoral existence: people lived in the country, and found their food growing around them. There was no need to work for a living; no animals were slaughtered for meat; people spent their time singing, dancing, and writing poetry. Many English writers at the time of Shakespeare found the pastoral conventions very attractive. Some poets, such as Sir Philip Sidney, wrote of shepherds

whose entire existence was given to worshipping the shepherdesses whom they loved: in the play, Silvius is typical of such shepherd-poets. Other poets, like Edmund Spenser, made their shepherds speak social criticism, often comparing court or city life, full of envy and ambition, with the peace and contentment of country life: Duke Senior, in *Act 2*, Scene 1, utters such conventional remarks.

The first scene of the play, then, starts off one of the two central actions of the complex plot. It also introduces three themes: the nature of a gentleman; the envy that is provoked by goodness; and the 'golden world' of pastoral convention. Each of these topics will be examined again—perhaps more than once—in the course of the play.

Scene 2

The second scene introduces new characters and begins the second main action of the play. When we first see Rosalind, in this scene, she is unhappy, and we are never allowed to forget this for very long. Rosalind is usually gay and witty, not because she is light-hearted and carefree, but because she has courage and can hide her sorrows. She decides that she will play at falling in love, and Celia warns her not to be too serious about this. Later in the play, we remember this warning.

Rosalind and Celia are both fond of making puns; many writers at the time of Shakespeare enjoyed this playing with words. In the English language, a lot of words have more than one meaning and some words, which have different meanings and different spellings, sound alike (for instance 'pear', 'pair', and 'pare'). A pun is made when someone amuses himself by reacting to one meaning of a word when the speaker had intended another: for instance

**Touchstone**
Nay, if I keep not my rank—
**Rosalind**
Thou loosest thy old smell. (*1*, 2, 95–6)

The word 'rank' can mean both 'position' (which Touchstone intends), and 'stench' (which Rosalind pretends to understand).

Touchstone takes no part in the action of the play, but he is very valuable for his observations, full of common-sense, on the ridiculous aspects of the other characters. When Le Beau tells Rosalind and Celia that they have 'lost much good sport' (*1*, 2, 89) because they have not seen a wrestling match in which a young man broke three ribs, Touchstone pretends to be glad that he has learned something new:

> Thus men may grow wiser every day. It is the first time that ever
> I heard breaking of ribs was sport for ladies. (*1*, 2, 121–2)

Touchstone is not stupid; he is a professional comedian. For hundreds of years before the time of Shakespeare, the kings of England employed such jesters as court fools, whose duties were to entertain the monarch at mealtimes, and at any other time when the king wished to be amused. Fools were permitted to speak freely, and to comment on current affairs and prominent personalities. They were the first English satirists. The fool's position had its dangers; if the fool gave offence, he was likely to be whipped (see *1*, 2, 76). The fool usually wore a distinctive 'motley' costume of green and yellow but Touchstone seems to abandon this professional dress while he is in the Forest. Celia's description of Touchstone as 'our whetstone' (*1*, 2, 50) points to another of the fool's functions. By appearing stupid, the fool gave other men a chance to make fun of him and show how witty they could be. He was what we now call a 'stooge'.

When Le Beau comes on to the stage, Celia greets him in French. This was the language used in the English court after the Norman conquest of England in 1066. Some people thought that to be able to speak French was a sign of good education, but there were other people, especially at the time of Shakespeare, who thought it was a ridiculous affectation. Celia makes fun of Le Beau and his formal speech. By calling the wrestling 'sport', and suggesting that the ladies would have liked to see the deaths of three fine young men, Le Beau shows the inhumanity of court life. His callousness contrasts with the tenderness and care that Rosalind and Celia show when they try to dissuade Orlando from fighting.

Rosalind's remarks to Orlando, and about him, reveal how quickly she is falling in love. At the end of the scene Orlando too admits to himself that he is overcome with a new emotion. Both Rosalind and Orlando have demonstrated an ability to use words well and wittily, but at this moment neither of them is able to express these new feelings. Rosalind can only tell Orlando, obliquely,

> you have wrestled well and overthrown
> More than your enemies. (*1*, 2, 228–9)

Orlando cannot speak at all until Rosalind has left the stage, and then he is amazed to find himself so tongue-tied:

> What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue?
> I cannot speak to her, yet she urg'd conference. (*1*, 2, 231–2)

After the wrestling match, we should have a good opinion of Orlando's strength. He showed moral courage when he defied his brother, and again when he politely refused to change his mind about fighting Charles. The fight has proved his physical strength—and after this the character can afford to indulge his romantic passion in the Forest.

When Le Beau returns to warn Orlando that he must leave the court, he is not the same as the affected courtier that he appeared to be when he first came on to the stage. What he says about Duke Frederick shows that he is aware of danger in the court, and knows he must be cautious about speaking his mind:

> The duke is humorous: what he is indeed
> More suits you to conceive than I to speak of. (1, 2, 240–1)

He prepares us for the duke's anger with Rosalind, and renews one of the play's main themes when he tells us that the anger is

> Grounded upon no other argument
> But that the people praise her for her virtues. (1, 2, 253–4)

**Scene 3** Although Celia and Rosalind are laughing about Rosalind's love for Orlando, they are really very serious about it. Their light-hearted play with words is only superficial, but even this fun disappears when Duke Frederick orders Rosalind to leave his court. Rosalind defends both herself and her father from the duke's accusations of treachery, and Celia comes to the defence of her cousin. We learn from this defence that Rosalind's father was banished many years ago—yet in an earlier scene we were told that the news at court is that 'the old duke is banished by his younger brother the new duke' (1, 1, 91–2). This contradiction is never satisfactorily resolved, and we have to accept that in *As You Like It* there is no real time scale, only 'dramatic time', which can be lengthened or shortened as Shakespeare pleases.

The most powerful motive affecting the duke's action in banishing Rosalind is not a suspicion that she may be a traitor; he has the same reason for hating Rosalind as Oliver has for hating his brother. The duke tells Celia

> Thou art a fool; she robs thee of thy name
> And thou wilt show more bright and seem more virtuous
> When she is gone. (1, 3, 75–7)

Le Beau told Orlando in the previous scene that Celia was quite unlike her father (*1*, 2, 245), and now Celia can demonstrate the truth of this.

The decision that Rosalind should dress herself 'all points like a man' (*1*, 3, 111) would not come as a surprise to Shakespeare's audience. The boy actors who played the women's parts were always ready to get back into their own clothes. Dramatists welcomed this, and enjoyed writing scenes for boys, who were women in disguise—who were boys in women's costumes!

## Act 2

**Scene 1** The first Act of the play was an Act of dispersal, bringing to our attention characters who had good reason for being unhappy in the court. This new Act is set in the Forest of Arden (although Scene 2 takes place at court, and Scene 3 outside Oliver's house). The first Scene shows us the realities of the 'golden world' referred to by Charles in *Act 1*, Scene 1. Duke Senior utters the proper sentiments, claiming to find country life much superior to life in 'the envious court' (2, 1, 4). But his suggestion, 'shall we go and kill us venison' (2, 1, 21), makes us aware that this life is not, as we had first supposed, the pastoral existence imagined by poets; in real life, men must eat meat, and they cannot do this without slaughtering the animals.

Jaques, it seems, finds life in the forest much the same as life in town, and we are told of his philosophizing over the wounded deer. But the account is given to us at second hand, not by Jaques himself. By this means Shakespeare lets us know, through the amusement of the duke and his followers, that we are not to take Jaques seriously. When we examine his ideas, we can see that they are not very original, and not very profound, and the excessive emotion of the little episode comes to sound almost comical, with Jaques

> weeping and commenting
> Upon the sobbing deer. (2, 1, 65–6)

**Scene 2** In Scene 2 we return to the court, to learn that Rosalind and Celia have been successful in their plan to run away from the court with Touchstone.

**Scene 3** Now Adam takes up the theme of the envy that is aroused in one man at the sight of another man's virtues. His statement of this theme is clear and unmistakable:

> Know you not, master, to some kind of men
> Their graces serve them but as enemies?
> No more do yours: your virtues, gentle master,
> Are sanctified and holy traitors to you.
> O what a world is this when what is comely
> Envenoms him that bears it! (2, 3, 10–15)

By using the words 'sanctified' and 'holy', Adam adds a new, spiritual dimension to the theme: we should remember that Envy is one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

Adam also, by offering his savings to help Orlando, introduces a new theme into the play, and Orlando is quick to state this theme in language as clear as Adam used:

> O good old man, how well in thee appears
> The constant service of the antique world,
> When service sweat for duty not for meed.
> Thou art not for the fashion of these times
> Where none will sweat but for promotion
> And, having that, do choke their service up
> Even with the having. (2, 3, 56–62)

Adam is not really a 'character' at all; he is too symbolic to be life-like. His name immediately suggests the Adam of the Bible, and this suggestion is reinforced by Adam's speeches, which are full of biblical phrases and allusions (2, 3, 43–4, for instance). He is a device which Shakespeare uses to expound certain themes; and he is also necessary to bring out Orlando's tenderness and sense of responsibility later in this Act.

**Scene 4** Now Shakespeare begins his exploration of the two sides, male and female, of Rosalind's character. In public, and in all outward appearances, she is masculine—able to take responsibility, to support the weak, and to maintain an appearance of cheerful courage. Privately, underneath the doublet and hose, she is very feminine—longing herself for that support she must appear to give to Celia. Some dramatists contemporary with Shakespeare (such as John Fletcher) disguise their female characters as boys, and then appear to forget that they were first intended to be women. Shakespeare never forgets. Here in *As You Like It* Rosalind's disguise is not only a source of comedy (as we shall see in *Act 3*), but a means by which Shakespeare can present the richness and complexity of Rosalind's character. Conventions of social behaviour in Shakespeare's time—and indeed in England at all times until the

present day—would not allow a woman to behave naturally—as an equal—in the company of men. Wit and intelligence were not considered desirable in a lady. As Ganymede, Rosalind is free from social restraint: a theatrical convention of disguise releases her from society's conventions of behaviour.

The fifteen lines of naturalistic prose conversation at the beginning of *Act 2*, Scene 4 are followed by an episode of very formal verse, spoken by the least life-like of all the characters, Silvius. Silvius is taken from literature, not from life. He is typical of the shepherds in romantic pastoral poetry, who live only to love. For an instant, Rosalind joins in Silvius's poetic dream of love:

> Alas, poor shepherd, searching of thy wound,
> I have by hard adventure found mine own. (2, 4, 40–1)

His patterned verse and her rhyming couplet are both artificial, remote from everyday speech, and we are made aware that there is something comical about this love when Touchstone joins in with a prose account of his own ludicrous love for Jane Smile.

A number of themes have been introduced in the first part of the play, but this scene brings the most important theme, love, which we are to contemplate in various aspects throughout the rest of the play.

**Scene 5** In their own part of the Forest the lords, entertained by Amiens' song and the comments of Jaques, are preparing some kind of meal (described in courtly terms as a 'banquet') for the duke. In performance, this meal is perhaps displayed at the back of the stage, so that it is not immediately noticed by Orlando when he brings Adam on stage, exhausted by their wanderings in a strange and uninhabited place.

**Scene 6** This short scene reveals another aspect of Orlando, as he tries to cheer and comfort his old servant.

**Scene 7** The intellectual discussion between Jaques and Duke Senior on the nature of the satirist and his role in society is one that has no solution: the subject is always topical. It is a matter of opinion, endlessly debatable, whether the satirist should be personally free from reproach, and whether his attack should be directed at a general vice (such as pride) or at an individual instance (one particular proud person).

When Orlando rushes on to the stage, with his sword drawn, the argument stops. Duke Senior reproves Orlando for his unmannerly

behaviour, and the mood of the play changes. Once again, in the conversation between Orlando and the duke, court and country life are compared, but this time it is to the advantage of court life. Orlando is proud to say that he is

> inland bred,
> And know some nurture. (2, 7, 97–8)

Now it seems that the duke is not so happy as he claimed to be in *Act 2*, Scene 1; he admits that he and his followers 'have seen better days' (2, 7, 120). Amiens' song tries to re-assert the superiority of country life:

> Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
> Thou art not so unkind
> As man's ingratitude. (2, 7, 174–6)

But the pastoral ideal of the poets has been questioned.

### Act 3

**Scene 1** It is odd to hear Duke Frederick, in this short scene, rebuke Oliver for his own most grievous failing—lack of brotherly affection and respect. Now Oliver is sent to find his brother—and he too must go into the Forest.

**Scene 2** In a short moonlit interlude, Orlando hangs his poems on a tree, where they hang unseen as

**Scene 3** Touchstone and Corin resume their debate on the relative merits of court life and country living. Touchstone is more obviously clever in his debating technique, but the simple arguments put across by Corin seem to win the day. But the poems are quickly found by Rosalind and Celia, and the comedy reaches its height when the two girls read aloud these poetic effusions—which are easily parodied by Touchstone. But Celia contributes her own account of her meeting with Orlando in the Forest, and in excusing her reaction to this news Rosalind once again draws attention to her feminine nature.

> dost thou think, though I am caparisoned like a man, I have a doublet and hose in my disposition? (3, 3, 173–5)

When it is time for her to speak to Orlando, she can quickly adopt a boyish impertinence and 'speak to him like a saucy lackey' (3, 3, 268).

She draws a picture in words (but see p. 61) of the conventional poetic lover (3, 3, 337–47), and also of the changeable woman in love (365–80). However, at the end of the scene her anxiety that Orlando 'would but call me Rosalind' (3, 3, 382) betrays how deeply she is affected by him.

Scene 4 Another aspect of love is seen when Touchstone attempts to marry Audrey in the Forest. This is the very opposite of Orlando's idealistic emotion. Audrey has never heard the word 'poetical' before, and Touchstone wants to be married in this improper fashion so that,

> not being well married, it will be a good excuse for me hereafter to leave my wife. (3, 3, 78–9)

Scene 5 Alone with Celia, Rosalind does not pretend to be Ganymede; she is a woman, and in love. Celia teases her, and makes fun of Orlando; real love, like Rosalind's, is not afraid of being laughed at.

Scene 6 The love that is now depicted cannot bear laughter. Silvius is the type of lover found only in poetry, who is wholly devoted to his mistress, no matter how cruel she is. Phoebe is probably reading a poem he has written when she says 'Thou tell'st me' (3, 6, 10). It was very common for such lover-poets to speak of the killing glances that came from the lady's cruel eyes. Phoebe examines the metaphor, a poetic 'conceit', and shows how ridiculous it is when taken literally. But Phoebe's criticism is malicious—and it is a fitting punishment that she should herself experience the pangs of love when she is reproached by 'Ganymede'—who will never return her love.

## Act 4

Scene 1 The comedy increases in *Act 4* when Orlando, playing the part of a romantic lover, pleads with Rosalind; she, as Ganymede, adopts an amusingly cynical attitude to love. Suddenly the tone becomes serious, when Rosalind decides that they will 'play' at getting married. This is not all game, and Celia is unwilling to join in—'I cannot say the words' (4, 1, 110). A court of law, in Elizabethan England, would accept this ceremony as a binding contract, committing the lovers to each other, although not permitting them to consummate their union without the blessing of the church. The solemn moment soon passes, and Orlando is not aware of it; but when the teasing and laughter are over, and Orlando has left the stage, Rosalind speaks of her love, with few words and much feeling:

> O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love! (4, 1, 180–1)

Scene 2 Time passes, with a song; and the comedy is renewed for a moment when Silvius brings a letter to Rosalind from Phoebe—a letter in which
Scene 3 Phoebe makes use of the same poetic devices that she had scorned in *Act 3*, Scene 5. It is a mark of Silvius's love for Phoebe that he is willing to carry a letter to his rival, but Rosalind despises him, because love has turned him into a 'tame snake' (4, 3, 68).

A more serious note is introduced by Oliver, telling of his rescue from death by Orlando. The episode shows Orlando's courage and, even more important, his generosity, when he had such an opportunity to repay his brother for Oliver's unnatural hatred of him. And Oliver himself is the first to acknowledge this

> But kindness, nobler ever than revenge,
> And nature, stronger than his just occasion,
> Made him give battle to the lioness, (4, 3, 125–7)

Rosalind's reaction to Oliver's speech once again forces us to think of the contrast between her outward appearance as Ganymede, and her real nature. Oliver does not suspect the truth, but the audience can enjoy the irony in the words to cheer 'Ganymede':

> Be of good cheer, youth. You a man? You lack a man's heart. (4, 3, 161–2)

## Act 5

Scene 1 When Touchstone finds the country lad, William, it is inevitable that he should make fun of him:

> we that have good wits have much to answer for. We shall be flouting; we cannot hold. (5, 1, 11–12)

This scene is necessary, not for anything that it tells us about the plot, themes, or characters, but to make a natural break between *Act 4*, Scene 3, and the meeting of Rosalind and Orlando. Also, Robert Armin (and the actors who have played the part of Touchstone after him) would enjoy this opportunity to show their wit.

Scene 2 Now it is time for all the lovers to be collected together: the first Act of this play was an Act of dispersal, and it is balanced here by an Act of

union. With a little surprise, we find that Oliver has joined the band of lovers, because he and Celia, on very short acquaintance, have developed a mutual affection. When Rosalind sees Orlando, for the first time after the fight with the lioness, she tries to laugh at her feelings:

**Rosalind**
O, my dear Orlando, how it grieves me to see thee wear thy heart in a scarf.
**Orlando**
It is my arm.
**Rosalind**
I thought thy heart had been wounded with the claws of a lion.
**Orlando**
Wounded it is, but with the eyes of a lady. (5, 2, 19–24)

Now the conceit does not seem absurd; there is so much true feeling in Rosalind's relationship with Orlando that it is a relief for both of them to hide behind a conventional form of speech. Silvius speaks for all the lovers when he begins a definition of love; the others join in the chorus.

**Scene 3** Touchstone and Audrey were absent from this meeting, but they have heard of the wedding-day, and Touchstone tells Audrey

> Tomorrow is the joyful day, Audrey; Tomorrow will we be married. (5, 3, 1–2)

Once more, a song marks the passage of time.

**Scene 4** The final scene of *As You Like It* evokes a mixture of laughter and tears—tears of happiness. After a ritual repetition of the lovers' promises, Touchstone takes centre stage to entertain the other characters (and the audience) while Rosalind, with Celia's help, changes out of her doublet and hose. And when the two girls return they are accompanied by Hymen, the classical god of marriage, who brings the business of the play to a near-supernatural conclusion.

There has always been a magical atmosphere in this imaginary Forest of Arden: good people have found their happiness within its bounds, and one bad character, Oliver, has been converted from his former nature. In *Act 4*, Scene 3, Rosalind asked if he was the man who had tried to kill Orlando, and she received the answer

> 'Twas I, but 'tis not I. I do not shame
> To tell you what I was, since my conversion
> So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am. (4, 3, 132–4)

With the arrival of Jacques de Boys, we hear what has happened to the other wicked character, the usurping Duke Frederick:

> 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. (5, 4, 150–3)

The 'old religious man' belongs to no identifiable religion. The characters in *As You Like It* speak easily in words and phrases from the Bible, as well as referring to the classical gods. The play's action belongs to no particular period, and the Forest of Arden might as well be in France as in Shakespeare's Warwickshire. Neither time nor place is important in this play, and a modern setting is as appropriate for its effects as an attempt at Elizabethan verisimilitude.

The achievement of the play, as we look back from Rosalind's Epilogue, is not simply its creation of an ideal world where the good characters are promised that they will 'live happily ever after', and where bad characters repent of their wickedness and reform their lives. This is what the plot achieves, but *As You Like It* is greater than its plot. The plot provided Shakespeare with a framework, inside which he could arrange themes, points of view, and contrasting attitudes. The final triumph of the play is to have reconciled so many different aspects, so that none dominates at the expense of the others. The various interests, like themes in music, occur and recur through the five Acts, until at the end they, like the characters, have achieved some form of unity within the play's structure and 'Atone together' (5, 4, 102).

# Shakespeare's Verse

## 'God buy you, and you talk in blank verse'

Jaques's satiric comment on Orlando, the romantic young lover, makes us alert to the changes, in *As You Like It*, from prose to verse, and back again. It is usual, in the drama of this period, for the writers to observe a fairly strict rule dividing characters into those who speak verse and those who speak prose. Verse speakers are kings and queens, lords and ladies, and lovers; prose is spoken by comic characters, servants, and country folk. But Shakespeare does not keep to this division in *As You Like It*. In this play it is, broadly speaking, the topic being discussed that decides whether prose or verse should be the medium of discussion: serious matters are spoken of in verse, and prose is used for mundane affairs. For instance—Duke Frederick banishes Rosalind in verse, (*Act 1*, Scene 3), but he watched the wrestling in prose (*Act 1*, Scene 2). When Orlando is explaining his birth and education in the first scene of the play, he speaks in prose; praising Adam's loyalty and industry, his speeches are in verse; comforting his exhausted servant, he returns to prose; and when he appears as the lover of Rosalind, his words naturally fall into the iambic pentameter that Jaques scorns:

> Nay then, God buy you, and you talk in blank verse! (*4*, 1, 29)

There is nothing artificial about the line that provokes Jaques's ridicule. The words are common, in everyday use, and they are in their normal order. Without Jaques's comment, we might well not notice that Orlando has delivered a perfect blank verse line:

> Good dáy and háppinéss, dear Rósalínd. (*4*, 1, 28)

Blank verse is ideal for English drama because its rhythms are close to those of normal speech; it is capable of infinite variation, yet at the same time it can impose a pattern on the shapelessness of ordinary speech. Basically, the lines, which are unrhymed, are ten syllables long. The syllables have alternating stresses, just like normal English speech; and they divide into five 'feet'.

**Duke Frederick**
I wóuld thou hádst been són to sóme man élse;
The wórld estéem'd thy fáther hónouráble
But Í did fínd him stíll mine énemý.
Thou shóuldst have bétter pléas'd me wíth this déed
Hadst thóu descénded fróm anóther hóuse.
But fáre thee wéll. Thou árt a gállant yóuth:
I wóuld thou hadst tóld me óf anóther fáther. 1, 2, 197–203

Easily the best way to understand and appreciate Shakespeare's verse is to read it aloud—and don't worry if you don't understand everything! Try not to be captivated by the dominant rhythm, but decide which are the most important words in each line and use the regular metre to drive them forward to the listeners.

## Source, Date, and Text

**Source** Shakespeare's main source for *As You Like It* was a popular prose fiction by Thomas Lodge, *Rosalind, or Euphues' Golden Legacy* (1590), which was itself based on a much earlier narrative poem of the fourteenth century—a story of greenwood outlaws and a youngest son who, driven from his father's estate, proves his manhood and virtue in many adventures which include winning a ram in a wrestling match. Lodge adds the more sophisticated elements of a king living as an outlaw in the Forest of Ardennes in France, and the romantic stories of the lovers. His very mannered style, with its elaborate similes and balances, derives from another popular prose romance, John Lyly's *Euphues* (1578), and is occasionally echoed in Shakespeare's play.

**Date** The play is not mentioned in *Palladis Tamia*, Francis Meres's list of the best contemporary English writing, which was entered for publication in the Stationers' Register in September 1598, but it must have been written before August 1600, when it was registered itself. *As You Like It* could even have been the first play for the new Globe theatre, which probably opened between June and September 1599—so that Jaques's speech about the theatricality of life could become a gesture in the direction of the new motto: *Totus mundus agit histrionem*—all the world plays the actor.

**Text** Although it was registered in 1600 (probably to frustrate unlawful publication), the play was not published until 1623, in the First Folio of Shakespeare's *Complete Works*, which forms the basis of all modern editions. The present edition uses the text established by Michael Hattaway in 2000 for the New Cambridge Shakespeare.

# People in the Play

**The household of the late Sir Roland de Boys**

**Oliver** *the eldest son and heir*

**Jacques** *the second son*

**Orlando** *the youngest son*

**Adam** *a loyal servant to the household*

**Denis** Oliver*'s servant*

**The court of the usurping Duke**

**Duke Frederick** *the younger brother of* Duke Senior

**Celia** *his daughter*

**Rosalind** *daughter to* Duke Senior

**Le Beau** *a courtier*

**Charles** *a wrestler*

**Touchstone** *a jester*

**The court in exile**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Duke Senior** | |
| **Amiens** | *an attendant lord* |
| **Jaques** | *a melancholy lord* |

**The Forest people**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Corin** | *an old shepherd* |
| **Silvius** | *a young shepherd* |
| **Phoebe** | *a shepherdess* |
| **William** | *a country man* |
| **Audrey** | *a country girl* |
| **Sir Oliver Martext** | *a country priest* |
| **Hymen** | *god of marriage* |

Lords, Pages, Foresters, Attendants

'Now Hercules be thy speed, young man.' (*1*, 2, 183) Nancy Carroll as Celia, Alexandra Gilbreath as Rosalind, Joshue Richards as Charles, and Anthony Howell as Orlando, Royal Shakespeare Company, 2001.

**Act 1 Scene 1**
Sibling rivalry: Orlando decides to leave home to escape the unkindness of a brother who plots his death, and we learn that Duke Senior has been banished from the court by his younger brother.

## SCENE 1

Oliver's *orchard: enter* Orlando *and* Adam

**Orlando**
As I remember, Adam, it was upon this fashion bequeathed me by will but poor a thousand crowns and, as thou say'st, charged my brother, on his blessing, to breed me well: and there begins my sadness. My brother Jacques he keeps at school, and report speaks goldenly of his profit. 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? His horses are bred better for, besides that they are fair with their feeding, they are taught their manège, and to that end riders dearly hired. But I, his brother, gain nothing under him but growth—for the which his animals on his dunghills are as much bound to him as I. 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. This is it, Adam, that grieves me, and the spirit of my father, which I think is within me, begins to mutiny against this servitude. I will no longer endure it, though yet I know no wise remedy how to avoid it.

*Enter* Oliver

**Adam**
Yonder comes my master, your brother.

**Orlando**
Go apart, Adam, and thou shalt hear how he will shake me up.

1 *As I remember*: The scene opens in the middle of a conversation, the characters speaking as they walk downstage towards the audience.
1–2 *it . . . will*: this is the manner it was left to me in (my father's) will.
2 *poor*: a mere.
*crowns*: gold coins (worth about 25p in 1600).
3 *charged my brother*: gave the responsibility to my brother.
*on his blessing*: as a condition for receiving his blessing.
4 *breed*: educate.
5 *Jacques*: Orlando's second brother does not appear until *Act 5*, Scene 4.
*keeps at school*: maintains at university.
*report*: rumour.
6 *profit*: progress.
8 *unkept*: without money.
9 *stalling*: stabling.
11 *fair with*: in good condition because of.
*manège*: correct paces and conduct.
12 *riders*: trainers.
14 *bound*: indebted.
15–16 *the something . . . me*: my natural social status.
16 *countenance*: behaviour.
17 *hinds*: farm labourers.
*bars*: deprives me of.
18 *as . . . lies*: as far as he possibly can.
18–19 *mines my gentility*: undermines my noble birth.

25 *apart*: aside.
25–6 *shake me up*: taunt me.

Adam *withdraws*

**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**

Aye, better than him I am before knows me: I know you are my eldest brother, and in the gentle condition of blood you should so know me. The courtesy of nations allows you my better in that you are the first-born, but the same tradition takes not away my blood, were there twenty brothers betwixt us. I have as much of my father in me as you, albeit I confess your coming before me is nearer to his reverence.

**Oliver**

[*Raising his hand*] What, boy!

**Orlando**

[*Seizing his brother*] Come, come, elder brother, you are too young in this.

**Oliver**

Wilt thou lay hands on me, villain?

**Orlando**

I am no villein: I am the youngest son of Sir Roland de

27 *what make you*: what are you doing; Orlando deliberately mistakes *make* = construct.

30 *Marry*: by St Mary (a mild oath).

32 *be naught awhile*: get away with you (a common catchphrase).

33–5 *Shall . . . penury*: Orlando refers to Jesus's parable of the prodigal son who wasted his inheritance ('portion') and was forced to eat the scraps ('husks') on which the pigs were fed (Luke 15:11–32).

39, 41 *know*: acknowledge.

40–1 *in . . . blood*: because of our noble breeding.

41 *courtesy of nations*: custom among civilized people.

42 *allows*: acknowledges.

43 *blood*: breeding.

45–6 *your . . . reverence*: being born before me entitles you to more of the respect due to him.

47 *boy*: An insult that provokes Orlando to demonstrate unexpected strength.

49 *in this*: in strength.

50 *thou*: Oliver's use of the familiar pronoun (instead of 'you') is insulting. *villain*: rogue; Orlando hears a pun on 'villein' (= peasant).

Boys; he was my father, and he is thrice a villain that says such a father begot villeins. Wert thou not my brother, I would not take this hand from thy throat till this other had pulled out thy tongue for saying so: thou hast railed on thyself.

55–6 *railed on thyself*: slandered yourself (by saying that his father could beget a villain).

**Adam**

[*Coming forward*] Sweet masters, be patient, for your father's remembrance, be at accord.

58 *at accord*: at peace.

**Oliver**

Let me go, I say.

**Orlando**

I will not till I please. You shall hear me. My father charged you in his will to give me good education: you have trained me like a peasant, obscuring and hiding from me all gentleman-like qualities. The spirit of my father grows strong in me—and I will no longer endure it. Therefore allow me such exercises as may become a gentleman or give me the poor allottery my father left me by testament: with that I will go buy my fortunes.

63 *qualities*: accomplishments.

65 *exercises*: pursuits.
*may become*: may be suited to.
66 *allottery*: share of the inheritance.
67 *testament*: will.

*He releases* Oliver

**Oliver**

And what wilt thou do? Beg when that is spent? Well, sir, get you in. I will not long be troubled with you: you shall have some part of your 'will'; I pray you leave me.

70 *your 'will'*: what you want.

**Orlando**

I will no further offend you than becomes me for my good.

**Oliver**

[*To* Adam] Get you with him, you old dog.

**Adam**

Is 'old dog' my reward? Most true, I have lost my teeth in your service. God be with my old master: he would not have spoke such a word.

[*Exeunt* Orlando *and* Adam

**Oliver**

Is it even so, begin you to grow upon me? I will physic your rankness, and yet give no thousand crowns neither.—Holla, Denis.

77 *grow upon me*: become a nuisance to me.
*physic*: cure, purge.
78 *rankness*: excessive wild growth.

*Enter* Denis

**Denis**

Calls your worship?

**Oliver**

Was not Charles, the duke's wrestler, here to speak with me?

**Denis**

83 *So please you*: if it may please you. *importunes*: demands.

So please you, he is here at the door, and importunes access to you.

**Oliver**

Call him in. [*Exit* Denis

86 *'Twill . . . is*: Oliver speaks *aside*, to himself.

'Twill be a good way, and tomorrow the wrestling is.

*Enter* Charles

**Charles**

87 *morrow*: morning.

Good morrow to your worship.

**Oliver**

Good Monsieur Charles, what's the new news at the new court?

**Charles**

90 *old news*: Celia says (*1*, 3, 66) that at the time of the duke's exile she was too young to appreciate Rosalind's worth.

91 *old duke*: i.e. Duke Senior.

There's no news at the court, sir, but the old news: that is, the old duke is banished by his younger brother, the new duke, and three or four loving lords have put themselves into voluntary exile with him, whose lands and revenues enrich the new duke; therefore he gives

95 *good leave*: full permission.

them good leave to wander.

**Oliver**

Can you tell if Rosalind, the duke's daughter, be banished with her father?

**Charles**

99 *bred*: brought up.

100 *to stay*: if she were forced to stay.

O no; for the duke's daughter, her cousin, so loves her, being ever from their cradles bred together, that she would have followed her exile or have died to stay behind her; she is at the court and no less beloved of her uncle than his own daughter, and never two ladies loved as they do.

**Oliver**

Where will the old duke live?

Charles

They say he is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world.

Oliver

What, you wrestle tomorrow before the new duke?

Charles

Marry, do I, sir; and I came to acquaint you with a matter. I am given, sir, secretly to understand that your younger brother Orlando hath a disposition to come in, disguised, against me to try a fall. Tomorrow, sir, I wrestle for my credit, and he that escapes me without some broken limb shall acquit him well. Your brother is but young and tender and, for your love, I would be loath to foil him, as I must for my own honour, if he come in; therefore, out of my love to you, I came hither to acquaint you withal, that either you might stay him from his intendment, or brook such disgrace well as he shall run into, in that it is a thing of his own search and altogether against my will.

Oliver

Charles, I thank thee for thy love to me, which thou shalt find I will most kindly requite. I had myself notice of my brother's purpose herein, and have by underhand means laboured to dissuade him from it—but he is resolute. I'll 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 practise 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 speak but brotherly of

105 *Forest of Arden*: an extensive tract of wild countryside near Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace; various references, however, suggest that the play, like its source, might be set in France—see 'Source, Date, and Text', p.xxv.
105–6 *a many*: a lot of.
107 *Robin . . . England*: A romantic outlaw of English folklore.
108 *fleet*: pass away.
109 *carelessly*: free from care.
*golden world*: the first age of the world.
113 *disposition*: inclination.
114 *disguised*: It was not appropriate for a gentleman to fight with a common wrestler.
*fall*: bout.
115 *credit*: reputation.
117 *love*: sake.
118 *foil*: overthrow.
120 *withal*: with this.
120–1 *stay . . . intendment*: stop him from carrying out his intentions.
121 *brook*: endure.
125 *kindly requite*: appropriately reward.
126–7 *by . . . means*: unobtrusively.
129 *of France*: See above, 105 note.
129–30 *envious emulator*: malicious detractor.
130 *parts*: qualities.
131 *contriver*: plotter.
*natural*: blood.
132 *had as lief*: would rather.
133–4 *look to't*: be careful.
135 *grace . . . thee*: distinguish himself against you.
135–6 *practise . . . poison*: plot to kill you with poison.
140 *brotherly*: as a brother, i.e. not objectively.

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