MATTER MADE EVEN: AS YOU LIKE IT

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May, 1979
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George Bernard Shaw, writing in 1890, complained that a new production of AS_YOU_LIKE_IT had been ruined by the producer's having attempted to reduce the play's length by the common method of "cutting out a bit here and a chunk there until the lines are few enough to fit. But somehow," he went on, "the shorter you make your play in this fashion, the more tedious it becomes."

Ninety years later, we can hope that the play's career on the chopping-block has ended for good. The question remains, however, of just what makes AS_YOU_LIKE_IT so particularly vulnerable to abridgements. Even such thickly-plotted works as HAMLET and ANTONY_AND_CLEOPATRA are commonly cut for performance, and though we may lament the loss of Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, or Pompey, we generally admit that these plays are sturdy enough to stumble on without them. This is not so for AS_YOU_LIKE_IT, despite its length - it is the longest of Shakespeare's mature comedies - and despite its remarkable lack of the traditional elements of plot. The story is far simpler even than the source,

Thomas Lodge's gem of a pastoral romance, *Rosalynde*. For the first act and a half it advances its folk-tale plot with speed and precision, "each phrase driving its meaning and feeling in up to the head at one brief, sure stroke," introducing all of the major characters and funneling most of them into the forest of Arden. But between their arrivals there and the end of the play, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that almost nothing happens: the various characters simply wander around the forest (usually aimlessly), meeting each other, talking, and eventually parting to look for others to meet. These three central acts are comprised almost entirely of a subtly modulating series of conversations rather than the bawdiness, slapstick, and story-twists of earlier plays like *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even *Love's Labour's Lost*, Shakespeare's only other comedy in which the plot is minimized, is more "like a well-ordered dance in which each of the participants repeats the steps of the others."[5] It is as if Shakespeare were going out of his and Aristotle's way to make the story-line distinctly secondary as a thematic and characterizing agent. For though


most of the Arden scenes are hardly necessary for the advancement of the plot, their removal leaves a mere half-play, and a very hollow half at that.

The scenes in Arden are indispensable to the play for many reasons. For one thing, they are most clearly written as the Globe audience would have liked it, in the pastoral style which was enjoying a resurgence of popularity in the Renaissance, especially around 1600.[6] The forest provides a fine setting for the festive release to "holiday humor" from the "working-day world" of the first few scenes, as C.L. Barber has shown (though a similar release takes place in Rosalynde).[7] Many of the characters in the forest are representatives of favorite Elizabethan dramatic stock-figures: the woman disguised as a boy, the giant-defeating hero, the witty fool, the melancholic, the love-sick swain, the coy mistress, the wise old shepherd, the affected courtier, and the fumbling Puritan preacher. The topics dealt with in the conversations among these characters, too, include many of the most popular of Renaissance literature, such as love, nobility, wisdom, the fleeting of time, and so forth.

Thus far, however, Shakespeare has presented nothing new, or even very much appreciably different from what

already existed in Lodge. Modern critics, in discussing why *As You Like It* has always been found to be by far the richer work, have tended to approach the play from two different angles. One group has examined the thematic content in some depth, showing the ways in which Shakespeare incorporated Elizabethan tradition—folk-tale, pastoral, character-types, etc.—into the play; others have been particularly interested in the unique dramatic style of the Arden scenes, likening them (for example) to a contrapuntal musical structure.[8] Both these perspectives have considerable relevance, and I would myself be little better than "an envious emulator of every man's good parts" were I to pretend to have much to add to the excellent work already done on the play. Nonetheless, I should like to try to examine *As You Like It* in such a way as to combine thematic and structural interpretation—to show that in the Arden scenes its structure is built of themes rather than of plot, and that these themes are synthesized in the conclusion (with the very central help of Rosalind) into a newly harmonious view of life.

Even a cursory reading of the play will yield a long list of the favorite Renaissance topics of discussion. In

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8. The quote with which this paper opens goes on: "The proper way is to divide your play into movements like those of a symphony. You will find that there are several sections which can be safely taken at a brisk allegro, and a few that may be taken prestissimo . . ." Shaw, p. 37.
Rosalynde, in which "the curious thing is that a book so full
of moral talk could be so short of moral significance,"
dozens of Elizabethan commonplace are repeated, by various
individuals with very little apparent regard for true moral
meaning or character consistency.[9] In As You Like It, on
the other hand, different viewpoints almost always have
strong dramatic purposes, even when philosophically weak -
and they tend to be strongly associated with specific
characters. In the absence of plot, the play's characters
are particularly concerned with philosophical "matter" - a
favorite word - which they both seek and expound at every
available opportunity: Duke Senior loves Jaques "in these
sullen fits, / For then he's full of matter";[10] to
Rosalind, "for lovers lacking (God warn us!) matter, the
cleanliest shift is to kiss" (IV.i.76-7); Touchstone
complains that the final song contains "no great matter"
(V.iii.35) - to cite just a few examples. Associated with
this search for matter is, as David Young has shown, a
preoccupation with the word if, "as though the grammar that
most suited a world like this one was the conditional."[11]
- Touchstone even goes so far as to claim that "Your If is

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9. Robert B. Pierce, "The Moral Languages of Rosalynde and
As You Like It," Studies in Philology, LXVII, 2, April, 1971,
p. 170.
10. II.i.67-8. All Shakespeare quotations are from The
Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston:
Houghton Mifflin, 1974).
11. David Young, The Heart's Forest: A Study of
Shakespeare's Pastoral Plays (New Haven: Yale University
the only peacemaker" (V.i.v.102-3). It is consistent, then, that the viewpoints presented in the play are arranged as a series of conflicts. These include, for example, age and youth, optimism and melancholy, realism and romanticism, nature and fortune, nature and art, poetry and truth, inherited nobility and acquired virtue, education and ignorance, wisdom and stupidity, hedonism and asceticism, kindness and malice, court and country, different treatments of time, various views of women, and associated modes of love. The interactions of the characters in Arden are made up almost entirely of these conflicts, at least several of which tend to be going on at any given moment, yet the play as a whole never falls into a tone of moral pedagogy, as does Rosalynde.[12] The characters' meetings are consistently thematic as well as good theatrical fun: sandwiched between the flurries of courtly and fairy-tale actions of the first and last acts (largely caused by the former and causing the latter), they set up a field of social and philosophical tensions which largely replace those normally created by an Aristotelian plot.

All the characters in Arden deal with at least some of these conflicts. Some simply act as examples of different topics or viewpoints: if Corin represents folk wisdom, for example, Audrey and William can hardly help standing for utter ignorance. Touchstone and Jaques, both of whom

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Shakespeare added to Lodge's story, are particularly important as outside commentators: taking little or no part in the (admittedly scarce) action, they make verbally explicit many of the most important opposing points of view, while at the same time undercutting (purposely for Touchstone, though not for Jaques) the very opinions with which they claim to sympathize. Jaques sets himself apart from society both physically and with his mode of explicit satire, conspicuously attacking virtually anything that happens to present itself. "Jaques arrogates to himself the divine role," Helen Gardner writes: he patronizes human society, but "has opted out from the human condition."[13] Touchstone, on the other hand, includes himself in society (as "amongst the rest of the country copulatives") whether he is wanted or not, satirizing it by identifying himself with it. His brand of wit, highbrow and yet earthy, is unusual among Shakespeare's earlier clowns. It may have been necessitated by the Globe's replacement of Kempe by Armin, but it is the perfect complement to Jaques' cold intellectualism.

It is Rosalind, however, who is given the central, unifying position in the play. In many ways she is its guiding force, with as privileged a viewpoint as the audience: the plot of the scenes at court puts her in the

middle of almost all the play's controversies, practical and philosophical, and she alone is given the ability and insight to reconcile them. She accomplishes this not by simplistically choosing one set of answers over another, but by accepting them all as parts of an all-embracing humanity—each is given its proper time and place; each is taken with a grain of salt. Rosalind's unique ability to appreciate the world's *discordia concors* enables her not only to resolve her personal difficulties, but to resolve a large part of her environment's tension as well, most strikingly, in the conclusion, by means of the institutional harmony of marriage.

This very brief outline of the general form of the dramatic tensions of *As You Like It*, and of Rosalind's resolution of them, will hopefully be made more clear by examining the treatments of some specific topics: time, women and love, and the problem of city versus country. These topics, distinct and (on the surface, at least) unrelated, are yet subsumed and interconnected by the broad view of life presented in the forest of Arden, and personified in the microcosm of Rosalind, who (despite Orlando's slim poetical talents),

By heavenly synod was devis'd,
Of many faces, eyes, and hearts,
To have the touches dearest priz'd.

*(III.ii.149-51)*

Let us look first at the treatments of time in the play. As Jay I. Halio has shown, civilization at the play's opening is highly time-conscious and infatuated with newness. It is
"not a brave new world, but a degenerate new one. With no obligation to tradition - to the past - it is ruthless in its self-assertion."[14] Up until the departure to Arden, the time-scheme is carefully worked out: everyone is punctual, and the figures in positions of power are exacting in requiring punctuality of others. Orlando escapes a fiery death only narrowly, by the timely warning of Adam; Rosalind is warned to leave Frederick's court "within these ten days" (I.iii.43), on pain of death; even Oliver's life finally comes to rest on whether he can apprehend Orlando "dead or alive / Within this twelvemonth" (III.i.6-7). When Oliver asks Charles for "the new news at the new court," the wrestler's brief reply contains no less than five instances of the words "new" and "old" (I.i.96-104); and when Oliver calls Adam an "old dog," the aged servant replies

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.

(I.i.81-4)

If the existing order is associated with empty newness, Orlando and Rosalind are associated with the fullness and goodness of the old tradition, suggesting the possibility of regeneration and renewal of human bonds. Orlando's name immediately connects him with his father Rowland; he proudly and repeatedly identifies himself as his father's son; and

his first speech is largely prompted by the fact that "the spirit of my father, which I think is within me, begins to mutine against this servitude" (I.i.22-4). Adam exclaims

O my gentle master,
O my sweet master, O you memory
Of old Sir Rowland! Why, what make you here?
Why are you virtuous? Why do people love you?
And wherefore are you gentle, strong, and valiant?
(II.iii.2-6)

Orlando demonstrates his worthiness for Adam's praise by returning it, very much in the voice of old Sir Rowland:

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. It is not so with thee.
(II.iii.56-62)

In the unnatural modern world of court and city, Orlando's descent from the good Sir Rowland prompts him to seek his fortune by challenging "The bonny priser of the humorous Duke" (II.iii.8) and to overcome him; but this same parental heritage - old Sir Rowland's association with Duke Senor - leads Frederick to cut Orlando off from any reward, and the envious Oliver to scheme to burn him alive. Rosalind, too, is identified with the old tradition through her father: her first speech deals with her incapacity "to forget a banish'd father" (I.ii.5-6), and the first reason she offers for loving Orlando is that "The Duke my father lov'd his father dearly" (I.iii.29-30). Like Orlando, she is banished by Frederick because "Thou art thy father's daughter, there's
enough" (I.iii.58) - despite her plea that "Treason is not inherited" (I.iii.61).

Thus the new order mindlessly ejects the relics of the valid tradition from its midst. Happily these relics manage to reach the forest of Arden, where they can "flee the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world" (I.i.119). Here Duke Senior, unlike Frederick, recognizes his old friend Rowland reborn in Orlando:

If that you were the good Sir Rowland's son,
As you have whisper'd faithfully you were,
And as mine eye doth his effigies witness
Most truly liam'd and living in your face,
Be truly welcome hither. I am the Duke
That lov'd your father.  

(II.vii.191-5)

The most formal philosophical statements about time are presented relatively soon after the main characters' arrivals in Arden, by the play's two commentators, Jaques and Touchstone, as well as by Rosalind herself. The early presentation of the statements effectively establishes a rough philosophical framework through which the actions of characters throughout the play may be considered; but these statements are woven skillfully enough into the dramatic structure, and show a steady enough development from one to the next, that they never fall into (unintentional) pedantry - in fact, they emerge as some of the play's more charming sections.

Touchstone's comments on time are the first to be offered, recounted for Duke Senior by Jaques:

He drew a dial from his poke,
And looking on it, with lack-luster 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 tail." 
(II.vii.20-8)

Time is here seen as a constant, and human life as a simply ripening and rotting. Touchstone seems, in fact, to be parodying Jaques, the courtly melancholic to whom he delivers this speech - why else would he have "rail'd on Lady Fortune in good terms" (II.vii.16) - but Jaques, like one of the dull victims of his own intended Foolery (II.vii.83-7), misses the gibe. While Orlando notes that the Duke's followers "Under the shade of melancholy boughs, / Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time" (II.vii.111-12), Jaques extends and enlarges Touchstone's view:

All the world's a stage, 
And all the men and women merely players; 
They have their exits and their entrances, 
And one man in his time plays many parts, 
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant, 
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms. 
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel 
And shining morning face, creeping like snail Unwillingly to school. And then the lover, 
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful bailad 
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier, 
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard, 
Jealous in honor, sudden, and quick in quarrel, 
Seeking the bubble reputation 
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice, 
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd, 
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut, 
Full of wise saws and modern instances; 
And so he plays his part. The sixt age shifts 
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon, 
With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side, 
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide 
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice, 
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes 
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing.

(II.vii.139-66)[15]

The poetry of this set-piece is attractive - Neoclassical and Victorian critics often considered it one of the play's definitive statements on human existence[16] - but its sentiment is undercut in at least two important ways. First, despite its increased scope, it is not markedly different in its general outlook from Touchstone's parody, delivered only a few minutes earlier. Time is again seen as an unchangeable constant, iron-handedly ruling each successive stage in the lives of human beings. Even more obvious than this means of undercutting (at least to an audience), no sooner are the last words out of Jaques' mouth than Orlando enters carrying Adam, like Aeneas rescuing Anchises from the flames of Troy. This association with Virgil's heroic figures immediately points up the inadequacy of Jaques' characterizations of young men as simply lovers or soldiers, and of the elderly as nothing more than doomed, babbling fools. Adam is utterly exhausted, and "sans teeth," having lost them in Oliver's


service, but still his age is not a mere decaying: rather it is "as a lusty winter, / Frosty but kindly" (II.iii.52-3). And in fact no one in the play (with the exception of the courtly lovers) comes close or even attempts to fit into the melancholic's attractively flat but incomplete stereotypes.

Rosalind makes her first comment on this discussion soon afterward: she rejects Touchstone's (and with it, Jaques') theory of time, telling him "you'll be rotten ere you be half ripe" (III.ii.119-20). When she learns that Orlando has been writing verses to her (poor though they may be), she becomes suddenly impatient; and when she meets him in the forest she tells him of her own theory of time's relation to humanity - a relativistic theory based on the viewpoints of individual people rather than on a hypothetical constant such as Time:

"time travels in divers paces with divers persons. . . .
Marry, he trots hard with a young maid between the contract of her marriage and the day it is solemniz'd. If the interim be but a se'nnight, Time's pace is so hard that it seems the length of seven year. . . . [Time ambles] With a priest that lacks Latin, and a rich man that hath not the gout; for the one sleeps easily because he cannot study, and the other lives merrily because he feels no pain; the one lacking the burthen of lean and wasteful learning, the other knowing no burthen of heavy tedious penury. These Time ambles withal. . . . [Time gallops] With a thief to the gallows; for though he go as softly as foot can fall, he thinks himself too soon there. . . . [Time stays still] With lawyers in the vacation; for they sleep between term and term, and then they perceive not how Time moves."

(III.ii.308-33)

"Jaques' speech [Halio writes] describes a man in his time playing many parts and suggests that his speed, or 'pace,' will vary along with his role; the series of vignettes illustrates the movement of a person in time. Rosalind not
only adds appreciably to Jaques' gallery, but showing
profounder insight, she shifts the emphasis from the movement
of a person, to the movement of time as apprehended by
individual human beings.[17] This view of time, as a
quantity varying relative to the perspectives of the
individuals perceiving it, is far more satisfactory in this
richly-peopled play than Jaques'.[18] In fact, this is
probably the most humane and inclusive view of time in
Shakespeare: as George Bernard Shaw noted elsewhere,
Macbeth's "petty pace" is little more than a paraphrase of
Touchstone's ripening and rotting.[19]

The Arden scenes are constructed dramatically as well as
philosophically to demonstrate that the characters with the
deepest understandings of time are the only ones flexible
enough to be able to put it to practical use. The timeless
nature of the forest, so welcome after the insane hurry of
Duke Frederick's court, gives each character the opportunity
to choose his or her own pace; but those who only minimally
understand time cannot change their paces to suit changing
situations, and so are easily manipulated by those who can.
Timelessness is one of Arden's blessings, but for those who
accept it too blindly, it carries the danger of becoming a
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17. Malio, p. 205.
18. Note also that the "divers persons" listed by Rosalind
are "all traditional subjects for satiric attack." Alice
Lotvin Birney, Satiric Catharsis in Shakespeare (Berkeley:
mindless progress in which the capacity to seize the moment is lost.

Most of the characters in Arden do adopt this unhurried attitude. Duke Senior and his entourage, though wistful about the court, are in no overwhelming rush to return to it; even Jaques, philosopher of time though he is, never varies his pace of life to any substantial degree. He seems to have made the conscious choice, as part of his apparent decision to be melancholy, to confine himself to his role as an unhurried observer, initiating no action himself: when Orlando threatens his life for food, he drollly replies, "And you will not be answer'd with reason [i.e. raisin], / I must die" (II.vii.100-1); and on the one occasion when he tries to speed up an action (Touchstone's marriage to Audrey - III.iii.), he only succeeds in delaying it. Celia takes to Arden's timelessness from the very first: "I like this place," she says, "And willingly could waste my time in it" (II.iv.94-5). She goes on to display her pastoral relaxation, teasing Rosalind by delaying to tell her the identity of the author of her verses (III.ii.179-217), helping to calm her when she becomes upset over Orlando's tardiness and replying to her promise to sigh until Orlando's arrival with the words "And I'll sleep" (IV.i.215-18). Orlando, too, makes the decision to "fleeet the time carelessly," probably as a personal reaction against the rapid-fire sequence of upsetting events which have hurried
him through the entire opening of the play. Safe and unharried in Arden, he takes joy that "there's no clock in the forest" (III.ii.300-1), and seems to revel in his (probably not unintentional) lateness for a meeting with Rosalind, despite her severe chastisements, saying only "I come within an hour of my promise" (IV.i.42-3). Even Silvius and Phebe, hurried as they seem to please their respective "true-loves," have no real conceptions of the passage of time: were it not for the help of Rosalind, their love-play might continue indefinitely - as Andrew Marvell later wrote, "Till the conversion of the Jews" ("To His Coy Mistress," I. 10).

The only characters who demonstrate real flexibility in their treatments of time (and in very different ways), are Corin, Touchstone, and Rosalind. In his age and experience, Corin accepts the generally relaxed nature of time in his pastoral world: he is patient with those he converses with, never allowing himself to be unnecessarily hurried or bamboozled, even by Touchstone (III.ii.11-37). Yet when speed is necessary, he does not delay: he will buy his master's "cote, his flocks, and bounds of feed . . . right suddenly" (II.iv.83-100); and he accomplishes his task of emptying the stage of Touchstone and Audrey with admirable economy: "Our master and mistress seeks you. Come away, away!" (V.i.60-1). Touchstone, too, has a good appreciation of time's variability (which is what allows him to parody Jaques' philosophy so effectively), but unlike the patient
pastoral shepherd, he urbanely uses his skill to hurry and manipulate other characters. His own sense of timing is an important by-product of his appreciation of time: he uses it, along with his folly, "like a stalking-horse" (V.i.v.106), putting his victims at ease with relaxed, even vacuous conversation before suddenly lashing into them with flurries of wit.

Rosalind combines both the flexibility of Corin's treatment of time and Touchstone's ability to take the initiative in personal interactions - and by combining them, she transcends them both. In a way, she displays youth with the wisdom of age, an antique and medieval tradition for superhuman or mystical female figures.[20] Her several layers of disguise allow her to switch rapidly from one role to another - to "change a visor swifter than a thought," as Mosca brags of himself in Jonson's Volpone - as circumstances or her own will suggest. This gives her unequalled freedom of movement and personal expression; and naturally, according to her own theory of "divers paces for divers persons," each separate role carries with it a separate treatment of time. As herself, a vital young woman in love, she grows impatient to learn the name of her berhymer, and on finding him to be Orlando she becomes frantic with joy (and a bit amused with herself at the same time):

Alas the day, what shall I do with my doublet and hose?
What did he when thou saw'st him? What said he? How

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look'd he? ... and when shalt thou see him again? Answer me in one word. (III.ii.219-24)

As the "swashing and marshall" youth Ganymed, she swiftly offers to buy Corin's master's property for herself and Celia (II.iv.88-93), initiates her relationship with Orlando in the forest by presenting her view of time (III.ii.297ff.), sets up appointments with him, and is quick to be obnoxious to Phebe (III.v.66-9). As Ganymed playing Orlando's "Rosalind" she acts out many of the worst stereotypes of women's time-senses: she is changeable and inconstant, chiding Orlando harshly for his lateness, yet begging a moment later "Come, woo me, woo me" (IV.i.68); she presses Celia to "marry" her to Orlando, yet to his proclamation of eternal love she replies "Say 'a day' without the 'ever.'" (IV.i.146). By acting out so many "divers paces," she reveals her deep knowledge of time - she knows love's history (IV.i.97-106), for example, and predicts its future (IV.i.143-9)[21] - and at least partially cures Orlando (among other things) of his pastoral proclivity for wasting time as if there were no future: the penitent Oliver begins to treat him as the older brother, asking his permission to marry Celia (V.ii.7-9);[22] and when Oliver's wedding-date is set, he realizes that "I can no longer live by thinking"


22. The puer senex was an ideal of late pagan antiquity, but it "remained alive down to the seventeenth century as a eulogy schema for both pagan and Christian use." Curtius, pp. 99-100.
(V.i.50). It is not until this sign of time-responsibility from him that Rosalind decides the time is right to arrange their wedding, as well as that of the two other amorous time-wasters, Silvius and Phoebe (whom Rosalind has advised "Sell when you can, you are not for all markets" - III.v.60). She accomplishes this by setting up the complex series of promises among herself and the other three lovers, in which one of the basic assumptions is that when the chance for marriage arrives the next day, it will have to be taken, at the risk of otherwise endangering all future happiness. In her time in the forest, then, Rosalind exhibits far more patience and flexibility with time, as well as more ability carpe diem when necessary, than any other character - and a virtuoso's ability to use each of these strengths in its proper time and circumstance. Drawn both by the timelessness of the forest and by the necessity of taking responsibility for her actions in time, she manages to create in herself a new synthesis, with this she can demonstrate the "divers paces" she needs to express her full self, and with this flexibility she helps create a new synthesis in society as well.

Let us now consider some ways in which this synthesizing process works in another of the central themes of the play, the relationship between the sexes. This theme is actually comprised of two separate but closely related topoi: the nature of women and the various modes of courtship. Rosalind
is the focus of this discussion even more clearly than of most, since for the greater part of the play her sexual and romantic identities are confused by successive layers of disguise - on the Elizabethan stage, while "curing" Orlando of his love, she would have been a woman played by a boy played by a woman played by a boy! She is thus placed, again, precisely between these polarities, and can use, combine, and transcend the several forms presented in the play of traditional sexual stereotyping and love-making. At the same time she retains certain important character traits which were meant to be considered specifically but non-stereotypically feminine.

Traditional masculine wisdom about the natures of women was divided into two basic camps, that of anti-feminism and that of Ovidian and courtly love. Anti-feminism had its roots in the popularity of the Biblical "Wisdom Books" among early Christians, one of the favorite themes being the contrast of good and bad women:[23]

All malice is short to the malice of a woman, let the lot of sinners fall upon her. As the climbing of a sandy way is to the feet of the aged, so is a wife full of tongue to a quiet man... From the woman came the beginning of sin, and by her we all die... Cut her off from thy flesh, lest she always abuse thee.

(Ecclesiasticus, 25:26-36)

But it was not until a massive propaganda campaign against marriage began after the introduction of clerical celibacy under Gregory VII (1073-1085) that anti-feminism gained a

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wide following in literature. [24] Women came to be seen in scholastic texts as conniving, murderous, heartless, subtle, traitorous, sexually entrapping near-demons: in short, daughters of Eve. Chaucer’s Wife of Bath complains that her husband Jankyn read continually to her of wives:

That some han slayn hir housbondes in hir bed,  
And lete hir lecchour dighte hire al the night,  
When that the corps lay in the floor upright.  
And some han dryve nayles in hir brayn,  
While that they slepte, and thus they han hem slayn.  
Some han hem yeve poysoun in hire drynke.  
He spak moore harm than herte may bithynke;

(Canterbury Tales, III(D) 766-772) [25]

Female characters of this type were still common in Renaissance literature, notably in Shakespeare’s Goneril, Regan, and Lady Macbeth, and in Webster’s Vittoria. In comedy the devilry of such women tended to be softened, appearing in such traits as lechery (generally among clowns), refusal to cooperate with men (as with Kate in The Shrew), and the assertion of tyrannical rule over men, as with the waiting gentlewoman Rosalind in Love’s Labor’s Lost:

How would I make him fawn, and beg, and seek,  
And wait the season, and obverse the times,  
And spend his prodigal wits in bootless rhymes,  
And shape his service wholly to my device,  
And make him proud to make me proud that jests!

(V.ii.62-6)

The wickedness of such feminine traits derived, in the Renaissance, largely from an implicit (and occasionally


explicit) contrast with the ideal view of women: the tradition of courtly love. This tradition, which may have grown up as a reaction to anti-feminism, was largely based on the convention of Ovidian love. Ovid, somewhat facetiously, wrote of the relationship between the sexes as a cunning, highly political contest in which the ultimate goal of both parties was to achieve sexual gratification:

He who is wise will know how to adapt to the mood. Be like the Protean god, a wave, or a tree, or a lion, fire, or a shaggy boar, shifting to any disguise.  
(The Art of Love, I.759-61)[26]

Possible lovers were a prey to be captured by any available device, especially (for men in search of women) pretended adulation. Courtly love, the late medieval modification of the Ovidian tradition, saw women far less cynically, as real near-deities — pure, beautiful, and refined beings, either fragile and passive or strong-willed and icily disdainful. They were to be sheltered from all discomfort, humored in their every whim, and especially, worshipped:

a young maid, whose wonderfulness took away all beautie from her [mother], but that, which it might seeme shee gave her backe againe by her very shadow. ... me thought Philocleas beautie onely perswaded, but so perswaded as all harts must yeeld: ... Philoclea so bashful as though her excellencies had stolne into her before she was aware: so humble, that she will put all pride out of countenance: in sume, such proceeding as will stirre hope, but teach hope good manners.  
(Sidney Arcadia, Book I)[27]


Young men worthy enough to be noticed by such women were supposed to prove themselves in battle; thus it was a favorite paradox that a mere glance from the proper woman should be sufficient to overcome a great warrior:

For from without came to mine eyes the blowe, 
Where to mine inward thoughts did faintly yield; 
Both these conspired poor Reasons overthowe; 
False in my self, thus have I lost the field.

Thus are my eyes still Captive to one sight: 
Thus all my thoughts are slaves to one thought still: 
Thus Reason to his servants yeelds his right; 
Thus is my power transformed to your will.

(Arcadia, Book I)[28]

Following the tradition of Ovid's amorously Machiavellian Ars Amatoria, many large books were written about the etiquette of courtly love, which was extremely complicated. Beaux were expected to be eternally mad with hurry to please their beloveds, to write verbose, hyperbolic love-lyrics, to neglect themselves "not out of carelessness, but care,"[29] and to pine away with melancholy - all in attempts to elicit their mistresses' pity.

There is no mountain so steep that I will not climb, no monster so cruel that I will not tame, no action so desperate that I will not attempt. Desirast thou the passions of love, the sad and melancholy moods of perplexed minds, the not-to-be-expressed torments of racked thoughts? Behold my sad tears, my deep sighs, my hollow eyes, my broken sleeps, my heavy countenance.

(Lyly Eudymion, (II.i)442-50)[30]

23. Ibid., p. 76.
Such activities were so often blatantly affected that the
Elizabethan stage ridiculed them almost as often as not, as
in *Love's Labor's Lost*, though usually through a base persona
such as a clown, so as not to upset the credibility of the
star lovers:

jig off a tune at the tongue's end, canary to it with
your feet, humor it with turning up your eyelids, sigh a
note and sing a note, sometime through the nose, as if
you snuff'd up love by smelling love; with your hat
penthouse-like o'er the shop of your eyes; with your arms
cross'd on your thin-bellied doublet like a rabbit on a
spit; or your hands in your pocket like a man after the
old painting; and keep not too long in one tune, but a
snip and away: these are complements, these are humors,
these betray nice wenches that would be betray'd without
these . . .

(III.i.11-24)

Rosalind fits neatly into none of these stereotypes, but
at various points throughout the play she either fits herself
or is fitted by others into all of them. In Duke Frederick's
court she and Celia are seen as pure courtly ladies by
everyone except the incisive Touchstone. They refer often to
traits they and the courtly society consider distinctly
feminine, such as falling in love "to make sport withal"
(I.ii.26), "a pure blush" (I.ii.28), the wearing of
petticoats, the recourse to tears, and so on. It is quite
clear, however, that they and Touchstone are all conscious of
the sexual roles they are playing: they jest philosophically
about Fortune's treatment of women and about their lack of
beards, and when they are invited to the wrestling-match,
Touchstone wryly comments, "It is the first time that ever I
heard breaking of ribs was sport for ladies" (I.ii.138-9) -
to counter which stereotyping is perhaps the very reason why they decide to attend. They continue to be treated with all the deference "due" to noblewomen until Duke Frederick decides to banish Rosalind, at which point his treatment of her contains hints of an anti-feminist perspective. He calls her "subtile," a word sometimes associated with Eve and often with the Serpent, who was "more subtil than any beast of the field" (Genesis, iii:1); and to Rosalind's innocent remonstrance he replies:

Thus do all traitors:
If their purgation did consist in words,
They are as innocent as grace itself.
Let it suffice thee that I trust thee not.

(I.iii.52-5)

It is little wonder then that when planning the escape from Frederick's court, Rosalind hits upon the idea (standard in the all-male drama of the Renaissance) of suiting herself "all points like a man" (I.iii.116). If, she reasons, she is to be stereotyped according to sex, she might as well

have a swashing and a martial outside,
As many other mannish cowards have
That do outface it with their semblances.

(I.iii.120-2)

Her male disguise is by no means easy for her to accomplish; she must struggle in the early Arden scenes simultaneously to remain true to her woman's self and to conform to the expectations aroused by her clothing:

I could find it in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman; but I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose must show itself courageous to petticoat . . .

(II.iv.4-8)
Good my complexion, dost thou think, though I am caparison'd like a man, I have a doublet and hose in my disposition?

(III.ii.194-6)

In the freedom of the forest, however, Rosalind manages to use her disguise to enlarge, rather than limit, her own capacity for personal expression. Arden contains representatives of all the various traditions of women and love outlined earlier, but all of these are presented in such ways as to undercut both themselves and each other. Only Rosalind, who freely appropriates selected aspects of these traditions as situations demand - "As wit and fortune will" (I.ii.104), she might say - succeeds in breaking through the limitations of each individual view.

Silvius and Phebe represent the pure courtly love tradition. Silvius sighs through his every line, "constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved"[31] displaying virtually every convention proper to an infatuated young beau. He lies awake "upon a midnight pillow" (II.iv.27); he believes the intensity of his love is unique, "As sure I think did never man love so" (II.iv.29); his passion leads him to break "from company / Abruptly" (II.iv.40-1); he claims that a cruel look from Phebe would kill him (III.v.1-7); and so on, ad ridiculum. Phebe herself plays the part of a teasingly disdainful mistress, to "insult, exult, and all at once" (III.v.36), tormenting

Silvius apparently to see how far his devotion can be extended. She even challenges, sarcastically though eloquently, some of his most cherished romantic notions of the powers of women over men:

Thou tell'st me there is murder in mine eye: 'Tis pretty, sure, and very probable, That eyes, that are the frailst and softest things, Who shut their coward gates on atomies, Should be called tyrants, butchers, murderers! Now I do frown on thee with all my heart, And if mine eyes can wound, now let them kill thee. Now counterfeit to swound; why, now fall down, Or if thou canst not, O, for shame, for shame, Lie not, to say mine eyes are murderers! Now show the wound mine eye hath made in thee; Scratch thee but with a pin, and there remains Some scar of it; lean upon a rush, The cicatrice and capable impressure Thy palm some moment keeps; but now mine eyes, Whica I have darted at thee, hurt thee not, Nor I am sure there is no force in eyes That can do hurt.

(III.v.10-27)

Phebe's anti-romantic point, that women's eyes have no physical power over men, is undercut by Phebe herself, cruelly teasing Silvius with her looks even as she speaks of their impotence. And later, talking to "Ganymed," she even defers to Silvius' own courtly definition of love (V.ii.83 ff.). In sum, however, courtly love as presented in Silvius and Phebe is remarkably charming and delicate, due both to the golden lyricism of their poetry, and (more important) to their utter and complete innocence. This charm is far too fragile and important ever to be subjected to the direct sarcasms of Touchstone or Jaques,[32] Orlando and Rosalind are both drawn to it: Orlando accepts it, immediately

[32. "Silvius has not to be destroyed or the play will lack
beginning to tack second-rate love-sonnets to the trees;[33] Rosalind too is tempted, but she changes her mind after a flurry of Touchstone's sarcasm:

I remember when I was in love, I broke my sword upon a stone, and bid him take that for coming a-night to Jane Smile; and I remember the kissing of her batler and the cow's dugs that her pretty chop'd hands had milk'd; and I remember the wooing of a peascod instead of her, from whom I took two cods, and giving her them again, said with weeping tears, "Wear these for my sake." We that are true lovers run into strange capers; but as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature in love mortal in folly.

(II.iv.46-56)

Audrey and the libidinous Touchstone are the representatives of the Ovidian love tradition taken almost to its logical limit. He is the artful lover; she is the mindless sex object. In wooing her, Touchstone specifically compares himself to "the most capricious poet, honest Ovid" (III.iii.7-8), and (perhaps not consciously) follows Ovid's three precepts of love:

First seek an object worthy of your flame;
Then strive, with art, your lady's mind to gain:
And last, provide your love may long remain.

(The_Art_of_Love, 2.40-2)[34]

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something near its centre," Jenkins, p. 126,

33. cf. Spenser, Colin Clouts Come Home Again: Her name recorded I will leave forever. Her name in every tree I will endosse, That as the trees do grow, her name may grow: And in the ground each where it will engrosse, And fill with stones, that all men may it know.

(ll. 631-5)