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## The Paradox of Shakespeare's Golden World

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# The Paradox of Shakespeare's Golden World

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MIGUEL A. BERNAD

They say he is already in the forest of Arden and a many merry men with him, and there they...fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world.

## I

**A** *S YOU LIKE IT* differs from Shakespeare's other plays not so much in structure or style as in tone and atmosphere. Its setting is unique. It does not take us to Verona or Mantua, to Venice or Belmont, to England or France or any other country on earth. It takes us to the forest of Arden which is supposedly in France but which is nowhere in the world.

They say of Boston that it is not a place but a state of mind. Whether or not this is true of Boston, it seems true of the forest of Arden: it is not a place but a state, a condition. It is less a spatial than a temporal concept. It belongs in the Golden Age when the world was young.

This is perhaps a temerarious thing to say, for the critics are unanimous in affirming that *As You Like It* is one of the "most English" of plays, and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has gone to considerable personal trouble to prove that the forest of Arden is in the very heart of England. On one occasion, "in hope to get a better understanding of Shakespeare," Sir Arthur and a friend of his tracked the Warwickshire Avon

from its source in Naseby to Tewkesbury where it is gathered into the Severn. They went on foot at first and then by canoe—a “canader.” (“I am pretty sure she was the first ever launched upon Avon from Rugby. A small curious crowd bore murmured testimony to this.”) On the second day they came to the upper bridge of Stoneleigh Deer Park, and the rest is best described in Q’s own words:

A line of swinging deer-fences hung from the arches of the bridge, the river trailing through their bars. We, having permission, pushed cautiously under these—which in a canoe is not easy. Beyond the barrier we looked to right and left, amazed. We had passed from a sluggish brook, twisting among waterplants and willows, to a pleasant, expanded river, flowing between wide lawns, by slopes of bracken, by the roots of gigantic trees....

This was Arden, the forest of Arden, actually Stoneleigh-in-Arden, and Shakespeare’s very Arden.

Actually, as we rested on our paddles, down to a shallow ahead—their accustomed ford, no doubt—a herd of deer tripped daintly and charged across, splashing; first the bucks in single file, then the does in a body. The very bed of Avon changes just here: the river now brawling by a shallow, now deepening, and now sliding over slabs of sandstone.

This (I repeat) is verily and historically Arden. We know that Arden—a lovely word in itself—was endeared to Shakespeare by scores of boyish memories; Arden was his mother’s maiden name. I think it arguable of the greatest creative artists that, however they learn and improve, they are always trading on the stored memories of childhood. I am sure that, as Shakespeare turned the pages of Lodge’s *Rosalynde*—as sure as if my ears heard him—he cried to himself, “Arden? This made to happen in a Forest of Arden, in France? But I have wandered in a Forest of Arden ten times lovelier; and, translated thither, ten times lovelier shall be the tale!”

Now, in Stoneleigh Deer Park, in Arden, I saw the whole thing, as though Corin’s crook moved above the ferns and Orlando’s ballads fluttered on the boles. There was the very oak beneath which Jaques moralised on the deer—a monster oak, thirty-nine feet around (for I measured it)—not far above the ford across which the herd had splashed, its “antique roots” writhing over the red sandstone rock down to the water’s brim.<sup>1</sup>

It would seem from this (and from what many another critic has said) that the forest of Arden is a very English

<sup>1</sup> A. Quiller-Couch *Shakespeare’s Workmanship* (Cambridge 1951) pp. 94-95.

forest. He who looks upon it, says Q elsewhere, "has looked into the heart of England." Yet Sir Arthur himself adds, a very significant admission:

And I saw the whole thing for what the four important Acts of it really are—not as a drama, but as a dream, or rather a dreamy delicious fantasy, and especially a fantasy in colour.<sup>2</sup>

Precisely. A fantasy, a dream. For though Shakespeare might have had (indeed very probably had) Stoneleigh-in-Arden in mind when he wrote *As You Like It*, nevertheless the forest of Arden which he did create in the play does not exist in England or anywhere else on earth. It is an impossible land, a golden paradise, a lost land of the lost childhood of the race.

And here, precisely, is the paradox of the play: for this impossible "fantasy" is also one of the most realistic of Shakespeare's plays.

## II

There is only one other play of Shakespeare's which takes us out of our everyday world of sordid reality into a golden paradise. That play is *The Tempest*. Even the *Midsummer's Night's Dream*, for all its fairy fantasy and moonlight enchantment, does not transport us to another world as does *The Tempest* where even Caliban, ugly and venomous as no toad can be, is overwhelmed by the beauty of the sounds he hears on the tempest-free island:

...The isle is full of noises,  
 Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.  
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices  
 That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,  
 Would make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,  
 The clouds methought would open and show riches  
 Ready to drop upon me, that when I wak'd,  
 I cried to dream again.

—*The Tempest* III. ii. 147-155.

There is nothing in *As You Like It* as intensely beautiful as that—or as broken-hearted. *As You Like It* is not a broken-hearted play although (as we shall point out later) there is a speck of cloud in its otherwise clear sky. The *Midsummer's*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

*Night's Dream* (as Miss Webster remarks) is moon-drenched, but *As You Like It* is drenched with the sun. Nor is there anything unearthly or unreal about its sunshine. It is very real, very earthy. For all that, it is a golden sunshine too good to be true. It is a golden paradise which can no longer exist.

But for the moment, one does not advert to the impossibility of its existence; one adverts only to its seeming reality. And for the moment one enjoys the sunshine, or the shade under the greenwood tree.

### III

The theme is enunciated early in the play. Oddly enough it is not put in the mouth of Orlando or of Rosalind or of any of the principal characters but in that of Charles the wrestler talking to the wicked Oliver. The principle which the dramatist follows here is not unlike that of the detective stories: suspect the least suspicious. The wrestler Charles, whom one is least likely to suspect of sentimentality, suddenly drops his tone of sarcastic humor and becomes almost wistful:

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. (I. i. 122-127).

The form is prose, the content poetry and the words have a strange far-away echo. Coming as these words do after the quarrel between the brothers, and spoken as they are in a context of intrigue and hate, they serve to heighten the contrast between the sordid actuality of the farm, where an inhuman brother tyrannizes over his younger brother and plots his death, and that golden world in the golden age where all are equal and all men are at one.

*And fleet the time carelessly*: the words invite attention. "Fleet" is an old form of float, and "carelessly" is not to be taken as we use it today, meaning heedlessly or in a slovenly manner, but as the word used to mean when its Latin origin was still fresh in the memory, meaning "without care" or "without anxiety" (*sine cura*). Thus Milton uses the word "care" in Sonnet XXII:

For other things mild heaven a time ordains  
And disapproves that *care*, though wise in show,  
That with superfluous burden loads the day.

To fleet the time carelessly is therefore to live a "care-less" existence, a life without effort, without anxiety, floating down the tide of time as one floats "down the river on a Sunday afternoon" (as the song has it). One is reminded of Lewis Carroll:

All on a golden afternoon  
Full leisurely we glide...

This mode of existence is obviously not possible in a world "sae fu' o' care" as ours is. It is possible only in the golden world—the world of romance, of adventure, like Robin Hood's.

#### IV

It is interesting to note that the allusion to Robin Hood has been misunderstood even by learned men. To the Englishman, Robin Hood is the personification of the carefree life of adventure just as Arthur and his knights were the personification, in an earlier age, of the mystic quest of the Grail. Furness, in the introduction to his Variorum edition, remarks how distinctively "English" this concept of Robin Hood is and how completely the point of this comparison has eluded some German scholars. Schmidt, for instance, in his revision of Schlegel's translation, thus renders the clause "and there they live like the old Robin Hood": *und da leben sie wie Zigeuner-wolk* (and there they live like the gypsies). Furness' comment on this mistranslation is quite spirited:

Few examples could better illustrate than this how emphatically, how ineradicably, Shakespeare belongs to England, and how impossible it is to transplant him to any foreign soil. Surely never a foreigner lived who better mastered the language of Shakespeare than he to whom we all owe gratitude for the *Shakespeare-Lexikon*, and yet, on his ears, the name Robin Hood falls with a dull, unmeaning sound; and all that band of men who "in summer-time when leaves grow green, And flowers are fresh and gay," with Will Scarlet and Little John fleeted the time carelessly—and all this band, the gods of every English-speaking boy's idolatry and summed up in the one name Robin Hood, is to the learned German merely a band of gypsies.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A New Variorum Shakespeare Vol. VIII *As You Like It*, ed. H. H. Furness (Philadelphia 1896) pp. vii and 19.

The point is well taken, nor were Furness and Quiller-Couch the only ones to remark on the "ineradicably" English quality of Shakespeare. Attempts to adapt *As You Like It* to the French and the German stage have been usually unsuccessful. In George Sand's adaptation *Comme il vous plaira* (1856), Jaques is the hero and marries Celia; the forest scenes are curtailed; indeed "the whole tone of the play is altered and the center of interest quite displaced."<sup>4</sup>

The same complaint is made of the German adaptations. We are told that between 1848 and 1870 there were at least seven adaptations of *Wie es euch gefällt*, the adaptations consisting mostly of compression, particularly of the forest scenes. Smith, in the Arden Shakespeare, says of these adaptations that "to a reader, at any rate to an English-speaking reader, it seems to betray a certain obtuseness as to the real theme and interest of the play. Perhaps the wit suffers in translation."<sup>5</sup>

A more serious complaint is made of the film version produced in England in 1936 under a German director (Dr. Paul Czinner), with his German wife (Elizabeth Berger) as Rosalind. We are told that she made a "disastrous"<sup>6</sup> Rosalind, one reviewer going so far as to say that, though "*unser Shakespeare*" might be a good German joke, Shakespeare never created a character called "*unsere Rosalind*"! Perhaps, however, the difficulty was less in Miss Berger than in the medium itself of the cinema: Rosalind in the play has to disguise herself as the boy Ganymede, but "a girl disguised as a boy never has and never will stand up to the test of realism demanded by the cinema."<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps also all this anti-German banter may only be tit-for-tat for Heine's outburst against the English:

<sup>4</sup> The Arden Shakespeare *As You Like It* ed. J. C. Smith, rev. by E. H. Wright (Boston etc. 1916) p. vii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Paul Dehn "The Filming of Shakespeare" in *Talking of Shakespeare* ed. John Garrett (London 1954) pp. 49-72.

<sup>7</sup> James Agate in the *Tatler* quoted by Dehn *loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Dehn *loc. cit.*

I grow desperate when I reflect that after all [Shakespeare] is an Englishman, belonging to that most odious nation which God in his anger created.

It is an odious nation, a joyless country, stiff, old-fashioned, selfish, narrow, English! Father Ocean would long since have swallowed up this nation, had he not feared the sea-sickness which might there-upon ensue....<sup>9</sup>

For all that, *As You Like It* is both a distinctively English and at the same time a universally human play. It is English in setting, characterization, atmosphere and humor; it is universal in its theme. For every human heart is an exile and the forest of Arden is a faint picture of his once happy home. That is why Arden is not in France nor in England nor anywhere else on earth. It is a lost land. It is a golden world in a deeper sense than Robin Hood's world of adventure. It is Eden. It is Paradise, the Paradise which cannot be regained on earth.

## V

This theme is emphatically restated in the very first lines spoken in the forest of Arden. This time it is no hearsay evidence, no second-hand report placed in the mouth of a wrestler. This time it is the Duke himself speaking, the banished Duke who, instead of pining for a lost dukedom, has come to love his exile in the forest.

Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,  
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet  
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods  
More free from peril than the envious court? (II. i. 1-4).

It would be irrelevant to remark that the Duke's reference to "old custom" would seem to contradict what we were told in the opening scene that the Duke was but lately exiled. The point is that the Duke finds himself in idyllic surroundings, enjoying a life of simplicity far different from the complexities of the court. He sums it up in a pregnant (but also controversial) remark (II. i. 5):

Here feel we not the penalty of Adam.

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<sup>9</sup> Heine on Shakespeare: a translation of his *Notes on Shakespearean Heroines* trans. I. Benecke (Wesminster 1895) pp. 9-10.



The line is controversial because Theobald emended the line to read: "Here feel we *but* the penalty of Adam"—a reading adopted by many editors of Shakespeare. Theobald offered a good reason for his emendation:

What was the penalty of Adam hinted at by our Poet? The being sensible to the difference of the seasons. The Duke says, the cold and effects of the winter feelingly persuade him what he is. How does he *not* then feel the penalty? Doubtless the text must be restored as I have corrected it, and 'tis obvious... how often *not* and *but*, by mistake have chang'd place in our author's former editions.<sup>10</sup>

The editor of the Arden edition, among others, applauds Theobald's emendation in strong terms. Theobald's correction, he says,

seems absolutely necessary. The penalty of Adam is the difference of the seasons. Shakespeare follows the classical, not the biblical account. Ovid (*Metamorphoses* i. 107) describes the Golden Age as a perpetual spring. Cf. also Virgil *Georgics* ii. 336; and Milton *Paradise Lost* x. 678.<sup>11</sup>

Which is all very well, except that it is doubtful whether Shakespeare had ever read the *Metamorphoses* or the *Georgics*, and certain that he had not read *Paradise Lost* which was published more than half a century after his death; whereas it may be assumed as certain that he knew the biblical account and the Catholic doctrine of original sin; and according to that doctrine the penalty for Adam's transgression is *all* suffering, not just the difference of the seasons.

The penalty for Adam's guilt is not this or that particular suffering, but the necessity itself of suffering; not this or that death, but the necessity of dying due to the loss of a preternatural immortality; not this or that mistake, but the tendency itself to commit blunders owing to a darkened intellect and a weakened will. Hence Theobald's emendation, though clever, does not seem to make much sense.

<sup>10</sup> *Apud* Furness' Variorum pp. 61-62.

<sup>11</sup> The Arden *As You Like It* p. 121. I am of course referring to the older Arden edition. Several volumes of the new Arden Shakespeare have recently been published in England and at Harvard, but as far as I know *As You Like It* is not yet in print.

Others, retaining the reading of the Folios, explain "the penalty of Adam" as the necessity of labor: "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread." "Here feel we not the penalty of Adam" would therefore mean: here we don't have to work for a living.

This latter interpretation would certainly make sense. But if the theme of the play is as we have explained it, viz. the revival of a golden age in which nature is yet uncursed, then the reading of the Folios is not only correct, but must be taken in a far more literal sense than the critics have been willing to admit. *Here feel we not the penalty of Adam*: here we are exempt from *all* of Adam's penalty. We have no suffering, no pain, no jealousy, nothing to mar our happiness; "here shall we see no enemy but winter and rough weather"—and even the rough weather is really not very rough. There is a Visayan song that expresses this idea succinctly: *Sa kabukiran layo ang kasakit* (In the mountains, pain is far away). So is pain far away from the golden world of Arden.

## VI

It belongs to the idea of a golden world that Arden should be peopled with congenial characters. "Orlando is altogether such a piece of young manhood as it does one good to be with," says Hudson. "Shakespeare evidently delighted in a certain natural harmony of character wherein virtue is free and spontaneous, like the breathing of perfect health. And such is Orlando. He is good without effort...."<sup>12</sup> The banished Duke "exemplifies the best sense of nature as thoroughly informed and built up with Christian discipline so that the asperities of life do but make his thoughts run smoother."<sup>13</sup> Hudson goes into a positive tantrum of delight in describing Rosalind: "We have a sort of faith that her dreams are made up of cunning, quirkish, graceful fancies, her wits being in a frolic even when she is asleep. And her heart seems a perennial spring of affectionate cheerfulness...."<sup>14</sup> And all

<sup>12</sup> H. N. Hudson *As You Like It* ed. E. C. Black (Boston 1908) pp. xxiv-xxv.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxxi.

the rest of the characters are such as one would want to live with: the faithful Adam, the loyal Celia, the fine-voiced Amiens, the priceless Touchstone. Corin is a genial soul, and even Jaques the cynic is a joy to listen to. Even the perverse Phebe and her infatuated shepherd are objects of harmless laughter. The usurping Duke and all the bad men are far away from this golden world. There are no Calibans in Arden.

No wonder the banished Duke could say of his life in the forest: "I would not change it"—if indeed the statement is the Duke's, for the Folios attribute the line to Amiens, and it was Upton who assigned it to the Duke *plaudentibus multis, ceteris dissentientibus*.<sup>15</sup> The Duke of course (or Amiens) is mistaken, as we shall see: but he has much reason to love this sylvan exile, for what a contrast is there between the tranquility of the forest and the turmoil of the usurper's court!

In modern productions of *As You Like It* it has become common practice to transpose the scenes so that all the court scenes are first shown, then all the forest scenes. This transposition is legitimate, required by the exigencies of modern stage production, and it has moreover the sanction of critical opinion, for good critics tell us that "Shakespeare is in a hurry to leave the court and to repair to the forest of Arden."<sup>16</sup> But perhaps we might be allowed to differ with this critical opinion. Perhaps *we* are in a hurry, but not Shakespeare. Notice how he makes the action flit from court to forest and from forest

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<sup>15</sup> Upton (1746) gave the line to the Duke on the ground that it is more in character for him than for Amiens. Cappell (1779) rejected the suggestion on precisely the same grounds. Dyce (1857) agreed with Upton in almost violent terms: "It seems strange that no one before Upton should have seen that these words *must* belong to the Duke, and still stranger that, after the error was pointed out, any editor should persist in retaining it." (Furness' *Variorum*, pp. 67-69). The fact, however, is that many editors do persist in retaining the "error" of the Folios. The modern editors are about evenly divided on the subject. To mention only two of the most recent, Harrison (New York 1952) follows Upton while Sisson (London 1953) retains the folio reading.

<sup>16</sup> For instance Quiller-Couch *Shakespeare's Workmanship* p. 95.

back to court. The scene changes no less than eight times. This to-and-fro movement might be hard to represent on the modern stage but it offered no difficulties for Shakespeare's, and it has the advantage of dramatizing the contrast between the tinsel world of the court and the golden world of Arden—between the cruel, selfish, suspicious, turbulent world outside, and the tranquil, carefree, merry life of the forest where one may find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.

## VII

This theme of a golden existence comes to a quiet climax not (as ordinarily in Shakespeare) in a spectacular peripety, but in a song:

Under the greenwood tree  
Who loves to lie with me  
And turn his merry note  
Unto the sweet bird's throat,  
Come hither, come hither, come hither:  
Here shall he see  
No enemy  
But winter and rough weather. (II. v. 1-8).

To have a place in the sun is the wish of ambitious men and it is at the root of much of the intrigue and unrest in the political, social, or financial world. It has caused many a war between nations. Because of it, today's friends are tomorrow's enemies, and today's allies are tomorrow's rivals. But in Arden, everyone has a place in the sun:

Who doth ambition shun  
And loves to live i' the sun,  
Seeking the food he eats,  
And pleas'd with what he gets,  
Come hither, come hither, come hither. (II. v. 38-45).

And since there is no ambition, there is no duplicity. There is no flattery. There is sincerity, truth. "When the cold wind bites and blows upon my body" (says the Duke) "even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say, 'This is no flattery: these are counsellors that feelingly persuade me what I am.'" (II.i. 8-11)

In such an idyllic setting one can afford to look squarely at the truth and laugh at it even at one's own expense. In such a setting one can laugh at life and its seven ages; to rail at the world as does Jaques; or to prove all men fools, as does Touchstone. Everything and everyone is subjected to laughter. None are excepted, except perhaps the Duke. The name itself of Jaques is occasion for uninhibited (and, one must admit, somewhat vulgar) humor.<sup>17</sup> Even the lovely song which marks the thematic climax of the play is not allowed to go unsatirized, and some of the best fooling in the play occurs in connection with the satirizing of this song's amphibrachs.<sup>18</sup> The lovers are of course not spared, and, as usual in Shakespeare, it is a very tangled love affair.

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<sup>17</sup> Professor Kôkeritz has this to say on the pronunciation of the name Jaques: "Though a disyllabic pronunciation is indicated by the meter of AYL 2.1.26 and AW 3.4.4, the common colloquial form then as now was doubtless a monosyllable pronounced like *jakes*. This variant is reported by Hodges (1643) who illustrates it by this sentence: 'Let the house bee made a *jakes* for Mr. *Jaques*.' Considerably earlier, Sir John Harrington relates the amusing anecdote of the prim gentlewoman who, having to announce Mr. *Jaques Wingfield* to her ladyship, blushing said that it was Mr. *Privy Wingfield*. It is this monosyllabic pronunciation... that must have prompted Touchstone's otherwise cryptic greeting of Jaques in AYL 3.3.74f: 'Good even Mr. *what ye cal't*...' In no modern edition of the play have I come across an attempt to explain *what ye cal't*, a phrase that Shakespeare's audience could never fail to understand." (Helge Kôkeritz *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* Yale 1953 "homonymic puns"). Furness in the Variorum edition had gone into this question at even greater length, and had come to the same conclusion—but he adds: "Having discerned the right let us be human and the wrong pursue. The name *jakes* is so harsh... that surely the fervent hope may be pardoned that the name will never be pronounced other than *Jaq-wes*!" (The Variorum *As You Like It* p. 2).

<sup>18</sup> Innumerable attempts have been made to find a meaning for *Ducdame ducdame ducdame* (as Furness' Variorum will testify), but it is generally accepted now as a nonsense word. The humor of the parody is in the *business*, the characters on the stage drawing close to Jaques as he sings *Ducdame*. This gives point to the following exchange: *Amiens*: "What's that ducdame?" *Jaques*: "'Tis a Greek invocation to call fools into a circle." The stage directions in the Samuel French acting edition (London 1944) are excellent. Professor Sisson, however, in his recent edition of Shakespeare's works (London

## VIII

That is why Arden is not an enchanted forest. It is not like the enchanted forest outside Athens where fairies play tricks on lovers and mechanicals. Nor is it like Prospero's enchanted island where miracles happen and then vanish into thin air. Arden is enchanting but not enchanted. Its sun is too bright, its atmosphere too clear for enchantment. It is merely nature at its best, nature as it should be, nature uncursed, nature before the Fall, where the bitter cold is really not bitter, nor the rough weather really rough. Men have to hunt for their food, but they do not have to go far for it and are never without venison. "Sirs, cover the while, the Duke will drink under this tree" (II v. 31-32): they are never without napkins or tablecloths in Arden. It is a place where people live not as beasts nor yet as angels, but simply as men. *Here feel we not the penalty of Adam.*

Such a forest is of course not a tropical jungle: things rank and gross do not possess it merely. Nor is it like the forest of North America in the seventeenth century where Brebeuf and the other French Jesuits had to brave not only the cruel weather but the cruel savagery of the Indians as well. There is nothing cruel or savage in the forest of Arden. The Duke and his merry men live as in a prolonged picnic. "I thought all things had been savage here," says Orlando, who soon perceives his mistake.

A golden paradise—that is Arden. Or so at least it is made to seem. That is why it exists nowhere. It is too good to be true.

And that is why the exiles in Arden cannot stay in Arden. They do not belong there anymore. They belong to fallen humanity, and fallen humanity must live not in Eden but in the world.

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1953) emends the text by having Jaques give a paper to Amiens on which his parody is written, and Amiens then sings it. This emendation seems logical, and might explain Amiens' line "And I'll sing it"—after all, there seems to be plenty of paper in Arden!

Indeed, if we look closely, we find the Duke mistaken when he says, "Here feel we not the penalty of Adam." Even in Arden they do feel Adam's penalty. Life in the forest, for all its carefree gaiety, is lived after all "under the shade of melancholy boughs." And the Duke, despite protestations to the contrary, does bear a heavy heart even in Arden. As Palmer points out,<sup>19</sup> the Duke lets the cat out of the bag when, forgetting his earlier eulogy on the happy life in Arden, he says upon witnessing the plight of Orlando:

Thou seest we are not all alone unhappy;  
This wide and universal theater  
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene  
Wherein we play in. (II. vii. 136-9)

So the Duke and his merry men are, after all, not entirely happy. *We are not all alone unhappy.* It would seem that even in Arden Forest, "fleeting the time carelessly" is not an altogether blissful existence.

No wonder then that at the first opportunity the Duke forsakes the "sweet uses of adversity" and returns to his dukedom, and all his merry men follow him back to the turmoil of the court, save Jaques alone who prefers to indulge his melancholy in a monastery.

## IX

The idyllic atmosphere that pervades the forest has led the critics to call *As You Like It* a play of "escape."<sup>20</sup> But "escape" is hardly the word for a paradoxical play that deals at one and the same time with a lost Eden and with the here and now; that is up in the clouds and down to earth; that is romantic and at the same time realistic; that tries wistfully to re-create a golden world, and at the same time satirizes this very re-creation.

<sup>19</sup> John Palmer *Comic Characters of Shakespeare* (London 1953) pp. 33-34.

<sup>20</sup> For instance T. M. Parrott *Shakespearean Comedy* (New York 1949) pp. 177-178 says that this play "is of all Shakespeare's plays most visibly a comedy of escape."

In this respect the play is not unlike *Alice in Wonderland*, which is not just a fairy tale, nor just a satire, nor yet all that Empson claims for it; it is a glorious tale in which fancy is set free and yet never leaves the realm of reality, laughing at reality and thereby affirming it. So is it with *As You Like It*. It is a romantic world, yet where romance itself is laughed at. And the three instruments of realism are the three satirists: the philosophical Touchstone, the melancholy Jaques, and the sharp-tongued Rosalind.

It is amusing to see the critics disagree as to which of these three characters is the more important. Furness in his day could divide the critics into two schools: the English for Rosalind, the Germans for Jaques. Today, the divisions are not so simple. Critics cross party lines, so to speak; and a growing number of critics have begun to appreciate the importance of Touchstone. But the question seems merely academic. The play would be the poorer without any of the three. These three are the catalysts which bring Shakespearean ebullience into Lodge's *Rosalynde*. Together they conspire to show what fools these mortals be — even in Arden.

## X

This realistic laughter is perhaps the play's chief merit. Johnson found fault with *As You Like It* for failing to drive home a moral lesson. "By hastening the end of his work," (particularly by not portraying the dialogue between the monk and Frederick which leads to the latter's conversion) Shakespeare "lost an opportunity of exhibiting a moral lesson in which he might have found matter worthy of his highest powers."<sup>21</sup> But Johnson did not always possess (or did not always exhibit) a sense of humor. There are perhaps other things more worthy of a dramatist's highest powers than the "exhibiting a moral lesson." One of these things is laughter.

Cristopher Fry makes his Thomas Mendip (who wants to be hanged) say to his fellow prisoner Jennet Jourdemayne (who is about to be burned at the stake):

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<sup>21</sup> *Johnson on Shakespeare* ed. Walter Raleigh (London 1908) p. 86.



Are you going to be so serious  
About such a mean allowance of breath as life is?  
We'll suppose ourselves to be caddis-flies  
Who live one day. This is our day  
And it is almost done. Do we waste the evening  
Commiserating with each other about  
The unhygienic condition of our worm-cases?  
For God's sake shall we laugh?

"For what reason?" asks Jennet who cannot keep the stake out of her mind. And Thomas replies,

For the reason of laughter, since laughter is surely  
The surest touch of genius in creation.

A sweeping statement, surely; but Thomas seems to make a good case in favor of laughter:

Would you have thought of it, I ask you,  
If you had been making man, stuffing him full  
Of such hopping greeds and passions that he has  
To blow himself to pieces as often as he  
Conveniently can manage it—would it also  
Have occurred to you to make him bust himself  
With such a phenomenon as cacchination?  
That same laughter, madam, is an irrelevancy  
Which almost amounts to revelation.

But Jennet remains unconvinced. She cannot forget that on the morrow she is to be burned at the stake—which surely is no matter for laughing. She says,

I laughed earlier this evening and where am I now?

But Thomas' answer is prompt:

Between the past and the future, which is  
Where you were before.<sup>22</sup>

That is the value of laughter: at best a tonic, at worst a harmless relaxation which leaves one where he was before. If it is an irrelevancy, it is therapeutic irrelevancy which almost amounts to revelation—for laughter results from vision. He who laughs, laughs at the incongruity of the real world.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Lady is not for Burning* (1949). I quote from the acting script used in the Ateneo de Manila production, August 2-6, 1955.

## XI

And that is the genius of Shakespearean comedy, among which *As You Like It* holds a high place.<sup>23</sup> Its value is not in its plot situations (which are faulty)<sup>24</sup> nor in its moral lessons (Johnson deplors their lack) nor merely in its abundance of quotable lines (though these abound); its value is chiefly in its laughter.

It is this laughter—not the forest of Arden—which is the most English thing about this play.

It is a way of the English to laugh at themselves a little now and then for the good of their souls, to make jests about the things they would die for next minute, such as their country or their regiment, or their countrymen and countrywomen, and all the things they love best. Why? I suppose from some sense of decency and proportion, lest like some nations known to history they should fall into the sins of exaggeration and pomposity and the madness of self-love.<sup>25</sup>

The above lines were written when England was at war and in the heat of patriotic fervor; nevertheless they may be taken at their face value as an Englishmen's testimony to the secret of English humor. He continues:

Shakespeare has been much studied in the last hundred years both on the continent of Europe and in America. You might pave the city of London with the books that have been written about him... The authors of these books have been most of them learned men... but you cannot read ten pages in most of them without discovering that they have never even begun to learn the principal lesson which Shakespeare has to teach.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> It is curious how widely opinions vary on the place of AYLI among Shakespeare's comedies. Some rank it among the highest—"the consummation" (e.g. Charlton *Shakespearean Comedy* 4th ed. London 1949 pp. 266-297). Others dismiss it as "far from being one of Shakespeare's greatest plays" (e.g. Goddard *The Meaning of Shakespeare* Chicago 1951) p. 281.

<sup>24</sup> Wright adduces six inconsistencies in Act I alone, which Smith tries to answer, at least in part. See Appendix B of the Arden *As You Like It* pp. 175-176.

<sup>25</sup> George Gordon *Shakespearean Comedy and Other Studies* (Oxford 1944) pp. 39-40.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

That lesson, he says, is "the lesson of the Comic Spirit; a lesson of humor and tolerance, of seeing two sides, and not seeing oneself or other people too seriously." It is this spirit, we might add, that makes it possible for a Chesterton and a Bernard Shaw to bash each other on the head, so to speak, in their oral and written debates and still remain good-natured friends.

No wonder that when Milton's "cheerful man" seeks entertainment in the theater, he seeks it in "Johnson's learned sock" or better still, he goes to see if "sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child, warble his native woodnotes wild." Nowhere are the woodnotes more wild yet more sophisticated, more tunefully sweet yet more rollickingly gay than in that paradoxical play—*As You Like It*.