

SAA 2025 Seminar:
As You Like It, As You Like It

Tom Bishop (University of Auckland)

t.bishop@auckland.ac.nz

William N. West (Northwestern University)

w-west@northwestern.edu

Abstracts

“A more equal enterprise”: Marriage and Friendship in *As You Like It*
Jonathan Baldo (Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester)

Marriage and friendship often come into conflict in Shakespeare’s plays: for instance, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or *The Merchant of Venice*. In the latter, Bassanio tries to navigate the tricky waters between his friendship with Antonio and marriage to Portia. He must weigh them in the balance, as it were, when Antonio’s life is threatened by Shylock’s demands for a pound of Antonio’s flesh. Although “married to a wife / Which is as dear to me as life itself,” Bassanio assures his friend in peril that Portia is “not with me esteemed above thy life.” Marriage and friendship in *The Merchant of Venice* are rival forms of affective “bonds.” In *As You Like It*, by contrast, friendship becomes implicated as the very basis of a sound marriage and a necessary supplement to romantic or courtly forms of love. In this paper I explore *As You Like It* as a friendship play more than a romance. The play’s idea of friendship in the play, rooted in Pythagorean thought, is central to the play’s interest in making of marriage a “more equal enterprise,” as Celia says in the context of Orlando’s wrestling match—a terrible mismatch, she thinks—with the court wrestler Charles.

Jacques and the *Troupeau barbare*: George Sand and *As You Like It* in France
Mathieu D.S. Bouchard (McGill)

In the preface to *Comme il vous plaira*, her 1856 adaptation of *As You Like It*, George Sand explained that she wanted to give the French public an entry-point into Shakespeare. Complaining that, for most French speakers, Shakespeare’s plays were still “buried under the icy shroud of literal translation,”¹ Sand sought to make his works more accessible. “Are we to leave the magic mirror in the hands of a few silent and delighted admirers, and to treat today’s public like a barbarian hoard, unworthy of being initiated, at least in part, to this attempt at acclimatization?”² Sand’s intervention was a timely one: French theatre, she argued, had fallen into a state of excess and stupidity, and it was only a healthy dose of Shakespeare, administered by Sand herself, that could help save it.³ Sand’s *Comme il vous plaira* is an adaptation, not a literal translation, and her most noteworthy change is her treatment of Jacques. He enters Sand’s play at the very start of the first act, as a messenger from Arden sent to deliver a letter to Rosalind; he watches the wrestling match between Orlando and Charles; he falls in love with, and eventually marries, Celia. Sand’s Jacques has become the focal point of critical discussions of the adaptation. Charles Dickens, who saw *Comme il vous plaira* performed in 1856, complained that Jacques “had shown himself in every phase of his existence to be utterly unknown to Shakespeare [...] and had in all respects conducted himself like a brutalized, benighted, and besotted Beast.”⁴ Horace Howard Furness, in a more tempered assessment of the play, noted that “to [Sand], as to the Germans, the wit and charm of heavenly Rosalind

are lost: the melancholy Jacques fascinated her, and he becomes the hero of the play, far eclipsing all the rest.”⁵

In this paper, I argue that Sand’s Jacques eclipses the other characters because Jacques represents Sand herself. In her preface, Sand explains that she modelled her Jacques not only on Shakespeare’s original, but also on Molière’s *Alceste*, from *La misanthrope*; Jacques, like Sand, straddles two theatrical traditions. More significantly, Sand quickly establishes Jacques as an arbiter of taste. In the play’s third scene, when Jacques learns that there is to be a wrestling match, he mocks the “oafs dedicated to the vulgar profession of wrestling,”⁶ a denunciation of popular entertainment that echoes Sand’s own prefatory words about contemporary French theatre. By crafting Jacques in her own image, Sand introduced a decidedly French voice into a very English play, while also drawing on the metatheatrical games, and the complicated gender dynamics, of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.

Emulation *As You Like It*: Rhetoric, education, and a “scholar’s melancholy”
Vernon Guy Dickson (Florida International University)

Near the beginning of *As You Like It*, Oliver accuses Orlando of being “full of ambition, an envious emulator of every man’s good parts, a secret and villainous contriver against me his natural brother” (1.1.134-136), conjuring early in the play the kinds of negative emulation that Shakespeare deploys in earlier works, such as his *Titus Andronicus*. However, the play moves from this kind of tragic emulation, seeking instead to discover and enact a more nuanced model of imitation that shows emulation (and related rhetorical practices) as potential tools for learning and education. Moving away from emulous rivalry, Shakespeare makes much of the attempt to imitate without vying in *As You Like It*, to reveal a model of emulation that rejects competition and the “scholar’s melancholy” in search of collaborative and instructive creativity and community through appropriate applications of decorum and discretion.

Notes on Winter and *As You Like It*
Ben Jeffery (University of Chicago)

This paper looks at the references to winter in Act 2 of *As You Like It*, as an entryway to thinking about the play’s treatment of finality and the perception of finality. The Act begins with the Duke using the idea of exposure to winter as a shorthand for a kind of beneficial exposure that produces self-knowledge (or prevents self-forgetting; he frames it as form of anti-flattery) and ends with a song about the winter winds being less hurtful than human ingratitude. In between those points, among other things, is Jacques’s quasi-Socratic assertion about how his critical discourse can cure spiritual infection, which the Duke seems to be somewhat less well-disposed to. This paper addresses the idea of a benefit found in pain and exposure that’s deployed in Act 2 and how it does (or does not) bear out across the rest of the play, as well as what it might mean that winter in particular is used as the symbol for this.

***As You Like It*: Radical Supplementation and Charles Johnson’s 1723 Mashup**
Clare Kinney (University of Virginia)

In Charles Johnson's *Love in A Forest* (1723), Touchstone disappears, there is no subplot involving Ganymede, Sylvius and Phoebe, and Oliver and Celia do not have a last minute, off-stage courtship because Celia marries Jaques after a distinctly Restoration wooing. Johnson might appear to be tidying up the play in accordance with the aesthetic and moral emphases of his own historical moment (these protocols have been carefully described by Jean Marsden in her work on eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare). At the same time, however, Johnson's rewrite of *As You Like It* is shot through with textual borrowings from other parts of the Shakespearian canon: there are intrusions from *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, and a fairly complete performance of the mechanicals' play from *Midsummer Night's Dream*. This paper will explore the relationship between Johnson's explicit claim to "weed" Shakespeare's "beautiful parterre" and his own eccentric supplementary collaging and pastiche. I am particularly interested in Johnson's flight from pastoral, his reinfection of romantic comedy and complex gender-play by way of the newly tidy doubling of the Rosalind and Celia love plots—and in those portions of *As You Like It* that remain splendidly impervious to all remodeling.

Prompting Rosalind's Genderfluidity in Macready's *As You Like It* (1842)
Alexandra E. LaGrand (Texas A&M)

By the time Louisa Nisbett took the stage as Rosalind in William Charles Macready's production of *As You Like It* at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in 1842, actresses had already performed the role in some form at least 569 times in the preceding 120 years at British, Irish, and American theatres.¹ Each of these actresses—Nisbett included—embodied genderfluidity in their performances as Rosalind and her subsequent dressing as Ganymede. Though theatre historians and critics alike have used the term "cross-dressing" to describe Rosalind's disguise performance of Ganymede, such a performance can now more accurately be described as "genderfluid" due to the spectrum of gendered traits seen from Rosalind. Nisbett and others can therefore be understood as having performed genderfluidity in their performances as Rosalind. In this paper, I examine Nisbett's performance of Rosalind as it was edited in Macready's 1842 prompt book of *As You Like It* to discuss how the role's genderfluidity manifested textually in performance materials. By considering how Macready edited the role of Rosalind for Nisbett, I argue that Macready and other actor-managers would have actively engaged with understandings of genderfluidity in their prompt books and sought to augment or merely accommodate it in their respective productions of *As You Like It*. With the knowledge that Macready likely took inspiration for his editorial choices from other successful Rosalinds—such as Dorothy Jordan or Madame Vestris—the implication is that Macready was representative of a larger, inherited practice of engaging with genderfluidity in the prompt book text.

"Woeful pageants" or "no theatre, no world"?
Ágnes Matuska (University of Szeged)

Starting out from Jacques's "All the world's a stage" monologue and the preceding reference by the Duke to life as a "woeful pageant" on the one hand, and Rosalind's creative and performative use of social roles to shape the plot, on the other, I propose to examine the diverse meanings and uses of the play metaphor in *As You Like It*. I propose to map the most important traditions informing the heterogeneity of the meaning of this rhetorical figure and the idea of the *Theatrum Mundi*. I see three perspectives or traditions that help us identify different layers of meaning: one, the theatre building (e.g., the supposed motto of the Globe as well as the tripartite division of the microcosmic stage); two, the explicit occurrence of the metaphor in drama texts (the best known example being Jacques's monologue, relying on the medieval *vanitas* understanding of the figure); and three, the implicit references to the figure in the plot through Rosalind's behavior and schemes. I hope to propose a working typology of the metaphor based on these perspectives, with special attention to the transition between a ritualistic type of drama towards a new, mimetic convention.

'If you like it, so': Shakespeare's Repurposing of Lodge's *Rosalynde* for Casting and Performance Considerations in *As You Like It*
Jeanne McCarthy (Georgia Gwinnett College)

Critical definitions of prose or chivalric "romance" are often imperfectly aligned with Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Indeed, though the play appropriates the prose romance *Rosalynde* by Thomas Lodge as a source, "romance" as a marker of the play's content is often set aside. More often, the comedy is defined as "pastoral," a critical habit evidenced in Anne Barton's introduction to the play in the Riverside edition when she identified Lodge's prose narrative as a "romance" but labeled Shakespeare's comedy "a pastoral" in the sense that "it is a way of testing both the self and ordinary, urban society." There is, however, some value in restoring the term "romance" to the play and to considering *AYLI* onstage as offering a dialogic positioning within the genres of romance and pastoral and between reading and performing, as is suggested by the term "pastoral romance," which Edward C. Baldwin attached to Lodge's narrative in his 1910 edition of *Rosalynde*. The value of restoring the term is that it allows one to consider how specific performance practices in Shakespeare's company of players were suited to this particular adaptation of Lodge's prose romance *Rosalynde*. Such a redefinition could enable a revised understanding of early modern stagecraft with implications for staging the play now.

Poetic Failure and Renewal in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*
Thomas Moretti (Iona College)

This essay investigates the playful impact of human language on nature in *As You Like It*. Subsequently, I hope to consider the influence that poetic language has over our perception of and relationship with the natural world, not just for the worse, but for the better. I hope to scan over several disparate developments in the play: the inheritances of Orlando's name and Orlando's poetic metamorphoses; the Forest of Arden as both "desert" and Edenic; Jaques' shifting moods in Arden; and Rosalind's subtle triumph in the final reunion scene.

At each turn, I contend, Shakespeare showcases the inextricability of poetry during any efforts toward personal, social, and ecological mutuality. I strive to offer an addendum to Robert Watson's writings on the inadequacies of human language to get "back to nature," to lend human beings to an unmediated experience of the natural world, let alone to reality. Yes, in this way, any poetry is as "lame" as Orlando's in Act 3. It is always incomplete because it cannot bridge the human-nature divide. It cannot express the "unexpressive" (*As You Like It* 3.1). Humans continue to try anyway. The failures of poetry make room for more playful exchanges in human encounters and relationships (cue Orlando and Rosalind-as-Ganymede), even as they underwrite the awe and humility so needed when humans interrelate and try to venture into a natural world that they cannot fully understand.

Failure in the play is the beginning, not the end. Human camaraderie and ecological sustainability are necessarily contingent upon the failures of poetic expressions and performances of intimacy, as well as upon our awareness and acknowledgement of those failures. The play traffics in the happy faults of poetry to showcase their comic and restorative potential for human beings before they seem to become forever one with the natural world, "sans everything."

As Celia Dreams It **Katie O'Hare (UCSC)**

A 2024 Santa Cruz Shakespeare production of *As You Like It* offered the play as a series of improvised performances in rehearsal. This approach drew attention to metatheatrical moments in the play, such as when Corin asks if Celia and Rosalind would like to "see a pageant truly played" between Silvius and Phoebe. While the rehearsal room concept lent itself to such moments, much of the pastoral language was cut, and Arden was a backstage rehearsal room instead of a forest. In this essay, I revisit my dramaturgical work for this production by considering the cuts: offensive racialized language as well as pastoral imagery that might confuse audiences. In light of these cuts, I then explore one remarkable addition to the play: Celia's dream in act 4. I discuss the stagecraft for Celia's dream spectacle in terms of her character. What seems ironic, though — in a production that sought to eliminate the language of the pastoral — is how this moment centered the pastoral in performance, with the company in hunting attire, wearing deer horns.

"Love is not all": *As You Like It* at and through the Seven Sisters, 1889-1931 **Sarah Wall-Randell (Wellesley)**

From their founding in the late nineteenth century, women's colleges in America required students to study Shakespeare as part of their moral and cultural education. Student Shakespeare performance was more controversial, but undergraduates eagerly took part, staging full-scale productions entirely acted and directed by students, with wary institutional support. My essay will discuss two performances of *As You Like It* at historically women's colleges in the late-nineteenth- and turn-of-the-twentieth centuries: the Wellesley College Shakespeare Society's production in June 1889, and the Bryn Mawr College sophomore class production in September 1901. The Gilded Age Seven Sisters

student repertoire was heavily dominated by the comedies, especially *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. These dramas' sylvan settings (AYLI, MND) and their opportunities for multiply layered play with gendered disguise (AYLI, 12N) become especially compelling when enacted by a cast of women's-college students whose playing spaces were outdoors in idyllic campus grounds. In these productions, demure reverence for the historical text and the heteronormative plot seems to intertwine with the liberatory pleasure of wearing trousers and the homoerotic possibilities of cross-gender casting. Using material from college archives as well as press writeups (since Wellesley and Bryn Mawr student drama was apparently considered newsworthy in Boston and Philadelphia in these years), I will try to read the dual dynamics of Bardolatry and the (Sapphic) carnivalesque that seem to be at play in these two productions.

As You Locate It: Movies that Move Arden
Robert Watson (UCLA)

My working title is "As You Locate It: Movies that Move Arden," and I'll be exploring the ways the play's entanglement of art and nature plays out on the screen. Even leaving aside the complicating realities, legalities, and mythologies of the Early Modern forest in a play that engages all three, and links them to the class warfare of enclosures in the 1590s, directors must struggle with Arden's epistemological ambiguities. There's a risk that audiences will either not see the art/nature allegory for the forest, or else not see the nature/art allegory for the trees. Why does Edzard's 1992 film replace Arden with a bleak paved warehouse yard in a big modern industrial port? What is gained or lost when a film (like Coleman's 1978 BBC version) instead produces it on very real spring greenswards? What did Branagh accomplish in 2006 by turning the pastoral idyll into what a subtitle card calls "a dream of Japan," with the aesthetic stylization of nature typical of much Japanese gardening? What does the RSC performance history show us about the difference between staging the realistic/artificial divide and filming it? And, what does all this suggest about a fundamental human homelessness, when Eden turns to Arden?

Books and Bad Fruit in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*
Breanne Weber (James Madison University)

My paper will explore how the play relies upon the trope of logophagy to emphasize the sympoietic nature of the Forest of Arden. While it has long been established that *As You Like It* is thematically interested in both textuality and food, I will argue against compartmentalizing these apparent interests by reading their coexistence as evidence of Arden's "making-with," to use Donna Haraway's terminology, the court exiles in the process of developing new and more complex identities. Food is both a metaphor and a cultural ideal in Arden, and the play's investment in its relation to manuscript culture—a culture that relies heavily upon the sense of taste as aesthetic practice—results in its characters ingesting and assimilating texts into their beings as a direct result of the forest's facilitation of the process.

Travelers in *As You Like It*
Michael West (University of Dallas)

Rosalind and Jaques discuss travel at the beginning of 4.1, in an oddly extended and seemingly topical conversation. Although Jacques claims to have “gained my experience” through travel, Rosalind suggests that his travel has done him no good and has merely made him “sad.”

But lots of other people travel in *As You Like It*, and for different reasons than Jacques’. There is the travel of banishment (Rosalind, Duke Senior), of fleeing (Orlando), of self-imposed exile (Celia, Touchstone), and even of Time itself (according to Rosalind, “Time travels in divers places with divers persons.”)

My paper is about the relationships among these different forms of travel. Orlando’s self-described deficit of education suggests that he lacks the continental travel of cultivated young men, the kind that Jaques has had. How is travel to the continent different from these other kinds of travel? How are these different kinds of travel occasions for “education” and /or “experience”? How does movement in space relate to evergreen questions about movement in genre?

Travel also has a submerged confessional valence in *As You Like It* that I’m still tracking. How is the ambient Catholic-ness of the pastoral, Robin-Hood and hermit-inhabited Arden related to the historical reality of Catholic Englishmen travelling to the North of England and the continent, for potentially similar reasons of education, banishment, flight, or self-imposed exile?

As You Like It* and *La Chanson de Roland
Deanne Williams (York University)

The pastoral context of *As You Like It* immediately and definitively places it within a recognizably “Renaissance” cultural mode that loops in a whole set of classical poetic precedents. Its main characters invoke a collection of contemporary sources, such as Lodge’s *Rosalynde* (1590) and Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, translated by Harington (1591) and dramatized by Greene (1594). However, by casting Orlando as the second son of Sir Rowland de Bois and brother of Oliver, the play also throws itself into dialogue with a medieval inheritance identified with the narrative material associated with the knights of Charlemagne, best known from the Anglo-Norman epic *La Chanson de Roland*. In this paper, I examine how *As You Like It* handles the Carolingian history celebrated in the *Chanson de Roland*, and the wider cycle of chansons de geste related to Charlemagne, as well as the wider medieval context of the Crusades that provide a historical backdrop for these texts. *As You Like It*, I argue, engages this medieval history and literary tradition at a greater level of detail and self-consciousness than has been previously understood. Moving beyond the British Isles, extending from France into Africa and Asia, *As You Like It* places its pastoral mode against the backdrop of the Crusades.