

The Coexistence of Contradictions in *As You Like It*: The Rosalind/Ganymede Condition

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In everyday life, 'if' is a fiction, in the theatre 'if' is an experiment.

In everyday life, 'if' is an evasion, in the theatre 'if' is the truth.

(Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 157)¹

Your If is the only peacemaker: much virtue in If.

(*As You Like It*, 5.4.102)²

Abstract

The machinations of *As You Like It* proceed out of the combinations of perceived opposites that the play presents: nature and nurture; the courtly and the pastoral; masculine and feminine; reality and illusion. The key word here is 'perceived'. A close reading of this play suggests that within the presentation of these coupled opposites lies an examination of the coexistence of contradictions. What are generally 'perceived' to be opposites are, therefore, united as single units in which contradictions are paired into single and harmonic wholes. This paper will analyse the coexistence of contradictions that permeates throughout *As You Like It* and conclude by suggesting that the personification of this arrangement in the figure of Rosalind/Ganymede serves to guarantee the play's comedic denouement.

¹ See Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1968; repr. 1990), p. 157.

² This and all consequent quotations from *As You Like It* taken from Shakespeare, William, *As You Like It*, ed. by Agnes Latham (London: Methuen, 1975)

It is commonly agreed that combinations, or pairings, of educating environment, behavioural patterns, familial relations and gender lie at the very core of *As You Like It*. J. L. Halio states that the 'combination of nature and nurture becomes a central thematic concern in *As You Like It*':³ The argument can, however, be extended to suggest that Shakespeare presents nature and nurture as intertwined parts of the same entity. The word 'combination' is, thus, a misleading simplification. In the Forest of Arden of *As You Like It* contradictions cease their inherent desire to oppose, and consequently dissolve into oneness.

The theme of nature and nurture that Halio claims is of pivotal importance to the play is central to Orlando's opening speech.⁴ Within the opening twenty-five lines of the play, Shakespeare introduces this focus on nature and nurture and accompanies it with a parallel investigation into the co-existence of contradictions:

ORLANDO

As I remember, Adam, it was upon this fashion
bequeathed me by will but poor a thousand crowns,
and, as thou sayst, charged my brother, on his blessing,
to breed me well; and there begins my sadness.
My brother Jaques he keeps at school, and report
speaks goldenly of his profit: for my part, he keeps

³ J. L. Halio, 'Introduction' in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of As You Like It*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968) p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

me rustically at home, or, to speak more properly,
stays me here at home unkept; for call you that
keeping for a gentleman of my birth, that differs
not from the stalling of an ox? His horses are bred
better; for besides that they are fair with their feed-
ing, they are taught their manage, and to that end
riders dearly hired: but I, his brother, gain nothing
under him but growth, for the which his animals on
his dunghills are as much bound to him as I.
Besides this nothing that he so plentifully gives me,
the something that nature gave me his countenance
seems to take from me. He lets me feed with his
hinds, bars me the place of a brother, and, as much
as in him lies, mines my gentility with my educa-
tion. This is it, Adam, that grieves me, and the spirit
of my father, which I think is within me, begins to
mutiny against this servitude. I will no longer en-
dure it, though yet I know no wise remedy how to
avoid it.

(1.1.1-25)

This speech serves to realign our understanding of the relationship between nature and nurture: they are coexistent and dependent on each other. The horses, like Orlando himself, are both natural and trained. Orlando's nurturing is taking place amongst the natural beasts that surround him. His environment at the onset of the play is a mini-Arden, a natural, nurturing

environment away from the court. He is not nurtured badly, but is, rather, nurtured naturally at the hands of his 'unnatural' brother.⁵ Evidence of the success of the nurturing of Orlando appears in the closing stages of the play. In a reversal of the previous power structure, Oliver asks Orlando for permission to marry Aliena (Celia). Orlando grants his permission, then takes on the role of father-figure responsible for the wedding preparations:

You have my consent. Let your wedding be to-
morrow. Thither will I invite the duke and all's
contented followers. Go you and prepare Aliena.

(5.2.13-15)

If to nurture is to educate towards adult responsibility, Orlando has been thoroughly nurtured. His nurturer, of course, has been nature. As a nurtured being he is now able to promote the natural union of man and woman, which in the world of *As You Like It* is defined as marriage. It is Hymen, god of marriage, who confirms the nurtured naturalness of wedlock:

*Wedding is great Juno's crown,
O blessed bond of board and bed.
'Tis Hymen peoples every town;
High wedlock then be honoured.
Honour, high honour and renown
To Hymen, god of every town.*

(5.4.140-5)

⁵ See *As You Like It*, 4.3.121-3.

Thus, the sense of opposition that Western thought processes deem inherent to the 'combination of nature and nurture' is reassessed and these foci of the play are restructured as a coexistent contradiction; opposites are united and moulded into a single concept or entity. This relationship between nature and nurture is investigated further through parallel references to the semantically-related pastoral and courtly. While one might expect the courtly, nurtured world to be positioned in direct opposition to the pastoral, natural world of the Forest of Arden, *As You Like It* rebuffs this simple logic. Both the court and the forest are nurturers of their resident populations. Touchstone, the courtly fool, and Corin, a shepherd, offer a concise and humorous display of this:

CORIN

And how like you this shepherd's life, Master
Touchstone?

TOUCHSTONE

Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life, but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now, in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As is it a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it,

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it goes much against my stomach. Hast any
philosophy in thee, shepherd?

CORIN

No more but that I know the more one sickens the
worse at ease he is; and that he that wants money,
means and content is without three good friends;
that the property of rain is to wet and fire to burn;
that good pasture makes fat sheep; and that a great
cause of the night is lack of the sun; that he that
hath learned no wit by nature nor art may complain
of good breeding or comes of a very dull kindred.

(3.2.11-30)

The equivocatory language of Touchstone is countered by the simple logic of Corin. This equality that exists between the two speakers is qualified by Corin's suggestion that 'wit' can be 'learned' through 'nature' or 'art'. The courtly and pastoral do not, therefore, negate or oppose each other, rather they both serve equally well as educators of those that enter their environments. This is made more implicit as the interchange continues:

TOUCHSTONE

Such a one is a natural philosopher. Wast ever in
court, shepherd?

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CORIN

No, truly.

TOUCHSTONE

Then thou art damned.

CORIN

Nay, I hope.

TOUCHSTONE

Truly, thou art damned like an ill-roasted egg,
all on one side.

CORIN

For not being at court? Your reason.

TOUCHSTONE

Why, if thou never wast at court, thou never
sawest good manners; if thou never saw'st good
manners, then thy manners must be wicked, and
wickedness is sin, and sin is damnation. Thou art in
a parlous state, shepherd.

CORIN

Not a whit, Touchstone: those that are good
manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country

as the behaviour of the country is most mockable at
the court. You told me you salute not at the court,
but you kiss your hands: that courtesy would be
uncleanly, if courtiers were shepherds.

(3.2.31-49)

Touchstone suggests that Corin's failure to experience and appreciate courtly behaviour has resulted in him being only half-developed, likening his nurturing to that of 'an ill-roasted egg, all on one side'. Corin, however, disputes this by stating that 'manners' must be appropriate to the environment. There are manners suitable for the forest and manners suitable for the court. The implication is clear and supported by the even match of the contestants in this battle of wits: the court nurtures and the pastoral world nurtures. Through this nurturing children will become lovers and, in turn, lovers will marry and produce children. The contradictory environments co-exist and simultaneously achieve Hymen's ultimate goal.

Shakespeare's presentation of the court and the pastoral world within *As You Like It* adds further complexity to the play's depiction of coexisting contradictions. While defining the pastoral world as an environment in which its inhabitants can be appropriately nurtured, the play simultaneously undermines the pastoral ideals projected through literary tradition. A further coexistence of contradictions is, thus, embedded into the structure of the play. C. L. Barber notes that 'the play ridicules precisely the sentiments and behaviour which are expressed or represented seriously in the

play as a whole'.⁶ It is a fact that pastoral poetry was popularly produced by printers during the Elizabethan period. Indeed, August 4, 1600, saw entry into the *Stationer's Register* of both *England's Helicon*, an anthology containing nothing but pastoral poetry, and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. At various junctures throughout this comedy, the playwright does indeed seem to gently attack the naivety of the period's popular poetry. Stanley Wells offers up Orlando's love verse as being 'a joyous but gentle send-up of Petrarchan conventions'.⁷ The truth behind Wells' observation becomes more apparent when Orlando's love poem, entitled 'From the East to Western Inde', is considered in the context provided by its sequential positioning in the play. The poem itself reads as follows:

*From the east to western Inde,
No jewel is like Rosalind.
Her worth being mounted on the wind,
Through all the world bears Rosalind.
All the pictures fairest lin'd
Are but black to Rosalind.
Let no face be kept in mind
But the fair of Rosalind.*

(3.2.86-93)

⁶ See C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959; repr. 1972) p. 14.

⁷ See Stanley Wells, *Looking for Sex in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 41.

Rosalind's performance of this plodding, simplistic verse of love is directly preceded by Touchstone's interpretation of the work of the shepherd:

That is another simple sin in you [Corin], to bring the ewes and the rams together, and to offer to get your living by the copulation of cattle; to be a bawd to a bell-wether, and to betray a she-lamb of a twelve-month to a crooked-pated old cuckoldy ram, out of all reasonable match.

(3.2.76-81)

This comical superimposition of Christian middle-class sexual mores onto animal husbandry undermines Orlando's expression of love with delicious ease. Lofty aspirations towards soul-felt love are translated into an animal mating ritual whose disguise has been penetrated. The fact that the 'target' of Orlando's desires is offstage during Touchstone's tirade, and enters the stage while reading the poem almost immediately after the Fool falls silent makes the undermining of the ideals of pastoral love blatant.

So as to ensure that the airy ideals of the pastoral romantic idyll are completely destroyed by the primeval sexual instinct, Touchstone follows Rosalind's reading of 'From the East to Western Inde' by mimicking the child-like rhythm and rhyme scheme of Orlando's poetry in bawdy, insulting verse of his own:

If a hart do lack a hind,

*Let him seek out Rosalind.
If the cat will after kind,
So be sure will Rosalind.
Winter'd garments must be lin'd,
So must slender Rosalind
They that reap must sheaf and bind,
Then to cart with Rosalind.
Sweetest nut hath sourest rind,
Such a nut is Rosalind.
He that sweetest rose will find
Must find love's prick, and Rosalind.*

(3.2.99-110)

Touchstone's emphasis on the sexual aspect of love at the expense of pastoral romance extends into his definition of matrimony; a licence to have sex.⁸ Halio points out that Audrey, Touchstone's chosen lover, is equally ready to 'get through any kind of marriage if it will expedite what is apparently for both of them the real business of love - sex'.⁹ Thus the play contains a pair of lusters to undermine the lofty proclamations of the pastoral, Petrarchan lovers. Of the latter, Orlando is a muted example, while Silvius and Phebe show pastoral tendencies which fluctuate between light

⁸ For a detailed study of the historical relationship between romantic love and sex, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. By Robert Hurley, 3 vols (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) and Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) p. 309.

⁹ See Halio, p. 4.

parody of this literary tradition and absurdity. The hyperbole contained within Silvius's description of the state of being in love, coupled with the absurdity of the closing statement (lines 37-40 below), surely work together to ridicule the high blown unworldly idealism of the pastoral tradition:

O, thou didst then never love so heartily.
If thou remember'st not the slightest folly
That ever love did make thee run into,
Thou hast not lov'd.
Or if thou hast not sat as I do now,
Wearying thy hearer in thy mistress' praise,
Thou hast not lov'd.
Or if thou hast not broke from company
Abruptly as my passion now makes me,
Thou hast not lov'd.
O Phebe, Phebe, Phebe!

Exit
(2.4.30-40)

As is invariably the case in *As You Like It*, sequencing is all important. Just fourteen lines before Silvius enters the stage with Corin to spew forth his hyperboles on love, the following exchange takes place between Rosalind and Touchstone:

ROSALIND

O Jupiter, how weary are my spirits!

TOUCHSTONE

I care not for my spirits, if my legs were not weary.

(2.4.1-2)

Touchstone's comment is, of course, filled with the humour that stems from emphasising physical realities over lofty spiritual ideals. It also encourages the audience to mock Silvius, and consequently the pastoral tradition, as he ruminates on his love condition. While Silvius joins hands with Petrarch, Shakespeare and Touchstone stand to one side, point, and laugh.

The positioning of this conflict of philosophies within the play's presentation of coexisting contradictions can be explained alongside references to the similarly charming mockery of romantic delusion famously found in Sonnet 130:¹⁰

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red.
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,

¹⁰ Quotation from Shakespeare, William, *The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)

But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go:
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
 And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
 As any she belied with false compare.

Edmondson and Wells correctly note that 'Shakespeare proclaims his independence from convention in Sonnet 130 in which, while declaring love for his mistress, he mocks the standard vocabulary of praise'.¹¹ This itself marks a coexistence of contradictions. The 'I' of the poem feels his love is beyond compare despite his lover comparing less than favourably with the female goddesses that populate our literary and cultural landscape. The impossible ideal, so readily engendered by followers of Petrarch, and the actual, are positioned in harmonic duality. Jan Kott offers a pertinent analysis of how Shakespearian sonnets compare with those of the Petrarchan tradition:

Ambiguity in the Sonnets is at the same time a poetic and an erotic principle. Compared with Shakespeare's Sonnets, the sonnets of Pet-

¹¹ See Paul Edmondson & Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 15.

rarch seem transparent and pure as crystal, but cold, artificial, contrived. Beauty and goodness are permanent values in them, never to be questioned; the conflict is between the body and the mind. In Shakespeare's Sonnets this rigid division into physical and spiritual is blurred. Good intermingles with evil, beauty with ugliness, desire with revulsion, passion with shame.¹²

In *As You Like It*, this same harmonic duality between the impossible ideal and actual is found in, and personified by, Rosalind.

Gordon level-headedly suggests that the logic which motivates critics to approach the dramatis personae of plays as if they were actual human beings living within the playwatcher's society is flawed.¹³ Rosalind is a clear example of how this 'making real' of the constructs within a piece of theatre can lead to blindness towards content and structure. If the natural temptation to focus on the person projected by the Rosalind role can be bypassed, a fascinating study in the coexistence of contradictions is unveiled. Indeed, Rosalind's two initial statements seem to encourage the spectator to consider her role as the central focus of the coexistence of contradictions that permeates the play:

I show more mirth than I am mistress of. (2.1.2)

¹² See Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. by Boleslaw Taborski (London: Doubleday and Company, 1965; repr. London: Routledge, 1994) p. 196.

¹³ See George Gordon, *Shakespearean Comedy and Other Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944; repr. 1961) p. 31.

I will forget the condition of my estate, to
rejoice in yours. (2.1.14-15)

These two utterances signpost Rosalind as being both merry and sad. The suggestion is that this member of the *dramatis personae* can present contradictory aspects of the human condition whilst maintaining oneness. This is developed further from the moment that Rosalind enters the Forest of Arden. On meeting Corin the shepherd (Act 2, Scene 4), Rosalind, having projected the image of irrational, lovesick maiden in the preceding action, assumes the role of rational financier of a farming business. During the scene she speaks directly to Corin on four occasions. Following the first exchange of required greetings, the remaining three statements addressed to Corin are all firmly embedded in the world of business:

I prithee shepherd, if that love or gold
Can in this desert place buy entertainment,
Bring us where we may rest ourselves and feed. (2.4.69-71)

What is he that shall buy his flock and pasture? (2.4.86)

I pray thee, if it stand with honesty,
Buy thou the cottage, pasture, and the flock,
And thou shalt have to pay for it of us. (2.4.89-91)

Thus, the female romantic heroine is simultaneously a male investor; the maleness, incidentally, is a response to — and is highlighted by — Celia's

stereotypical projection of the female in need of protection and nutrition:

I pray you, one of you question yond man, if he for
Gold will give us any food. I faint almost to death. (2.4.60-1)

Rosalind's ability to adopt what might be termed as traditionally masculine behaviour whilst preserving her female foundational role is central to the play. Rosalind and Ganymede, two roles which, by definition, contradict, are coexistent within the same member of the dramatis personae. This is not to say that Rosalind's success lies in her ability to play the role of Ganymede without letting her disguise slip, but rather to say that one of the play's many strengths is its ability to depict synchronic unity between opposites. The next step in the analysis must be a careful consideration of the gender of the Rosalind/Ganymede role.¹⁴

In her fascinating reflections on the sexual behaviour of human beings, Camille Paglia states that 'Christianity splits woman into divided halves: Mary, the Holy Mother, and Mary Magdalene, the whore'.¹⁵ Paglia then suggests this is problematic as 'maternity and sexuality don't mix well in our tradition, with its transcendent, earth-shunning deity'.¹⁶ This division of sexuality is readdressed in a non-Christian context via the Rosalind/Ganymede dichotomy. The two sexual roles, a) nurturer (mother)

¹⁴ For a gender-focused survey of leading twentieth century performances of the role of Rosalind, see Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 48-85.

¹⁵ See Camille Paglia, *Vamps and Tramps: New Essays* (London: Penguin, 1994) p. 58.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

and b) playmate (whore), intimated at by Paglia, are translated into a) procreative nurturer and playmate and b) non-procreative nurturer and playmate in the Rosalind/Ganymede role of *As You Like It*. Richmond proposes that 'as a maturing person, Rosalind eagerly investigates both sexual potentialities; and Shakespeare shows us this process with an assurance modern writers have only recovered since Jung asserted the presence of both the female-oriented persona (or anima) and the male animus in all human personalities, whatever their local physiological attributes'.¹⁷ This might, however, be somewhat simplistic. To state that Rosalind/Ganymede functions in *As You Like It* as both male and female is to utter a truism. Of much greater interest is that fact that Rosalind/Ganymede embraces both sexualities simultaneously and is, at any given time whilst within the Forest of Arden, projecting anima and animus in equal measures.¹⁸ Rosalind/Ganymede is, therefore, a miraculous creation which threatens to undermine our perception of self as a consistent entity. Thus, Richmond's suggestion that 'Rosalind's experiments as a male are an early prefiguration of Jung's sense of the creative possibilities of at least some awareness of bisexuality' can be enhanced to deem Rosalind/Ganymede not as bisexual, but, during her stay in the forest, as a 'biperson' in which no sexual persona is stronger than its opposite until the denouement.¹⁹ Martin Wiggins

¹⁷ See Hugh M. Richmond, *Shakespeare's Sexual Comedy: A Mirror for Lovers* (Indianapolis: The Bobs-Merrill Company, 1971), p. 142, and C. G. Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, translated by R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968)

¹⁸ For an analysis of the Renaissance depiction of gender, see Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

¹⁹ See Richmond, p. 140.

states that 'Shakespeare's woodlands are places where the characters temporarily give up control of their lives, where it is chance or fairies that make the running'.²⁰ This is largely true, with Rosalind/Ganymede as an extraordinary exception. The suggestion is that Rosalind/Ganymede's ability to allow contradictions to coexist renders chance and fairies powerless. An all-encompassing identity cannot be threatened or controlled by surrounding society. This is, perhaps, the root of the comedy found in *As You Like It*; Rosalind/Ganymede cannot fail as she encompasses all aspects of the societies housed by the Forest of Arden.

To say that Rosalind/Ganymede boasts an all-encompassing identity is to claim that this figure can be read as being androgynous. Kott, in a fascinating study of the Arcadian myth, suggests that a profound connection between androgyny and human identity exists:

Man was created in the likeness of God. However, it was not man or woman that was created in the image and likeness of God, but androgyny. Mankind takes its origin from androgyny.²¹

The theological aspects of Kott's statement are, of course, drawn from previous sources, and open to debate.²² Of interest, however, is the intimation

²⁰ See Martin Wiggins, *Shakespeare and the Drama of his Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 65.

²¹ See Kott, p. 234.

²² Kott quotes his sources as being Mircea Éliade, *Mephistophèles et l'Androgynie*, Paris, 1962, G.R. Hocke, *Die Welt als Labyrinth, Manier und Manie in der europäischen Kunst*, Hamburg, 1957, Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, Oxford, 1933, and R. Caillois, *L'Homme et le Sacré*, Paris, 1958.

that the state of androgyny is inherently all-encompassing. While her fellow dramatis personae can only function within the behavioural parameters that the playwright has imposed upon them, the Rosalind/Ganymede figure is seen to embrace all aspects of the human condition.

Completeness is inherently accompanied by contradiction. It is the lack of contradiction in Rosalind/Ganymede's fellow dramatis personae that renders them simplistic. These dramatis personae work alongside each other to provide a kaleidoscope of behavioural patterns, but smack of the stock type when considered in isolation: *As You Like It* is home to usurping brothers; deposed brothers; simple shepherds; oversexed shepherdesses; and a witty fool.²³ All of these can be read as being somewhat two-dimensional in nature. This very fact necessitates a reassessment of Jaques. Famed for his 'seven ages' speech, Jaques is commonly a focus of critical interest. The following extract from Furness's *Preface* to his New Variorum edition of *As You Like It* highlights the general tenor of previous approaches to this role:

With the sole exception of HAMLET, I can recall no character in SHAKESPEARE of whom the judgements are as diverse as of this 'old gentleman,' as AUDREY calls him. Were he really possessed of all the qualities attributed to him by his critics, we should behold a

²³ Douglas Bruster argues that the tendency to present a rich variety of viewpoints and ideologies within a single play is a result of market forces. See Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 1-11.

man both misanthropic and genial, sensual and refined, depraved and elevated, cynical and liberal, selfish and generous, and finally, as though to make him still more like HAMLET, we should see in him the clearly marked symptoms of incipient insanity. Indeed, so mysterious and so attractive is this character that, outside of England at least, JAQUES has often received a larger share of attention than even ROSALIND.²⁴

The fact that Jaques has attracted such a broad diversity of interpretations is curious. His famous speech denies any sense of omniscience and exposes Jaques as being incapable of hosting contradiction, and therefore, far from complex or all-encompassing. In the world of Jaques, there is no space for the factor that offers Rosalind/Ganymede, and, to a degree, Hamlet, immunity from stock type characterisation; this factor might be termed the conditional 'if':

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 school-boy with his satchel

²⁴ See Horace Howard Furness in Shakespeare, William, *As You Like It*, ed. by Horace Howard Furness ([New York(?)] J.B. Lippincott, 1890; repr. New York: Dover, 1963), p. vi

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And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then, a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, 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 lined,
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws, and modern instances,
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side,
His youthful hose well saved, 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 everything.

(2.7.139-66)

The foundations of this speech are rooted in type, simplicity, and a rejection of the possibility of an adjustment in conditions; there is, in other words, no allowance for 'if'. The manner in which the Rosalind/Ganymede

figure functions intimates that to state that the life of man follows the path of seven ages, and to profess accuracy of depiction of each stage despite this depiction lasting for just a few lines of iambic pentameter, would be to render oneself guilty of simplification bordering on the absurd. In the world of Jaques' seven ages of man, all people follow a path through life in which control over identity and attendant adaptability are non-existent as human behaviour is pre-determined and common to all. If 'the world' is, indeed, 'a stage', the playwright has complete control and the actors merely fulfil roles instead of creating them. This denotes a negation of the conditional 'if'.

It is here that Peter Brook's analysis of 'if' becomes apposite.²⁵ Brook states that 'in the theatre, "if" is an experiment'.²⁶ The suggestion is that the theatre can be used to analyse, or experiment with, the processes and results connected to the making of choices in moments at which the routes or actions which might be taken are various and no optimal option is clearly discernible. As intimated above, Jaques' speech marks the very opposite of experimentation in that action and result are predetermined and, therefore, choice is negated. The conditional and, consequently, experimental 'if' is rejected in favour of hard and fast edicts borne out of oversimplification.

The antidote to Jaques' rejection of the conditional 'if' is found in the Rosalind/Ganymede figure. As host to an all-encompassing identity and

²⁵ See Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1968; repr. 1990) p. 157.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

its attendant gender-related/society-related poles, Rosalind/Ganymede could be described as a personification of the coexistence of contradictions, and therefore a creator and manager of societal situations in which 'if' is a central concern. The relationship between Rosalind/Ganymede and the conditional 'if' comes to the forefront in two key stages of the play. The first of these stages marks the initial step towards successful, and therefore comedic, closure of the potentially tragic love dilemma that exists between Phebe, Silvius, Orlando, Ganymede and Rosalind. As it becomes clear that the various loves that exist between these figures are misdirected, and consequently destined to be unrequited, Rosalind/Ganymede translates herself into the conditional 'if' so as to silence the complaints of the lovers and allow the play to reach a comedic denouement:

Pray you no more of this 'tis like the howling of
Irish wolves against the moon. [*To Sil.*] I will
help you if I can. [*To Phebe*] I would love you if I
could. Tomorrow meet me all together. [*To Phebe*]
I will marry you, if ever I marry woman, and I'll
be married tomorrow. [*To Or.*] I will satisfy you,
if ever I satisfied man, and you shall be married
tomorrow. [*To Sil.*] I will content you, if what
pleases you contents you, and you shall be married
tomorrow.

(5.3.110-18)

It is, of course, the coexistence of contradictions that exists within

Rosalind/Ganymede that engenders the malleability required to create the solutions to the societal problems in existence. This is to say that precisely because Rosalind/Ganymede hosts the 'if' inherent to an androgynous, multi-functioning figure, Hymen's goal of marriage, in itself a coexistence of contradictions, can be reached.

Having secured the goal of comedy on stage, Rosalind/Ganymede then becomes real/fictional and directs her attention onto the audience:

My way is to conjure you, and I'll begin
with the women. I charge you, O women, for the
love you bear to men, to like as much of this play
as please you. And I charge you, O men, for the
love you bear to women-as I perceive by your
simpering none of you hates them-that between
you and the women the play may please. If I were
a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had
beards that pleased me, complexions that liked
me, and breaths that I defied not. And I am sure,
as many as you have good beards, or good faces, or
sweet breaths, will for my kind offer, when I make
curtsy, bid me farewell.

(5.4.208-20)

Here, once again, the 'if' generated by Rosalind/Ganymede (now Actor/Rosalind/Ganymede) is employed to ensure that the onstage comedic

ending of appreciation of lovers, marriage and dance is matched by a comedic ending of appreciation of lovers and applause in the auditorium. This Epilogue and this ending is made possible by the coexistence of contradictions out of which the Rosalind/Ganymede figure is fashioned. 'If', indeed, 'is the only peacemaker'.

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