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Examining the Language of Love in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at exploring one of the major themes of *As you Like It* - 'love at first sight' through the lens of language. Not only the hero (Orlando) and the heroine (Rosalind) fell in love at first sight in the play but a girl like Celia, who is always suspicious and wary of romantic love, surprisingly and suddenly began to woo Oliver in one meeting. I also observe here some of the minor characters in action in this light. In this essay, we are trying to understand two first meetings in the great comedy, one in the Duke's court, the other in the Arden, as *dramatic situations.* The playwright here, at two crucial moments in the action, is not taking situations and elements of convention for granted. Working within the formula, the playwright works also outside it, assimilating to life (and silently adapting the story to this end): invents circumstance, telescopes events, fashions mood and moment, relates situation to character. Apparently the characters look that they knew each other from a long time, but a close analysis of the situations and actions of the characters in the play shows us that their amour began at first sight and in a body they establish the 'Dead Shepherd's words : 'who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight'.

Keywords: Love, Language, Characters, Pastoral, Disguise, Comedy.

1. Introduction

Reading Shakespeare's words can be difficult for a lot of people nowadays, but it is a problem that can be resolved. The language of poetic drama will be easy for individuals who have studied Latin (or even French, German, or Spanish) and who are accustomed to reading poetry. Others must, however, learn to decipher odd phrase structures and to identify and comprehend

wordplay, omissions, and lyrical compressions. And Shakespeare's words can occasionally be difficult for even people who are proficient at interpreting odd sentence forms. The "static" that separates his speech from our hearing is the result of almost four hundred years of linguistic and life changes. Though some of his words are no longer in use and many of his words have meanings that are far different from those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the majority of his vocabulary is still in use today.

Long, broken sentences and sentences with fundamental aspects greatly delayed are common in several of Shakespeare's plays (Hamlet, for example), sometimes intended to bring the audience up to speed on the story and other times employed as a defining feature. They only sporadically occur in As You Like It, since the sentences are usually simple in structure. Phrases in several of Shakespeare's plays are occasionally complex—not because of odd word choices or breaks, but rather because Shakespeare leaves out words and word fragments that are typically needed in English phrases. It is important for the researcher to bring up Charles the wrestler's account of Celia's affection for Rosalind: "Her cousin loves her so much, being ever from their cradles bred together, that she would have followed her exile or have died to stay behind her." There is a lot of compression here. That would be "have followed her [into] exile or have died [if she had been forced] to stay behind her," in its entirety. Furthermore, the shortened phrase is a part of an interrupted structure that distinguishes the memorable phrase "being ever from their cradles bred together" from the parts of "so loves her that."

2. Examining the Language of Love in *As You Like It*

The dramatic and emotional effect of Shakespearean comedy can be defined as a process of making manifest “a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace.” This comic toughness derives in part from Shakerpeare’s ability to present his themes in a very subtle manner. In *As You Like It* he also presents his theme of love at first sight through a few couples of lovers. The major exponent of it is the couple of Rosalind and Orlando. It is almost as if we hear him indulging in a sly joke about the whole paternalistic New Comedy model when he has Rosalind, at some undramatized point, meet her father in the forest, where, as she later reports to Celia, she had much question with him: ‘He ask’d me of what parentage I was. I told him of as good as he, so he laugh’d and let me go. But what talk we of fathers, when there is such a man as Orlando?’ (III. Iv. 33-36). With no parental obstacles, no separating misprisions or vows or oaths, with no reason (as has often been pointed out) for Rosalind’s continuing disguise once she is safe in the forest and the writer of the execrable verses identified, *As You Like It* is the only comedy in which the two chief protagonists fall in love not as victims of blind Cupid, or of plots of one kind and another, or against their own conscious will, but freely, open-eyed, reciprocally and as if in godsent

fulfillment of their own deepest desires. Definitely their love starts at the first sight in the court.

The another minor character Phebe, the Arden shepherdess in *As You Like It*, speaks 'Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight', and one's first thought is that 'Dead shepherd' Marlowe's words not only tell her mental state, but also Rosalind's and Celia's. There are some things to be said in this regard. It may well be that it is love at first sight in each case (Audrey who is the only other young woman in the play is gross, a clod of earth), but there is not quite the same fairy-tale suddenness and unaccountability about Rosalind and Celia in this matter as there is, appropriately, about the pastoral nymph Phebe.

Actually, the happening of love at first sight in Shakespearean comedy seems to be such exaggerated. Outside the early plays *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and excepting Lucentio in *The Taming of the Shrew* (I, i, 143-53) and Proteus whose love for Silvia is both mischievous and capricious, two unindividualized characters in two early and immature comedies, and the mercurial Gratiano, one does not see young people in Shakespeare's world being struck down at the first sight of each other-not till we come to the final play *The Tempest*. (If Romeo and Juliet make one pair, Ferdinand and Miranda may be the only other pair whose love is truly an example of the phenomenon and is also a wholly serious dramatic concern.) Antipholus of Syracuse discovers, at least declares, his love for Luciana at the second (III, ii), not the first (II, ii) meeting; Valentine and Silvia fall in love off-stage, the event taking place before her first appearance in the play (II, i); Mariana is Angelo's betrothed. The boy and the girl may be married when we first meet them (Posthumus and Imogen), or have known each other (Bassanio and Portia, I,I, 163-4, I, ii, 100-9, II, ix, 101; Benedick and Beatrice, I, I, 25-74), or are already in love (Proteys and Julia, Lysander and Hermia, Lorenzo and Jessica, Claudio and Juliet, Troilus and Cressida, Florizel and Perdita); and where the love is unrequited, it goes back to a time before the play begins: Demetrius, Helena (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Helena (*All's Well That Ends Well*), Orsino. Angelo's for Isabella, or Bertram's for Diana, is lust, not love. Claudio knew Here before he went to the wars (I, I, 258-67), and she is bidden by her father to accept him (II, I, 42-3, 55-7). The ship-wrecked Viola hears that she is in Illyria which is governed by a Duke who loves a Countess, says without more ado that she has designs on him (I, ii, 28-9, 41-4); she has not *seen* the Duke yet. Shakespeare, turning to humorous account the difficulty of having women's parts played by boys, makes Olivia fall in love with Cesario (Viola) the moment she sees him (her); we have comedy of the same kind in Phebe's falling in love with Ganymede-Rosalind, though in her case the merry jest is partly against the pastoral convention.

It was Shakespeare's old habit that he would conform to old genres and conventions; or would not, good-humouredly still, and without fuss.

One does not therefore find out till one has a close look that his comedies have few obvious cases of love at first sight. As used, the device of distancing the love or infatuation from the first meeting which takes place on or off the stage, after or before the commencement of the action, may be unobtrusive. And in the presence of two young persons prattling of their love when they are first seen together in the play, we may have the pleasant delusion that this is the first time they have been together, though we come to know in some way or other that this is not so.

In fact, Rosalind is not such a girl who 'lov'd not at first sight', but we can say only with reservations that Celia's or her true love falls within the genre formula. In this essay we are trying to understand two 'first' meetings in the great comedy, one in the Duke's court, the other in Arden, as *dramatic situations*. The playwright here, at two crucial moments in the action, is not taking situations and elements of convention for granted. Working within the formula, the playwright works also outside it, assimilating it to life (and silently adapting the story to this end): invents circumstances, telescopes events, fashions mood and moment, relates situation to character. What happens to the two cousins, *in the manner it happens,* exhibits his growing power to project character in action. And it is not the mature dramatic art merely. The stage craft evolved from a decade's experience of writing for the theatre, economically makes performance complementary to the dialogue. (One would wish that Granville-Barker's studies *Prefaces to Shakespeare* had included *As You Like It*.)

It is suggested from Celia's speeches to her father (I, iii, 72-79) that her cousin has not been unhappy in her company during all the years that have gone by since the elder Duke went into exile. There would appear to be confirmation in what we are told by Le Beau (ii, 266-267) about the two cousins 'whose loves Are dearer than the natural bond of sisters'. However, the playwright contrives that Rosalind first meets Orlando (I, ii, 153) only a little while after she is seen brooding (I, ii, 2-22), unable to forget her wronged father, hardly reconciled to the separation. We do not get from the First Act the impression that she is thus always. The point is that on this day (when we first see her) she is an unhappy woman, with a sense of deprivation: 'Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father, …' Again: "Well, I will forget the condition of my estate, to rejoice in yours.' The playwright carefully chooses the moment for the first impact of Orlando's personality on her young mind, and it is part of the dramatic design that the history of his deprivation and the nature of his emotional response to it should be made known to her even before the wrestling event. He would not be dissuaded from it by the entreaties of two princesses: '… if I be foil'd, there is but one sham'd that was never gracious; if kill'd, but one dead that is willing to be so. I shall do my friends no wrong, for I have none to lament me; the world no injury, for in it I have nothing; only in the world I fill up a place, which may be better supplied when I have made it empty.' And is not

Rosalind 'one out of suits with fortune'? As she listens, she feels an emotional kinship. Orlando's mind, like Rosalind's, has been conditioned for the first meeting (he knows that one of the two princesses is Rosalind and presently hears one speak of the banished Duke as her father and of herself as one that 'lacks means'). Orlando is strong and bold, and (neglected, cheated, as he is) he is, on his brother's testimony, 'gentle; never school'd and yet learned; full of noble device'; of a disposition that makes him 'of all sorts enchantingly beloved'; this youth comes to the Duke's court with the traumatic experience of the confrontation with his deceitful brother the day before (Oliver: 'and to-morrow the wrestling is' I, i, 93), and his words of bitter resentment before and during the confrontation suggest his being in a frame of mind when the emotive experience of being treated with sympathy and concern may overwhelm him. This indeed happens, and we hear his sentimental lament.

But we can say about Rosalind, to sympathy (an emotion which feeds love) is added admiration (another emotion which is food for it) for Orlando's valour, when he, confounding everyone, beats the mighty Charles with great ease. And presently the sympathy has a keener edge: the Duke, who has seemed courteous and considerate, is piqued that the gallant victor should be a son of his brother's staunch ally, and has unkind words only as he leaves in a huff. One can visualize the situation. The Duke is gone with his retinue, and only the three young persons are present : an embarrassed Celia ; Orlando, a moment before the cynosure of all eyes and now shunned by the whole court, wounded by the world's malice, strong in his pride ('I am more proud to be Sir Rowland's son…'); Rosalind, hurt, grieving. It is not only that she finds that Orlando has been cheated of a victor's dues, that to him Fortune has again been churlish. Emotions have been stirred as she has known that the gallant wronged youth is a son of her wronged father's great friend (the wrong-doer in both cases is her uncle). The playwright, deviating from the novel, conceives a situation in which the family friendship is the cause that the Duke is provoked. Rosalind reacts: more than before she has now cause to remember a dear deprived father (there is now pride with sorrow in the remembrance), and relationships which he valued are tinged with emotion. Later, teased by Celia about her having 'on such a sudden' fallen in love with Orlando, she may be attempting an analysis in retrospect of her feelings when she says, 'The Duke my father lov'd his father dearly' (I, iii, 28); and while this could not have been meant or accepted as the whole truth, we need not think she here mentions something which has not been an element in the complex experience.

Some (not all) elements in this experience can be sorted. Young love always has that in it which cannot be explained, and I have been only trying to say that, if we have been attentive to what is seen or is heard or is known, we shall find that there is psychological truth, as also an element of the not wholly unexpected, in what we see happen to Rosalind.

In Lodge's play the wrestling event which brings Rosader and Rosalynde together does not take place a day after the two brothers' quarrel, but after an unspecified long period of time. Again, the usurper King Torismond on hearing that the gallant victor was 'the youngest Sonne of Sir John of Bourdeaux … rose from his seate and imbraced him'; 'the Peeres intreated him with all favorable courtesie… . Lodge's Rosalynde flirts with the young wrestler, and we are told that 'she accounted love a toye, and fancie a momentary passion, that as it was taken in with a gaze, might be shaken off with a wincke'. Shakespeare conceives both the nature of Rosalind's love at the first meeting and the whole situation differently. Not one *word* in that part of the dialogue in Scene ii (lines 1-13, 147-235), on which our analysis is based, was suggested by incidents or dialogue in Lodge's narrative.

In Celia's case we are prepared in a different way. She is an intelligent observer of life and her cousin's equal in witty repartee: however, it is remarkable that in Arden while she is her usual self alone with Rosalind or with Rosalind and Touchstone, she is very reserved when others also are present. I do not know editors and critics have considered the matter in its total significance. We can note the contrast between the two Celias in Act III, Se. ii. She enters reading a verse piece which she has picked up in the forest, and in dialogue as witty and delightful as is to be found anywhere in Shakespearean comedy she lovingly teases her cousin about its author, perhaps excelling her in vivacious conversation (so too in III, iv), but she does not speak one word during Rosalind's memorable first encounter with Orlando in Arden a few moments later. It is a long meeting, and a third person (to whom Orlando is no stranger) had many opportunities for witty observations. Nor does she speak even once during Rosalind's amusing encounter with Phebe (III, v). In the delightful scene of mock courtship (Iv, i), she speaks but thrice, each time very briefly, twice on Rosalind's prodding, but comes into her own after Orlando has left, and teases her. In this regard C.L. Barber's remark should be quoted

> The reality we feel about the experience of love in the play, reality which is not in the pleasant little prose romance, comes from presenting what was sentimental extremity as impulsive extravagance and so leaving judgment free to mock what the heart embraces. The Forest of Arden, like the Wood outside Athens, is a region defined by an attitude of liberty from ordinary limitations, a festive place where the folly of romance can have its day. (6)

In accordance with the Petrarchan tradition tin the court, the male lovers were generally expected to woo their beloveds through long lyrical poems. The mistresses were neither supposed to yield easily to their vows nor could the women reveal their real sentiments in wooing. Having assimilated this consuetude Orlando inscribes his mistress' name on a number of trees.

Rosalind is here mentioned as “Queen of Night,” “fair,” “chaste,” and “unexpressive.” However, Rosalind considers the glorification of the woman as a maltreatment of her name. In disguise of Ganymede, she tells Orlando, “There is man haunts the forest the abuses our young plants with carving ‘Rosalind’ on their barks, hangs odes upon hawthorns, and elegies on brambles; all, forsooth, deifying the name of Rosalind.” (III, ii, 355-359) I am completely agreed with Payal Khanna in this regard:

> As Ganymede, Rosalind is able to resist this tradition that restricts the sexuality of women. She does not conform to her socially defined role of the ‘unexpressive’ mistress in wooing. Rosalind challenges this typification of women in courtship as she voices her feelings. Cross-dressing helps her subvert the social construction of women that confines them to passive roles in society. Their sexuality is sought to be suppressed by ideas of female chastity. For Rosalind the glorification of the mistress in the tradition of courtly love becomes a ‘deification’. (127-128)

We should discuss now Act IV, scene iii. It has two parts, the two cousins being present all through: the third character in the first part is Silvius; in the second part, Oliver. The scene opens with a petulantly complaining Rosalind and a teasing Celia who is just like a silent observer. Here she has one short speech, the three words of commiseration ‘Alas, poor shepherd!’ As he goes out, a stranger enters, accosts the two cousins as ‘fair ones’ (line 76), for Shakespeare forgets that Oliver sees only one lady, Aliena; however, the point is that his question ‘Where in the purlieus of this forest stands A sheep-cote fenc’d about with olive trees?’ is addressed to them *both,* and is answered-how unlike her!-by Celia (not Rosalind): ‘West of this place, down in the neighbor bottom….’ This answer is not casually given, with the opulent poetry of four and a half lines; one cannot recall a single occasion in Arden with any person other than Rosalind (or Touchstone) when her speech is as free. The stranger explains what he has been told about the boy and his sister, and his second question, ‘Are not you The owner of the house I did inquire for?’ is certainly put to Ganymede, the man, but is answered by celia, ‘It is no boast, being ask’d, to say we are.’ She has a greater share than Rosalind in the 82-line verse dialogue: speaks when either could have, or specifically her cousin should have, done so. If we have observed Celia well in Arden-seen the character acted not known her only from a reading of the play-her conduct will seem so unusual as to appear (to our questioning minds) as the awakening in her of an interest in the stranger. He asks the cousins if they ‘will know’ about him and what has happened, and Celia says they will: ‘I pray you, tell it.’ She interrupts the long narrative to say that Orlando has told them about the bad brother. (She is not won like Desdemona by tale of hair-breadth escapes, but the controlled emotion of the narrative and the dignity of phrase that, one may presume, would be accompanied by dignified bearing, would have made

Oliver seem another person than the villain *we* have known: *she* sees and knows only what she now sees and hears.) Her pained question 'Are you his brother?' should be noted when the stranger at the conclusion of his narrative uses the first person to identify the rescued man, 'I awak'd.' And presently, another pained question: 'Was't you that did so often contrive to kill him?' The two questions hardly conceal her disappointment.

One can foolishly ask why Celia should have felt an emotional interest in the stranger before she has known more about him: questions about love, Celia's or anybody's else (and not in literature only) are never completely explained, and sometimes cannot even be partly explained. I have only been trying to show that the *interest* can be traced for some time before we hear about her being in *love*. One may be puzzled that Celia retains this interest even after she knows that the stranger is the unnatural brother. Anshuman Singh's remark is very relevant in this context. He says:

> It was always been felt that Shakespeare's comedies raise problems which, if developed to their full potential, would take the plays towards a tragic denouement. But the comic solution always depends on an 'unreal,' imaginary resolution of socio-political problems.(121)

Perhaps we do not need to say more than that one young person's interest in another has *already* been aroused; also, Oliver's reassuring words that he is a different man now, 'Twas I; but 'tis not I' and that his 'conversion So sweetly taste' must have been sweet comfort to her too. And presently there is a situation which draws young persons together. Rosalind swoons (line 162), and in this crisis (the concluding 25 prose lines) Celia has only the stranger to turn to for help, 'Good sir, go with us', and he readily responds, 'That will I,' and accompanies the cousins to their cottage. It is not known how long after, or how soon, we next meet Orlando and Rosalind (v, ii) when we hear him question his brother about his falling in love on 'so little acquaintance' and hear her talk teasingly about her cousin: there is an interval, long or short, for young persons to meet, for love to grow. A scene (v, i), which introduces a different set of characters, is interposed.

Lodge's Alinda takes the initiative in the dialogue most of the time in the Arden scenes, and the novel therefore provides no hint for the suggestive change in Shakespeare's Aliena's demeanor at a particular phase of the action. One cannot be insensitive to the poetry of character that there is in the whole matter as Shakespeare conceives it; besides, the matter lends itself to effective presentation in the theatre. On the stage a person's presence may make her as conspicuous when she is silent as when she speaks, and silences and speech may contribute equally to an understanding of her personality and mind. The psychology of Lodge's rather long description of Alinda's manner of falling in love is suggestive, as is his description of Rosalynde at the first meeting with Rosader, of the

world of *Love's Labour's Lost.* Here mutual relationship is the other important issue about which Nathaniel Strout passes a very important comment:

As You Like It parallels the mutual relationship between lovers, a relationship which, if it is to end with the couple getting married, similarly depends on conventions being accepted and experiences being shared, especially in Rudor and Stuart England, when "from contact to contract, from good liking to final agreement, most couples passed through a recognizable series of steps." The play, in other words, and, as we shall see, in marked contrast to Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde* (1590), its main source, establishes connections between past mutual interactions and future mutual outcomes: Rosalind and Orlando's liking for each other leads to their becoming man and wife. (200)

Effective by contrast in the theatre would also be Celia's complete passivity and silence in Act V, Sc, iv (she does not speak at all, though she has two appearances in this scene and is present most of the time); she is not present in the other three scenes.

So this researcher may get at a certain conclusion which is not very reverberating. Here every play-within –the- play deals with a couple of lovers - Orlando and Rosalind, Phebe and Silvius, Phebe and Rosalind, Oliver and Celia, Touchstone and Audrey and everyone is 'counterfeit', which means, somebody is hoaxed or camouflaged or misidentified or rendered artificial in such a way that all these coincidences fulfill the theme of instantaneous love as their hearts are being entwined very suddenly. So it is not necessary to mention specifically that it is a dreamy and somehow whimsical tale of romantic idealism and swift affection. Considered together, they seem to imply that a world (not just the ambiance of the court or of Arden) is being represented which should be interpreted, that something is behind what is visible. Things are not what they seem to appear not only because Rosalind is disguised here as Ganymede, but because throughout the whole play every scene and every character is rendered artificial and 'elsewhere' very purposefully: audience can observe what is going onstage and simultaneously he or she has to keep in mind what is offstage.

As readers for four centuries have found, it is tremendously satisfying to work deliberately with Shakespeare's language so that the words, the sentences, the wordplay, and the underlying stage action all become evident. It might be more enjoyable to see a play performed well. These pleasures, however, rival (or at least enhance) those of the performed text for many people, and it is definitely worth the effort to "break the code" of Elizabethan poetic drama and release the amazing language that constitutes a Shakespeare text. The capacity to visualize a scene from one of Shakespeare's plays and revisit sections that continue to elicit new

interpretations (or inquiries) when one reads them are examples of these delights.

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