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# Shakespeare and the Traditions of English Stage Comedy

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Our wooing doth not end like an old play:  
Jack hath not Gill. These ladies' courtesy  
Might well have made our sport a comedy.  
(*Love's Labour's Lost*, 5.2.874–6)<sup>1</sup>

Here Shakespeare signals his awareness, in a relatively early play, written in 1594–5, of a conscious departure from existing stage tradition. Indeed *Love's Labour's Lost*, as I have argued elsewhere, is a highly fashion-conscious play, deliberately playing with modishness and parodying very contemporary trends in both theatre and London life (Dillon 2000). Yet the force of this rejection, with its bid to create new fashion, can only be visible to an audience familiar with older tradition, an audience that recognizes the difference between old and new in what it sees. It is the aim of this essay not only to show how far Shakespeare is indebted to the old in his comic writing, but also to illustrate the degree to which the stance of *Love's Labour's Lost* is characteristic of his work. While his plays so evidently grow out of English stage traditions (which are very varied in themselves, and include several different strands of classical and European influence), their characteristic attitude towards tradition is dialogic, playful, and exploratory. That conscious dialogism works by constructing an audience alert to allusions, quotations, and in-jokes. Thus, if we wish to recover the full comic experience of Shakespeare's comedies we must by definition seek to reconstitute an awareness of tradition.

Yet "tradition" does not merely mean the long familiar and well established. It can mean everything that is already in place, even if only for a short while. This point is worth emphasizing because, in England, comedy itself, as we now understand it, as a dramatic genre defined by structure, was only a generation or so older than Shakespeare. "Is not a comonty a Christmas gambold, or a tumbling-trick?" asks Christopher Sly in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593–4; 1.1.137–8), thereby demonstrating his unfamiliarity with the term. The classical derivation of the word points

to its origins in the humanist revival of interest in classical drama, and terms such as *commedia* and *comédien* first emerged in common use for plays and players in European languages in the mid-sixteenth century, around the same time as the emergence of professional playing companies (Salingar 1974: 257).<sup>2</sup> Several strands of English tradition to which Shakespeare was indebted can be traced back to classical origins. Translations and adaptations of Plautus and Terence had been performed in elite circles since the beginning of the sixteenth century, and English humanists had been importing the plots and character types of classical comedy since about the 1530s in plays such as *Thersites* (1537) and *Ralph Roister Doister* (ca. 1547–8). Such adaptations could anglicize their material in different ways and for different ends, so that while *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (ca. 1551–4), for example, located these recognizably classical types and shapes in the vernacular setting and mores of an English village, thus exploiting the possibilities for rustic humour, *Jack Juggler* (1553–8) used them to incorporate witty play on the very fraught topical question of Reformed church doctrine. Another highly fashionable strand of elite English drama looked back to classical forebears through the writers of Italian *commedia erudita*, so that George Gascoigne's debt to the classics in his *Supposes*, performed at Gray's Inn in 1566, comes through Ariosto's *I Suppositi* (1509), which he is translating. And in addition to plays themselves, a considerable body of theoretical writing, formulated in response to Aristotle's *Poetics*, had been building first in Italy and later in England, most famously in Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, which Shakespeare almost certainly knew.

More obviously and insistently, of course, Shakespeare was immersed in popular English stage tradition through his professional involvement with the theatre as an actor and sharer as well as a dramatist. The distinction between classical and popular (English vernacular) theatre is not wholly satisfactory, though it was one that contemporaries recognized, as in the opposing terms for different modes of Italian theatre, *commedia erudita* (learned theatre) and *commedia dell'arte* (professional theatre).<sup>3</sup> Popular theatre at this time is characterized by a magpie ability to pick up pieces from different sources; and any source, including classical or classically influenced sources, was fair game. Stephen Gosson noted in 1582 that “boudie Comedies in Latine, French, Italian, and Spanish, haue beene thoroughly ransackt to furnish the Playe houses in London”; and more recently, Kent Cartwright has persuasively argued that the debt cuts both ways, with learned dramatists also absorbing the dramaturgical techniques of popular tradition (*Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, Chambers 1923: IV, 216; Cartwright 1999). Shakespeare's own use of foreign models was noted more approvingly by another contemporary, John Manningham, who recognized his *Twelfth Night* as “most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni” (*Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 1840).<sup>4</sup>

The professionalization of the stage was a process concurrent with Shakespeare's own lifetime. Until about half-way through his life, the English stage was a collection of *ad hoc* practices. Drama proliferated according to occasion, most performance was amateur, and venues ranged from inns, churches, village greens, marketplaces, guildhalls, quarries, fields, and private gardens to the halls of great houses or the court. Performers were sometimes offering different fare for different occasions and different

clienteles, but they were also adapting the same material for those different audiences. The notion that different kinds of engagement belonged in different kinds of plays was alien. Hence the anachronism, outside an academic context, of terms like “comedy”, used to categorize drama as one kind of genre or another. Dramatists sought variety instead. They looked to make audiences laugh and weep from moment to moment, so that the experience of the play was one of plenitude rather than unity. Tragedy and comedy were ingredients, not definitions. It was a virtue in plays to be flexible, open to improvisation and adaptation, cutting and extending, and it was not uncommon for the prefatory material to advise on how it might be played with different sized companies or cut for audiences who wanted fun without teaching. “Yf ye lyst ye may leve out muche of the sad [serious] mater”, advises John Rastell with regard to *The Four Elements* (ca. 1517–ca. 1518).

When the terms “tragedy” and “comedy” were used (outside an academic context), the difference from our present usage is evident. The same play can be described on its title page as “A Lamentable Tragedie, mixed full of pleasant mirth”, while the running heads call it “A Comedie of King Cambises” (1561). Even Richard Edwardes, Master of the Chapel Children, a highly educated court dramatist writing on a classical subject in his *Damon and Pythias* (1565), performed before Queen Elizabeth and at Merton College, Oxford, presents his play as a “tragical comedy” presenting “matter mixed with mirth and care” (Prologue, ll.37–8). And as late as 1612, Heywood, though he began Book III of his *Apology for Actors* with Greek and Roman definitions of genre, went on to define a comedy, in English playhouse practice, as a kind of play “pleasantly contrived with merry accidents, and intermixt with apt and witty jests, to present before the prince at certain times of solemnity, or else merily fitted to the stage” (Heywood 1841: 54).

From about the late 1570s, when drama begins to become more theory-conscious, more aware of the notions of unity associated with the name of Aristotle,<sup>5</sup> some English writers, both theorists and dramatists, begin to regard the miscellaneous character of English drama as something in need of reform. Hence Sidney’s complaints about plays that are “neither right tragedies, nor right comedies” (Sidney 1973: 135).<sup>6</sup> Yet the revived classical precept of bringing together the *utile et dulce*, the useful and the pleasing, is not sufficiently distinct from the popular “mingling [of] kings and clowns” (ibid.) it seeks to dismiss for the distance between the two to remain fixed. John Lyly, writing for elite audiences at court and the Blackfriars in the 1580s, is evidently influenced by both Sidney and classical drama, and echoes Sidney’s wording in his prologues, yet his statements of intent could stand as unwitting defenses of less learned drama. “We have mixed mirth with counsel and discipline with delight, thinking it not amiss in the same garden to sow pot-herbs that we set flowers,” he writes in the Blackfriars prologue to *Campaspe*; while in his Blackfriars prologue to *Sappho and Phao* (probably first performed, with *Campaspe*, in 1583) he writes of “knowing it to the wise to be as great pleasure to hear counsel mixed with wit as to the foolish to have sport mingled with rudeness.” The attempt to differentiate himself from popular tradition is evident, but the conceptual framework of mixing mirth with matter remains the same.

*Amiens.* What's that 'duc dame'?  
*Jaques.* 'Tis a Greek invocation, to call fools into a circle.  
 (*As You Like It* 2.5.58–60)

As the lines from *Love's Labour's Lost* are cited at the start of this essay in order to focus Shakespeare's comic dialogue with tradition, so these lines epitomize a starting point for examining some of the shapes of that deviation, shapes I propose to look at through concentration on one comedy, *As You Like It*, written ca. 1599. The lines are almost the last lines in a short scene that begins with Amiens' song in praise of the greenwood life, an idealistic piece in the pastoral tradition. Jaques responds with a song of his own, mocking both the song and thus the pastoral tradition by conceiving of retirement as stubborn willfulness and gross folly:

If it do come to pass  
 That any man turn ass,  
 Leaving his wealth and ease  
 A stubborn will to please,  
 Duc dame, duc dame, duc dame!  
 Here shall he see  
 Gross fools as he,  
 And if he will come to me. (2.5.50–7)

When Amiens asks about the meaning of its refrain: "What's that 'duc dame'?", Jaques promptly turns the whole notion of concord and harmony underpinning comic form in on itself: "'Tis a Greek invocation, to call fools into a circle." When Jaques and the others are gathered round Amiens as he sings, the tableau is idealistic, seeming to present the "golden world" of art that Sidney recommends as superior to the "brazen world" of nature in a consciously literary idiom (see further below). What Jaques does is to puncture the moral idealism of that tableau and expose it momentarily as foolish and sentimental gullibility. In performance the fools gathered round him in a circle either fall back awkwardly or continue to hold the pose; but, even if the pose is held unaltered, its look is changed. The audience can no longer see it as an image of contentment because they have been invited to see it as false and ridiculous. The easy and traditional pleasure of pastoral idealism is denied.

The pleasure of comedy, however, is not denied, but it is changed. The dialogue with tradition opens up a space for a more skeptical engagement that offers competing kinds of comic pleasure. Besides the straightforward joke of turning pastoral nostalgia temporarily upside down, there is the further witty play with classicism in Jaques' affirmation that "duc dame" is "a Greek invocation." The term has become a textual crux for modern editors, who gloss it as anything from Latin to Italian, Welsh, Romany or pure nonsense (the note on it in the Variorum edition of the play covers almost three pages). But if there is one thing the context makes clear, it is that Jaques is playing with his onstage auditors and Shakespeare is playing with his audience. And what the line does at this distance in time is highlight for us simultaneously that playfulness, its importance in relation to the play's stance towards its classical

forebears and the fact that we may have to reconcile ourselves to the irrecoverability of its exact nuances.

Yet we can go a little further than this. Even without being certain of the precise implications of one word, we can see that Shakespeare is playing with his source and with theoreticians like Sidney as well as with classical and newly fashionable pastoral.<sup>7</sup> He is consciously changing the tone of Lodge's *Rosalynde*, the prose novella that is his primary source, by adding an extra character whose function is precisely to play with the other characters and with the literary frame within which they are set. He is quite consciously defying Sidney's contempt for English plays that proceed by "thrusting in clowns by head and shoulders" (Sidney 1973: 135). In fact, he thrusts in not one clown but two, since Touchstone is also an addition to Lodge; and both characters are named in such a way as to indicate their capacity to stand outside the fiction as commentators: Jaques with lavatorial innuendo and Touchstone with possible sexual innuendo ("stones" are testicles) and extradiegetic reference to the actor playing the part (if indeed the part was taken by Robert Armin, who was a goldsmith by trade), besides the more obvious literal suggestion that here is a character who functions as a testing ground for the pretensions of other characters, and perhaps of the play itself.

One of the most famous pieces of commentary in the canon is Jaques' speech on the seven ages of man, yet all too often scant attention is paid to its speaker. As commentary, the speech is of course highly detachable in one sense; yet that should not lead us to undervalue its contextual importance. "All the world's a stage" is scarcely any more novel or exciting an observation in Shakespeare's time than it is in our own. But, in theatrical terms, the speech is not merely a skillful variation on a well-worn metaphor; it is also part of the play's ongoing dialogue with theatre tradition and with familiar modes of representation. The roll-call of figures is not just, perhaps not even primarily, an encapsulation of the ages of a man's life; it is also a sequence of recognizable theatrical characters (lover, soldier, old man, and so on), which the term "pantaloon," with its explicit allusion to the *commedia dell'arte*, underlines. And Orlando's entry with Adam on his back as Jaques finishes with the "last Scene of all," the portrait of helpless old age, provides a further link between the speech and the play itself, with its own character-parts, and the varying levels of role-consciousness they inhabit. Jaques, the speaker, repeatedly calls attention to his melancholy as a role, and his self-staging invites the audience to think about other plays they have seen, other stage representations of the melancholic, at least as much as about the fashion for melancholy in late sixteenth-century London. What his speech on the seven ages does in context is force the audience to pause and think about *As You Like It* within the wider framework of theatrical history, to reflect on its pantaloons, melancholics, and lovers in relation to stage traditions, whether English, Italian, or classical.

The sheer excess of commentators in the play is one measure of its interest in evaluating its own position in relation to both stage tradition and literary tradition, in particular pastoral, which Italian dramatists like Tasso and Guarini were making fashionable, and which Shakespeare himself had already introduced more fleetingly into *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1594). One point at which stage tradition meets fashion

in this period is in the way that, season by season, the different companies seek to “answer” plays staged by their rival. This is especially true of the 1590s, when, for much of the decade, there were only two licensed companies, the Chamberlain’s and the Admiral’s Men. In 1598 the Admiral’s Men had staged two plays about Robin Hood, *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* and *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon*. Ballads and plays of Robin Hood had been popular since the Middle Ages, but there was also a particular vogue for them in the 1590s, a vogue of which *The Downfall* registers awareness in a dialogue between Little John and the Friar itemizing the kind of content such plays normally contained: “ieasts of Robin Hoode, . . . merry Morices of Frier Tuck, . . . pleasant skipplings vp and down the wodde, . . . hunting songs, . . . coursing of the Bucke” (ll.2210–13). Lodge’s *Rosalynde* has Rosalynde’s father, Gerismond, living “as an outlaw in the Forrest of Arden” (Bullough 1957–75: II, 169), but Shakespeare develops this passing remark into four scenes representing the life of banishment, and in so doing specifically alludes to and builds on the two earlier Robin Hood plays.<sup>8</sup> Early in the play he also goes out of his way to make the Robin Hood reference explicit, when he has Oliver ask Charles where the banished Duke will live, and Charles reply:

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. (1.1.114–19)

The reference to the golden world is equally carefully placed as a signpost. Just as the Robin Hood reference points to two particular plays of the previous season and more widely to an English tradition of ballad and romance, the golden world reference points specifically to Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry* and more widely to a classical and Italian tradition of pastoral. The Robin Hood plays represented a very English manifestation of pastoral, which had already been introduced into the English theatre in more learned and continental style in George Peele’s *The Arraignment of Paris* (1583) and in John Lyly’s *Gallathea* (1585), a play to which Shakespeare’s debt in *As You Like It* is very substantial. Pastoral was a particularly compelling predecessor to engage with at this point in time, because, besides being currently very fashionable in London, its avowed depiction of a golden world, a time and place of uncorrupted innocence and simple pleasures, linked it to current theoretical discourse on art itself as depicting a golden world. As Sidney writes in defence of poets:

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. (Sidney 1973: 100)<sup>9</sup>

Imitation, as Sidney and many Renaissance theorists understand it from their reading of Aristotle and Italian commentators, is not a realistic mirroring of the real world, but an idealized representation of the state to which the real world might aspire, and

it is this that gives art its moral grounding. To the accusation that poets are liars, Sidney replies that poets feign with moral purpose, in order to show truth as distinct from reality. The business of art is to “imitate,” or represent, the highest ideals, and thereby inspire humans to imitate (in the sense of copy) those representations of ideal truth. For Sidney, “the question is, whether the feigned image of poesy or the regular instruction of philosophy hath the more force in teaching,” and the answer is that poetry, because “the feigned may be tuned to the highest key of passion,” has the greater power to teach: “For [the poet] doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it.” Art, like “a medicine of cherries,” inspires readers and spectators to love “the form of goodness” (ibid: 108–14). Shakespeare is consciously targeting the Sidneian view when he thrusts in yet more clowns to play mischievously with Sidney’s notions of truth and feigning:

*Touchstone.* Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical.

*Audrey.* I do not know what ‘poetical’ is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?

*Touchstone.* No, truly; for the truest poetry is the most feigning, and lovers are given to poetry; and what they swear in poetry may be said as lovers they do feign.

*Audrey.* Do you wish then that the gods had made me poetical?

*Touchstone.* I do, truly; for thou swear’st to me thou art honest. Now, if thou wert a poet, I might have some hope thou didst feign.

*Audrey.* Would you not have me honest?

*Touchstone.* No, truly, unless thou wert hard-favor’d; for honesty coupled to beauty is to have honey a sauce to sugar. (3.3.15–31)

Both Touchstone and Audrey are additions to Lodge, and Shakespeare knows exactly what he is doing with them. As with Jaques, their comic function consists partly in making us laugh by detaching us from the comic structure of plot in order to make us look consciously at the comic and theoretical traditions it both embraces and refuses.

Pastoral tradition is explored precisely by bringing together a range of miscellaneous and, generically speaking, incompatible stage traditions. But, in a much looser and more pragmatic way, the play remains true to the traditions of English popular form by refusing classical or generic unity. It evidently delights in weaving together seemingly incompatible modes in a way that invites an audience to become self-conscious about the identifying features of each. Thus Silvius and Phoebe, the verse-speaking shepherd and shepherdess taken from Lodge, and by Lodge in turn from a variety of pastoral sources, including vernacular adaptations such as Lyly’s *Gallathea* and Montemayor’s *Diana* (a Spanish prose romance), represent the classically derived vein; Duke Senior and his men represent the nostalgic, equally idealized, English popular vein; Jaques and Touchstone stand apart as well-read, courtly commentators, witty fools, who have read their Lodge and Lyly; while Audrey and the mischievously named William (perhaps, as T. W. Baldwin (1960) long ago suggested, played by Shakespeare) are clowns whose very appearance may provoke laughter, as the famous Tarlton was said to do just by peeping his head round the curtain.

Yet the urge to classify and categorize separate strands of influence as one thing and not another can also falsify, as noted above. It would be misleading to suggest that the pastoral mode on the English stage descended wholly from a line traced back from Lyly to Virgil and Theocritus through Guarini, Tasso, and Sannazaro. As the vernacular tradition of Robin Hood demonstrates, forms of pastoral were already deeply rooted in medieval English tradition, both on and off stage, wherever romantic plots created opportunities for flight or retreat. Religious and secular tradition alike had long been enamored of knights errant, forest hermits, persecuted saints, long-suffering heroines, abandoned children, and wild men of the woods. *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* (ca. 1570–83), one of three surviving stage romances predating Peele's and Lyly's learned adaptation of classical pastoral<sup>10</sup> "and sundry times Acted by her Maiesties Players," shows how the popular English stage brought together some of the features recognizably present in Shakespeare's comedy. Most striking, since Shakespeare's comic heroines are sometimes said to initiate roles for assertive women on the Elizabethan stage, is the role of Neronis. Like Rosalind, Neronis falls in love at first sight with a man who may be her social inferior and finds herself torn between her desire to express her love openly and the social decorum of "shamefastnesse and womanhood" that "bids vs not seeke to men" (1.1020). She becomes a servant to a shepherd named Corin, who rightly predicts that the village wenches "will loue thee bonnomably in euery place" (1.1329). The play's depiction of him as a working countryman rather than an idealized literary shepherd-type may well also have contributed to Shakespeare's depiction of the rural group of Corin, Audrey, and William in *As You Like It*, two of whom are additions to Lodge, and all of whom contest the literary artificiality of Lodge's shepherds.

Neronis, however, though her resemblance to Rosalind is striking, is not the only model of an assertive woman on the pre-Shakespearean English stage. English plays had been developing representations of women more complex than the saints and temptresses of miracle, mystery, and morality plays since *Fulgens and Lucre* (ca. 1496–7), and Greene and Lyly, two of Shakespeare's most prominent immediate predecessors, had made strong women central to their plays. Greene had depicted a woman's decision to venture into an unfamiliar world disguised as a man in his *James IV* (ca. 1590), while Lyly had explored the tensions between love and duty for a woman of power who falls in love with a social inferior in his *Sappho and Phao*. Shakespeare's greatest debt to Lyly in *As You Like It*, however, is to his *Gallathea*, from which Lodge too may have borrowed in writing *Rosalynde*.<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare shares with, and perhaps learns from, Lyly the interest in moving away from narrative drive to circle around the tonal and textural exploration of ideas. Thus, where Neronis and other pre-Shakespearean heroines such as Greene's Dorothea disguise themselves in male attire in order to achieve their ends (or, critically speaking, further the plot), Lyly and Shakespeare are more interested in pausing to experiment with what crossdressing feels like, what its implications are, and how the audience might position themselves psychically and emotionally to view it. Both are also fascinated by the dramaturgy of symmetry, and Shakespeare learns from Lyly how to parallel characters, scenes, and speeches with satisfying and sometimes comic precision. In *Gallathea* there are two

girls in male disguise, and from this a set of parallel ironies proceeds. When they first meet, each hopes to learn from the other how to behave as a boy, and both express blushing discomfort with their disguise, but each immediately falls in love with the other. From their first meeting to the end of the play their scenes are constructed as parallel. When one speaks, the other echoes her, whether in an aside or a reply; when one enters alone and expresses inward thoughts, the other enters alone and expresses the same thoughts in the next scene. Same-sex attraction, played with in the enactment but finally denied in the resolution of *As You Like It*, is much more openly and curiously explored in *Gallathea*, where Phyllida asks herself, “Art thou no sooner in the habit of a boy but thou must be enamored of a boy?” (2.4.3–4), and each girl in male attire openly laments the accident of sex:

*Phyllida.* It is a pity that Nature framed you not a woman, having a face so fair, so lovely a countenance, so modest a behavior.

*Gallathea.* There is a tree in Tylos whose nuts have shells like fire, and being cracked, the kernel is but water.

*Phyllida.* What a toy is it to tell me of that tree, being nothing to the purpose! I say it is pity you are not a woman.

*Gallathea.* I would not wish to be a woman, unless it were because thou art a man. (3.2.1–8)

The conundrum of the tree in Tylos is indeed crucial to the play in a way that is not the case in *As You Like It*. The gods in *Gallathea* have to do more than merely descend to bless the marriage, as Hymen does in Shakespeare’s play. Nothing, says *Gallathea*’s Venus, is “unpossible” to “love or the mistress of love”: one of the girls must simply be transformed into a boy at the church door when they come to marry, and neither must know which of them it will be until that point. *Gallathea*, played by a boy in a play performed entirely by boys, speaks an epilogue of a quite different tone from Rosalind’s, urging all ladies to yield themselves to love, which can work “things impossible in your sex” (Epilogue 3). The tone of the two plays throughout is very different, but the focus of interest, the scenic construction, and the patterned speeches have much in common. Both “tickle our senses with a pleasanter vaine, that they make vs louers of laughter, and pleasure, without any meane, both foes to temperance,” as Gosson despised comedy for doing (*Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, Chambers 1923: IV, 215).

The tone of *As You Like It*, in which its chief difference from Lodge, Lyly, and anything else on the English stage before Shakespeare’s own plays resides, may be examined further through analysis of three passages where the tone can be specified more closely by looking at them in relation to the English stage before Shakespeare: Silvius’ wooing of Phebe in 3.5; Rosalind’s feigned swoon in 4.3; and the descent of Hymen in the closing scene. While isolating individual passages, however, it is also necessary to recognize the extent to which their tone is determined by how they are placed within the play. By the time Silvius’ wooing of Phebe is set before us in 3.5, we have seen a sequence of wooing rituals displayed in comic conjunction. First we see Orlando hanging verses to Rosalind on trees, speaking parodically inflated verse:

“Run, run, Orlando, carve on every tree / The fair, the chaste, and unexpressive she” (3.2.9–10). We do not hear the verses until they are read aloud, later in the same scene, by Rosalind and Celia in front of Touchstone, so that we are distanced from their content by the critical ear that each of them applies to Orlando’s poor rhymes and metre. A meeting between Rosalind and Orlando follows in which Rosalind, already flirting indirectly with Orlando, proposes the love-cure;<sup>12</sup> and that in turn is followed by Touchstone’s marriage proposal to Audrey, in the first scene that has shown them together, a scene that ends with the wonderful rhyme for which Shakespeare must surely have named Audrey: “Come sweet Audrey, / We must be married or we must live in bawdry” (3.3.96–7). The next scene shows Rosalind playing the distracted lover to visible extremes, with Celia’s mocking responses calling attention to the absurdity of Rosalind’s performance; and only then, after all these competing modes of courtship, love, and playing at love have been displayed, does Corin invite Rosalind and Celia to come and see “a pageant truly play’d / Between the pale complexion of true love / And the red glow of scorn and proud disdain” (3.4.52–4).

“Pageant” is the key word that positions the audience for viewing this scene. Just as the absurdity of Orlando’s versifying is underlined by the foregrounding of its formal inadequacies by Rosalind, Celia, and Touchstone, so the foregrounding of this scene as a well-worn tableau highlights its absurdity and distances us from any emotional engagement with the characters as feeling beings, as does the fact that Corin refers to the players, not by name, but as the “shepherd” and “shepherdess” (48, 50). Lodge’s Silvius and Phebe are a source for innumerable and prolonged songs, presented as an embellishment of the narrative; and Lodge in turn is drawing on the rarefied shepherds and shepherdesses of Italian stage pastoral.<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare’s pair speak in verse, and his Silvius adopts the literary conceits of the Petrarchan lover wholesale, but Phebe mocks the literary stereotype with brutal realism:

I would not be thy executioner;  
 . . .  
 And if mine eyes can wound, now let them kill thee.  
 Now counterfeit to swoond; why, now fall down,  
 Or if thou canst not, O, for shame, for shame. (3.5.8–18)

Rosalind punctures the self-dramatizing moment of adoring shepherd and cruel shepherdess with a much franker realism, advising Phebe directly that, since she is no beauty, she should

thank heaven, fasting, for a good man’s love;  
 For I must tell you friendly in your ear,  
 Sell when you can, you are not for all markets. (58–60)

The scene takes a further step into the literary and theatrical stereotype of love at first sight (already noted in the brief account of *Gallathea* above) as Phebe gazes at

Rosalind, but again signals that step with another overt distancing mechanism that invites us to see the play as in conscious dialogue with tradition, this time the quotation of the dead Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*:

Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might,  
'Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?' (81–2)

The address to Marlowe as shepherd, playing as it does on the traditional shepherd/poet topos, marks the mechanism of the quotation even more emphatically. And Phebe's languishing for Rosalind after her departure, in particular for "his complexion [and] a pretty redness in his lip, / A little riper and more lusty red / Than that mix'd in his cheek; . . . just the difference / Betwixt the constant red and mingled damask" (116–23) not only mocks tradition in itself, by recalling traditional literary praise of women and Rosalind's scorn for Phebe's own "cheek of cream" (47), but by recalling realist Rosalind's earlier languishing for Orlando in 4.4. The traditions of loving at first sight and dying for love, on which so much earlier theatre, including Shakespeare's own *Romeo and Juliet* (1595–6), is based, are made ridiculous in Silvius and Phebe; they in their turn unwittingly parody Rosalind and Orlando, with their love at first sight and their stagy languishing; while Rosalind and Orlando themselves pull back mischievously from the stereotypes they play through Orlando's failure to display the "lean cheek" and other features of the stage-lover (3.2.373–84) and Rosalind's later denial, with a further direct reference to Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, that any lover ever died for love (4.1.94–108). Added to this, Corin's reminder in the middle of the wooing sequence of act 3 that shepherds are men whose hands are greasy with handling their ewes (3.2.53–4) and Touchstone's accusation that they make a living "by the copulation of cattle" (3.2.80) function to mock the easy romanticizing of both pastoral and love. The fact that one of the truly idealistic pastoral speeches of the play is inserted between these two moments and uttered by Corin is characteristic of Shakespeare's method, where no perspective is allowed to dominate and all are in perpetual dialogue with each other.

The tone or, more truly, tones of Rosalind's swoon similarly arise out of the very careful preparation and juxtaposition of earlier material, particularly in relation to feigning. First, the simple life of the banished Duke and his fellows celebrates a rejection of the false posturing and artifice of the court. As Amiens sings, "Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly" (2.7.181). Touchstone, as noted above, takes up the theme of feigning with sophisticated irony, linking it to lovers and teasing Audrey with her lack of artifice or understanding (3.3.15–41). Phebe, as we have seen, specifically chooses swooning as an example of the falseness of lovers' large claims when she challenges Silvius to "counterfeit to swoon" if he really wants to play the lover. Rosalind herself has been involved in deceit since first disguising as a boy, and has worked herself deeper into deception through the game of the love-cure, earning Celia's rage for her dishonesty: "You have simply misus'd our sex in your love-prate. We must have your doublet and hose pluck'd over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest" (4.1.201–4).

By the time we reach Rosalind's swoon in 4.3 we have seen love played out in a number of different kinds of performances and routinely signaled as precisely that: a performance. Yet before Rosalind swoons, there is one more love-performance, this time clearly signaled as spontaneous, uncontrollable, and not consciously performed: Orlando's swoon. As Oliver narrates the event, it is continuing loss of blood from a lion's bite that causes Orlando to faint and to "[cry] in fainting upon Rosalind" (149); and it is precisely as a token of the reality of his wound, and its prevention of his promised visit to Rosalind, that he sends her the "napkin / Dy'd in [his] blood" (154–5), which in turn provokes her swoon. Swooning is the last thing any man would feign, since it seems to call his manhood into question ("Be of good cheer, youth", Oliver responds to Rosalind-Ganymede's swoon, "You a man? / You lack a man's heart" (163–4)), but then Orlando does not swoon, or even claim to swoon, for love. Rosalind's swoon is equally clearly not feigned, since she is dressed as a man; but it equally clearly *is* for love, since she swoons not at the point when she sees the bloody napkin, which she inquires about quite calmly (138), but at the point when she realizes that the blood is Orlando's. The joke, but also the emotional intensity, of the moment is encapsulated in the fact that she needs to become doubly deceptive in claiming that the real swoon was counterfeit. Again, the Shakespearean tone lies in the sure combination of humour, wit, and poignancy in a single stage action, which is then pushed even closer to the edge, following Oliver's chiding of Ganymede as lacking in a man's heart:

*Rosalind.* I do so, I confess it. Ah, sirrah, a body would think this was well counterfeited! I pray you tell your brother how well I counterfeited. Heigh-ho!

*Oliver.* This was not counterfeit, there is too great testimony in your complexion that it was a passion of earnest.

*Rosalind.* Counterfeit, I assure you.

*Oliver.* Well then, take a good heart and counterfeit to be a man.

*Rosalind.* So I do; but, i' faith, I should have been a woman by right.

*Celia.* Come, you look paler and paler. Pray you, draw homewards. (165–78)

The playing becomes sharper, the wordplay more risky, the intrusion of the imagined physical body more insistent and dangerous.

The two crucial ingredients of this scene are found together in an earlier scene from another of Lyly's plays, *The Woman in the Moon* (1590–5), which has both a swoon and a bloody napkin. Another pastoral play, it centres around the creation of a woman, Pandora, for the shepherds of Utopia, and the working of her downfall by the planetary gods, who make her faithless and changeable. When the faithful Stesias rightly accuses her of wantonness, Pandora feigns a swoon in order to express false outrage ("Then dye, Pandora! art thou in thy wits / And calst me wanton?"), thus prompting Stesias to instant repentance: "Divine Pandora! rise and pardon me!" (4.1.84–7). Pandora's feigning knows no limits. She concocts an absurd story, which Stesias willingly believes, and the pastoral imagery brutally contrasts his simpleness with her guile:

*Stesias.* I cannot stay, my sheepe must to the fould. *Exit.*  
*Pandora.* Go Stesias as simple as a sheepe;  
 And now Pandora summon all thy wits,  
 To be reuenged vpon these long-toungd swaynes. (107–10)

Her revenge on the other three shepherds who love her includes sending a bloody napkin (dipped in lamb's blood) to one of them with the message that she has stabbed herself for his sake and is now calling on him as her only love. The parallels with *As You Like It* are striking, but the elements have been reworked in a wholly different style, so that what was primarily a piece of simple plotting in the earlier play becomes a complex exploration of the boundaries between genders and between counterfeit and truth. Ironically, despite the unsophistication of this scene in *The Woman in the Moon*, it may have been Lyly, as *Gallathea* illustrates, who partly inspired Shakespeare's interest in exploring this kind of territory.

The ending of *As You Like It*, even more than those scenes examined already, reworks a series of debts to the earlier English stage. The paralleling of characters and language becomes even more pronounced as the play moves towards its climax, and again Lyly is the most obvious precedent here. The memorable repetitions of 5.2, matching the lovers up in sequence:

*Phebe.* Good shepherd, tell this youth what 'tis to love.  
*Silvius.* It is to be all made of sighs and tears,  
 And so am I for Phebe.  
*Phebe.* And I for Ganymed.  
*Orlando.* And I for Rosalind.  
*Rosalind.* And I for no woman. (83–8)

can be regularly paralleled in Lyly's plays,<sup>14</sup> though Shakespeare emphasizes and partly parodies the patterning by breaking it off with an abrupt move into realism:

*Phebe.* If this be so, why blame you me to love you?  
*Silvius.* If this be so, why blame you me to love you?  
*Orlando.* If this be so, why blame you me to love you?  
*Rosalind.* Why do you speak too, "Why blame you me to love you?" (103–7)

As I have argued elsewhere, this strategy works to give Rosalind greater depth and seriousness (Dillon 2001: 52). Shakespeare characteristically brings different tones and modes into marked conflict, making it seem as though the characters are speaking in two different plays, and thereby bringing genre and tradition openly into the frame of the audience's viewpoint.

Yet it is not the case that the only effect is parody, for the patterning also works to underline our sense that the play is approaching a resolution. Latham speaks for a widely shared dislike of this kind of dramaturgy in recent times when she dismisses it as "characteristic enough of Lyly's dramatic style, but . . . less to be expected in a mature play by Shakespeare" (Latham 1975: lxii); but she also points out earlier in

the same essay, quite rightly, that Shakespeare's plays, from first to last, "show a tendency to some kind of formalism at the conclusion" (ibid: xxi). She is thinking about stagecraft rather than language when she writes this, and in particular about the masque of Hymen, but the dialogue echoes the pageant-like quality of the stage-picture in its privileging of the aesthetic. The language of spectacle, typically combined with very formal speech, if speech figured at all, was entrenched in stage tradition at all levels from the popular to the elite. The entry of Hymen stands in a long line of spectacular descents and tableaux, stretching back through public playhouses, court masks, royal entries, and civic shows, to the mystery cycles, with their assumptions of the Virgin and descents of God. Though Glynne Wickham (1979) has shown that even playwrights writing as late as the end of the 1580s could not take it for granted that public playhouses would have a machine for ascents and descents,<sup>15</sup> such machinery had long been known and used in a variety of theatrical venues, including even moveable street pageants, and evidently playwrights often sought to present such effects where possible. This is perhaps unsurprising in plays written for court performance, like Lyly's *Woman in the Moon*, with its uncompromising orders for ascents and descents of the planetary gods. But even the rougher, more popular *Clyomon and Clamydes*, in a scene that Shakespeare echoes more directly in *Cymbeline* than in *As You Like It*, instructs that Providence descend to stay Neronis' hand from killing herself in despair and then reascend; and the wording of the stage direction, "Descend Providence" (1.1.549), is as uncompromising as Lyly's.

Descent, however, is only one possible aspect of what critics usually refer to as the "masque" of Hymen. Both the word and its spelling are instructive. A tradition of court revels going back to at least the start of the sixteenth century in England included entertainments commonly known as masks (a term not clearly distinct in early use from "disguisings" and "mummings"). These shows often had to claim space and attention in the middle of an evening's banqueting and festivity, and a spectacular irruption was one sure way of doing this. Typically, a large wheeled pageant car, constructed to resemble a castle, a rock, or a garden, bearing one central figure or a group of figures, richly and often allegorically costumed, together with singers and musicians, would enter the hall and play out its allegory. The event always came to an end with dancing, usually between the masked or costumed participants and the guests for whom they had played their pageant. Speech was optional and subordinate in this kind of performance. The primary stage language was visual and kinetic.

The playwright most noted for drama in this vein in Shakespeare's lifetime was George Peele. Peele wrote for very different kinds of performance: the Chapel Children at court; Paul's Children at their private indoor playhouse; the adult companies at the public playhouses; and the civic street performance of the Lord Mayor's Show. The tendency to construct scenes as tableaux, part of civic pageantry by definition, is visible across all these different forms of writing. *The Arraignment of Paris*, written for court performance before Queen Elizabeth in 1583, in the same season as *Campaspe* and *Sappho and Phao*, has not only its spectacular mode but its mythical subject matter in common with those of mask and pageant. The coronation pageants for Anne Boleyn in 1533, for example, were underpinned by the conceit that Anne's entry would bring

about a return to the Golden Age and included “a ryche pageaunt full of melodye and song, in whiche pageaunt was Pallas, Juno and Venus, and before them stode Mercury, whiche in the name of the .iii. goddesses gave to her a balle of gold devided in thre, signifying thre giftes the which thre Goddesses gave to her, that is to saye, wysdome, ryches and felicitie.”<sup>16</sup> The shows of the goddesses in *The Arraignement*, 2.2, are especially close in style to the Tudor court mask, with their music, song, bejeweled props, and richly costumed attendants. Juno’s show specifies a mechanically ascending and descending tree: “Heereuppon did rise a Tree of gold laden with Diadems and Crownes of golde” (456); “*The Tree sinketb*” (462). Other entries are in more processional mode, and though pageant cars are nowhere specified, they are not improbable, as in the following entry for Helen of Troy: “*Here Helen entreth in her braverie, with 4. Cupides attending on her, each having his fan in his hande to fan fresh ayre in her face*” (497). Spectacle is enhanced by music, Italian song, and formal verse. Perhaps Shakespeare had this scene in mind, alongside North’s prose, when he wrote Enobarbus’ description of Cleopatra in the barge. Certainly, in the early 1590s, when Peele himself was writing, Shakespeare wrote a spectacular pageant-car entry for Tamora and her sons in *Titus Andronicus* (5.2). Echoes of mask and pageant are widespread in Elizabethan dramatic writing, not confined to any particular style of dramaturgy.

The stage direction for the entry of Hymen does not mark it as a descent or a visual spectacle, but the provision of “still music” signals the entry as an important visual tableau. So too does the formal verse that follows, both in the set speech of Hymen, which echoes Peele in its deliberate highlighting of metrical variation, and in the combining of patterned speech with patterned movement. The repetition of the lines that follow Hymen’s first speech:

*Rosalind.* [To Duke Senior] To you I give myself, for I am yours.

[To Orlando] To you I give myself, for I am yours.

*Duke Senior.* If there be truth in sight, you are my daughter.

*Orlando.* If there be truth in sight, you are my Rosalind. (5.4.116–19)

is the repetition of dance; it includes repeated gesture and movement in different directions, shaping the revelations and reconciliations into the elegance of measured time and space. The move into song creates an extended pause in which the spectators can appreciate and savor the tableau. The parallel with Tudor mask is evident. Even the closing dance and epilogue, so familiar an aspect of early Shakespearean and Elizabethan comedy generally, echo the *rapprochement* between performers and spectators in the dancing that always follows on from the spectacular entry in mask. Yet the word “mask,” with its early Tudor spelling, is almost never used in Shakespeare studies. Critics throughout most of the twentieth century typically acknowledge only the influence of “masque,” the term given to the revived version of these revels at the Jacobean court, which always included speech, and usually employed noted literary men like Samuel Daniel or Ben Jonson to write it; and even then they would typically be more comfortable if Shakespeare could only have grown out of such childish things. As Dover Wilson expresses it, “There is no dramatic necessity for this masque-

business" (quoted in Latham 1975: xxi). The need to substitute the awkward and dismissive phrase "masque-business" for straightforward "mask" or "masque" is revealing. Wilson, like many others, is uncomfortable with the privileging of the visual over the verbal, indeed with the various modes of Elizabethan dramatic writing that seek to give pleasure to eye or ear in a manner that flaunts the distance from realism, feeling such writing to be somehow naive, embarrassing, or "immature."<sup>17</sup> Work on the Stuart masque since Dover Wilson's time has made it more acceptable to study the link between Shakespeare's dramaturgy and masque, but the Tudor mask awaits full rehabilitation and incorporation into Shakespeare studies.<sup>18</sup>

Shakespeare and his contemporaries would have been puzzled by this resistance to a style of dramaturgy which was both traditional and fashionable, as the discussion of descent machinery in the public playhouse implies. It is likely that the first playhouse to incorporate descent machinery was the Rose, and likely furthermore that the incorporation of that machinery at the Rose was part of the alterations to the building made by Henslowe in 1592–5. Expensive refurbishment of the Theatre in 1592 might conceivably also have been to incorporate this kind of machinery (Wickham 1979: 2–5). Neither Philip Henslowe nor James Burbage would have dreamed of going to the expense and inconvenience of closing the theatres and carrying out costly building works had they not been virtually certain of attracting bigger audiences following refurbishment. And if visual spectacle was fashionable at the public playhouses, this was partly because it was already a defining feature of both private, elite performance, and large-scale, prestige outdoor performance.

Characteristically, however, the perspective of mask is not given sole dominance in this closing scene, any more than any single perspective is ever given dominance throughout the play. Between the song and the dance of mask-form a new character enters, Jaques de Boys, announcing the sudden conversion of Duke Frederick after "meeting with an old religious man." The suddenness of this, together with its unnecessaryness (as Dover Wilson might put it) and its introduction of a new character, seem to represent another playful and affectionate gesture towards the implausible plot resolutions of older romance tradition. *As You Like It* could easily end without this implausibility. The conversion is there precisely to call attention to itself and to remind the audience again of what the theatrical traditions and options are at this stage of a play. It also, by interrupting the mask, distances the audience from that mode of engagement too, allowing them to see the two traditions of mask and romance side by side, vying as it were for dominance over the form. As Duke Senior seeks to restore the resolution of mask, by summoning music and dance ("Play, music; and you brides and bridegrooms all, / With measure heap'd in joy, to th' measures fall" (178–9)), so Jaques interrupts again with a further distancing mechanism, rejecting straightforward dance or mask, marriage or conversion, and opting instead to be a spectator on the edge: "To him will I. Out of these convertites / There is much matter to be heard and learn'd" (184–5). At one level this is the position Shakespeare, through all these distancing mechanisms, is inviting his spectators to adopt: they are to be outside, on the edge, viewing . . . and learning? Or perhaps not. Given Shakespeare's ongoing dialogue with the theorists as well as the stage in this play, there seems to be one more joke in Jaques'

sober decision to pursue learning while those around him pursue their “pleasures” (Jaques’ term, I.192). Sidney justified art above all for its capacity to teach; Gosson attacked contemporary English romantic comedies for being too foolish to teach: “When the soule of your playes is eyther meere trifles, or Italian baudery, or wooing of gentlewomen, what are we taught?” (*Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, Chambers 1923: IV, 216). For Shakespeare, the best joke is to laugh, with his audience, at those who think that comedy needs to be justified on moral grounds. Though he incorporates much that is new in his remaking of English stage tradition in this play, he is not new-fangled enough to dispense with the implicit and traditional assumption of theatre practitioners, as opposed to theorists: that plays are for pleasure.

## NOTES

- 1 Quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans; 2nd edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).
- 2 “Comedy” is in earlier use in English, but without specifically dramatic application.
- 3 Despite the distinct terms, however, the Italian genres are indebted to each other, and part of the problem of distinguishing popular from literary sources in English drama stems from the interdependence of the sources.
- 4 Though Manningham writes of *Gl’Inganni*, he almost certainly meant *Gl’Ingannati*.
- 5 Aristotle, it should be noted, only advocated unity of action. He did not prescribe unity of time or place.
- 6 Sidney’s *Apology* circulated in manuscript before his death in 1586. It was printed by two different printers in 1595, under two different titles, *An Apologie for Poetry* and *The Defence of Poesie*.
- 7 Italian pastoral was already fashionable in England. The two best-known Italian pastoral plays were Tasso’s *Aminta* and Guarini’s *Il Pastor Fido*, probably written in 1572–3 and 1580–5 respectively, and published together in England in one volume by John Wolfe, working with Giacompo Castelvetro (nephew of the famous critic), in 1591. *Il Pastor Fido* had been published in Italy only a year before, but already, according to Castelvetro’s dedication, there was a real demand for an English edition (Henke 1997: 46–7). As Louise George Clubb (1989) has shown, however, these two have come to be falsely regarded as typical of the genre. Italian pastoral was much more diverse than these two plays (also very different from one another) suggest.
- 8 The case has been argued more fully by A. H. Thorndike (1902), who also demonstrates the extent to which *As You Like It* takes on the ethos of repentance and forgiveness from the Robin Hood plays in place of the warlike resolution of Lodge’s *Rosalynde*. Thorndike also lists the known Robin Hood plays between 1589 and 1599.
- 9 The Robin Hood plays also seem to demonstrate familiarity with this more literary vein of writing. Robin has a set-piece speech very like Duke Senior’s in *As You Like It* on the “tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones” (2.1.16–17), in which his praise of an outdoor life, where “For Arras hangings, and rich Tapestry, / We haue sweete Natures best imbrothery [embroidery]” (*The Downfall*, lines 1374–5) sounds like a dispute with Sidney.
- 10 The other two are *Common Conditions* (1576) and *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* (1582).
- 11 This point is made by Agnes Latham in her introduction to the Arden edition of the play. I am indebted throughout this essay to her thorough analysis of the play’s sources.
- 12 The love-cure is not in Lodge, and may represent a possible further debt to Lyly, who portrays three shepherds cured of their love for Pandora in an earlier pastoral play, *The Woman in the Moon* (1593).
- 13 Not all Italian pastoral is so artificial, and some script low-born clowns alongside idealized shepherds, but Tasso and Guarini, as noted above, were the familiar models.

- 14 Lyly is not the only source, of course, nor is drama alone in producing this kind of speech. Agnes Latham demonstrates the parallel with Bartholomew Young's translation of Montemayor's *Diana*, completed in 1583 and published in 1598: "And it was the strangest thing in the world to heare how Alanius sighing saide, Ah my Ismenia; and how Ismenia saide, Ah my Montanus; and how Montanus saide, Ah my Selvagia; and how Selvagia saide, Ah my Alanius" (Latham 1975: viii).
- 15 Wickham cites the stage direction from *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (ca. 1587–8) that reads "Exit Venus. Or if you can conueniently, let a chaire come downe from the top of the stage, and draw her vp" (ll.2109–10), to argue that Greene is catering for all possibilities. Wickham himself notes, however, that this provisionality is in conflict with the opening stage direction, which instructs unequivocally that "Venus be let downe from the top of the Stage" (ll.1–2).
- 16 The quotation is from Hall's Chronicle, and the text is quoted from my edition for the Society of Theatre Research, *Performance and Spectacle in Hall's Chronicle* (London, 2002). The same coronation entry included another pageant figuring prominent descent machinery, in which a falcon (Anne) first descended, followed by an angel who crowned it. The theme of the judgment of Paris had already been used for the Edinburgh reception of Margaret Tudor, sister of Henry VIII, in 1503 (Anglo 1997: 225).
- 17 The phrasing here is of course anachronistic, since no Elizabethan writer would have thought of realism as any kind of norm or criterion. The dramatists are simply writing to their own standards. The "criterion" of realism needs to be introduced as a way of explaining later critics' embarrassment or awkwardness in dealing with drama that does not start from that premise.
- 18 See further my forthcoming paper in the collection of papers from the SCAENA conference, 2001, ed. Aebischer, Esche, and Wheale.

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