# As rosalind likes it

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Rosalind’s literal significance in Shakespeare’s “ As You Like It” is grounded in her motivation in acting as Ganymede, for it is her sole perspective that elucidates the reader of the biases of society’s gender roles. The necessity for Rosalind to perform as Ganymede defines her with a perverse yet rational will, for instead of speaking in the abstract as Celia does and “ sit[ting back] and mock[ing]” (I. ii. ln. 31) Fortune’s gifts being unequally bestowed to men and women, Rosalind physically takes on the duty of the “ bountiful blind woman [who] doth most mistake in her gifts to women” (I. ii. ln. 35). She is truly a “ blind woman,” knowing not what she will encounter, and forced to quite literally become blind to a society whose head, Duke Frederick, has made her ill favored in the court. As Celia says, “ those that [Fortune] makes honest, she makes very ill favoredly” (I. ii. ln. 37). And yet it is not Fortune’s action, but society’s cutthroat decision in banishing Rosalind that forces Rosalind to disguise herself as Ganymede, and in doing so, dishonestly represent her true gender. Appearances are certainly deceiving, for even fate is molded to accommodate that which society deems to be appropriate, thus establishing a most unnatural hierarchical order. It is for this reason that Rosalind remains immortal as a character, for in doing Fortune’s work and physically moving towards Nature’s Forest of Ardenne, she is able to assume an unnatural yet liberating gender role. Celia serves to perpetuate society’s affect on Rosalind, thus undermining Rosalind’s unique sense of self, and underscoring the image Celia incessantly attempts to project onto Rosalind of a woman of proper and socially acceptable behavior. Prior to banishment, Rosalind is thus trapped as a woman of traditional identity within the very walls of the play’s text, confined by the outer appearance of social conventions that dictate her life. Rosalind simply acts in the appropriate

ways expected of a woman in her position, but fails to truly portray the emotions of one sincerely affected. Celia introduces Rosalind to the text with an attached, emotional plea for her cousin's happiness, "…sweet my coz, be merry" (I. ii. ln1), yet in doing thus, the reader's reality concerning Rosalind in the context of the court is filtered by the melancholy that Celia immediately brings to the reader's attention. As a young woman whose father has been banished, Rosalind must now assume the role of a saddened daughter, and yet it is clear after a few lines that Rosalind would in fact prefer to " be merry" as Celia compassionately urges her to be, instead of remaining in the " condition of [her saddened] state" (I. ii. ln15) as is expected of her. The irony lies in the fact that while Celia seemingly tries to comfort Rosalind, it is she herself who reinforces Rosalind's dismal behavior. Simply by addressing Rosalind as if something should be the matter, Celia forces Rosalind to defend herself, and Rosalind is unwittingly coerced into voicing the reason for her sadness as being the banishment of her father regardless of whether or not there is any basis to this claim. It is exactly this coercive social force in Celia that Rosalind must yield to, for Rosalind deliberately says only what is necessary to avoid social criticism and to publicly uphold the values that are politically and socially correct for her to have. Rosalind immediately and repeatedly makes attempts to lift the distressed tone cast upon the scene by bypassing Celia's negative sensibilities in a manner that still does not make her seem careless and unfeeling. She says quite deliberately "…would you yet [I] were merrier? Unless you could teach me how to forget a banish'd father… (I. ii. ln. 4)," where almost as an afterthought she addresses the banishment of her father. In doing so, Rosalind affirms Celia's reasoning in assuming that she

must be sad, though the true root of her melancholy does not permit itself to be accurately defined at this time. She simply cites a socially acceptable reason for her sadness, and in doing thus, swiftly digresses as a means of avoiding conversation over the true stimulus for her dejected tone. Rosalind makes a plea to " forget the condition of [her] estate," (I. ii. ln. 15) and then another to " devise sports" (I. ii. ln. 24) as a means of changing the topic of conversation, but it is Celia who sets the tone for Rosalind's performance, who succeeds in her continued effort to dwell on that which society expects Rosalind to be sad about, thereby allowing the further subjugation of Rosalind's true emotions. Rosalind opposes the conventional order by refusing to expose herself as emotionally vulnerable to Celia, for doing so would result in complete conformity between the two, and further demolish any sense of a unique self that Rosalind is left struggling to maintain. Although the greater court views the love between Celia and Rosalind to be " dearer than the natural bond of sisters," (I. ii. ln. 276) Celia does not seem especially apt in sensing Rosalind's desire to speak of something besides her father's banishment. In trying to get an emotional rise out of Rosalind, Celia is attempting to further cement the bond between the two cousins, yet Rosalind resists the urgency to become the traditional emotional woman who is so predictable in her sensitivities. In the continual coupling of Celia and Rosalind's characters, Celia manages to drives a wedge between herself and the protagonist, for while Rosalind expresses neither strong sentimental attachment to her father nor any apparent guilt about his fate, her emotions are simply exploited by what Celia, a representative of the natural customs of society, assumes them to be. Thus, it is as a model of social order and conventional values that both Celia and the greater society that she

represents are initially portrayed, but both fail to show a deeper understanding of Rosalind's need for self-expression and a unique identity that cannot be defined by the society at court. Rosalind's emotions are piqued by Orlando's similar fate, and her desire to be with him thus becomes grounded in the fact that the two share commonalities. Superficial passions are not supreme, for what Rosalind needs is someone with whom she can simultaneously identify and be able to preserve her own sense of self. Although it may be Orlando's brawn that initially piques Rosalind's interest, it is neither his wit nor his charm that causes her to fall in love with him. The moment she approves of his family, Orlando suddenly becomes a viable option for marriage, and Rosalind allows herself to become smitten as is clear when she says " Had [she only] known [his ancestry] before…[she] should have given him tears unto entreaties, ere he should thus have ventur'd. (I. ii. ln. 237)" In saying so, she already takes on the role of a wife, serving to caution and protect Orlando. Rosalind is no longer as concerned with what is expected of her, for in shedding the Duke's expectations of her, she freely continues to congratulate Orlando. She not only hands over a chain as the symbol of their mutual affection, but in establishing a physical connection with Orlando, goes on to reveal, almost in spite of herself, the source of her melancholy at the beginning of the play. Orlando is in the same position as Rosalind, for his scheming brother has affected his own fortunes. Likewise, she cannot help but admit that "[her] pride [also] fell with her [own] fortunes (I. ii. ln. 252)." In being able to identify with Orlando, she is able to isolate her own desire to be proud of herself and pinpoint her need to find a way to enhance her own sense of proper dignity and self worth. Rosalind thus falls into the role of a love-struck woman, yet manages to

acknowledge her feelings for Orlando as both insensible yet honestly intentioned. This distinction distinguishes her from other idealistic, romantic figures in Shakespeare's plays, for while Rosalind recognizes the affect Orlando has on her, instead of waiting for him to rescue her, she is able to optimize his effects on her by contentedly going " To liberty, and not to banishment (I. iii. ln. 138)," and quite literally liberating her own sense of self confidence and bringing about a change in the role she plays in her own life. Rosalind's growing attachment to Orlando parallels her own increased awareness of the fact that she is in fact alone, and that unless swift action is taken, that the social authority and general control over her own personal rights that are rapidly diminishing will soon completely be gone. At the beginning of scene three, Celia asks whether Rosalind is still pensive about her father, but Rosalind replies, " some of it is for my child's father (I. iii. ln. 11)." Rosalind's response is more selfish and distant than before, for while society treats her as a child whose concerns should, in turn, only be for her absent father, Rosalind slowly transitions into more autonomy as can be seen when she is asked " But is all [worry] for your father?" (I. iii. ln. 10) and Rosalind outright says " No…" (I. iii. ln. 11). Rosalind is coming into her womanhood only to realize that she has " not one [word]" (I. iii. ln. 3) for Celia, the typical representative of the traditional behavior of restrictive courtly society. " They are but burs, cousin, thrown upon thee in holiday foolery" (I. iii. ln. 13) Celia says, but Rosalind now is less able to keep the same politically and socially correct manner with which she was able to so effectively accommodate Celia's expectations in the scene previous. In that scene, act I scene ii, Celia offers her inheritance to Rosalind saying " You know my father hath no child but I, nor none is like to have; and truly when

he dies, thou [Rosalind] shalt be his heir" (I. ii. ln. 17), but this simply serves to reinforce the mutual identity of the two cousins and undermine Rosalind's independent social status. Therefore it is a common linkage with Orlando that makes Rosalind confident in her own image, and able to identify with him without replacing her own sense of self with his character. In attempting to regain the " pride" that was lost to her, she forges an identity new to Celia, but truer to her inner self – Ganymede. Rosalind literally goes " from Fortune's office to Nature's" (I. ii. ln. 40) by changing her natural gender to reap the rewards that Fortune has bestowed on her, rewards such as inherent intelligence, energy and appeal, all virtues that society has thus far prevented her from benefiting from. Acting as Ganymede, Rosalind has the freedom to assert herself in the presence of others, act as an equal among men, and even initiate a courtship as Ganymede does successfully with Orlando. These sorts of liberties are unbeknownst to women, namely Rosalind, who as can be seen prior to her banishment, is restricted by society's expectations of a woman in her position. Celia continually stands as society's ideal representation of women, for she takes on the character Aliena, a largely passive woman whose very name has roots in the word " outsider". Celia simply waits for life to deliver her a suitable man, and in doing so stands in stark contrast to Rosalind's character Ganymede who is revived with a fresh sense of youthful optimism and actively plays a role in her dealings with Orlando. The relationship between Orlando and Rosalind serves to further distinguish Rosalind from other traditional women of the era, for she is able to assert herself as a man would in the figurative absence of a socially constructed court, yet preserve the dignity of her femininity by still acting in ways that are true to her real identity as a woman. In thereby

redefining her own role as a woman, Rosalind forces the reader to question the extent to which conventional societal rules apply. As Jacques says " All the world's a stage," where Rosalind's performance as Ganymede serves to illuminate the legitimacy, or lack thereof, of pre-established gender roles, for she brings to light the fact that the only thing distinguishing conventional sexual arrangements from the alternatives is something seemingly as superficial as clothing! Society accommodates Rosalind in a restrictive setting until it becomes inconvenient, for the Duke unleashes himself from any sense of responsibility just as quickly as he attains it. Socially dictated behavior, outer appearance, and expectations are what perpetuate the construction of stagnant social rules that serve to initially entrap Rosalind, for the Duke condemns Rosalind not based on any factual evidence, but merely based on his perceptions of her. Rosalind therefore manages to use her image as a tool in revealing society's insistence on gender differences as more than mere tradition. Rosalind makes outer appearance work in her favor, for in dressing as a man and gaining a freedom unknown to her as a woman, she successfully uses society's double standard against its own ideals. Simply by presenting herself in masculine form, Rosalind is able to fully prove to society the attributes that are clearly inherently enshrined within her; the creative intelligence that is innate to her in the female form. In establishing her authority as Ganymede, she sets precedence for the power relations in her relationship with Orlando, for she sets the tone for the behavior that should be expected from her in her pursuit of preserving a sense of pride in her own identity. It is this simple fact that sheds light on the disparity of traditional gender roles in society, for Rosalind's actions only

serve to reveal the true hypocrisies of society’s differing behavior towards men and women.