



# Rosalind

in *As You Like It* is one of the most favored and widely discussed heroin in Shakespeare's plays. Named well with its title "As You Like It," Rosalind is still a favorable character for many critics. There are three major reasons that can explain the dateless attractiveness of Rosalind.

First of all is the complexity of Rosalind's characteristics that break the boundaries of two sexes. Firstly we can perceive that Rosalind brings out the most amiable and charming female lover in Shakespeare's plays. Instead of being confined in the stereotypes of woman's passiveness and modesty, Rosalind is very active and daring in the pursuit of love. As she falls in love with Orlando at the first sight, she gives Orlando her necklace as if to reward her knight for wining the wrestling. On departure, her inside passion overwhelms her reason, and she claims that Orlando, who is actually tongue-tied, calls them back. "He calls us back. My pride fell with my fortunes. I'll ask him what he would." (1.2.218-219) What's more, Rosalind is full of humor in her speech of love. As Celia inquires whether her sadness is about her father, Rosalind replied "No, some of it is for my child's father." (1.3.9) Furthermore, the dominating characteristic of Rosalind is a kind of silly yet attractive vehemence. Not knowing exactly how love suddenly possesses her, Rosalind says the reason she loves Orlando is because "The Duke my father loved his father dearly." (1.3.24) Hearing that Orlando is dressed as a hunter she exclaimed "O ominous-he comes to kill my heart." (3.2.224) Love also induces and nurtures Rosalind's feminine eloquence. Knowing that Celia withholds some news about Orlando, Rosalind feels like "One inch of delay more is a South Sea of discovery" and gets all agog in urging Celia to reveal "I would thou couldst stammer, that thou mightst pour this concealed man out of thy mouth as wine comes out of a narrow-mouthed bottle- either too much at once, or none at all. I prithee, take the cork out of thy mouth, that I may drink thy tidings." (3.2.180-184) What's funny is the way that Rosalind ardently pours out more than seven questions to Celia like a crazy nag and then asked her "in one word," (3.2. 204) and the way she self-defenses with "Do you not know I am a

woman? When I think, I must speak.” (3.2.227-228) By writing Rosalind with such vehemence, silliness and daring, Shakespeare dramatizes and explores the variety of stereotypes of women to shape up the unconventional feminine side of Rosalind.

On the other hand, Rosalind also bears characters that mostly apply to men. Besides her daring in showing her passion, Rosalind also has bravery and valor to dispute the authority. Instead of being obedient like a constrained young maid, Rosalind ridicules the reason of her own banishment by proclaiming that “Treason is not inherited, my lord. Or if we did derive it from our friends, what’s that of me? My father was no traitor.” (1.3.55-57) However, authority and corruption can’t be reasoned, so Rosalind and Celia decide to disguise themselves and take refuge in the forest of Ardenne where Rosalind’s father and his followers live. In renaming Rosalind with a masculine name “Ganymede,” which signifies a young boy who was the lover of an older man, Shakespeare calls in attention of the hidden homoerotic love in this play. In the attire of man, Rosalind demands Orlando to woo her in the name of ‘Rosalind’ to cure him of his unrequited love. What’s more, later in the play the shepherdess Phoebe falls in love with Ganymede. Whereas in the former case Rosalind, as Celia puts it, takes on a male point of view by introducing anti-feminist literature that “misused” women to disillusion Orlando of his idealization of women. Apparently this is the best way and the only way for Rosalind to be with Orlando, but as Orlando takes a male for his ideal lady, which is already unconsciously having homosexual relationship, the bigger issue here is the controversial question “With what kind of love is Rosalind loving Orlando? What is she thinking when she unconsciously notifies Phoebe of her lodging?” In the male attire, Rosalind is a man of reason with strong, oppressive arguments and demands; on the contrary, within the attire a woman’s heart is swirling and swooning for her restrained love. Although Rosalind does point out how she will not “disgrace my man’s apparel and to cry like a woman,” (2.4.3) however, she doesn’t know how love works and who she is in others’ eyes. In a word, instead of over-focusing on the unconscious homoerotic love, I think what Shakespeare wants to convey through the two love affairs accounted above is the idea that “Love, although blind, brings in possibilities and surpass confinements.” With the lovers’ eyes, Orlando and Phoebe can see through the dressing of both Rosalind’s male and female qualities overlapping, merging and completing Rosalind.

Secondly, Rosalind is the critic and reformer of the society. At the very beginning of the play we can already grasp the atmosphere of the social corruption such as sibling rivals, usurpation and banishment. It is a world of injustice and social disorder, where “Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold,” (1.3.104) and “what is

comely envenoms him that bears it!"(2.3.15) Tyranny allows no critics so "fools may not speak wisely what wise men do foolishly." (1.2.72-73) Corruption of humanity, honor and self-respect numb the society, where "None will sweat but for promotion, and having that do choke their service up even with the having." (2.4.61-63) With Rosalind's lead we shift the setting to the forest of Ardenne, which is a long lost "Golden world" (1.1.103) Before coming into the wood Rosalind says to Celia "We'll have a swashing and a martial outside, as many other mannish cowards have, that do outface it with their semblances." (1.3.114-116) Whereas in the court swearing by one's honor doesn't prevent one from forswearing for one doesn't have honor, within the forest, kindness and trueness can be rebuild and preserved. Rosalind chooses to sacrifice her chances of being in love with Orlando as herself, for in the attire of man she must "comfort the weaker vessel" (2.4.5) to become a man as a way to show trueness to her attire. As a social reformer, Rosalind disillusions Orland's idealization of woman by replacing the idolatry praises like "Helen's cheek distilled by Nature" and "Cleopatra's majesty"(3.2.130) with dramatized yet true descriptions of real life women's giddiness and fickleness, such as "I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock pigeon over his hen...more giddy in my desires than a monkey." (4.1.127.130) Being tangled in the love affair of Silvius and Phoebe, Rosalind sees the problem in a counsel's eyes, so she chides both Phoebe for being too proud and Silvius being a flattering fool that abetment Phoebe's pride. Withholding the "magic," Rosalind is both the lover and the counselor in settling the love affairs, and with exchanging promises and giving demands, she succeeds in both the marriages at the end and the rebuild of trueness, kindness and humanity in the forest that lead to the reform of the society.

The last one is that Rosalind is just like her creator, a convention breaker. Although Rosalind isn't the first woman to be disguised as a man in a pastoral play, she is the first woman to be in the epilogue of a play to conclude and ask for applause. Shakespeare certainly has felt favorable toward such a character who dares to risk her own happiness with such cruel counsel just to insinuate whether Orlando's love be genuine and strong. What's more, not a woman has the ability to bring out all the various sides of women, not to mention to her lover. Furthermore, no woman have such chances to teach their lover who woman really is and how to woo and love them beforehand. By this kind of counseling, it could prevent cuckoldry and end with a safely promised happy ending that differs from the conventional happy ending, for such love is tried and true.

In conclusion, the major two reasons why Rosalind fascinates critics are her characteristics that break the boundaries of two sexes, being the critic and reformer of the society, and being a convention breaker like Shakespeare. Rosalind is the key of the play that holds the “magic” to open every lock that leads us to various angles to think and be more than who we are defined.

Reference:

(1) Picture of Rosalind from website: [www.literaryramblings.com](http://www.literaryramblings.com)