

[Critical paper written for my 2009 Shakespeare course at Messiah College.]

Transcending All Bounds: Selfless Love in *As You Like It*

It seems almost too obvious to state that love is a major theme of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. *As You Like It* is a comedy, so one knows from the beginning that it will end in at least one marriage (or four, in this case). However, looking at marital love alone limits the representations of love found within *As You Like It*. Within the play Shakespeare highlights honorable characters whose main virtues are their loyal and loving natures. Although protagonists Rosalind and Orlando certainly demonstrate love for other characters within the play their efforts are outdone by the selfless, platonic love shown to Rosalind by Celia and to Orlando by Adam; Celia and Adam not only demonstrate that selfless love is not restricted to a particular generation or station but also prove that a faithful love can be sustained outside of the idyllic setting of Arden.

Celia's love for Rosalind is apparent before the two women even appear in the play; in the opening scene of the play, Charles tells Oliver of Celia's love for Rosalind. Charles explains that although Rosalind's father has been banished, she has not because "the duke's daughter her cousin so loves her, being ever from their cradles bred together, that she would have followed her to exile, or have died to stay behind her. She is at the court, and no less beloved of her uncle than his own daughter, and never two ladies loved as they do" (1.1.104-109). When Celia and Rosalind are introduced in the second scene of the play it appears from Celia's lines that her love for her cousin is greater than Rosalind's love for her. Upon Rosalind's lament Celia replies:

I see thou lov'st me not with the full weight that I love thee. If my uncle thy banished father had banished thy uncle the Duke my father, so thou hadst been still with me, I could have taught my love to take thy father for mine; so wouldst thou, if the truth of thy love to me were so righteously tempered as mine is to thee. (1.2.6-13).

Through this reply Celia establishes that her love for her cousin is so strong that it even outweighs her love for her own father; Celia professes that had their situations been reversed she would have happily taken Rosalind's father as her own, provided that she had the company of Rosalind. Celia is even willing to give her inheritance to Rosalind "in affection" (1.2.19) as payment for Duke Frederick's actions against Rosalind's father.

Celia's love for Rosalind remains constant even after Duke Frederick banishes Rosalind. After the banishment is pronounced Celia asks Rosalind, "Know'st thou not the Duke / Hath banish'd me his daughter?" (1.3.91-92). When Rosalind argues that the Duke has done no such thing, Celia counters by saying

Rosalind lacks then the love
Which teacheth thee that thou and I am one.
Shall we be sunder'd? Shall we part, sweet girl?
No, let my father seek another heir.
Therefore devise with me how we may fly...
Say what thou canst, I'll go along with thee. (1.3.93-7, 102)

As in the previous scene, Rosalind seems to have underestimated or undervalued Celia's love and devotion; Rosalind fails to realize that Celia will not let banishment separate

them. Celia does not hesitate to follow her cousin, putting her love for Rosalind before all other concerns. Although she could easily stay comfortably at court and enjoy the safety and pleasures of being the Duke's daughter and heir she instead follows Rosalind into the forest, forsaking safety and comfort out of love for her cousin.

Just as Celia displays a selfless love for Rosalind, Adam displays an equal love for Orlando. When Orlando is threatened and he must seek safety in the forest, Adam offers to give Orlando money to aid his journey. Adam tells Orlando,

...I have five hundred crowns,
 The thrifty hire I sav'd under your father,
 Which I did store to be my foster nurse
 ...Here is the gold,
 All this I give you. Let me be your servant,
 Though I look old...
 ...Let me go with you,
 I'll do the service of a younger man
 In all your business and necessities. (2.3.38-40, 45-47, 53-55)

Without a thought for himself Adam gives over to Orlando the entirety of his savings, money which he had intended as a retirement fund for the time when "service should in [his] old limbs lie lame" (2.3.41). Yet Adam does not merely give Orlando financial aid for his journey but also asks to accompany and serve Orlando in his flight. Adam makes a promise to Orlando to "follow... / To the last gasp with truth and loyalty" (2.3.69-70); in other words, Adam has promised to serve Orlando until death.

Adam makes good on his promise to serve Orlando to “the last gasp with truth and loyalty.” Although Adam is clearly an old man nearing retirement he follows Orlando on an arduous journey to the Forest of Arden, attempting to provide the same quality and strength of “service of a younger man.” This attempt results in Adam’s collapse in the forest. Adam tells Orlando: “Dear master, I can go no further. O I die for food. Here lie I down, and measure out my grave. Farewell kind master” (2.6.1-3). Adam forsakes his own health to follow and serve Orlando; Orlando reveals to Duke Senior that Adam provides this selfless service out of “pure love” (2.7.131). As with Celia’s case, these are sacrifices that Adam does not *have* to make; he makes them, nonetheless, because of the love he bears his “sweet master” (2.3.3). He follows Orlando into the forest, even though his age makes the travel difficult for him, and gives over to Orlando all the money he had saved to make his winter years more comfortable.

While it is clear that both Adam and Celia make great sacrifices for their loved ones, Orlando’s response to Adam’s promises insinuates that he thinks selfless love a relic of Adam’s generation. Upon Adam’s request to accompany him Orlando replies,

O good old man, how well in thee appears
 The constant service of the antique world,
 When service sweat for duty, not for meed.
 Thou art not for the fashion of these times. (2.3.56-59)

These lines indicate that Orlando believes that only older men like Adam are willing to serve out of love rather than for wages. Orlando thinks that such a “constant service” is of “the antique world” and that such outdated service is not to be found in people of younger

generations. However, Celia's love for Rosalind disproves Orlando's theory. Celia is, presumably, near to Orlando's age and thus not of the "antique world" of Adam.

Moreover, Celia would not even stand to profit in wages through her service to Rosalind, since she is Rosalind's equal and not a servant. Shakespeare uses Celia and Adam to represent the two extremes of age and station. Celia represents youth; her example proves that the virtues of love and self-sacrifice will not die out with the older generation. As a representative of nobility, Celia proves that a person of privilege can willingly give up their comforts to endure hardship alongside a loved one. Conversely, as a representative of the lower class, Adam shows that a person can put aside their own pressing needs and give away their hard earned savings to help someone of a superior social station. Taken together, Celia and Adam prove that selfless love is not restricted to a particular social class or age group.

Celia and Adam demonstrate not only that love is not restricted to a particular age or class, but also that true love can be sustained outside of the Forest of Arden. In *As You Like It* Shakespeare draws upon pastoral conventions by creating a tension between life at court and life in Arden. The life of the court appears cruel; it is at court that Duke Frederick and Oliver antagonize their virtuous relations and it is from the court that Rosalind, Celia and Orlando flee. By comparison with the court, the Forest of Arden generally appears idyllic and more desirable. Duke Senior extols the virtues of the forest to his men, stating:

my co-mates and brothers in exile,

Hath not old custom made this life more sweet

Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods

More free from peril than the envious court?

Here feel we not the penalty of Adam. (2.1.1-5)

Duke Senior praises the forest life as superior to the “painted pomp” of the court, arguing that the pastoral setting is both free from harm and sin (“the penalty of Adam”). Although the forest is certainly not without its dangers, it is easy to see how it appears more desirable than the court: the forest unites the lovers, reunites Rosalind and Duke Senior, and reforms Oliver and Duke Frederick. Whether or not one setting is truly superior to the other, Shakespeare makes it clear that the characters cannot remain in Arden and must return home to the court; the play ends immediately after the wedding ceremony as the characters prepare to go back to the court. For many readers this raises concerns over the fate of the marriages. The couples united and had their start in the idyllic setting of Arden and as a result many wonder whether their love can be maintained once they leave that idyllic place. Although readers can only speculate as to what befalls the lovers after the final scene they can look within the text for evidence that love is possible at court; such evidence is found in Celia and Adam. Celia’s love for Rosalind is not only displayed at court but also recognized by other members of the court. Duke Frederick’s wrestler, Charles, has either seen or heard enough about this love to bring word of it to Oliver in the opening scene of the play. Similarly, Adam’s love for Orlando is shown while they are still at court, before they flee to the Forest of Arden. In fact, it is their love for Rosalind and Orlando that *takes* Celia and Adam to the forest; their love for the protagonists does not take shape in the forest but is instead their only motivation for

going to the forest in the first place. Although it is unclear what will happen to the lovers once they return to court, the love of Celia and Adam shows that it is possible to sustain love both at court and in the forest.

As You Like It is without a doubt a play about love, but audiences will miss the point if they only focus on the romantic love celebrated by the quadruple wedding. Celia and Adam provide admirable examples of selfless love by devoting their service freely to Rosalind and Orlando, following them into danger and exile for no other reason than love. Celia and Adam prove not only that a selfless love is possible but that its possibility is not limited by age, gender, social station, financial status or setting. Although *As You Like It* has its share of loving and admirable characters, Celia and Adam represent the best the play has to offer.