

Seasons, Ages, Cycles: All *As You Like It*

An easy place to begin an analysis of this production of *As You Like It* could be a discussion of its conceptual, technical, even aesthetic disharmonies relative to the play's original text. However, in the spirit of conducting analysis rather than writing review, a better starting point might be to question the possible motivations underlying directorial choices, specifically how the director might have *sought* to link such choices with several key thematic tones arising from the original text. In this sense, answers to these questions can be found by closely examining two major elements of the production's setting: historical orientation and set design. With these elements specifically, the production embodies the thematic parallelism of seasonal, generational, even historical cycles found abundantly in the text.

Beginning with a discussion of the textual basis of the play's themes, it suffices to say that the overarching impression of intergenerational conflict is inaugurated almost immediately. In the immediate action of the play, the older generation's fear of being supplanted by the younger is reflected by Oliver's schemes against Orlando and Duke Frederick's banishment of Rosaline. Consequently, the younger generation's desire to overturn the order established by the dominant elder generation is represented by Orlando's dissatisfaction with his Oliver's "tyranny" and Celia's decision to leave the city with Rosalind. Also, it is represented on both symbolic and

literal levels as Orlando heaves Charles, Frederick's older and champion wrestler, to his defeat during a match.

However, there is another dimension to this theme added by the realities that Duke Senior is older than his usurping brother Frederick, and the servant Adam is older than his oppressive master Oliver. To fit this disparity into proper context, it helps to consider Orlando's words to Adam "O good old man, how well in thee appears/The constant service of the antique world,/ [...] Thou art not for the fashion of these times," (2.3.56-58). At this point in the analysis, a historical model such as Hesiod's can be applied in which the span of human existence is broken into ages beginning with glorious golden age and degenerating to oppressive iron "perpetual present" of the age. In this context, Orlando's lines create comparisons between the not-so-coincidentally-named Adam, his biblical namesake, and the just, benevolent figures of a more glorious past. Similarly, the deceased Sir Rowland de Boys and the exiled Duke Senior fit quite clearly with this impression of suppressed or lost glory.

One more thematic lens must be used to properly see how all these themes align: the cyclic nature of the seasons. The present of the play is situated within winter, presumably near the end, as evidenced by Duke Senior's words "Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,/The seasons' difference; as the icy fang and churlish winter's wind,/Which when it bites and blows upon my body [...]," (2.1.5-8), as well as the Pages' song "And therefore, take the present time, With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,/For Love is crowned with the prime,/In the spring time, [etc.]," (5.3.28-31). Not only to these passages situate the play within a transition from winter to spring, but the Pages' song specifically seems to inject the play with a rather optimistic note. Applying Northrup Frye's model of Shakespearean comedy, the connotations of spring such as youth, rebirth, vitality, and liberality would correspond to youthful lovers like Orlando and

Rosalind who oppose characters like Frederick and thus, the established order of winter, death, stasis, and conservatism. In this sense, the Pages' song can be read as an affirmation that spring will overtake winter, and even further, that the younger generation will supplant the older. Similarly, the play's final act substantiates this interpretation, ultimately ending with the restoration of Duke Senior to power, Adam to relative health, and the glory of the "golden age" to the kingdom.

To connect these themes with aspects of the production, it makes sense to begin simply with superficial directorial choices like set design, costuming, colors, and other such features. By comparing sets like Frederick's palace to that of the Forest of Arden, it becomes clear that the production attempts to assert a visual contrast between the locations. The palace is furnished austere with dark, heavily finished wood panels, bleachers, and an imposing portrait of Frederick rendered without color (hidden behind this is a colorful portrait of Duke Senior). Though the austerities of color and decor might not consciously evoke themes of seasons, ages of man, and intergenerational conflict, they do register implicitly, legitimizing Frederick as a tyrannical figure. Conversely, the Forest of Arden is lavishly rendered in vivid colors and populated with flora and fauna. In this way, the visual aspects of the forest become associated with the characters dwelling within it. Again, overarching thematic impressions do not arise from the sets themselves but rather, the sets provide an additional avenue by which characters' actions, words, and consequently, aspects of theme can be expressed.

Such visual elements of setting really begin to give rise to theme during characters' interactions, at which points they highlight relevant aspects of speech and action. As the intergenerational conflict plays out, the associations of visual austerity with Frederick and chromatic abundance with the young lovers become clear and embody the thematic impressions

of the text. The warm colors of the forest along with speech like the Pages' song, lead to associations between the youthful characters and spring time. Again, this contrasts with the visual austerity of the city which becomes associated with Frederick and winter. The respective portraits of Frederick and Duke Senior provide another example of how visual elements lead to theme. In the context of the production's historical orientation in the 1950's, it is hard to resist a figurative comparison of the colorless portrait of Frederick to a black-and-white television. Similarly, Duke Senior's portrait would signify color television. Historically, as the color television replaces the black-and-white, these images create the impression that Duke Senior (and the characters aligned with him) will replace Frederick. Again, linking this to Hesiod and Frye, the restoration of Duke Senior's power thematically represents the transition from winter to spring, conservatism to liberalism, and the iron age back to the golden age.

Finally, the choice to set the play in the 1950's is probably the most significant way the director brought the plays' themes, specifically that of intergenerational conflict, to the forefront. This period in the United States historically is associated with the emergence of what might be operationally referred to as the "post-World War Two patriarchy." In this period, social conservatism dominated in a way similar to that of Frederick's rule. Again, applying Frye's comedic model, this conservatism would correspond to the winter season and adulthood. However, by setting the play in this era, it is beholden to a historical trajectory in which the social revolution of the 1960's overturns the established order. Just so, this is the case with the characters dwelling in the Forest of Arden who regain control of the kingdom.

Admittedly, it is difficult to make conclusive inferences as to which aspects of the production correspond allegorically to aspects of the historical period, especially considering the fact that Frederick abdicates his rule while in the various counterculture movements of the

1960's more or less seized control. However, period details of the production such as music and costume suggest that both decades were represented. Some of the more austere elements of set design and costuming, specifically those without color or associated with the city, corresponded to the 1950's. Motifs of this decade begin to break down in the forest when color is introduced in ways evocative of 1960's phenomenon such as the proliferation of color television or the mass experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs. In this way, it makes sense to view the inclusion of motifs of both decades in these respective locations and scenes as a way of portraying the transition from one decade to the next. Even Jacques' recitation of his "all the world's a stage" monologue as a beat poem, the most unambiguously "1950's" moment in the Forest of Arden, is still a point of transition as the Beats historically helped pave the way for the dissidents of the 1960's. For these reasons, the pervasive impressions of transition from one decade to the next, conservatism to liberalism, the older generation to the next, and the winter to the spring are ultimately reinforced.

Through its choices regarding set design and historical orientation, the production of *As You Like It* highlights the play's textual themes of seasonal, generational, and historical cycles. By visually contrasting locations, the production reinforces the oppositions represented and dramatized by the characters interacting within them. Color choices strengthen associations between characters and their symbolic representations like seasons, generations, and ages. By incorporating 1950's and 1960's motifs, the intergenerational conflicts of that era thematically parallel such conflicts within the play. By using period-specific details, the production blends these two decades and achieves an impression of transition from one to the next. Ultimately, the production links text to performance and late 16th century England to mid 20th century America, dramatizing the universality of cycles, seasons, degeneration, and restoration.

Works Cited

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