



GABLESTAGE AT THE BILTMORE

Proudly Presents

As You Like It

by William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare



(Rosalind in the Forest, by Sir John Everett Millais)

THE LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare was born in April of 1564. There is no specific date of birth because at that time the only date of importance was the date of baptism, though infants often were baptized when they were three days old. Shakespeare's baptismal date was April 26, 1564.



Shakespeare was born in the village of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. At the time of his birth, the village had a population of 1500 people, and only 200 houses. Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, came from a family of yeomen, and he gained many prestigious positions in the community. Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, came from an ancient family of landed gentry. The whole family was Anglican. The family's financial situation was well off. Not much information is known about Shakespeare's youth, although undoubtedly he was educated in the local school, where he studied Latin and Greek, among other subjects, during a school day that often lasted from dawn to dusk. Shakespeare's first exposure to the theater probably occurred when he was young. As a child his father probably took him to see plays when traveling troupes of actors came to town, although that was not often.

Shakespeare was married to Anne Hathaway in 1582, when he was 18; she was 26, eight years his senior. The exact wedding date is uncertain, but the marriage certificate was issued on November 27, 1582. Anne was the daughter of a respected yeoman farmer. William and Anne had their first child, Susanna, in May of 1583. This was followed by the birth of twins, Hamnet and Judith, in January of 1585. Most historians believe that Shakespeare was not often around his family in Stratford after that because historical records show him in London during the following years.

The first written reference to Shakespeare's existence in London occurred in 1592, when Shakespeare was in his late twenties. He seems to have been fairly well established in the theatre by that point, since the reference, written by another playwright, hints of jealousy at Shakespeare's success.

With his two patrons, the Earls of South Hampton and Pembroke, Shakespeare rose quickly in the theater as both an actor and an author. He joined the Lord Chamberlin's Men, an acting company which was protected by the Queen, becoming a shareholder and senior member in 1595. Because of his success in London, he was able to purchase New Place, the largest and most elegant house in his home town of Stratford, when he was in his early thirties (1597).

In addition to his popularity as both an actor and playwright, Shakespeare became joint owner of the famous Globe Theater (*pictured below*) when it opened in 1599. His share of the company's management added heavily to his wealth.

Shakespeare's financial success in the London theatre enabled him to retire and return to his home in Stratford around 1610. He lived there comfortably until his death on April 23, 1616 (it is popularly believed that he died on his birthday). He is buried in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Though Shakespeare is most closely associated with the Elizabethan period, his career can be categorized as both Elizabethan and Jacobean, as several works were completed after James I became king in 1603.



AN APPROXIMATE CHRONOLOGY OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

1588-1595

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Taming of the Shrew, First, Second and Third Parts of King Henry VI, Titus Andronicus, King Richard III, The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, King Richard II

1596-1599

King John, The Merchant of Venice, First and Second Parts of King Henry IV, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, King Henry V, Julius Caesar

1600-1605

As You Like It, Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Troilus and Cressida, Measure for Measure, Othello, All's Well That Ends Well, Timon of Athens, King Lear

1606-1611

Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Pericles, Coriolanus, The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline, The Tempest

1613

King Henry VIII, The Two Noble Kinsmen

SYNOPSIS OF *As You Like It*

Duke Frederick has usurped his older brother, Duke Senior, forcing him to live in the Forest of Arden with some of his followers. Duke Senior's daughter, Rosalind, is allowed to remain at court because she is the cousin and best friend of Celia, Frederick's only daughter.

Meanwhile, there is another sibling rivalry going on. Orlando demands that his older brother, Oliver, give him part of the inheritance left by their father, but Oliver refuses. Oliver discovers that Orlando has agreed to undertake a wrestling match with Charles, Duke Frederick's champion wrestler. Oliver encourages Charles to kill Orlando, but Orlando is the victor. Upon meeting each other at the match, Rosalind and Orlando instantly fall in love.

Duke Frederick suddenly becomes angry with Rosalind and banishes her from court. Celia and Rosalind decide to run away to the Forest of Arden, taking the court fool, Touchstone, with them. To avoid danger, the two women disguise themselves; Rosalind as a country boy named Ganymede, and Celia as his sister, Aliena. After Orlando learns of Oliver's plot to kill him, he and his servant Adam flee to the forest as well. Duke Frederick suspects Orlando is responsible for the disappearance of Rosalind and Celia and orders Oliver to go into the forest to search for them or face banishment himself.

In the Forest of Arden, Rosalind and Celia buy a cottage from Corin and Silvius, two shepherds. Orlando, suffering from extreme hunger, stumbles upon Duke Senior and his entourage discussing country life and listening to their melancholy friend, Jaques. Orlando demands food for Adam and himself. Duke Senior shares his food willingly, and Orlando and Adam join the Duke.

Orlando hangs poems in praise of Rosalind on trees in the forest. Ganymede (Rosalind) finds the verses and promises to help Orlando get over his lovesickness. Orlando agrees to pretend that Ganymede is his Rosalind and to visit every day.

Ganymede witnesses Phoebe mistreating Silvius, her lovesick suitor. While Ganymede is scolding her for this behavior, Phoebe falls in love with her. Touchstone, who originally scorned rural life, plans to marry Audrey, the goatherd who was originally engaged to marry William, a country boy.

Later, Rosalind is upset because Orlando fails to show up for his lesson. She and Celia encounter Oliver, who explains that just before a lion was about to attack him, Orlando saved his brother and was wounded in the process. Rosalind faints and claims that she was "counterfeiting." Oliver, however is not convinced. Oliver and Aliena (Celia) instantly fall in love. Rosalind, growing tired of the deceptions, decides to end the charade. Ganymede (Rosalind) promises Phoebe, Silvius, and Orlando that she will meet them tomorrow and they will all be satisfied. Rosalind elicits promises from everyone to meet the next day.

As agreed, everyone meets at Duke Senior's camp the following day. Phoebe promises to marry Silvius if for any reason she cannot marry Ganymede. Duke Senior promises that if Ganymede can produce his daughter (Rosalind) he will allow Orlando to marry her. She and Celia leave the camp and return without their disguises, accompanied by the god of marriage, Hymen. Hymen blesses the couples: Orlando and Rosalind, Silvius and Phoebe, Oliver and Celia, and Audrey and Touchstone. The festivities are interrupted by news that Duke Frederick has given up worldly pleasures and returned the dukedom to Duke Senior. Rosalind ends the play by delivering the epilogue to the audience.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The plot of *As You Like It* was well known in Shakespeare's day. Audiences would have been as familiar with the story as we are with the story of Romeo and Juliet today.
- The origin of the word "role" comes from actors being given a rolled up copy of their lines.
- Shakespeare's ancestry can be traced to a group of villages in the Forest of Arden, not far from Stratford-upon-Avon.
- There are more songs in *As You Like It* than in any of Shakespeare's other plays.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION

1. *As You Like It* has several themes, one of which is transformation. Based on the text, which character(s) do you believe experienced the greatest transformation and why? Do you think the actor(s) were successful in demonstrating this journey?
2. The entrance of the god Hymen at the end of the play is sometimes difficult for modern audiences who are not familiar with seeing gods on stage. How would you stage this scene in order to have it make sense today?
3. To what extent do you think Rosalind, dressed as Ganymede, looks like a boy? How do you imagine Rosalind dresses when she is pretending to be Ganymede? What does she do with her hair?
4. By putting on male clothes and adopting a masculine swagger, Rosalind easily passes as a man throughout the better part of the play. What does her behavior suggest about gender? Does the play imply that notions of gender are fixed or fluid? Explain.
5. Discuss *As You Like It* as an example of pastoral literature. What features of the pastoral mode lend themselves to social criticism? What, if anything, does Shakespeare's play criticize?
6. Throughout the play, we find numerous allusions to cuckoldry. In a play that celebrates love and ends with four marriages, what purpose might these allusions serve?
7. Like Rosalind, both Touchstone and Jaques possess an ability to see things that the other characters do not. They are critics, but their criticism differs greatly from Rosalind's. How is this so? To what effect do these different criticisms lead?