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Review by W. Reginald Rampone

Lynch, Stephen. *As You Like It: A Guide to the Play*. Greenwood Guides to Shakespeare. Westport, CT & London: Greenwood P, 2003. 200 pages.

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Stephen Lynch's recent interpretation and textual analysis of *As You Like It* in the Greenwood Guides to Shakespeare is a useful and helpful study of this most festive of plays. Apparently, there is no known copy of a quarto edition of this play: *AYL* first appeared in the First Folio of 1623. The textual history of this play is happily unproblematic as "scholarly challenges...are limited because the only authoritative version is the First Folio, and it seems to contain relatively few printing errors" (4).

In the second chapter ("Contexts and Sources") Lynch does a very fine job of explicating the relationship between *AYL* and its contexts. He opines that Shakespeare may possibly have been "familiar not only with the main source of the play, Lodge's *Rosalynde*, but also with Lodge's primary source, the anonymous *Tale of Gamelyn* (c. 1350, unpublished until 1721)" (11). There are, however, some signal differences between *AYL* and Lodge's *Rosalynde*; for example, patently unsophisticated characters such as William and Audrey are "without counterparts in Lodge's romance" [and] "may well be parodic versions of English country folk" (12).

In Chapter Three ("Dramatic Structure"), Lynch argues, "The most prominent structural feature of *As You Like It* is the continual shifting back and forth in the first three acts between the court (the world of artifice) and the more natural world of the Forest of Arden" (43). The world of artifice is integral to the experience of Orlando in the play, for Lynch points out, "Not only has Orlando been deprived of the benefits of artifice (education and training) but his natural virtues have been suppressed by corrupted artifice—his brother's malevolent schemes to keep him down" (44).

Chapter Four ("Themes") recapitulates many of the main ideas of the play: court vs. forest, Petrarchan love vs. "natural"

love, and the role of a cross-dressed adolescent performing a female role. Here Lynch argues, “Beneath the variable masquerades of artificial gender types, the play seems to point to a solid bedrock of innate gender differences” (77). At times it appears that Shakespeare, as well as literary critics, wants to conceptualize gender as both innate and as a social construction.

Certainly, the most provocative chapter is Chapter Five (“Critical Approaches”) with its consideration of formalist, historical, theological (Christian), and feminist paradigms. Lynch cites Louis Adrian Montrose’s brilliant New Historicist article, “‘The Place of a Brother’ in *As You Like It*” in which he “argues that the practice of primogeniture, in which the eldest son inherits all or most of the estate, was a cause of great tension and conflict within propertied families, especially families of the gentry” (106). He also cites Marjorie Garber’s feminist essay, “The Education of Orlando,” which makes the case that cross-dressing is unique in Shakespeare’s comedies, “for Rosalind does not need to keep her disguise after she reaches the Forest of Arden and meets Orlando.” Similarly Lynch notes that Jean Howard combines feminist and New Historicist approaches in “Crossdressing, the Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England” and argues crossdressers were castigated by the clergy and the state’s sumptuary laws because this sartorial practice caused cultural anxiety, subverting the “normative, religious and social order of hierarchy, male privilege, and female subordination” (115).

Chapter Six (“The Play in Performance”) takes us from early modern to postmodern stage productions. The play’s provenance was recorded at the Stationers’ Registrar on August 4, 1600, and in 1842 Charles Macready made the first serious attempt to revive *As You Like It* according to the Folio text. Henry Irving and Herbert Beerbohm Tree created extremely lavish and highly detailed sets. William Poel, who formed the Elizabethan Stage Society, however, “did produce plays in a minimalist Elizabethan style” (138). When Jacques Copeau produced *AYL* in Paris in 1934, he used “artistic sets, costumes, dance, and music to create a highly unified aesthetic experience” (143). By contrast, Ernst Wendt’s provocative postmodern version represented the court and country by the same white curtains and the same chairs in his 1982 Munich production while Adrian Noble presented the play via Jungian symbolism and psychology in modern day attire.

Overall, Lynch has written a useful and pleasurable introduction to *As You Like It*. Students and faculty alike will derive many insightful and intelligent observations, especially from the very strong critiques of such brilliant scholars as Marjorie Beth Garber and Jean Elizabeth Howard.

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