

Una manus vobis vulnus opemque feret: Rosalind as Ovid in Shakespeare's As You Like It

Although *As You Like It* stands alongside *Titus Andronicus* as one of only three Shakespeare plays to mention Ovid by name, it has received scant scholarly attention. Most of the scholarship that does acknowledge Ovid's presence in *As You Like It* focuses on pastoral elements in the play (Young 1972; Fortin 1973). Aside from one brief reference in Bate 1993, scholars have largely neglected the play's echoes of the *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, and *Remedia Amoris*.

Although the cantankerous court-jester Touchstone complains that he is "honest Ovid [...] among the Goths" (III.iii.7-8), I suggest that it is Rosalind who takes on an Ovidian role in *As You Like It*. In her meetings with Orlando, she becomes a gender-swapped *praeceptor amoris*, claiming to have special knowledge of both the art and the remedy for love. When she first speaks to him while disguised as Ganymede, she upbraids him for failing to exhibit the usual signs of love (III.ii.380-388), and her list of symptoms comes straight from the *Ars Amatoria* and *Amores*. Embarrassed, Orlando begs Rosalind (whom he does not recognize, because she is dressed as a boy) to teach him how to woo his beloved; she offers to cure him instead, and to that end subjects him to some of Ovid's remedies. Most notably, she forces him to dwell on his beloved's worst qualities (especially her inconstancy -- *Rem.* 301) and, by maintaining her disguise, denies him the opportunity to spend time with "Rosalind" (e.g. *Rem.* 213-8). By making use of some of these strategies, Rosalind has the opportunity to make sure that Orlando is serious about his intentions. Of course, like Ovid, she teaches both the remedy for love and the art of wooing: "Una manus vobis vulnus opemque feret" (*Rem.* 44). Once she has taught Orlando how to woo her and failed to 'cure' his lovesickness, she provides an alternative remedy by arranging their marriage.

Most scholarship on Shakespeare's affinity for Ovid makes the obligatory reference to Francis Meres's 1598 pronouncement that "the sweete wittie soule of Ouid liues in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare." That sweet and witty soul lives in Rosalind, too: even as a poet of exile, newly robbed of her home and her father, she is all wit and wordplay. For example, when Orlando tries to express his love through poetry, she teases that his verses stumble because they have too many feet (III.ii.167-73).

In addition to her instructions on wooing and her knack for wordplay, Rosalind is a winkingly self-conscious artist. As the character who understands the most of what is going on in Arden, she writes the play's happy ending, choosing her words carefully (especially when she addresses Orlando and Phoebe) so that she can set the stage for a final scene that will please everybody. After the quadruple wedding and restoration of civic order at the end of Act V, Rosalind comes back onstage alone and begins by musing on what makes a good epilogue. This playful, self-referential awareness of genre is reminiscent of Ovid, who begins one collection of poems by claiming that he meant to write an epic but got distracted (*Amores* 1.1.1-4), and, once he does get around to writing his epic, begins by outlining his poetic ambitions (*Met.* 1.1-4) and ends by self-assessing that he's achieved them (*Met.* 15.871-879).

I argue that, although Touchstone compares himself to Ovid, it is Rosalind who serves as the poet of exile in *As You Like It*. Lavinia, whose gruesome fate in *Titus Andronicus* has inspired far more scholarship on Shakespeare's reception of Ovid, becomes a passive text through her relationship to the ancient poet; Rosalind, on the other hand, becomes an author herself. By examining the oft-neglected echoes of Ovid in *As You Like It*, we can better understand the "infinite variety" of Ovid's work and Shakespeare's transformations of it.

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