

Kaitlin P.
Editing: Michelle Baleka

The Royal Shakespeare Company's *As You Like It*

The Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *As You Like It* ~~is performed in~~ September 2010 at Stratford-Upon-Avon is really as everyone—or no one—likes it. (this gives me the immediate impression that the production was bad and that you are about to explain why it failed, so I would consider rewording this opening if that's not what you intended) Directed by Michael Boyd, the ~~Shakespearean-drama performance~~ mixes the ~~almost-three-hour~~ word-for-word edition of Shakespeare's play with a few zany scenes that make one wonder if the director is trying a little *too* hard to make this production stand out. That being said, like many RSC productions, this one is still satisfactory, capturing the basics of what any audience would expect from a Shakespearean drama.

Not only is this production consistent with the original vernacular of Shakespeare's edition of the play, but the play's set, costumes, and other special effects are also executed in a way that does not take away from the text. For example, the set consists of neutral-coloured panels in the floor and backdrop that open to make the space look bigger when depicting the forest (~~comma~~) and close to make it look more enclosed when depicting the court. The props are extremely sparse, leaving much to the imagination and to the audience's interpretation of the words and actions of the characters on-stage. The costumes are ~~from the period in which the play was written,~~ based on clothing from the Elizabethan period, and are very colourless. In the court scenes, the actors are dressed in black gowns with white ruffles and collars, while the pastoral scenes have ~~the same~~ black and white attire that is more informal and outdoorsy. Boyd is

certainly not concerned with creating spectacle; instead, he wants Shakespeare's words to speak for themselves.

(You may want to attach this to the paragraph above since the "this" you are referring to is the subject of the previous paragraph, and thus a bit unclear when isolated in a new paragraph)

The only ~~downfall~~ downside of this is the sparseness of this production's pastoral setting. The pastoral contexts that arise in many of Shakespeare's plays often act as a place of refuge or sanctuary and *As You Like It* is no exception as the Forest of Arden harbours Duke Senior and his men as well as Orlando, Rosalind, and their friends. However, this production's dark and lifeless setting of the politically corrupt court does not greatly differ from the setting of the forest. The lighting is dim and the props are scarce in both the court and the forest. The only props that introduce the pastoral setting to the audience in Act 2, Scene 4 are a big bundle of leafless vines and a wheelbarrow. Although these do contribute to a rustic setting, they do not capture the greenery of a natural setting (I think you could put the comma here and delete the commas between "and" & "thus" and after "thus" as well) and, thus, do not symbolically present the forest as any more life-giving than the court.

However, if Boyd was intending for a more realistic portrayal of the pastoral setting, rather than a symbolic portrayal of a life-giving and romantic setting, then he does accomplish that by using the effects of snow in Act 2, Scene 1. This makes sense in connection to the director's close attention to the text itself and Duke Senior's speech about the cold being better than the falseness of court. Boyd also uses guns as props in Act 2, Scene 1, showing the harshness of life in the forest and the need to hunt for food. While the contrasts between the two main settings of the court and the forest are minimal, both settings are realistically portrayed.

The humour in this production sets it apart from others and gets a consistent response of laughter from the audience. For example, when Touchstone enters the forest setting in Act 2, Scene 4, he is wrapped up in an exaggerated amount of vines and twigs with a sour expression upon his face. In Act 3, Scene 2, the shepherd Corin skins a rabbit on-stage as Touchstone watches. This not only re-enforces the director's realistic portrayal of the pastoral life, but it also is infused with more of the same sarcastic, dry humour. As Corin butchers the animal, Touchstone holds up a cardboard sign that says "no animals were harmed". (the period should be enclosed within the quotation marks: "no animals were harmed.") The audience laughs at the tongue-in-cheek humour. The humour not only provides continuity within the production, but it also gives a modern spin to the comedic aspect of this Shakespearean drama.

The actors play a big role in infusing humour into the production too. Richard Katz is an extraordinary Touchstone. The character Touchstone plays the role of a fool in the court and in the forest. However, Katz brings out this role-playing into the live performance as well. In the scene where Corin skins the rabbit in Act 3, Scene 2, the audience claps when Corin finishes the job. Katz brings his role as jokester to life when he rolls his eyes at the audience and challenges them: "So, you'll clap for him." He proceeds to pull out a branch and start whittling and, when he gets no response, he waves the branch at the audience until they start clapping for him too. It's unclear whether Katz comes up with this on the spot or not, but he wholeheartedly steps into his character and acts as the performance's fool, not just the court's fool.

Jaques, who also doubles as Lord Amiens, is brought to life by Forbes Masson. The melancholy and pessimistic lord accompanies Duke Senior and is, ironically, one of the funniest characters in this production. His melancholy is exaggerated in contrast to the romantic aspects of this play. For example, in Act 2, Scene 5, Jaques comes on-stage singing in a mournful tone.

When he stops playing, he looks at the audience suspiciously and says, “More? You want more?” The audience laughs as he enters into dialogue with them. Throughout the play, one can be sure that Jaques will show up at the most romantic or serious moments, roll his eyes and throw in some exaggerated, pessimistic comment that will make everyone chuckle.

Katy Stephens plays a strong, confident Rosalind. In fact, she makes Orlando, played by Jonjo O'Neill, seem like a minor character. Although there are some good moments of chemistry between Orlando and Rosalind, Stephens' (not sure why there is an apostrophe here) is a more convincing Ganymede than the beloved of Orlando. This feministic portrayal of a poised Rosalind and boring Orlando raises questions about the director's choice to leave out most of the original epilogue, a final speech that reaffirms Rosalind's independence to “kiss as many of” the audience as she likes. Instead, Stephens sings a generic farewell song to the audience.

This 2010 production of *As You Like It* is a satisfactory interpretation of the text, creating a period drama that utilizes Elizabethan costumes and language. At the same time, the director replaces pastoral symbolism with a more realistic tone and infuses humour that connects a modern audience to the Shakespearean classic. Richard Katz as Touchstone, Forbes Masson as Jaques, and Katy Stephens as Rosalind fulfill the director's purpose of a period drama that connects to a modern audience through their use of subtle humour and through Stephens (should be Stephens' here) feministic Rosalind. The production is well-interpreted and performed—it's likeable—but it's not anything new.

Works Cited

As You Like It. By William Shakespeare. Dir. Michael Boyd. Digital Theatre. 2010. *The Royal Shakespeare Company*. Web. 17 February 2016.