

Some Considerations on the Pastourelle in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

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ABSTRACT

Touchstone and Audrey's love relationship in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is here to be considered a mechanism of evasion that the author uses as an alternative to the rigidity of the conventions of the time. In the play, courtly Rosalind subverts convention in order to prove her beloved Orlando's faith and to be able to finally marry him. Similarly, the idealized shepherdess Phebe fails to meet the requirements of convention as soon as she yields to Silvius' amorous proposals after finding out her beloved Ganymede's real female identity. Illiterate goatherd Audrey, however, does not have to take part in any love debate to subvert convention in order to marry the clown Touchstone, whom she openly loves. Touchstone and Audrey's unconventional love ending in marriage highlights the absurdity both of courtly conventions and the need to subvert them that starts to be present in the Renaissance texts since the 1590s. Thus, here the pastourelle is proved not to work as a necessary 'safety valve' for the convention to remain viable, but as an alternative to any kind of convention whatsoever, pastourelle itself included.

Pastourelle is part of the arsenal of lyric genres at the disposal of medieval courtly love poets who wrote within a rigid convention that relegated the relations between the sexes to an extremely elevated plane of spiritual improvement and refinement of character (Forster 1969:85). This admission of no final satisfaction in love —except that which can be derived from purifying and high-minded frustration— makes genres such as the pastourelle an ideal way of questioning the Petrarchan convention within the convention. The low origin of the lady in the genre allows the love poet to escape the authority of convention, to forget courtly manners for a while,

and to be able to momentarily relax entering a new alternative love code in which the identification of love labor with self-purification does no longer apply.

These considerations taken, Touchstone and Audrey's unconventional love relationship in *As You Like It* can be considered to be an unconventional pastourelle with which Shakespeare highlights the absurdity both of courtly conventions and the need to subvert them that starts to be present in the Renaissance texts since the 1590s. The present study analyzes Shakespeare's departure from the convention of the pastourelle, a genre which has been commonly used by courtly love poets in order to escape the inflexibility of the convention itself. The analysis proves pastourelle not to work as a conventional 'safety valve' supporting the authority of the courtly convention, but as a clear alternative to the negative rigidity of any kind of convention whatsoever, pastourelle itself included.¹

Although the love story of the courtly clown Touchstone and the young goatherd Audrey takes place in a pastoral setting, the Forest of Arden, they do not play the traditional roles of the courtly love poet and the beautiful shepherdess of a conventional pastourelle, neither their rhetoric aims at the traditional love debate commonly found in pastourelles. Besides, it is not hard for the fool Touchstone to get Audrey's amorous favor. Touchstone's role at court is that of a clown. He is not a real courtly character coming to the forest to win a young beautiful shepherdess before turning back to worship his courtly marble-hearted lady. Rather on the contrary, he shows his intention of naturally getting Audrey's love from the very beginning, even if that implies marriage.

Audrey, in that sense, is not portrayed as a threatened beautiful shepherdess either. Rather on the contrary, she is characterized as an illiterate goatherd who does not have to protect her virtue from Touchstone's possible abuse. Thus, she is not forced by the convention of the pastourelle to feel the need to take part in a love debate to prove Touchstone's real intentions

¹ The unconventionality in the pastourelle characterized by Touchstone and Audrey has been widely assumed. Judy Z. Kronenfeld 1978: 147 points out that "In courting Audrey, Touchstone assumes the role of the knight attempting to win a country maid. But while the social distance between the knight and the shepherdess in pastourelle is very great, in Touchstone's case the courtship becomes parody, for he only pretends to a great difference in rank". The present study analyzes Shakespeare's departure from the convention of the pastourelle in order to point to the author's possible intention of highlighting the absurdity both of courtly conventions and the need to subvert them by the use of conventional 'safety valves' such as pastourelle that starts to be present in the Renaissance texts since the 1590s.

or faith before accepting his love and getting married. That is right what Rosalind, the main female character of the courtly love story in the play, is both conventional and socially forced to do in order to assure herself the same safe marriage she desires.

The frustration caused by a rigid, elaborate and artificial code of courtly manners precluding spontaneity of expression and denying natural conduct led men to long to escape the repression of society (Pincis 1979:70). Many times, this longing for escaping repression led men straight away to the forest, to try to get some shepherdess' favor before going back to artificial courtly manners.² In courting Audrey, Touchstone assumes the role of the knight attempting to win a country maid. But while the social distance between the knight and the shepherdess in pastourelle is very great, in Touchstone's case the courtship becomes parody (Kronenfeld 1978:147). Shakespeare introduces him as a courtly clown; one of those artificial fools who mimic the limitations of natural fools and consequently have license to mock others in society (Janik 1998:1).

Touchstone shows his love for the non-idealized goatherd Audrey in a quite conscious and natural way:³ "As the ox hath his bow sir, the horse his curb, and the falcon her bells, so man hath his desires, and as pigeons bill, so wedlock would be nibbling" (III, 3:71-73).⁴ He cannot woo illiterate Audrey singing a song ending with the idea of the song as fulfillment in itself (Sproxton 2000:21). Thus, he can not hide his natural desire to win her behind any kind of idealizing discourse: "When a man's verses can not be understood, nor a man's good seconded with the forward child, understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room" (III, 3:9-12). He would have preferred a different situation: "I do truly. For thou swear'st to me thou art honest. Now, if thou wert a poet, I might have some hope thou didst feign" (III, 3: 21-23). But, as he concludes, "be it as it may be, I will marry" (III, 3: 35-36).

The clown's conscious love ends up leading Audrey to the natural marriage she openly desires: "I do desire it with all my heart; and I hope it is no dishonest desire, to desire to be a woman of the world" (V, III: 3-5); that is to say: a married woman. At first sight, it may be tempting to think

² See William Paden (1995:299-325).

³ See Sproxton (2000:15-33).

⁴ Touchstone makes use of a "priamel" with examples taken from nature in order to show his natural desire to get Audrey's favor. See Virgil (II, 63-65): "Torua laena lupum sequitur, lupus ipse capellam./ florentem cytium sequitur lasciuia capella, / te Corydon, o Alexi: trahit sua quemque uoluptas".

that she has stumbled on an impropriety because if “woman of the world” can mean “loose woman”, then to desire to be one is no ‘honest’ desire (Lathan 1991:119). Nevertheless, to desire to be a “loose woman” not subject to courtly conventions, love treatises or conduct books can look like a honest desire in this play. On this occasion, it is right looseness what allows the free acknowledgement of those desires which lead to a marriage that is necessary for women in the social system of the time. In these years, although the mystical idealism associated with Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy did not disappear altogether, it was significantly qualified by a more secular world view, as the new scientific philosophy began to secure its ideological hegemony and married love started to be defined with reference to that intermediate concept of *amore humano* or humane love with which Ficino had attempted to reconcile his binary opposition between a heavenly and earthly desire (Berry 1989:136).⁵

In the courtly love story of the play characterized by Rosalind and Orlando, Rosalind is not given the chance to trust the love Orlando says to profess her in his courtly poems. This lack of confidence on Orlando’s real intentions prevents her from showing her own love for Orlando openly. Throughout the play, she can only confess it to her cousin Celia: “O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love! But it can not be sounded” (IV, 1: 195-197), or try to explain her situation to Orlando when she is hidden behind her Ganymede disguise: “You may as soon make her that you love believe it, which I warrant she is apter to do than to confess she does. That is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their consciences” (III, 2: 377-381).⁶

Both Rosalind and Audrey get to marry their respective suitors at the end of the play despite their different origins and the different conditions under which their love stories take place. Being women of the early modern period, they can really only be examined in terms of their relationship to the marriage paradigm (Jankowsky 1992:24). In this context, it is not surprising that they both prefer a safe marriage assuring them a safe place

⁵ Pastourelle cannot make the convention remain viable in this play once its rigidity has been completely ridiculed by real social conditions forcing women to a safe marriage.

⁶ In the “Eighth Dialogue” of Andreas Capellanus’s *Tractatus de amore* (1184-1186), women of the higher nobility are already advised: “No woman of any character ought to be so quick to assent to her lover’s desire, for the quick and hasty granting of love arouses contempt in the lover and makes the love he has long desired seem cheap... Therefore a woman ought first to find out the man’s character by many tests and have clear evidence of his good faith” (p. 132). Translation is taken from Walsh, P. G. trans. 1982: *De amore*. London, Duckworth.

in society in the future. Both of them do finally make up their minds to agree with the marriage rituals. Audrey ends up meeting all the requirements to get the safe place of a chaste wife giving her the chance to become a respected widow in the future despite her lack of idealization. She may be depicted as honest, not as virgin: "Well, I am not fair, and therefore I pray the gods make me honest" (III, 3: 29-30). It may be true that this honesty, as Touchstone answers to her, is only due to her ugliness: "Truly, and to cast away honesty upon a foul slut were to put good meat into an unclean dish" (III, 3: 31-32). It may be also true that she first learns of the rituals of marriage when a third character, the melancholic Jaques, advises Touchstone to marry her and to avoid living "in bawdry".⁷ Otherwise, it is highly probable that she would have accepted as natural the clandestine union Touchstone confesses to preferring in an aside after listening to Jaques' advice: "I am not in the mind but I were better to be married of him than of another, for he is not like to marry me well; and not being well married, it will be a good excuse for me hereafter to leave my wife" (III, 3: 81-85). But, playing the role of the ugly goatherd of the unconventional pastourelle of the play, she is not forced to feel the need to take part in any love debate proving Touchstone's faith before showing her own desire to be a married woman.

Courtly Rosalind, meanwhile, has to overcome more obstacles than rustic Audrey to get free, final, and safely married to Orlando, whom she loves. Their courtly origin deprives both Rosalind and her beloved Orlando from the freedom to express the emotions Touchstone and Audrey enjoy. Forced to profess idealized love to Rosalind, Orlando is unable to show his intention to marry her in his poems. Expected to keep courtly manners, Rosalind is not allowed to admit her love for Orlando either. In order to avoid revealing her desire to marry him, she is conventionally supposed to miss the chance of knowing her beloved's real intentions. The only thing she can do in order to prevent Orlando's sonnets from ending with the idea of the song as fulfillment in itself, is to hide herself behind her Ganymede

⁷ According to G. M. Pinciss' article "The Savage Man in Spenser Shakespeare and Renaissance English Drama". *The Elizabethan Theatre* VIII (1979): 83, Jaques would belong to a third category of savages: "This species is composed of those who reject civilized life, take up residence alone, and gradually reverse the process of acculturation... Their reasons for fleeing the society of men may vary, but most frequently they are either ordered into exile or banishment—usually as a result of slander— or they suffer from the betrayal of love or friendship". See also Winfried Schleiner's "Jaques and the Melancholy Stag". *English Language Notes* XVII, 3 (1980): 175-179 and M. D. Faber's "On Jaques: Psychoanalytic Remarks". *The University Review* 2 (1969): 91-96.

disguise. Once hidden, she can take part in a particular love debate with Orlando which would not have really fit her courtly condition otherwise.⁸ The debate starts as a conventional courtly war of words in which Orlando feigns he woos Rosalind in Ganymede disguise. But, very soon, Rosalind subverts all conventions and leads the debate towards the safe marriage she needs and desires, no matter the idea of marriage is more likely to be present in a conventional pastourelle rather than in a courtly love debate:

Ros. Then you must say 'I take thee Rosalind for wife'.

Orl. I take thee Rosalind for wife

(IV, 1: 128-129)

Love relationships do not meet the requirements of the convention in this play by Shakespeare even when the main characters involved are idealized shepherds and shepherdesses such as Silvius and Phebe. At first sight, everything seems to be working according to the convention. Silvius describes himself as a good courtly lover and, playing that role, he does not hesitate to woo Phebe and to identify her with the cause of his death in this way.⁹ Nevertheless, subversion of convention takes place as soon as Phebe acknowledges her love for Rosalind in Ganymede disguise and she does finally accept Silvius' love, without need of being wooed, after finding out Ganymede's real identity.

All obstacles between these two couples of idealized characters and marriage get sudden and finally overcome without need of wooing thanks to an absurd lie Rosalind removes seven times:

Pray you no more of this, 'tis like the howling of Irish wolves against the moon.

[*To Sil.*] I will help you if I can. [*To Phebe*] I would love you if I could. Tomorrow meet me all together. [*To Phebe*] I will marry you, if ever I marry woman, and

I'll be married tomorrow. [*To Orl.*] I will satisfy you, if ever I satisfied man, I

⁸ This particular love debate allows Rosalind to prove Orlando to be a good lover not really in the Petrarchan sense, but rather according to the darker, more satirical courtly love precepts of Ovid and Andreas Capellanus. See Oestreich-Hart's (2000).

⁹ In his *Ars amatoria*, Ovid advises: "swear that you are dying of frantic love" (I.374), implying, of course, that no such thing is true. Andreas Capellanus repeatedly suggests this stratagem for his lovers of various classes. Although the tactic is used in his Second, Fifth, and Eighth Dialogues, the author puts his strongest statement in the mouth of the Fourth Lover: "If, then, you send me away without the hope of your love, you will drive me to an early death, after which none of your remedies will do any good, and so you may be called a homicide" (lo. 67). Translation is taken from Moore (1982).

you shall be married tomorrow. [*To Sil.*] I will content you, if what pleases you contents you, and you shall be married tomorrow. [*To Or.*] As you love Rosalind meet. [*To Sil.*] As you love Phebe meet. And as I love no woman, I'll meet. So fare you well. I have left you commands (V, 2: 110-122).

The end of the play highlights the absurdity both of courtly conventions and the need to subvert them that starts to be present in the Renaissance texts since the 1590s. In his play *As You Like It*, Shakespeare provides an alternative to this absurdity through the unconventional pastourelle played by the couple of fools conformed by the clown Touchstone and the illiterate goatherd Audrey. The three main female characters of the three different love stories in the play, Rosalind, Phebe and Audrey, end up getting a safe place in society through a marriage they desire. But Audrey, the illiterate ugly goatherd, does not have to react or to take part in any love debate to subvert convention. The goatherd's lack of idealization prevents the courtly clown Touchstone from wooing her while playing the role of the courtly knight in the forest who tries to escape the rigidity of court. Shakespeare does not use pastourelle as a conventional 'safety valve' supporting the authority of the courtly convention in *As You Like It*, but as a clear alternative to the rigidity of any kind of convention whatsoever and its negative consequences.

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