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Allison Grant

University of Akron, alg49@zips.uakron.edu

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Recommended Citation

Grant, Allison (2011) "The Dangers of Playing House: Celia's Subversive Role in As You Like It," *Selected Papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference*: Vol. 4 , Article 5.

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The Dangers of Playing House: Celia's Subversive Role in *As You Like It*

Allison Grant, *The University of Akron*

As a result of Rosalind's cross-dressing and the various romantic plots of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, the play has long been regarded as thought-provoking in regard to homoerotic relations. In fact, "Shakespeare's *As You Like It* has become a centerpiece in criticism on early modern English gender and sexual prescriptions and the theatre's role in reputing or reaffirming a patriarchal and/or heteronormative social structure" (Segal 1). The effects of Rosalind's disguise as Ganymede are virtually too numerous to count as she flirts her way through the forest of Ardenne, inspiring love and lust in male and female characters alike. The complex web of desire woven by Rosalind ensnares many of the characters with whom she comes into contact during the course of her exile; not only is Orlando mesmerized by both Rosalind and Ganymede, but Phoebe is as well. The questions that arise from the convoluted courtships of *As You Like It* are seemingly limitless. Does Orlando recognize that Ganymede is in actuality his Rosalind, or does he genuinely enjoy feigning courtship with the fair youth? Is Phoebe attracted to Ganymede's masculinity, or is she attracted to the supposed young boy's underlying feminine qualities? What are the implications of Rosalind-cum-Ganymede's reactions to Phoebe's advances? Is Celia's devotion to Rosalind more than that of a childhood friend? Further consideration of the implications of Rosalind's choice of name, which is traditionally associated with the homoerotic – as well as the fact that the actor playing her would have been male – has led countless critics to attempt to decipher the exact nature of desire among those living in Ardenne.

In order to enter into a discussion of homosexuality in *As You Like It*, it is necessary to first acknowledge Alan Bray's groundbreaking work, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, in which he recognizes that, "the terms in which we now speak of homosexuality cannot readily be translated into those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," as well as the fact that, "female homosexuality was rarely linked in popular thought with male homosexuality, if indeed it was recognized at all" (17).¹ Awareness of this fact then naturally leads to the question of self-identity,

and whether it is appropriate to ascribe modern labels to personalities who, linguistically, would not have possessed the terminology to categorize themselves as either homo or heterosexual. Because of the complex nature of the play's main romantic relationships—due to Rosalind's cross-dressing escapades—this question of sexual identity presents a particular challenge when analyzing *As You Like It*.

Through the chapter entitled “The Homoerotics of Shakespearean Comedy” in her book *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*, Valerie Traub circumvents this dilemma by focusing on the circular nature of desire within *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, rather than homosexuality itself (117). In the case of *As You Like It* her cogent reading of both plays provides a solution to the question of sexual self-identification in the culture of early modern England when she states that:

I am not arguing that Rosalind or Orlando or Phebe “is” “a” “homosexual.” Rather, at various moments in the play, these characters temporarily inhabit a homoerotic position of desire....The entire logic of *As You Like It* works against such categorization, against fixing upon and reifying any one mode of desire. (128-29)

Instead of viewing each character's sexuality as invariable, Traub proposes that the play's gender-bending plot lines invoke questions of the circular nature and mutability of desire rather than simply homosexuality itself. Traub uses both Phebe's and Orlando's attraction to Ganymede as examples of “dual sexuality that feels no compulsion to make arbitrary distinctions between kinds of objects,” noting that, for instance, “homoerotic desire in *As You Like It*...circulates from Phebe's desire for the ‘feminine’ in Rosalind/Ganymede to Rosalind/Ganymede's desire to be the ‘masculine’ object of Phebe's desire” (127). Furthermore, Traub suggests that “the salient concern may be less the threat posed by homoerotic desire *per se* than that posed by non-monogomy and non-reproduction” (141).

This notion of circular desire is an edifying critical lens with which to frame a discussion of *As You Like It*, specifically regarding the nature of Celia's affection for Rosalind. Celia is notably absent in Traub's examination of the mutability of desire, despite her acknowledgment in a previous essay of the erotic qualities of her discourse with Rosalind

(*Renaissance* 171). I would suggest that Celia's omission from Traub's discussion of the circular nature of desire is appropriate; this is not because she does *not* exhibit what in modern terms would be described as "homoerotic" desires, but rather because she *does*, and does so consistently—despite her eventual marriage to Oliver. The romantic undertones of Celia's affection for Rosalind remain consistent throughout the play; subsequently, Celia's character does not reflect circular desire as clearly, for instance, as Orlando or Phoebe's characters do. This is not intended to suggest that Celia herself is not *capable* of circular desire, but rather simply to acknowledge that, within the play, her desire remains fixated on Rosalind. It remains important to note that while her *affection* for Rosalind will be shown to remain constant, Celia's *sexuality* itself may still be viewed as capable of circularity—for instance, although her attraction is first evinced towards the feminine Rosalind, her desire transcends the guises of gender and remains even while Rosalind-cum-Ganymede begins to acquire traditionally "masculine" behaviors during their time in Ardenne. Carrying out an examination of those characters who, for whatever reason, do not act on circular desire within *As You Like It* proves to be a worthwhile expansion of the concepts outlined by Traub; in fact, an acknowledgement of this further reinforces Traub's suggestion that *As You Like It* allows for consideration of a "dual sexuality that feels no compulsion to make arbitrary distinctions between kinds of objects" (*Desire* 127). Celia participates in the "conflict between discourses of gender and sexuality because Celia desires Rosalind, regardless of the "kind" of object—male or female—she may happen to 'be' at the moment (*Desire* 127).

Furthermore, I would extend Traub's conclusion that "*exclusive male homoeroticism...would disrupt important early modern economic and social imperatives: inheritance of name, entitlement, and property*" and suggest that exclusive female homoeroticism would pose an equally significant threat to "these imperatives, crucial to the social hierarchies of early modern England" (141). The actions of Celia provide ample opportunity for applying Traub's conclusions to potentially exclusive female partnerships, which, like "exclusive male homoeroticism" would result in the "non-reproduction" which she determines to be the "salient concern" underlying cultural anxieties about homoeroticism (141). Throughout the course of the play, Celia, motivated by a constant want to

remain near to Rosalind, makes a series of subversive decisions which may be viewed as potentially disruptive to the economic and social imperatives of the time. Desirous of maintaining a relationship with Rosalind, Celia flees to the forest, where she succeeds in creating a viable and sustainable domestic realm without an authoritative male influence. Celia's desire and affection for Rosalind may further be seen as constant rather than variable by viewing her hasty marriage to Oliver as a way for Celia to not only maintain close proximity to Rosalind, but to obtain legal validation of the "sisterhood" that they have exemplified for years prior.

In order to understand Celia's desire as constant, as well as to see her often overlooked subversive tendencies, it is necessary to undertake a detailed examination of her affection for Rosalind as expressed by Celia herself. It is not insignificant that Celia's second line in the play regards the level of her devotion to Rosalind. She admits that, "I see thou lovest me not with the full weight that I love thee" (1.2.6-7). Celia tells Rosalind that "if the truth of thy love to me were so righteously tempered as mine is to thee," she would be able to overcome her pain regarding her father's exile by filling the emotional void left by his absence with Celia's affection (1.2.10-11). This imbalance in their relationship will continue throughout the play. In the first of many decisions which implicitly subvert the patriarchal systems and social imperatives noted by Traub, Celia insists that Rosalind should not worry herself with questions of inheritance:

You know my father hath no child but I, nor none is like to have.
And truly when he dies thou shalt be his heir; for what he hath
taken away from thy father perforce, I will render thee again in
affection. By mine honour I will, and when I break that oath, let me
turn monster. (1.2.14-18)

Celia's promise, if fulfilled, would effectively make Rosalind the Duke's heir—something that he undoubtedly would not approve of at this point in the play. As Will Fisher argues, "Celia's inheritance schema is set up in contradistinction to—and as a means of redressing the inequities of—the masculinist system that revolved around transactions between men" (101). Celia is not only purposefully circumventing her father's authority by vowing to share her inheritance with Rosalind, but with her suggestion she is also unwittingly undermining the patriarchal structure of the established system of inheritance. Jana Segal notes that as a result of this subversive behavior, Celia "is threatening to the patriarchal order at court

in her defiance of gender and social-class prescriptions, and this defiance complicates the reduction of Celia to the status of conformist "femme" (Traub *Renaissance* 171 qtd. in Fisher 6). The reduction of Celia's character to "femme" is further complicated by considering her desire for Rosalind as a potential motivation for the subversive acts she commits. Once Rosalind has been reassured by Celia's determination, she begins to muse aloud about falling in love, after which Celia advises her that, while she may fall in love for the purposes of lighthearted amusement, Rosalind ought to "love no man in good earnest" (1.2.22-23). Thus, in fewer than the first twenty-five lines of the women's introduction to the stage, Celia has displayed a tendency towards rebellion against societal norms, declared her devotion to Rosalind, and requested that her friend not fall in love—not in general, but with a man specifically. This brief interaction between the two not only raises questions about the nature of Celia's love, but also her level of commitment to what is normally seen as her social role of the submissive female.

Act 1.3, in which the Duke banishes Rosalind, speaks volumes about the nature of the two women's relationship with one another as well. Immediately following Orlando's wrestling match, the scene opens with Celia and Rosalind briefly discussing the latter's newfound romantic interest. Notably, Celia's references to Orlando mainly consist of lighthearted jokes until she disbelievably asks, "Is it possible on such a sudden you should fall into so strong a liking with old Sir Rowland's youngest son?" (1.3.22-23). Though Celia seems doubtful of Rosalind's abrupt attachment, Rosalind asks her to accept Orlando and to "love him because I do" (1.3.30-31). However, Celia's response to her friend's request is interrupted by the Duke's entrance and his subsequent banishing of Rosalind—a decision which Celia does everything in her power to circumvent. It is reasonable to infer that the Duke believes that Rosalind is distracting male attention from his daughter, thus decreasing her chances of attaining a betrothal. In this sense, it is possible to view the relationship between the two women as a potential disruption to the established social order from the beginning of the play. If the Duke's worries are well-founded, Rosalind's presence would hinder Celia's chances of marriage and in turn her ability to procreate and maintain the family name. The threat to social imperatives implied by the Duke's concern over Rosalind's presence will prove, as the play progresses, to be

further exacerbated when the women establish a life of their own in the forest of Ardenne.

Celia's pleas to her father make the audience further aware of the depths of her devotion to Rosalind, as well as the extent to which she considers herself and her cousin to be one:

We still have slept together,
Rose at an instant, learned, played, eat together,
And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans
Still we went coupled and inseparable. (1.3.67-70)

Clearly, the two women have never been apart—without considering any homoerotic implications, the fact remains that they are bedfellows and best friends who have shared the bond of sisters since childhood. Celia seems to be appealing to the Duke's sense of pity as she suggests that it would be cruel to separate two who have been living as one for so long. Celia invokes the imagery of Juno's swans as a way of underscoring the eternal connection between the women; as Traub suggests, "In Ovid, swans accompany Venus, goddess of love, not Juno, goddess of marriage; Celia's transposition thus conflates erotic love and marriage in the service of female amity" (*Renaissance* 171). Given Celia's quietly subversive tendencies, it is not entirely surprising that she would transpose even the legends of the gods in order to strengthen perceptions of her relationship with Rosalind—after all, she has already undermined the accepted system of inheritance by declaring Rosalind as her heir (and by extension the Duke's) in the previous scene.

Once it has become clear that the Duke is deaf to her pleas, Celia automatically includes herself in her friend's fate, and regards Rosalind's exile as her own: "Pronounce that sentence then on me, my liege. / I cannot live out of her company" (1.3.79-80). It is clear that, to Celia, a life without Rosalind is not only unimaginable, but unlivable. Celia's entreaties towards Rosalind as she tells her that she will be accompanying her into exile are expressed in romantic phrases; the language itself seems to echo that of a marriage ceremony as she questions if Rosalind has forgotten the love that "teacheth thee that thou and I am one" (1.3.91). She asks, "Shall we be sundered? Shall we part, sweet girl?" (1.3.92). Celia's language when questioning Rosalind's level of devotion reinforces the elevation of their relationship established through her earlier reference to "Juno's swans" (1.3.69). By choosing to go along with her

cousin and live in Ardenne of her own volition, Celia—and by extension Rosalind—takes ownership of her circumstances and once again undercuts the authority of the Duke. As Celia leaves the land of her father, she will take with her the Duke's ostensible motivation for banishing Rosalind, leaving him with no plausible explanation to give the court in regards to his decision. However, this is not the last example of Celia's subversive tendencies. As Janna Segal asserts, "Celia's non-conformist court behavior culminates in her choice of banishment and disguise, but the threat she poses to the dominant order continues to loom...in the Forest of Arden[ne]" (7).

Interestingly, despite the fact that Rosalind will eventually assume the disguise of a man, it is the outwardly feminine Celia that is the more decisive of the two during their time at court. While Rosalind, bewildered by the news of her banishment, seems at a loss for what to do, Celia takes control of the situation by suggesting the forest of Ardenne as a refuge and assuaging Rosalind's fears for their safety. She once again renounces the social imperatives of name and inheritance by assuming an alias and declaring "Let my father seek another heir" (1.3.93). Fisher discusses the implications of her chosen alias, *Aliena*, noting that the word *alienate* was often used in regards to property and disinheritance in early modern England, further emphasizing Celia's voluntary removal from, and redefinition of, "the very structure of the patriarchal family" (102). That she does not hesitate before offering to accompany Rosalind illustrates not only Celia's devotion, but also her confidence in their ability to become self-sufficient and exist outside of a male-dominated social structure. When Celia leaves the protection of her father to enter the forest with Rosalind, she bravely proclaims, "Now go we in content, / To liberty, and not to banishment"—a liberty for which the free-thinking Celia would seem to be better suited than the restrictive environment of the court (1.3.131-32).

Once the women arrive in the forest, Celia's affection for Rosalind remains unchanged. However, Rosalind's personality undergoes a distinct transformation once she assumes the masculine disguise of Ganymede—a change which further complicates the notions of both homo- and heterosexual desire contained within the play. While Celia was the more decisive of the two in the environment of the court, Rosalind-cum-Ganymede often takes charge while in Ardenne, particularly in her

courtship of Orlando. Her masculine behavior further complicates the homoerotic nature of desire within the play: “there is a certain homoerotic irony in that fact [which] has yet to be noted. As a ‘ganymede,’ Rosalind would be expected to play the part of a younger, more receptive partner in an erotic exchange. S/he thus not only inverts gender roles; s/he disrupts alleged homoerotic roles as well” (Traub *Desire* 127). Rosalind further asserts her authority as a “male” through her interactions with Phoebe, a young woman of the forest who falls in love with Ganymede. Rosalind’s brutal denial of Phoebe’s affections is perhaps the greatest example of her abuse of her powers as a “male” as she ruthlessly rebuffs the advances of the other woman in heartless terms: “Why, what means this? Why do you look on me? /I see no more in you than in the ordinary / Of nature’s sale-work” (3.5.42-44).

That Rosalind behaves in this way exemplifies Traub’s suggestion that “the relative power of each woman is aligned according to her *denial* of homoerotic bonds...the incipient heteroeroticism of the woman who is recipient rather than enunciator of homoerotic desire comes to stand as the natural telos of the play” (*Renaissance* 174). This is certainly true for Rosalind, whose courtship with Orlando takes center stage throughout *As You Like It*, despite the numerous other relationships evolving within the action of the play. In this regard, Celia is the definitive “enunciator of homoerotic desire,” and as such experiences a decrease in power and influence (*Renaissance* 174).

Celia’s reactions to Rosalind’s emotional transformations—including her growing absorption in Orlando—indicate that she is uncomfortable with not only the changes within the power dynamics of their friendship but with Rosalind’s impending marriage as well. Once Orlando’s presence in the forest is known, Celia is obviously distrustful of his motivations, and repeatedly indicates to Rosalind that she should exercise caution in her interactions with him. Notably, Celia never directly encourages Rosalind’s love of Orlando, and whenever she speaks to her friend of a man—Orlando or otherwise—romantically, her lines are either playful or sarcastic, rarely if ever indicating serious consideration. This fact is not lost on Rosalind, who comments on her friend’s attitude by chastising her: “Nay, but the devil take mocking. Speak sad brow and true maid” (3.2.194-95). In a later scene, observing Rosalind moved nearly to tears by Orlando’s unpunctuality, Celia compares Orlando to

Judas and states unequivocally that she does not believe him to be truly in love (3.4.7-8; 3.4.25). Furthermore, many of Celia's lines when discussing Orlando could easily be interpreted as biting sarcasm:

O that's a brave man. He writes brave verses, speaks brave words, swears brave oaths, and breaks them bravely, quite traverse, athwart the heart of his lover, as a puny tilter that spurs his horse but on one side breaks his staff, like a noble goose. But all's brave that youth mounts, and folly guides. (3.4.35-39)

Given Celia's distrust of Orlando's sincerity and her belief that his courtship of Rosalind is guided by folly, it is not surprising that when Rosalind asks her to perform their "marriage," she declares that "I cannot say the words" (4.1.109). Upon Orlando's exit after the mock marriage ceremony, Celia immediately confronts Rosalind, in language that not only acknowledges Rosalind's change in behavior, but also leaves no room to doubt her opinion of their coupling: "You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate. We must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest" (4.1.172-74). Once again, Celia denigrates the importance of Rosalind's relationship by reducing what her friend sees as an integral moment in their courtship to the status of a "love prate" (4.1.172).

Celia seems to resent Orlando's intrusion on the life she has established with Rosalind within the forest; her reactions may plausibly be motivated by a belief that Orlando is a threat to what she views as the permanence of her bond with Rosalind, as indicated first by her reference to the two as "Juno's swans" (1.3.69). The Ovidian implications of Celia's reference to Juno as well as Rosalind's choice of the alias Ganymede may be extended to the forest of Ardenne itself. Traub suggests that when "loosely associated with a pastoral environment aligned with the emotionally expansive Shakespearean 'green world,' female homoeroticism is ... part of an Ovidian heritage of metamorphosis that authorizes a temporary suspension of social order and fleeting indulgence of polymorphous desire" (175). This concept could easily be applied to the forest of Ardenne, a world far removed from the social restrictions of the courts, in which characters are able to experience desire in non-heteronormative ways. I would extend this argument by suggesting that the forest of Ardenne "authorizes a temporary suspension of social order" that also allows Rosalind and Celia to create a self-sufficient domesticity

free of outside male influences (*Renaissance* 175). While Celia certainly challenges the social order through her abdication of her inheritance and family name, her most subversive action is the purchasing of a cottage within Ardenne, where she and Rosalind successfully establish an independent homestead.

As Will Fisher states, “[T]he two women replicate and transform many of the material practices associated with the heterosexual marriage process” (100). In a culture where marriages were often seen as pecuniary transactions, Celia merges her finances with Rosalind’s to purchase a home, creating between the two women an autonomous economic unit. From the time that they enter the forest, the jewels and wealth gathered by each woman before fleeing the court have been merged into a mutual fund that is used to procure their cottage, thus extending their inseparability from an emotional to a fiscal realm. This is exemplified by Rosalind telling Corin, “Buy thou the cottage, pasture, and the flock, / And thou shalt have pay for it of *us*” and Celia adding that, “And *we* will mend thy wages” [my emphasis] (2.4.87-88). Significantly, the women now not only own a cottage, but a flock and pasture as well as sponsor an employee; in essence they have purchased a lifestyle. This is important to note because not only do the two now own a home together, but they have obtained the means to produce goods and earn profits, which would enable them to continue their life in Ardenne indefinitely if they so desire.

The fact that they own their own home and flock is emphasized multiple times by various characters throughout the play, including Rosalind during her denial of Phoebe’s advances when she says, “If you will know my house, / ‘Tis at the tuft of olives, here hard by” and then turns to Celia and commands her “Come, to our flock” (3.5.75-6, 81). Similarly, Oliver asks Celia (as *Aliena*) “Are you not the owner of the house I did enquire for?” (4.3.86-87). Celia’s response denotes once again her view that she and Rosalind constitute a single unit, as she replies - despite Oliver’s use of the singular *you*- “It is no boast, being asked, to say we are” (4.3.89). This emphasis placed on the women’s ownership of property reinforces Fisher’s assertion that “the act of purchasing the land is symbolically coded in the play as an instance of the women asserting control over their lives and freeing themselves” (105). In this regard, Celia’s aforementioned chastising of Rosalind, where she exclaims, “show

the world what the bird hath done to her own nest," may be interpreted as an expression of frustration that, through her interest in Orlando, Rosalind has destroyed their chances of sustaining the home they have created together (4.1.174). As such, Rosalind herself becomes a threat to the liberty that Celia so enthusiastically sought within the forest.

Having thus established that Celia and Rosalind have successfully created a domestic realm within the forest of Ardenne, capable of being sustained without outside male influence, it becomes possible to further the consideration of Celia and Rosalind's relationship as a threat to the "important early modern economic and social imperatives" mentioned previously (*Desire* 141). Throughout the course of the play - beginning with the Duke's motives behind his banishment of Rosalind - the women's relationship may be perceived as not only a threat to the patriarchal systems of inheritance and family name, but to heterosexual marriage and reproduction as well. Though they both become married at the conclusion of *As You Like It*, neither woman needs to do so in order to gain economic stability. While Rosalind clearly marries for love, Celia's motivation for marrying Oliver is, arguably, suspect. Notably, the "courtship" between Celia and Oliver is told second-hand, through Rosalind's assurances to Orlando that the two are in love: as Wu Lin-na notes, the love "between Oliver and Celia is not only indiscernible to [the] audience, but also to Rosalind and Orlando" (55). The little interaction between the two that is seen by the audience, as Celia listens to Oliver's tale of being rescued by Orlando, is more pragmatic than romantic. Orlando himself questions his brother's feelings for Celia, echoing the disbelief of the audience as he asks, "Is't possible that on so little acquaintance you should like her? That but seeing, you should love her? And loving, woo? And wooing, she should grant?" (5.2.1-3). It seems significant that despite the fact that he fell in love with Rosalind nearly instantaneously, Orlando seems to distrust that the same could be true for Oliver and Celia.

Traub notes that in many of Shakespeare's plays, "an originary, prior homoerotic desire is crossed, abandoned, betrayed; correlatively, a desire for men or a marital imperative is produced and inserted into the narrative in order to create a formal, 'natural' mechanism of closure" (*Renaissance* 175). This convention would certainly also hold true in regards to Celia's relationship with Rosalind, and the betrayal she seems

to feel as a result of her courtship with Orlando. Celia's devotion to Rosalind is well established through dialogue from the earliest introduction of her character; however, true to formula, a heterosexual marriage is necessary at the conclusion of the play. Significantly, *As You Like It* ends in not one or two couplings, but four. This abundance of heterosexual marriages is necessary in order to "balance" the homoerotic explorations of the text, as well as the extremity of the threat to the social order posed by, "Rosalind and Celia's alliance and their household [which is] made manifest by the particular way in which they are separated.... As a result, we might say that Orlando does not simply 'win' Rosalind; rather, he re-wins the domestic sphere for a masculine, reproductive regime" (Fisher 109).

Most, but not all of the marriages at the conclusion of *As You Like It* are founded on romantic love. Phoebe, for instance, agrees to marry Silvius simply because marriage to Rosalind-cum-Ganymede is not an option. Even Hymen's language when wedding the two is rife with heteronormative connotations: "You to his love must accord, / Or have a woman to your lord" (5.4.122-23). Similarly, as continuing the lifestyle that she established with Rosalind is no longer an option for Celia, she too enters a match that she may not be fully emotionally invested in. Celia's motives for marrying Oliver have long been analyzed by critics, resulting in a myriad of interpretations. While some choose to accept her motives as genuine, another possible view is that Celia marries Oliver as a response to the betrayal she feels when Rosalind chooses Orlando: she "meets Oliver at the right time, which provides an escape, and in a sense revenge...to get married [in front of] Rosalind" (Lin-na 55). However, these interpretations lack consideration of the depth of Celia's affection for Rosalind, as well as her tendency to challenge her own role as a traditional submissive female. It seems an oversimplification to attribute these potential motives to a woman who has not only demonstrated subversive tendencies but declared a lasting commitment. Whether she is motivated by attraction, revenge, or both, could the Celia who once subjected herself to exile in order to remain near to Rosalind, really replace the object of her desire so readily?

Rather than viewing Celia's decision as "revenge" or even more simply as her giving up on her chances to remain in Ardenne, it is possible to interpret Celia marrying Oliver as a way for her to maintain

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both physical and emotional proximity to Rosalind. By deciding to marry Oliver, Celia may be seen as tacitly submitting to societal pressures to conform to the established patriarchal social structure. For Traub, this would imply that this decision is the “desire for men or a marital imperative [which] is produced and inserted into the narrative in order to create a formal, ‘natural’ mechanism of closure,” – a mechanism made necessary by Celia’s earlier subversive actions (*Renaissance* 175). However, in a twist that would not be uncommon for one of Shakespeare’s women, Celia’s decision may also be read as a way for her to subvert the very system which is pressuring her yet again. By recognizing the cultural loophole that, “*if* same-gender erotic practices *could* exist coterminously with the marriage contract and husbandly authority, there would be little cause for alarm,” Celia is able to maintain her intimacy with Rosalind [emphasis added] (*Renaissance* 181). Though the precise nature of their bond may have been altered by their marriages, Rosalind and Celia are now lawfully sisters, a development that not only gives a legal acknowledgement of the connection between the two women, but potentially even provides Celia with a judicial foundation for fulfilling her earlier promise of sharing her inheritance with Rosalind. Through her decision to marry Oliver, Celia may be tacitly acknowledging that once she participates in heterosexual marriage rites, and thus proves her willingness to participate in reproductive society, her desire and affection for Rosalind will be allowed to continue undeterred.

Notes

1. Valerie Traub has worked to correct this oversight of female homosexuality studies mentioned by Bray. In particular, she discusses what she terms the “(in)significance of lesbian desire” in her work *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (158).

2. Segal notes that “Valerie Traub recognizes the homoerotic potential of *As You Like It*’s portrayal of ‘chaste’ female friendships; nonetheless, Traub finds that the play . . . renders such love impossible, ‘insignificant’ . . . and unthreatening to the social order because of the lover-friends’ heightened femininity.” Segal further asserts that, “rendering Celia ‘femme’ is problematized by her dissident behaviour before and after her self-imposed exile” (5-6).

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