

Forming the “Chain of Chains”: Rosalind and the Magic of Love in *As You Like It*

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In her relationship with Orlando in *As You Like It*, the heroine Rosalind exhibits an amazing fusion of gender and power roles. Initially, she appears to act like many of Shakespeare’s other strong-willed females, such as Viola in *Twelfth Night* and Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, who assume male disguises to solve their problems. Like Portia and Viola, Rosalind dresses as a boy to do things prohibited by society for females. She finds herself in dire straits and literally trapped as far as her gender will allow. Indeed, in comparison to the other characters at the beginning of this play, Rosalind appears to be the most disadvantaged and lacking in abilities to succeed even apart from her gender. Margaret Boerner Beckman notes the many strikes against her: she is “under sentence of death, without a father or lover, without money,” and yet, despite all this, “she also seems to have greater powers than anyone else in the play.”¹ This power is not simply a result of Rosalind’s own forceful will like many of Shakespeare’s other heroines. Rather, as Rosalind hides in the Forest of Arden and recognizes her affection for Orlando, she also discovers a force beyond her own that she can work to her advantage. Dressed as a male, Rosalind gains power by assuming the role of a magician to manipulate Orlando. Calling upon the Renaissance philosophies of the magic art, Rosalind transforms herself as she wields the age-old power to direct Orlando’s actions and train him to become exactly what she desires.

An important aspect of Rosalind’s gender/power construct is her periodic identification as a magician. Margaret Boerner Beckman classifies Rosalind as a magician “because throughout the whole play she has made extraordinary, seemingly impossible—and thus ‘magical’—conjunctions between contrary things.”² John Powell Ward calls Rosalind a “spellbinder” for her skill in manipulating Orlando, “mesmerizing” Phebe, and “conjuring” the

audience women in the epilogue.³ And yet, these critics have not identified the exact method of her magic nor followed the progression of Rosalind's power. In fact, her magic is much more than simply a game; it appears to follow, almost precisely, the pattern outlined by the Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno in his book *De vinculis in genere* ("Of bonds in general"). A near contemporary of Machiavelli and his famous work *The Prince*, Bruno's lesser-known book addresses the same topics of power and manipulation, yet from the perspective of magic and love. Bruno provides a highly detailed account of the process and capabilities of magic when employed in the context of love. The basic premise of the philosophy is that "love rules the world" and that the god of love, Eros, "is lord of the world; he ushers, directs, controls, and appeases everyone" because "love is the foundation of all emotions."⁴ Similar to Machiavelli's prototype, the magicians identified by Bruno manipulate people through the power of love. Indeed, Bruno asserts that everything reduces to love, and this premise is widely apparent in the relationships of *As You Like It*. Everything of value or importance in the play comes down to love, and it is this bond that motivates Rosalind's actions with Orlando. Thus, Rosalind acts as a magician in the pattern of Bruno's philosophy to fulfill her desires for Orlando's love and to mold him into her ideal over.

Before examining Rosalind's role as a magician, we must first understand the requirements established by Bruno for such a figure. The powers of magic that Bruno analyzes all originate in the emotion of love. These two elements of love and magic are similar and interrelated: both love and magic involve the senses and imagination. One scholar, Ioan Couliano, explains Bruno's philosophy: "Love is, in turn, magic, since its processes are identical to magic processes."⁵ Bruno's work *De vinculis in genere* explores psychological manipulation and, more specifically, the power available to a manipulator in using love. Everything in Bruno's world is defined in terms of love and in relation to Eros because "the highest bond, the most important and the most general, belongs to Eros."⁶ Furthermore, this philosophy assigns all people to two basic categories: the manipulator and the manipulated.⁷ The manipulator possesses the power of magic, and this magic action "occurs through indirect contact, through sounds and images which exert their power over the senses of sight and hearing."⁸ The magician/manipulator employs the powers of his subjects' senses and their susceptibility to the phantasies of the mind. The ultimate goal of Bruno's manipulator is control by enchaining the

manipulated in his bond.⁹ By working on the senses of the subject, a magic manipulator is able to gain this control: "The manipulator, in order to use his techniques, applies himself to knowing and fathoming through intuition the characteristics, reactions, and emotions of the subject to be bound to him."¹⁰ Thus, the manipulator must be in tune with the inner workings of the manipulated.

Yet, although magicians manipulate the phantasies of others, they must be removed from the phantasies themselves. Most mortals are influenced by the powers of imagination, but a magician must have complete control over his own imagination.¹¹ Bruno explicitly warns would-be manipulators not to be controlled by their own phantasies, "lest, believing himself to be their master, he nevertheless becomes dominated by them."¹² Couliano explains that "in order to exercise control over others, it is first essential to be safe from control by others."¹³ Bruno also provides two vital guidelines for the workers of this magic power. He says that 1) a magician must be able to accurately identify the source of information and influences in the world, and 2) "he must render himself completely immune to any emotion prompted by external causes."¹⁴ A magician must hold himself above both the outside influences of the world and his own inner emotions. Ironically, to work the powers of love, he must be completely detached from any involvement himself.

Returning to the text of *As You Like It*, we find that this requirement of an impartial and immune magician appears problematic in Rosalind's case. Early in the play, she demonstrates definite signs of affection for Orlando. After Orlando's wrestling match, Rosalind bestows a "chain" upon him and hesitates to leave as she first begins to feel Cupid's power over her (1.2.233).¹⁵ Later, when she expresses her love pains to Celia, Celia at first misunderstands her and thinks that Rosalind's sorrow is for her father, yet Rosalind corrects her assumption: "No, some of it is for my child's father," signaling a rather firm attachment to the man (1.3.11). To Celia's response that she should shake off her feelings as mere burrs on her stockings, Rosalind replies that the "burrs are in [her] heart," and the affections that she feels "take the part of a better wrestler than [herself]" (1.3.16,22-23). This woman obviously lacks the detachment of Bruno's magician and so is seemingly unfit for the role. A magician cannot be controlled by emotions, his fantasies, or the power of love, or his magic will not work. Further, an additional problem presents itself in Rosalind's gender; the magician figure traditionally assumed by

Bruno was always male. Clearly, such conditions would seem to negate Rosalind's opportunity to act as a magician in this sense. And yet, is it not possible that Rosalind could become someone else to enact this magic? Although Rosalind as herself is not the magician specified by Bruno, the new male identity she assumes does allow her to fulfill the requirements of a magician.

Rosalind takes on the disguise of a boy named Ganymede as she, Celia, and Touchstone depart from court life and enter the Forest of Arden as exiles. Under threat of death from her uncle, Rosalind decides that as a boy she can more easily escape capture and hide from her death warrant. Yet, the disguise is much more than simply a change of gender; this new identity provides the ideal costume for the role of magician which she is soon to play with Orlando.

Rosalind only comes to recognize the possibility inherent in her disguise by degrees. She feels quite content with her ingenuity in creating a disguise to evade capture and is completely occupied by providing for herself and her traveling companions. But, her satisfaction soon disappears after she enters the Forest of Arden as Ganymede and feels the enticements of love, for she finds poems written in her honor and hung on trees by Orlando. Rosalind at first does not recognize that he is the author, but after Celia clues her in to Orlando's affections, Rosalind's previous affections for the man suddenly return. She is dismayed to be thus attired as a man, and her strong regard for Orlando causes her to suddenly desire very much to be a woman; Rosalind replies in anguish to Celia's revelation that Orlando adores her, "Alas the day! what shall I do with my doublet and hose?" (3.2.214-215). Rosalind suddenly finds value in her female identity and wishes to return to it.

She displays almost frantic feminine emotion then quiets to spy on Orlando and Jacques as they enter the scene. By the time the two men pass, Rosalind has regained her senses and quickly resolved upon a plan to use her male disguise to her advantage, thus beginning to plot her magic. As Jacques exits, leaving Orlando alone, Rosalind confides to the audience, "I will speak to him like a saucy lackey, and under that habit play the knave with him" (3.2.289-290). In her subsequent exchange with Orlando, Rosalind converses with him about the weaknesses of the feminine sex as well as the follies of love. Her tone is authoritative and even condescending as she speaks of love. She convinces Orlando that his love for Rosalind is "merely a madness" in need of curing and that she has power to perform such a feat "by counsel" (3.2.386-390). In effect, she announces her ascendancy to the role of magician and her determination to influence Orlando.

Albert Cirillo writes of Rosalind's magic actions in the forest, "Here, amidst the traditional trappings of the rustic retreat which the Renaissance knew well she assumes an important role which is central to the entire play and which makes her something of a *magus* or magician."¹⁶ Disguised as the boy Ganymede, she initiates her magical actions and begins to draw Orlando into the bonds of her magic. Later, Rosalind gradually increases the force of her magic as she invents first an uncle and then a magician mentor, creating a sort of professional guild to which she belongs. (3.2.334; 5.2.57-59). She becomes more effective and influential as she recognizes the potential of her power to draw Orlando into her bond.

Ganymede (or Rosalind) acts as a magician by using Orlando's emotions and imagination against himself. As Bruno prescribes, she enchains him by "knowing and fathoming through intuition the characteristics, reactions, and emotions of the subject."¹⁷ Orlando is desperate for help, and like a hopeless child being instructed that a cure for a painful ailment is possible, he will try anything. Ganymede instructs Orlando to call her Rosalind and to pretend that she is indeed his lover; she tells him, "I would cure you, if you would but call me Rosalind and come every day to my cote and woo me" (3.2.4110-411). Orlando must suspend his disbelief as he pretends that Ganymede is his beloved Rosalind. She insists that he follow a rigid and demanding standard of devotion, and when he falls short of her expectations, she reprimands him sharply: "Why, how now, Orlando, where have you been all this while? You a lover? An you serve me such another trick, never come in my sight more" (4.1.36-38). She tests his patience and loyalty by pretending to reject him on behalf of Rosalind, but he professes over and over again his eternal fidelity to her. When she says that she will not have him, he protests, "Then, in mine own person, I die" (4.1.86). Rosalind has thoroughly enchained Orlando; his profession of mortal dependancy on her is the epitomy of Bruno's magic objective. Thus manipulating both his emotions and imagination, the disguised Rosalind furthers the process of shaping Orlando into the ideal lover.

As Bruno identifies that the magician must be detached from the influence of phantasies, we find that Rosalind as Ganymede fulfills this requirement. Ganymede reveals none of her female-Rosalind emotions as she directs and instructs Orlando in his presence. She remains detached and distant, enacting the vitally important emotionless role for a magician. However, the roles of Rosalind and Ganymede are exceptionally fluid, and, as such, there

is frequent movement between the two. Though Rosalind remains dressed as Ganymede almost the entire play, she alternates between her identities, most often returning to her female identity to talk to Celia and bemoan her love. Yet, when Rosalind is around Orlando, she remains in her Ganymede disguise and is able to work her magic. C. L. Barber writes of the distinction between Rosalind's roles in the play,

Romantic participation in love and humorous detachment from its follies, the two polar attitudes which are balanced against each other in the action as a whole, meet and are reconciled in Rosalind's personality. Because she remains always aware of love's illusions while she herself is swept along delightfully by its deepest currents, she possesses as an attribute to character the power of combining whole-hearted feeling and undistorted judgment.¹⁸

By creating a disconnect between her two selves, Rosalind can express her female emotions and pains of love while simultaneously working dispassionately on Orlando as a magician.

Acting as Ganymede and the magician with Orlando serves Rosalind's purposes. She loves Orlando and desires him for her own, yet she must first teach and train him in the way that she wants him to love. She accomplishes this task much more effectively by pretending to be another, by distancing herself from Orlando through the disguise of Ganymede and at the same time controlling him through her powers of magic manipulation. The result of this magic manipulation is a man worthy of the real Rosalind's love and devotion to him.

Rosalind's magical work is drawing to a close when, near the end of the play, for the first time she alludes to her magic powers. Addressing Orlando and Oliver, Rosalind says,

Believe then, if you please, that I can do strange things. I have, since I was three years old, conversed with a magician, most profound in his art and yet not damnable. If you do love Rosalind so near the heart as your gesture cries it out, when your brother marries Aliena shall you marry her. I know into what straits of fortune she is driven; and it is not impossible to me, if it appear not inconvenient to you, to set her before your eyes tomorrow, human as she is, and without any danger. (5.2.52-59)

Rosalind appeals publicly to the magic power as both testimony and evidence for her efforts: her "strange things." Yet, while she alludes to her magic manipulation with Orlando, she also promises almost "magical" results when she makes the astounding assurance

of Rosalind's appearance and acceptance of Orlando. Until this point, Rosalind/Ganymede has promised only a "cure" for Orlando's love sickness; he employed her services in the hopes of being freed from the emotions of his love for Rosalind. Ganymede, the boy love-curer, now suddenly proclaims a promise that most assuredly shocks Orlando; he questions Rosalind's statement, "Speakest thou in sober meanings?" (5.2.66). At this time, Rosalind publicly reverses both the goal and method of her tactics with Orlando while inwardly merely completing the magic process of her art. She never intended to free him from his love but rather to use his love to mold him into her ideal.

Bruno's magic process proves completely effective; Rosalind, as the boy magician, has brought Orlando into her "chain of chains." As her magic purposes come to completion, the magic manipulator prepares to rejoin her magician self and her female self all in one. Robert Kimbrough characterizes Rosalind in these final stages of the play: "Not only is Rosalind the magician she claims to be; she is herself the product of her magic."¹⁹ Like the newly trained and reformed Orlando, Rosalind is also a product but not in her role as Ganymede. Ganymede the magician had to remain detached and unaffected by emotions or magic powers; however, the female Rosalind is not restricted by the requirement of emotional aloofness and succumbs quite willingly, when allowed, to the powers of love and magic. Rosalind's detached, manipulator role of Ganymede will soon be needed no longer as the female Rosalind, long awaiting the moment, reveals herself to the "cured" Orlando and becomes his bride. The play ends with the happy union of lovers; the magic is complete, and the bond of love secured.

As Giordano Bruno explains, the ultimate goal of this magic power is control; the manipulator seeks to bind "vincere" his subject within the bonds of love—literally, the chain of chains. In one of the first scenes of *As You Like It*, Rosalind bestows a "chain" on Orlando. As she hands him this chain she instructs, "Gentleman, Wear this for me, one out of suits with fortune, That could give more but that her hand lacks means" (1.2.233-234). This simple act and seemingly insignificant piece of jewelry nonetheless signifies immense meaning within the entire scheme of the play. This chain "that [Rosalind] once wore" and that is now "about his neck" recalls in dramatically symbolic terms Giordano Bruno's theories of love and magic (3.2.177). Bruno describes the processes of love as a "chain of chains" directed by a magic manipulator and fulfilled through the actions of the manipulated. As Rosalind literally gives

Orlando her chain, she foreshadows an enormously significant process that will draw him into her own carefully constructed, intangible chain. Rosalind's work as the magician and Orlando's patience as her subject proved successful, and they are ultimately rewarded.

Notes

1. Margaret Boerner Beckman, "The Figure of Rosalind in *As You Like It*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29:1 (Winter 1978): 44-51.
2. Beckman, 51.
3. John Powell Ward, *As You Like It* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 52.
4. Quoted in Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 97.
5. Couliano, 88.
6. Couliano, 91.
7. Couliano, 95.
8. Couliano, 91.
9. Couliano, 91.
10. Couliano, 95.
11. Couliano, 92.
12. Quoted in Couliano, 92.
13. Couliano, 93.
14. Quoted in Couliano, 93.
15. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Frances E. Dolan (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 1.2.233.
16. Albert R. Cirillo, "As You Like It: Pastoralism Gone Awry," *ELH* 38 (1971): 19-38.
17. Quoted in Couliano, 95.
18. C. L. Barber, "The Use of Comedy in *As You Like It*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of As You Like It*, ed. Jay L. Halio, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 14-27.
19. Robert Kimbrough, "Androgyny Seen Through Shakespeare's Disguise," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33:1 (Spring 1982): 17-33.