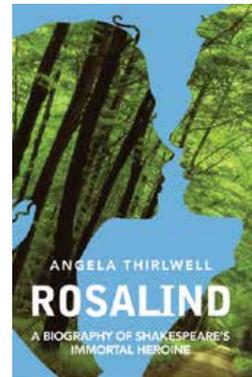


BEHIND THE BOOK

Much of the research material for [Angela Thirlwell's](#) highly original 'biography' was drawn from the Library's English Literature and English Drama shelves



Angela Thirlwell's *Rosalind: A Biography of Shakespeare's Immortal Heroine* (2016).

My latest book is Rosalind: A Biography of Shakespeare's Immortal Heroine (Oberon, 2016). Unlike conventional subjects of biography who lead their authors all over the world in track of their personal papers, Rosalind, an imaginary character, left me only her dazzling conversation in As You Like It. But in the Library's rich collections I discovered Rosalind's ancestors, her sisters, her lover and her descendants.

◆ **Rosalynde** by Thomas Lodge (1590), ed. W.W. Greg (London 1931). L. English Lit. Stealing plots was common in Tudor times, and was not seen as the act of plagiarism it is today. Shakespeare gutted Thomas Lodge's romantic tale of 1590 for the setting, story and most of the characters of *As You Like It*. Almost ten years before Shakespeare's comedy, Lodge's cross-dressing Rosalynde is the rehearsal for a more radical heroine.

◆ **Collected Works, Elizabeth I, Queen of England** ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago 2000). H. England, Kings &c., Elizabeth I. The ageing Elizabeth I could have been the mirror image of Shakespeare's transvestite Rosalind. Both turned sexual stereotyping inside out. 'I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman,' said Elizabeth, 'but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too'. Elizabeth's manipulation of power and gender is apparent throughout this scholarly project, which collates and compares surviving versions of her letters and speeches.

◆ **The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines in a Series of Fifteen Tales** by Mary Cowden Clarke (3 vols., London 1864). L. English Lit., Shakespeare. In this daring literary extravaganza Cowden Clarke reimagines some of Shakespeare's

female characters by inventing prequels or back stories for them. 'Rosalind and Celia; The Friends' is among the most touching. Although Rosalind chooses romantic heterosexual love with Orlando, Cowden Clarke is right to identify Celia's love for her cousin Rosalind as perhaps the most enduring in the play.

◆ **Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England** by Stephen Orgel (Cambridge 1996). L. English Drama, Hist of.

This is an investigation of the tangle of gender on the Elizabethan stage where boys played all the female roles. Orgel saw *As You Like It* on Broadway in 1950 with Katharine Hepburn as Rosalind and William Prince as Orlando. The author unpacks his formative teenage experience in this later academic study. Boys disguised as women, he says, 'destabilize the categories, and question what it means to be a man or a woman'. Just like Rosalind.

◆ **On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters** by Helena Faucit, Lady Martin (Edinburgh, London 1885). L. English Lit., Shakespeare.

Threaded through my book are interviews I held with modern actors, both male and female, who have played Rosalind. I couldn't interview the actors of the past, but Helena Faucit left a passionate

account of playing an acclaimed Rosalind throughout the Victorian era until she was 65. But she admitted she found Rosalind's Epilogue almost impossibly challenging, for in it 'one addresses the audience neither as Ganymede nor as Rosalind, but as one's own very self'.

◆ **The Modern Actor** by Michael Billington (London 1973). L. English Drama, Hist. of. The *Guardian* theatre critic makes many perceptive observations about the essence of acting. Billington identifies an androgynous quality that often underpins great acting. In the theatre we can release our inhibitions and accept that 'our natures are a compound of masculine and feminine', as Rosalind embodies in Arden.

◆ **The Book World of Henry James: Appropriating the Classics** by Adeline R. Tintner (Ann Arbor 1987). L. English Lit., James.

When I was asking myself who were Rosalind's 'daughters' in life and literature, it happened on Tintner's exploration of Henry James's reading. This led me to his story, 'The Papers' (1902), based on *As You Like It*. James's newspaper reporter, Maud, is an ambiguous Rosalind, for James says she might 'as easily have been christened John'. In a bold rewrite, James pairs Maud, not with Rosalind's Orlando, but with Howard, a latter-day version of cynical Jacques.