

SETTING

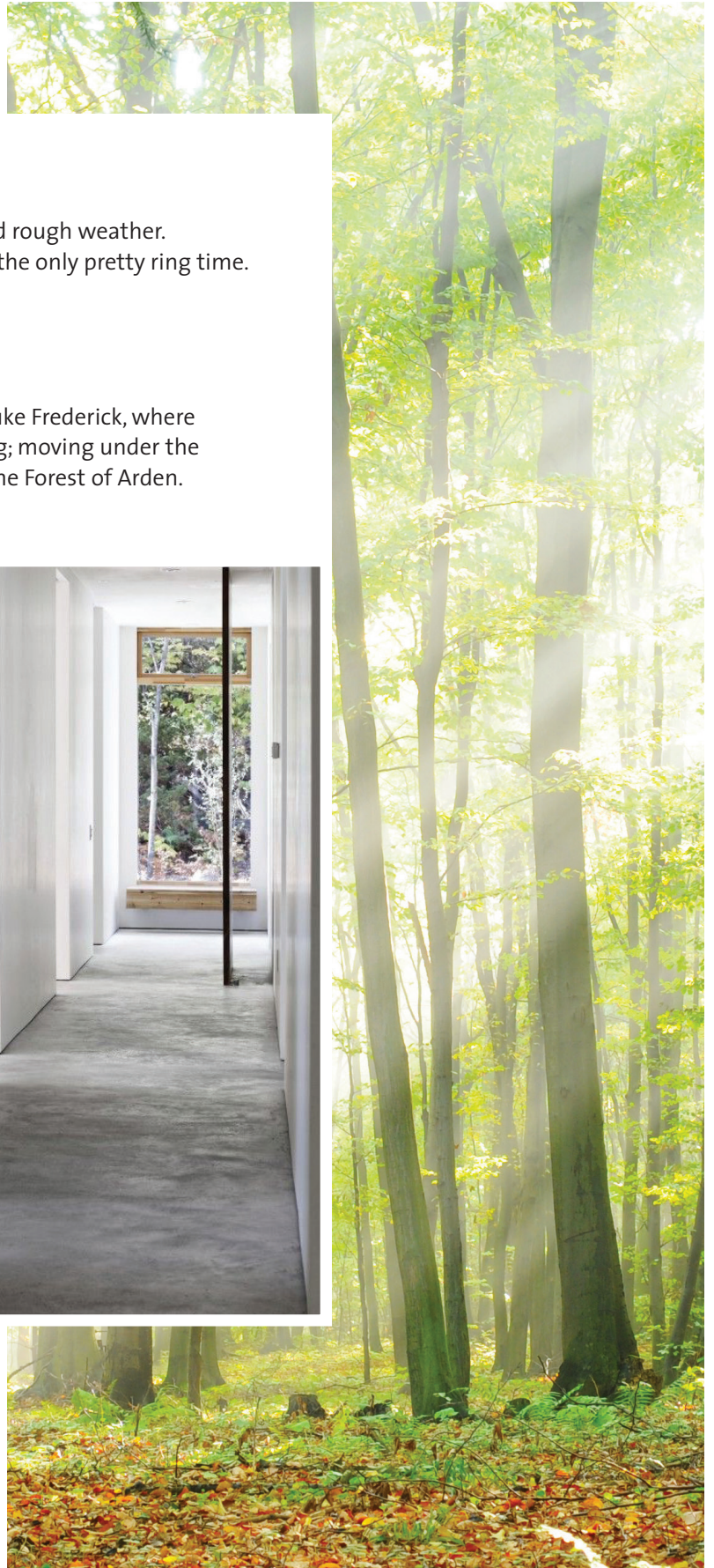
TIME & PLACE

TIME:

Beginning with winter and rough weather.
Ending in the springtime, the only pretty ring time.

PLACE:

Starting at the court of Duke Frederick, where most friendship is feigning; moving under the greenwood tree, deep in the Forest of Arden.

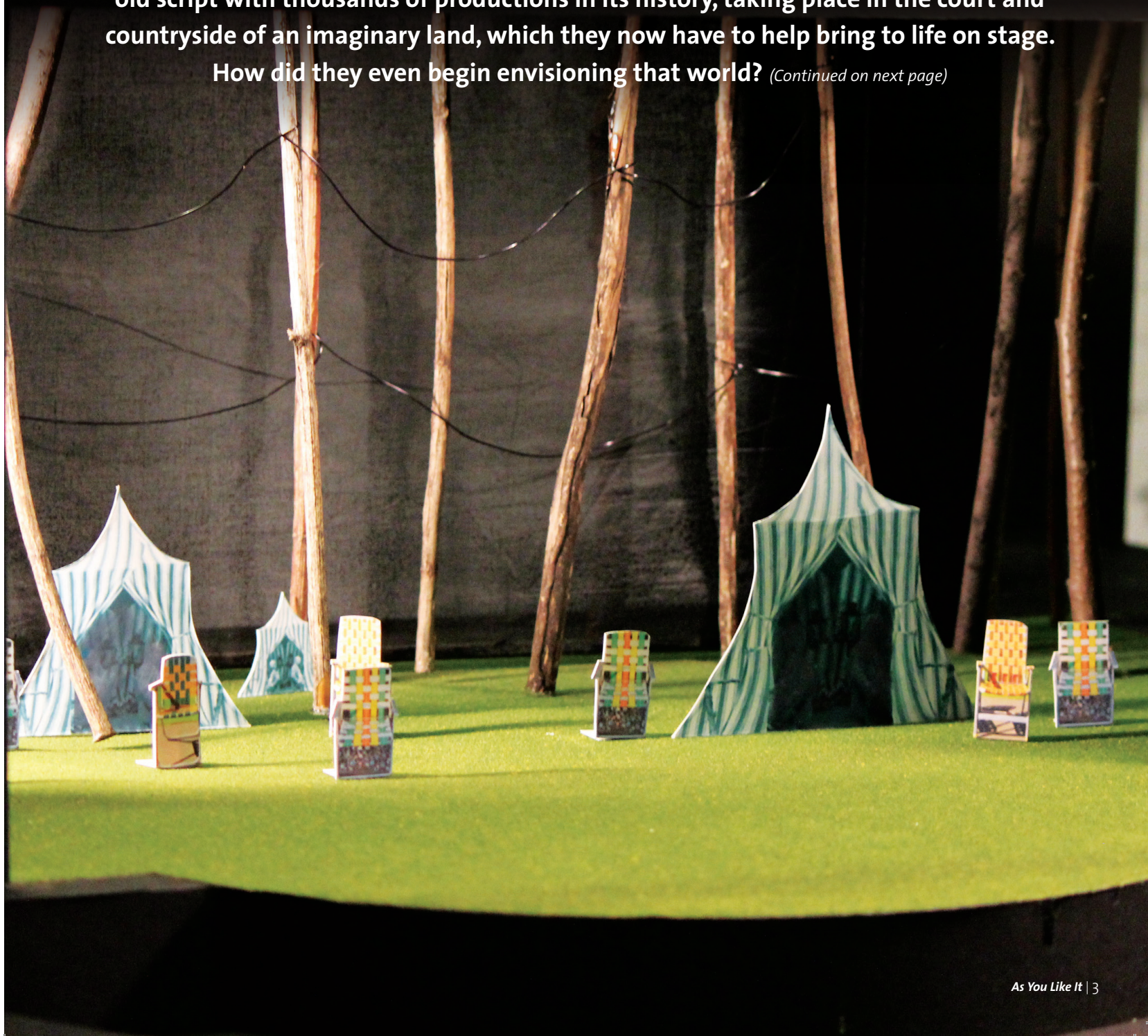


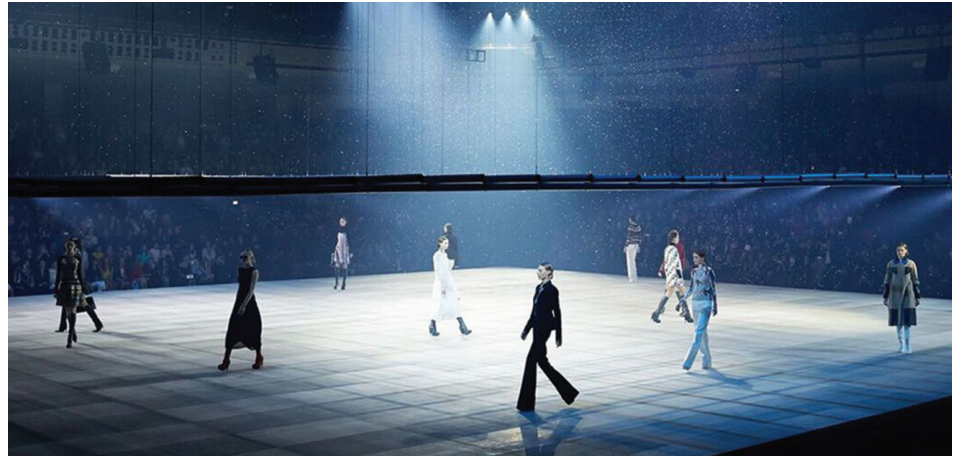
MEET
THE DESIGNERS

FRESH AT 400: FOCUS ON DESIGN

Preparing for this production of *As You Like It*, production dramaturg Gavin Witt sat down with **costume designer Anne Kennedy** and **scenic designer Arnulfo Maldonado** to talk about the world of the play and their approach to it. Here, after all, is a 400-year-old script with thousands of productions in its history, taking place in the court and countryside of an imaginary land, which they now have to help bring to life on stage.

How did they even begin envisioning that world? *(Continued on next page)*





“I am ambitious for a motley coat”

Anne: For me, Wendy [Goldberg, the director] set the tone, in a way that allowed me to spring off her initial impulses and run with them. She sent me some images from Prada runway fashion shows as inspiration for the Court scenes, and from those I gleaned a few initial parameters: it’s a modern world; it’s a monied world; and it begins in a very angular world (in contrast to softer lines and curves for the forest later).

Research is my favorite part, always; I could go for days, hunting and gathering and living in the creative process. But to narrow it down, I started with some landmarks, looking at designer clothes from Tom Ford, Armani, a bit of Vivienne Westwood, some Versace, Prada of course.... Then I moved into thinking about individual characters.

For the girls, Celia and Rosalind—I knew, from the text and from the idea of the spectrum and fluidity of gender performance we’re exploring in this production, that I wanted Celia ultra-feminine, pretty and playful. That said to me, “look to the Fifties and Sixties.” So we started with an iconic Balenciaga dress

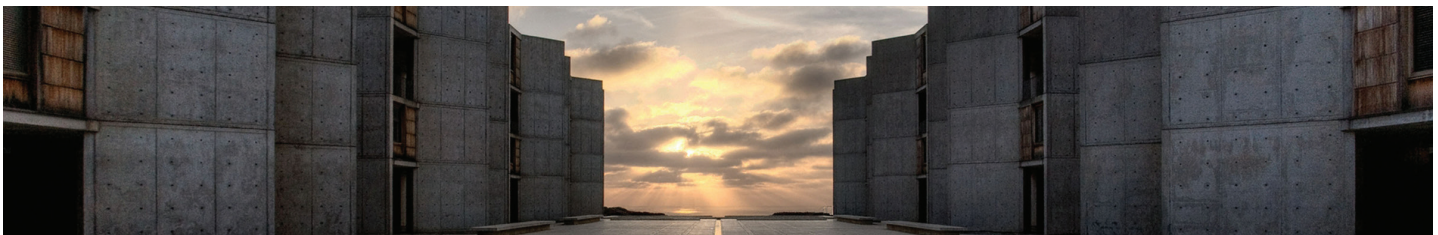
from the Sixties, and we’re playing with that; I love that it does one thing in front and something else in back, and then it’s filled with feathers. Glamorous, not at all practical, so fun and frivolous.

And for Rosalind, I started with another iconic piece, a Cheong Sam dress I think maybe I saw an Olsen twin wearing. What it said to me was: still elegant, still “feminine” in a different way, but a bit more sober, more modest, more restrained. It even has a bit of an Edwardian touch, with a hint of bustle. I wanted to help distinguish the differences between these two women, who they are and where they start out.

That’s all for the Court, of course. Once we go to Arden, to the forest, it changes. Less angular, less austere, less artificial and more natural. And because we’re making up this whole world, one way I can play with that is to draw on different time periods. So we’ve got echoes of different counter-cultures from the whole 20th Century to today. I looked at tons and tons of photos.

Working with the costume shop here, we assembled a “boutique” of options, where we could take each actor and “shop” for their characters. I met the actresses, and together we started sketching in three dimensions, pulling pieces and putting them together on bodies and dress forms. But I always want to try to keep them in a realm of reality—making them clothes, not costumes.

In keeping with the particular approach of this production, having a company of women playing all the roles, the images we started with were also quite androgynous. Or rather, some were androgynous—not distinctly male or female—while others were a fusion of each. This gave me a great starting point, and actually that’s pretty much where I ended up going—that idea of androgyny as the range or fusion of possible appearances, how gender and clothing can be fluid. We kept asking, what does it mean to dress “masculine,” or “feminine,” or androgynous? And sometimes that leans one or another way, sometimes it’s a hybrid, and sometimes it’s a crazy mashup.



“Now am I in Arden”

Arnulfo: For anything as well-known as this play, I purposely avoid looking at other productions. Because what we were really interested in was creating our own version, our own take. But that’s how I usually work: picking out the reference points, anything specific to the text, but also following a more visceral, emotional reaction.

When I design, I’m interested in what I call temperature. I never sketch; I work mainly in architecture, exploring textures and surfaces and volume and seeing what will work, what feels right for the world. I was looking more to establish an emotional sense of each place, not necessarily a specific location.

For Arden, I understood that better to begin with; it wanted a sense of dirt and grass and Nature. Reacting to what the opposite of that would be, for the Court, guided me. I looked at a lot of reflective surfaces—shiny wallpaper, Plexiglass, mirrors—something where you couldn’t, say, lean against the wall because then you’d have to polish it. But also self-conscious, reflecting back at

themselves, and unwelcoming. You can’t go near it because it’s precious, and pushes you away. Not an inviting world.

Creating a Court that felt very oppressive, cold, and sterile juxtaposed with the forest of Arden—the antithesis of that in every way—meant looking at architecture and surfaces that felt like those things. Images of a Louis Kahn chapel from Spain really helped—a modern but monumental space. And the repetition of that stripe is kind of revolting, even oppressive. Kind of playful, but kind of repellent. The Kahn felt heavy, like it carried an importance. After all, these exiles in Arden are retreating away from the Court, so it was important to me to make that feel as unwelcoming as possible. It should feel almost like sitting in a mausoleum, like you’re afraid to sit on the furniture. I wanted us to experience what the characters experience: a sense of relief and release, of escape, when they get away to Arden.

In contrast, Arden becomes a stripping away of all that artifice, and we’re basically dealing with Nature. We never wanted to

put a forest on stage, but wanted to get a sense of expansive openness. Our Arden may have a fair number of trees, but I still see it as a fairly minimal approach, in that there’s room for it to breathe—especially with the amount of layering that we’ve done. As we go with them into the forest, it’s very much about exhaling, about having that space to breathe—in finding that, I hope we’ll find the playfulness in Arden, and in the play.

And I love the choice to show that transition, the theatricality of that transformation. Literally seeing the actors, the characters, getting rid of one world and choosing another. We get a glimpse of green early, but that transformation should really provide a sense of surprise, of wondering “how big can this get?” We’re not looking to mask any of that, we’re embracing it. We’re not trying to pass off these women pretending to be men; there’s a fluidity to that, and the space should help do the same thing. 🍃

Do you not know I am a woman?

By Gavin Witt

The Roaring Girle

OR Moll Cut-Purse.

As it hath lately beene Acted on the Fortune-stage by
the Prince his Players.

Written by T. Middleton and T. Dekkar.

My case is altered, I must worke for my living.



Printed at London for Thomas Archer, and are to be sold at his
shop in Popes head-pallace, neere the Royall
Exchange. 1611.

“Dost thou think, though I am caparisoned
like a man, I have a doublet and hose
in my disposition?”

Rosalind, *As You Like It*

The Elizabethan era brought England unprecedented decades of peace and prosperity. And yet, for nearly all of those decades, England had a woman problem.

You would think they'd have gotten over it. When Shakespeare's *As You Like It* premiered sometime around 1600, a woman had ruled the English for nearly 50 years. First to follow mighty Henry VIII (after the death of his sickly son Edward) was Lady Jane Grey: hastily crowned, hastily deposed and beheaded, and as hastily forgotten. Then came the sanguinary reign of Mary Tudor. Finally, her half-sister, Elizabeth, took the throne.

During her long, epochal reign, Elizabeth was celebrated as the Virgin Queen and hailed as Gloriana, inspiring fawning epic poetry like Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* and Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia*. But she still had to tolerate Parliament, her courtiers, and parades of foreign ambassadors pressing her to find a male consort. She herself fueled the duality: when she addressed her armies massed at Tilbury to repel a potential Spanish invasion, the queen declaimed, “I know I have the body of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king.”

Before the crown was even warm on the young queen's brow, the tumult had begun; the very year of her accession, the English popular press exploded with argument and counter-argument about women's rule, behavior, attire, cosmetics, speech, and perceived depravity. Beginning in 1558 with the metaphorical blast of *The Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* by Puritan exile John Knox, Albion's men thundered forth from press and from pulpit their dismay at what they viewed as unnatural behavior.

Knox and his ilk lambasted the “abominable empire of wicked women,” especially those who took on roles reserved for men. But they aimed their invective not

The Man-Woman:



solely at “mannish women,” whom they deplored; oceans of ink were similarly spilled condemning “womanish men.” And while topsy-turvy behavior was bad enough, most egregious was cross-dressing or any confusion in attire. In 1574, in response to the brewing controversy, the government issued new Statutes of Apparel legislating clothing and appearance. Increasingly, satires against women’s clothing took on a new ferocity, accusing them of dressing like and so imitating men. It was a controversy that alternately simmered then boiled over for the next 60 years—sometimes in print, sometimes in law, and sometimes too on stage.

With the shift from Queen Elizabeth to King James in 1603, the gender war heated up. By 1620, King James decreed that his clergy preach, or rather “inveigh vehemently and bitterly” in sermons, “against the insolencie of our women, and theyre wearing of brode brimd hats, pointed dublets, theyre haire cut short or shorne, and some of them stilettoes or poinards, and such other trinkets of like moment.” The world, the king and his counselors feared, “is very far out of order.”

Echoes of that anxiety resonate in the pages of two popular pamphlets published in the same year. First came *Hic Mulier*, subtitled the Man-Woman and purporting “to cure the Coltish Disease...in the Masculine Feminines of our Times.” Its title is a Latin pun on the controversy: the male article (*hic*) applied to the word for woman (*mulier*). Its author insists, “Since the days of Adam women were never so Masculine: Masculine in their genders and whole generations.... Masculine in [clothes] from head to the foot; Masculine in Mood,

from bold speech to impudent action; for without redress they were, are, and will be still most Masculine, most mankind, and most Monstrous.”

Responding within mere weeks, the answering pamphlet reversed the accusation; *Haec Vir, or the Womanish Man* tweaked both the Latin pun and the indictment itself. Its author defends women’s freedom, while accusing men of similarly confusing behavior, speech, and clothing—teasing the eponymous fop as a “most tender piece of Masculine; most courageous counterfeit.” But it rests on the same binary assumption: that without clear outward show, men and women were themselves “in nothing but in name.”

Not limited to the presses or the pulpits, the debate found its way to the playhouses as well. The cross-dressing, counter-cultural Mary Frith, aka “Moll Cutpurse,” captured the popular imagination at the century’s turn. She herself appeared on stage at the Fortune Theater in a virtual stand-up act, dressed as a man (complete with dagger and pipe). Then playwrights Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton immortalized her in their wildly successful *The Roaring Girl*. And consider how many times Shakespeare had recourse to the figure of a young woman passing as a male outside of just *As You Like It*: Julia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Nerissa and Portia in *Merchant of Venice*, Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*, the Page in *Taming of the Shrew*, to name but a few.

Of course, complicating all this theatrical transvestism was the fact that, in each case, it was actually men playing these women playing at manhood. The playhouse practice of cross-dressing, as deliciously ironic as

The Womanish-Man:



it made such moments, elicited a mixture of horror and fury among contemporary critics. They saw in it a tacit license for such behavior in society at-large, and feared in it the danger they perceived in theater more generally: that the illusion of fictive truth created a very real alternate reality. For men and women to exchange dress and behavior in the pretense of theater risked that same fluidity in real life.

“What can be more barbarous,” asks one outraged pamphleteer, “than with the gloss of mumming Art to disguise the beauty of their creations?” This “deformity,” the author laments, “hath no agreement with goodness; it is all base, all barbarous.” Such women aspire not just to be “manlike” from head to foot; they are “man in body by attire, man in behavior by rude complement, man in nature,...in action...and, in brief, so much man in all things that they are neither men nor women. And “the devil’s bait” of this corrupting illusion, this “Disguise,” he locates in the Playhouses.

All of which floated in the creative ether as Shakespeare composed his tale of exiled Rosalind and Celia fleeing into Arden’s groves—the former deftly deceiving her beloved, her own father, and the other foresters with her outward appearance and general deportment as the male Ganymede. Gender identity, the Elizabethans and Jacobean seemed intent on recognizing with anxiety or with delight, could be no more than a performance—a flexible, fluid, malleable, uncertain, highly theatrical representation. And after all, as Jaques reminds us, “All the world’s a stage.” 🍀