



BEYOND THE STAGE

Dramaturgy Notes for the Illinois Shakespeare Festival



THE PERFORMANCE OF LOVE

How do we express true love? Does it all rest on those three important words? Is it in what we do? It is something that happens to us whether we like it or not—a racing heart, flushed cheeks?

We tend to think of love as a natural, spontaneous emotion. But the 2019 season of the Illinois Shakespeare Festival shows us that love can also involve deliberate performance.

In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare drew inspiration from the pastoral genre, which traditionally featured shepherds and shepherdesses (or rather, nobles dressed as simple folk) exchanging vows of love in the countryside. Perhaps more profoundly than any other heroine in Shakespearean comedy, Rosalind understands that love is theatre with an age-old script when she role-plays courtship scenes with Orlando in the Forest of Ardenne. But that doesn't make her feelings for him any less true.

Elizabeth Bennet, in our stage adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, also knows that young women and men must perform their given roles for romance to end in marriage. But she insists on playing by her own rules or not at all. Ironically, it is Mr. Darcy, equally too proud to play the game, who wins Elizabeth's affections, even though he shuns the mannered conversations and awkward dances that suitors are expected to initiate. They manage to perform love in a more authentic way.

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THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT:
AS YOU LIKE IT
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE
CAESAR

Finally, in *Caesar*, we have a somewhat different idea of love: love for one's country. Here, the performance of patriotism is always a calculated act. May Antonia—our modern version of Mark Anthony as a powerful woman in politics—sways public opinion to her side through her teary-eyed display of love for Caesar and the nation. Her televised address to the people of Rome is both meticulously staged and convincingly natural. Some say that politics is all theatre, but what happens when the performance is brilliant?

Join us next summer at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival to explore these and many other ways in which we do love, rather than simply be in it.