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As You Like It English Translation

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Bridging the Bard: A Guide to the Best As You Like It English Translation

Shakespeare's comedies have enchanted audiences for over four centuries, and *As You Like It* stands as one of his most beloved works. With its witty dialogue, memorable characters like Rosalind and Touchstone, and timeless reflections on love, identity, and the natural world, the play remains a staple of both the stage and the classroom. Yet for many modern readers, the original Elizabethan English can feel like a foreign language. Archaic vocabulary, intricate wordplay, and elliptical sentence structures can obscure the very brilliance that makes the play so enduring. This is where an **As You Like It English Translation** becomes invaluable. A thoughtful translation does not replace Shakespeare; it opens a door, allowing contemporary audiences to experience the story's humour, heart, and wisdom without the barrier of outdated language. In this guide, we'll explore what makes these translations essential, examine the different approaches available, and help you choose the right version for your needs.

Why We Need a Modern English Translation of As You Like It

Shakespeare wrote in Early Modern English, a language that, while recognisably English, differs from our own in vocabulary, grammar, and idiom. Words such as *hie* (hurry), *wherefore* (why), and *prate* (chatter) can trip up even confident readers. Puns and double meanings—central to the comedy of *As You Like It*—often rely on now-obsolete pronunciations or cultural references. For example, the famous line "And thereby hangs a tale" (a pun on "tail") loses its humour if the listener doesn't know that "tale" and "tail" were once homophones. A modern English translation clarifies these moments without sacrificing the spirit of the original. It turns a chore into a pleasure, making the play accessible to students, casual readers, theatre-goers who prefer to read along, and anyone who wants to appreciate the story without constant dictionary checks.

Moreover, the play's exploration of gender roles—Rosalind disguises herself as a boy, Ganymede—and its pastoral critique of court life resonate strongly today. A clear translation ensures that these themes are understood in all their nuance. By using an **As You Like It English Translation**, you are not damaging the work; you are preserving its relevance for a new generation.

Understanding the Original: Language and Context of As You Like It

Before diving into translations, it helps to appreciate what the original text demands. *As You Like It* mixes prose and verse, with characters like the melancholy Jaques speaking in poetic measures while the clown Touchstone speaks in witty prose. The play is rich with literary allusions, borrowings from Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*, and a forest setting that symbolises freedom and transformation. Shakespeare's language here is particularly playful, filled with love sonnets, pastoral songs, and intellectual banter.

Key linguistic challenges include:

- Archaic vocabulary: e.g., “an” meaning “if,” “eke” meaning “also,” “durst” meaning “dare.”
- Complex word order: Shakespeare often inverts subject-verb-object for poetic effect.
- Unfamiliar idioms: “I will not cast away my physic but on those that are sick” requires unpacking.
- Double entendres: The joke about “horns” and cuckoldry may be lost on modern readers.

A good translation addresses each of these while keeping the rhythm and rhetorical power alive.

Approaches to Translating Shakespeare into Modern English

Not all translations are created equal. Publishers and scholars adopt different strategies, each with its own strengths. Understanding these approaches helps you select the **As You Like It English Translation** that best fits your purpose.

Literal, Side-by-Side Translations

The most common format for students is the parallel text, such as the *No Fear Shakespeare* series. On the left page, you see the original text; on the right, a straightforward modern version. This approach prioritises clarity. For instance, the famous speech “All the world’s a stage” becomes more direct: “All the world is a stage, and all the men and women just actors.” While it loses some poetic rhythm, it gives you instant comprehension. These editions are excellent for first-time readers or for quickly checking difficult passages.

Verse Translations

Some translators aim to recreate the poetic feel of Shakespeare while updating the language. For example, the *Folger Shakespeare Library* editions provide modernised spelling and punctuation, plus extensive footnotes, without fully rewriting the lines. They preserve the iambic pentameter and much of the original vocabulary, but gloss unfamiliar terms at the bottom of the page. This is a lighter touch—more of a “translation aid” than a full rewrite. It works well for readers who want to stay close to the original sound but need occasional help.

Prose Renditions

A less common but valid approach is to render the entire play into contemporary prose, ignoring the original verse structure. These versions read like a novel. They sacrifice the musicality of Shakespeare’s lines for extreme readability. Such translations are rare for *As You Like It* because the play’s charm partly lies in its verse songs and poetic debates. However, they can be useful for people who struggle with any poetic form.

Adaptations and Retellings

Beyond direct translation, there are creative adaptations that reimagine the play in modern settings or language. For instance, a young adult novel or a graphic novel version of *As You Like It* might drastically change dialogue while keeping the plot and characters. These are not strict translations but can be engaging entry points for reluctant readers.

Notable English Translations and Editions of As You Like It

Several high-quality editions of *As You Like It* are available, each offering a different balance between scholarly rigour and accessibility.

No Fear Shakespeare (SparkNotes)

This is the most popular modern English translation for students. It provides a line-by-line paraphrase in contemporary language. For example, the opening lines between Orlando and Adam become clear without losing the narrative thrust. The main drawback is that the modern text can be flat, lacking the witty cadence of the original. Still, for quick comprehension, it is hard to beat.

The Folger Shakespeare Library Edition

Edited by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, this edition uses modern spelling and punctuation while keeping the original words. The marginal notes define archaic terms and explain allusions. It is not a full translation, but it functions as one for most readers. The Folger edition is highly recommended for serious students who want to taste the original language with help at hand.

The Arden Shakespeare (Third Series)

Arden editions are scholarly, with deep footnotes and extensive introductions. The language is original, but the notes often provide modern equivalents. For someone studying the play in depth, this is ideal. The Arden edition of *As You Like It* includes detailed commentary on puns and textual variants, making it a top choice for advanced readers who still need translation assistance.

Modern Prose Translations by Independent Translators

Several authors have published full prose translations. One example is *Shakespeare Made Easy: As You Like It* by Alan Durband, which presents a modern version alongside the original. These are similar to No Fear but sometimes more faithful to the original's rhythm. They are good for classroom use or for anyone who wants a clean, understandable reading experience.

How to Choose the Best As You Like It English Translation for You

Your choice depends on your goals. Consider the following questions:

1. Are you reading for pleasure or study? For pleasure, a prose or side-by-side translation may work best. For academic work, choose an edition with notes, like Folger or Arden.
2. Do you plan to see the play performed? If so, read a translation that preserves the dramatic rhythm. The Folger edition is a safe bet.
3. How comfortable are you with Elizabethan English? Beginners should start with a full modern translation. Experienced readers may only need occasional footnotes.
4. Do you want to compare multiple versions? Some readers enjoy having both a literal translation and an original text side by side. In that case, No Fear or Durband's editions are convenient.

Remember, no single translation is perfect. Many enthusiasts recommend reading the original with a good guide, then turning to a full translation for difficult scenes. This hybrid approach deepens your understanding without losing the essence of Shakespeare's language.

Tips for Using an As You Like It English Translation Effectively

To get the most out of a modern translation, engage with it actively rather than passively. Here are some strategies:

- Read aloud: Even in modern English, the dialogue is meant to be spoken. Hearing the words brings out the humour and emotion.
- Compare phrases: If you own a side-by-side edition, read the original line first, then the translation. Notice what is lost and gained.
- Watch a performance: After reading a translated scene, watch a film or stage version. The Royal Shakespeare Company's 2010 production, for example, is freely available online. See how actors interpret the modernised lines.
- Discuss with others: Translations can vary in accuracy and tone. Talking to fellow readers can reveal insights you missed.

The Role of Translation in Performance

Interestingly, many actors and directors already use modern paraphrases during rehearsals. A performer might translate a difficult line into colloquial English to understand the character's intent, then revert to the original for the final performance. This is why an **As You Like It English Translation** is not just for readers—it is a

practical tool for theatre practitioners. For instance, the line “I would not be cured, youth” can be paraphrased as “I don’t want to be cured, young man,” which instantly clarifies the character’s stubborn affection for melancholy. Using a translation in preparation helps actors deliver the original with genuine emotion rather than rote recitation.

Common Pitfalls in Shakespeare Translation

Not all translations are equally reliable. Some oversimplify complex jokes, turning them into bland statements. Others impose modern sensibilities that distort the original meaning. For instance, the play’s references to “natural” philosophy or Elizabethan gender norms may be anachronistically reinterpreted. When choosing a translation, look for:

- Translator credentials (scholars usually offer more nuanced versions)
- Reviews from educators or Shakespeare specialists
- Whether the edition includes annotations explaining challenging choices

Avoid editions that claim to “modernise” by replacing every unusual word with a simple synonym, as this often

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