

Where There's a Will

Epilogue

Give me thy last words.

[*Two Noble Kinsman*, V,iv:88 – Palamon]

In our previous *Where There's a Will*, gentle reader, we shared with you the nitty-gritty on Will's seven prologues. In this installment, we jump from the first page to the last and get the scoop on what's going on at the other end, in Will's epilogues.

Epilogue comes to English, via French and Latin, from the Greek *epilogos*, denoting an 'in addition speech.' The purpose of the epilogue is to make comment or provide a conclusion to the action you have just spent the last 'two hours' traffic of our stage' watching, or, in the case of Will's original audience, listening to. We see a play; Elizabethans heard one.

Quick bit of nitty-gritty, an epilogue is presented by a character from within the play. If the playwright pops in to provide the final prognostication, it's an afterword. Will uses a mix of both. During the course of his writing career, our beloved Bard employs epilogues more in the latter half than in the first half [9:4]. Of the thirteen postscripts, six are in the comedies, three in the histories, three in the romances, and one in the tragedy of *Timon of Athens*.

As You Like It has the only epilogue spoken by a female:

*It is not the fashion to see the lady the Epilogue,
but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord
the prologue...*

*...If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that
pleased me, complexions that liked me and breaths that I
defied not. And I am sure as many as have good
beards, or good faces, or sweet breaths will for my
kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell.*

[*As You Like It*, Epilogue:1,16 – Rosalind]

This is our Will at his dazzling best, and why *As You Like It* slots so beautifully into the trilogy known as the joyous comedies; the other two being *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*. *As You Like It* is a masterful examination of gender-bending theatre. How so?

Well, because it's against Elizabethan law for English women to appear on stage as professional actors - a law that will not be undone until Charles II returns from the far more sensible France - originally, all parts performed in Will's plays are enacted by men and prepubescent boys. Rosalind, in saying 'if I were a woman' is telling the truth. Once the play is done, she's not. She's a boy actor, who plays a girl, who disguises herself as a boy, and goes on to teach a boy - her love Orlando - how a girl wants a boy to act.

There's a further dimension to the character, one that examines the realm of transgender. Rosalind is Will's beautiful tribute to his old mentor and murdered friend, the homosexual, playwright Christopher Marlowe - co-author of portions of the *Henry VI* trilogy that made our Will a star. This is why Rosalind gets the epilogue. [Much, much more on this, anon.]*

The first epilogue Will writes, and surely the most charming, is given at the end of the play he creates for a wedding. There are eleven candidates as to which wedding. My personal favourite is the nuptial of Lord Thomas Berkeley and Elizabeth Carey - daughter to Lord Hunsdon, Will's boss [anon].

*If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.*

[*Midsummer Night's Dream*, Epilogue:1 - Puck]

Will has good reason for Puck's 'hope we didn't piss you off.' The most powerful person in the land, godmother to the bride, one who is talked of as a character in the play - the only one in which Will has her [apart from as a baby in *Henry VIII*] - is the guest of honor that day.

When Oberon tells Puck:

*Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal throned by the west,*

[*Midsummer Night's Dream*, II,i:157 - Oberon]

he's talking about that very special guest. Yep, none other than Queen Elizabeth. It turns out Will and Puck have little to worry about. Elizabeth - who, because Cupid missed her, goes on to proudly become the Virgin Queen - loves our Will's merry band of players, The Chamberlain's Men. From their creation as a company

until her death, nine years later, the queen calls on them to perform for her at court thirty-two times.

The only occasion she does get twitchy with Will is when the Chamberlain's Men enact *Richard II* at the Globe, in a performance paid for by the 2nd Earl of Essex, the day before reckless Robert decides to rise up in rebellion against Her Majesty [anon].

Quick bit of nitty-gritty. Unlike in the fabulous movie *Shakespeare in Love*, Queen Elizabeth never once set foot in the Globe Theatre.

Following Puck's 'give me your hands if we be friends' entreaty, Will's next epilogue pops up in another comedy written for a special occasion. The event is either a gathering at the Earl of Southampton's residence, or a performance at court for the queen. Either way, *Love's Labour's Lost* has the most rhyme of all our Will's scripts. The reason for this is linked to the pandemic of Will's day - the plague [anon]. There's a rule in Will's London, forty deaths a week and everything gets shut down. The forty-a-week does not drop for sixteen months. Desperate for income, Will turns to composing fourteen-line wonders of amorous angst, sonnets, and epic poems dedicated to noble lords. One of these, the very pornographic *Venus & Adonis*, Will - upon self-publishing it with his old Stratford schoolmate, printer Richard Fields - will call 'the first heir of my invention':

*'Fondling," she saith, 'since I have hemmed thee here
Within the circuit of this ivory pale,
I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer:
Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale;
Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry,
Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.'*

[*Venus & Adonis*, 229]

It's pure filth! And copies of it blaze around the coterie of young English aristocrats - the earls of Essex, Southampton, and Pembroke - like wildfire [anon]. No surprise then, when Will gets back into the theatre, the first play up, *Love's Labour's Lost*, contains seven sonnets:

*If love make me foresworn, how shall I swear to love?
Ah, never faith could hold, if not to beauty vowed.
Though to myself foresworn, to thee I'll faithful prove.
Those thoughts to me were oaks, to thee like osiers bowed.*

[*Love's Labour's Lost*, IV,ii:105 - Nathaniel]

Quick nitty-gritty. Love or 'loove'?

Keeping in line with the rhyming motif, LLL's epilogue is a song:

*The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he, Cuckoo;
Cuckoo, cuckoo: O word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!*

[*Love's Labour's Lost*, V,ii:886 - Holofernes {Ver}]

With a final word from Armado:

*The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of
Apollo. You that way: we this way.*

[*Love's Labour's Lost*, V,ii:918 - Armado]

Mercury and Apollo do not get along. The reason is they fall in love with the same nymph, Chione. With Apollo, she gives birth to the musician Philammon. With Mercury, Chione bears the thief Autolycus. And we're walking.

Following the comedies, Will switches back to histories with *2Henry IV* and *Henry V*. *2Henry IV's* epilogue has some unusual features, namely, it's very long, and, as *As You Like It*, it's in prose. The reasons for this become clear when you realize *2Henry IV* is not one, but much like Chromosome 2 in humans, two epilogues stuck together. The first seventeen lines comprise Epilogue 'One.'

*First my fear, then my courtesy, last my speech.
My fear is, your displeasure; my courtesy, my duty;
and my speech, to beg your pardons...
...Be it known to you, as it is very well,
I was lately here in the end of a
displeasing play to pray your patience for it and
to promise you a better.*

[*2Henry IV*, Epilogue: 1,8 - Speaker]

This, the very definition of an afterword, comes directly from Will's mouth after a performance at Whitehall, before Queen Elizabeth.

The remaining lines form Epilogue 'Two'. 'Two' is first given at a public performance by a post-show jig dancer.

*If my tongue cannot entreat you to acquit me, will
you command me to use my legs?*

[*Henry IV, Epilogue: 18 - Dancer*]

The dancer, it makes perfect sense, is the famous comedian-jig specialist Will Kempe:

*One word more, I beseech you. If you be not too much cloyed with
fat meat, our humble author will continue the story with Sir John
in it and make you merry with fair Katharine of France, where,
for any thing I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat unless
already a' be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died
a martyr, and this is not the man.*

[*Henry IV, Epilogue: 26 - Dancer*]

Unlike in *Midsummer*, Will has good reason to be worried, there are those he has deeply offended. Ironically, the cause of the outrage is the very reason the two *Henry IVs* are a massive hit in the first place, the character of Falstaff. Will's original name for the comic genius, foil to Prince Hal, is Oldcastle. The appellation comes from the martyr, and close friend to Henry V, Sir John Oldcastle, who is burnt alive for being a Lollard - a bunch of folks who believe the bread and wine given during the communion stays as bread and wine. The real Oldcastle, now considered by Protestants a martyr, has descendants who are a very powerful bunch, the Lords Cobham, the 10th and 11th thereof. These nobles are pissed at Will's lampooning, *Miles Gloriosus* representation of their veritable ancestor, and they want Elizabeth to string him up for it [anon]. This is why our Will asserts in Epilogue Two '*Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man.*'

It's clear from Epilogue Two that Will intends to bring Falstaff back in *Henry V*. In V, Will predicts, Falstaff will 'die of a sweat.' Sadly, Sir John does not get to come back. Realizing it does not behoove him to piss off the hand that feeds him, Will bows to the 'hard opinions' and kills off his loquacious lump of lard offstage. He has Mistress Quickly report it to us:

*I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they
were as cold as any stone. Then I felt to his knees,
and they were as cold as any stone, and so up'ard and
up'ard, and all was as cold as any stone.*

[*Henry V, II,iii:22 - Hostess*]

Henry V, with its most glorious prologue, ends with the character who gives all the prologues, Chorus, though there's a touch of afterword in the last line:

*Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crown'd King
Of France and England, did this king succeed;
Whose state so many had the managing,
That they lost France and made his England bleed:
Which oft our stage hath shown; and, for their sake,
In your fair minds let this acceptance take.*

[*Henry V*, Epilogue:16 - Chorus]

Indeed, Will's Chamberlain's Men presented the tragic story of the saintly, but pathetic, Henry VI many times, for Will writes his box-office smash trilogy, about the ill-fated monarch and the Wars of the Roses, at the start of his career.

Like *Love's Labour's Lost*, the epilogue in *Twelfth Night* is a song, performed by the clown Feste:

*When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day.*

[*Twelfth Night*, V,i:382 - Feste]

Feste is a new type of clown for a new type of actor. A couple of years after the Falstaff debacle, Will Kempe storms out of the Chamberlain's Men, never to return, and is replaced by the actor Robert Armin, known for his wit not his dancing [anon].

In *Troilus & Cressida*, Troilus damns, Cressida's uncle, Pandarus, with the epilogue, and the eternal curse of his name, being a panderer.

*As many as be here of pander's hall,
Your eyes, half out, weep out at Pandar's fall;
Or if you cannot weep, yet give some groans,
Though not for me, yet for your aching bones.*

[*Troilus & Cressida*, V,xi:47 - Pandarus]

The fellow problem play *All's Well That Ends Well* has an epilogue that, like the play, just hangs there.

*The king's a beggar, now the play is done.
All is well ended, if this suit be won,
That you express content...*

[*All's Well That Ends Well*, V,i:382 - Unknown]

Though, due to the first line, it's given to the actor playing the king, no one knows who actually speaks this epilogue. It also appears the lines were added later and were not spoken at every performance. But, hey, all's well...

Only one tragedy possesses a postscript, the extremely problematic *Timon of Athens*. Symbolic of all that is wrong with *Timon*, this epilogue is the only one not performed; it's read aloud, by Alcibiades, who totally contradicts himself.

*'Here lies a
wretched corpse, of wretched soul bereft,
Seek not my name: a plague consume you wicked
caitiffs left!*

[*Timon of Athens*, V,v:70 - Alcibiades]

In these lines, clearly, the man in the grave does not want you to know who he is. However, these lines are immediately followed by:

*Here lie I, Timon, who, alive, all living men did hate,
Pass by and curse thy fill, but pass and stay
not here thy gait.*

[*Timon of Athens*, V,v:70 - Alcibiades]

Which one is it? In performance, the first lines are cut, and it is revealed that this is Timon's grave. But here is great evidence that Will himself was not pleased with *Timon* and did not finish writing it.

Nor, it seems, does *Timon* please the publishers of the First Folio, Will's fellow actors Heminges and Condell. The evidence suggests they are not going to include the script in the Folio. Then, they get into a copyright fight over *Troilus & Cressida*, forcing them to pull it from printing, and they're left with a gap between the end of *Romeo & Juliet* [p77] and the beginning of *Julius Caesar* [p109]. Heminges and Condell decide to slam *Timon* into the gap whilst they sort out the legal battle over *Troilus & Cressida* [anon].

Thus, we come to the Romances. The first to get an epilogue is the play that does not make it into the First Folio:

*In Pericles, his queen and daughter seen,
Although assailed with Fortune fierce and keen,
Virtue preserved from fell destruction's blast,
Led on by heaven and crowned with joy at last.*

[*Pericles*, Epilogue:3 - Gower]

As in *Henry V*, Prologue gives the epilogue, in this case Gower. Though *Pericles* is a huge hit during Will's lifetime, Heminges and Condell have good reason to not include it in the *Complete Works*. *Pericles* will not appear in any collection until the second impression of Chetwinde's Third Folio, and then only as a supplement. The first reason for the non-inclusion is the only copy available to the publishers is the very corrupt Q₁ edition. Also, *Pericles* is co-written, and the co-author is believed to be the innkeeper of the notorious Cow-Cross tavern, pimp of prostitutes, George Wilkens [anon].

The last of the thirteen epilogues are to be found in the last two plays Will has a hand in: *Two Noble Kinsmen*:

*I would now ask you how you like the play,
But, as it is with schoolboys, cannot say.
I am cruel fearful! Pray yet, stay a while,
And let me look upon you. No man smile?
Then it goes hard, I see.*

[*Two Noble Kinsmen*, Epilogue:1, - Ulysses]

and *Henry VIII*:

*'Tis ten to one this play can never please
All that are here: some come to take their ease,
And sleep an act or two;*

[*Henry VIII*, Epilogue:1, - Ulysses]

Both are an afterword from the playwright hoping you liked his work. And both are not written by Will, but by co-author John Fletcher [anon].

Bringing us to the most stunning of the epilogues, uttered by the magician Prospero, in the last play Will writes as a single author, *The Tempest*:

*Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint:...*

*...Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free.*

[*The Tempest*, Epilogue:1, - Prospero]

This is both an epilogue and an afterword, for it is a beautiful way to tell your fans of twenty plus years that it's time for you to put down your quill, kick off your dancing shoes, and gracefully glide into retirement. It's after penning *The Tempest* that our Will says *au revoir* to his lodgings, his theatres, and his friends in London and returns to permanently reside in the town of his nativity, Stratford. Here the Swan of Avon lives out the rest of his life having achieved his ambition of becoming a country gentleman with a coat of arms. He chooses himself a deeply appropriate motto - *non sans droict* [Not Without Right], or, as the ever-jabbing Jonson refers to it, 'Not Without Mustard.'

Now, Will spends his days with Anne, his wife of thirty-five years, in the second largest house in town, New Place, playing with his granddaughter, Elizabeth. And it is in this new place, five years after writing his retirement that Will leaves us for the Elysian Fields. *Finis*.

It's Juliet Capulet, perched on her balcony, who calls forth, "What's in a name?" In the next installment of *Where There's a Will*, we're going to answer her question by taking a 'deep dive' into our Will's name. What backstories does the appellation William 'Arden' Shakespeare hide within its letters?

For now, as Ulysses warns Achilles, in that problem of a play *Troilus & Cressida*, *be wary for*:

*One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin
That all with one consent praise new-born gauds.*

[*Troilus & Cressida*, III,iii:176 - Ulysses]

Stay safe out there. Anon, good friends.

Oh, if you have a particular backstory that you'd like us to create with regards to any aspect of Will's life and works, please do let us know and we will endeavour to fulfill your wish.

* NB. A quick reminder that [anon] indicates we will be dedicating a future *Where There's a Will* to the topic.