

Master Rosalind Short Guide

Master Rosalind by John Louis Beatty and Patricia Beatty

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Overview

Master Rosalind is about growing up and learning to recognize the complexities of the world. Through her adventures in London, Rosalind, the heroine of the story, learns that what seems to be the truth may not be the actual truth, that good people are not always entirely good, and that bad people are not always entirely bad. As she learns that people are not always what they appear to be, Rosalind begins to grow up.

Master Rosalind brings to life a time in the distant past. Set in the last years of the reign of England's Queen Elizabeth I, the book focuses on the common people who lived far from the glory of the court. In addition, many historical figures—such as the writers William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson—appear in the book as realistic characters. The reader is swept along by a fast-paced story and is challenged to unlock the mystery that confronts Rosalind. Adventure, suspense, and drama create an engrossing plot as the heroine grows from a self-centered, rebellious girl to a sensitive, loyal young woman.

About the Author

Both John and Patricia Beatty were born in Portland, Oregon, in 1922, and graduated from Reed College.

Patricia then studied at the University of Idaho and at the University of Washington in Seattle. John received his master's degree from Stanford University and his doctorate from the University of Washington. He served in Europe with the U.S. Army during World War II, earning the Silver Star, the Purple Heart, and the Combat Infantryman's Badge. After the war, he was a professor of history and humanities at the University of California, where his major field of interest was seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English history. He received a Foundation for Economic Education fellowship in 1953 and an American Philosophical Society grant in 1959.

The Beattys were married in 1950.

Their first collaboration, *At the Seven Stars*, was named an outstanding book for young adults by the *New York Times* in 1963. The Beattys received the Commonwealth Club of California Silver Medal Award in 1965 for *Champion Towers* and the Southern California Council on Literature for Children and Young People Medal in 1967 for *The Royal Dirk*. John Beatty died on March 23, 1975, in California.

Patricia Beatty has taught high school English and history and has also held a position as a science and technical librarian. She taught creative writing for young readers at the University of California, Los Angeles, and at the University of California, Riverside. In addition to awards received in partnership with her husband, Patricia Beatty received the Southern California Council on Literature for Children and Young People "Body of Work" award in 1974.

She received the Woman of the Year award from the American Association of University Women in 1975 and an award from the Riverside-Magnolia Center Business and Professional Women's Club in 1977. After the death of her husband, she married Carl G. Uhr, a professor of economics.

Setting

Set near the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, who ruled from 1558 to 1603, *Master Rosalind* takes place from 1598 to 1600. The main character, Rosalind Broome, lives with her grandfather in Cowley, a small town near Oxford, England. Her grandfather asks her to take a book to Dr. Hornsby, the master of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and Rosalind—who knows that it is unsafe for young girls to walk alone on the roads—dresses for the journey in boy's clothes.

Rosalind decides to attend a play while she is in Oxford, but when Dr. Hornsby recognizes her at the performance—offlimits to youths because of the supposedly "scandalous" nature of plays—she flees into the woods. Abducted by a man she believes to be an "Abraham Man," or wandering madman, Rosalind travels with her captor to London and joins the highly organized society of thieves who plague the city. She later joins a community of actors in London and performs before the queen.

Social Sensitivity

Most historical novels deal with the rich and powerful, and many readers forget that the majority of people in a particular period, even one as glamorous as the reign of Elizabeth I, are neither rich nor powerful. While *Master Rosalind* gives a glimpse into the lives of a few historical figures, it mainly deals with the lives of the poor and those who lived on the fringes of society. Avoiding moral judgments, the Beattys carefully detail the dangerous lives of the children thieves of London, rendering a humane portrait of the children who stole to survive.

Master Rosalind also addresses hero worship, which is as common today as it was in the time of Rosalind Broome.

Rosalind idolizes the Earl of Essex, a real historical character. Initially, Rosalind believes everything she hears about the young and handsome earl, who has a reputation for unflinching bravery.

Slowly, she realizes he is not the perfect person his reputation suggests. When Essex falls from favor, Rosalind begins to see that he is a human being who, like all humans, has flaws.

Literary Qualities

An exciting tale of mystery and adventure, *Master Rosalind* explores the difference between appearance and reality.

The authors give the reader one important piece of information that Rosalind lacks—the fact that Adam Fenchurch wants Rosalind dead. Because the rest of the story deals exclusively with what Rosalind sees, does, and thinks, the reader can observe that Rosalind's judgment is sometimes faulty. As Rosalind matures, her judgment improves and her perception becomes more reliable.

The plot hinges on actual historical events and characters. Rosalind seems like a real person, and through her eyes a historical period comes alive. Real slang words from the time, and a background of historical events and characters, create a true picture of life in London in the late 1500s.



Themes and Characters

Master Rosalind features a variety of characters who are not always what they seem. The story is told from Rosalind's perspective; because she is young and inexperienced, she often judges people solely by their appearances and sometimes draws incorrect conclusions as a result.

Before Rosalind departs for Oxford, her grandfather insists that, soon after her return, she go to live with Lady Margaret Forster and learn to act like a proper young lady. But Rosalind, a tomboy, instead chooses to stay with the band of thieves in London and thus to live the "boy's life" she has always wanted to live. Though initially frightened, she remains bright, intelligent, and good-hearted. She is separated from her family and surrounded by thieves who keep a constant watch on her, but Rosalind refuses to do what she feels is wrong—in this case, steal. Always spunky, Rosalind develops true courage as she grows up and begins to understand the world around her.

Tom O'Bedlam, the "Abraham Man" who kidnaps Rosalind, swears revenge when he baptizes her into the society of thieves only to discover that she is a girl.

A very devious and dangerous man, Tom is Rosalind's first suspect when, later in the book, she realizes that someone in London is trying to murder her.

The environment into which Rosalind finds herself transplanted is a hazardous one. Stealing in Elizabethan London carries the death penalty; even children are executed for theft. Rosalind gains a friend in a young boy named Dickon, a master thief who realizes from the start that Rosalind will never learn to steal but nonetheless takes care of her and continues to try to teach her his craft.

Finally forced to flee from the authorities, Rosalind joins a company of actors and is taken in by Thomas Pope and his housekeeper, Dame Gillet Willingson, both of whom believe she is a boy. Rosalind eventually becomes Pope's apprentice, and he teaches her to act; it falls to Dame Willingson to teach "Robin," as they call Rosalind, how to play a girl on stage. In effect, Dame Willingson teaches Rosalind social graces much as Lady Margaret Forster would have, had Rosalind not been abducted. Pope and his housekeeper are the most gentle characters in the book, caring for Rosalind with great consideration and a quiet kind of love. Both William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson belong to the same acting company as Pope; after she learns her craft, Rosalind performs before the queen at court with these actors.

When a young actor in the company, Davy, is brutally murdered, Rosalind is convinced the attacker actually meant to kill her. She survives an attack by a strange man with scarred hands, whom she assumes is in the service of Tom O'Bedlam. In reality, both Rosalind's grandfather and his brother, Lord Broome, have died. Because of an ancient falling out between the two brothers, no one in authority knows of Rosalind's existence, although she is the true heir to Broome's title and wealth. Adam Fenchurch, the



presumed heir, has discovered Rosalind's whereabouts and sent his badly scarred servant, Sclater, to kill her.

His first plan thwarted, Fenchurch comes up with another strategy. As the queen congratulates Rosalind for her performance, Fenchurch—a member of the court—reveals her true identity.

Since it is a crime for women to appear on the stage, Rosalind is taken to a holding cell in the Tower of London, and from there to the White Tower, where she is interviewed by Sir Robert Cecil, the queen's chief counselor. Through Cecil, Rosalind learns that she is actually Lady Rosalind, Baroness of Broome—and that Tom O'Bedlam, Cecil's employee, deserves credit for discovering Fenchurch's plot against her.



Topics for Discussion

1. Dickon is a thief, yet he helps Rosalind on several occasions. What is the authors' intent in creating a criminal character who nonetheless befriends Rosalind?
2. Queen Elizabeth appears in only three scenes in the story. What does the queen contribute to Rosalind's view of herself?
3. After Rosalind's adventures leave her quite knowledgeable and independent, why is it important for her to live with Lady Margaret Forster, considering that this fate is what Rosalind tries to avoid at the start of the book?
4. On several occasions, the authors lead the reader to believe that a character is evil, only to reveal later that such is not the case. Why is this important?
5. In Rosalind's mind, the Devil is a terrifying being. Does he turn out to be terrifying? Is the Devil a good name for him?
6. Rosalind does not know that her cousin is trying to have her killed. Why is it important that the reader receives this information before the main character does?
7. Why do the authors structure the book so that the reader knows the solution to some mysteries from early on but learns solutions to others only later, when Rosalind learns the truth?
8. To a large extent, the book deals with the lower levels of society in London in the late 1500s. Why is it important to look at this side of life as well as at the lives of the lords and ladies of the court?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Master Rosalind gives a detailed description of life among the poor in London. Research the subject and discuss the accuracy of the novel's depiction of London's poor in the late sixteenth century.
2. At various points in the story, the authors introduce actual historical characters. How does this technique improve the story of Rosalind Broome? Do these characters emerge as real people with distinct personalities, or do they simply remain famous people?
3. Early in the book, Rosalind fights with her grandfather, disobeys orders, and refuses to accept a position that will do her good. Does the reader sympathize with her? Why or why not? How does Rosalind change over the course of the story?
4. Many of the characters in the story seem to be "bad" people, yet they help Rosalind. Are they really bad people?

Why is it important to understand if they are bad or good?
5. Read *As you Like It* or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, both plays by Shakespeare in which Rosalind performs for the queen. Choose a few scenes from the play and perform them with several of your classmates. You may wish to make costumes, and you should try to memorize the characters' dialogue.

For Further Reference

Commire, Anne, ed. *Something about the Author*. Vols. 6, 30. Detroit: Gale Research, 1974, 1983. Contains biographical sketches of the Beattys.

De Montreville, Doris, and Donna Hill, eds. *Third Book of Junior Authors*. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1972. Contains biographical information.

Meigs, Cornelia, et al., eds. *A Critical History of Children's Literature*. New York: Macmillan, 1969. Entry on the Beattys discusses their contributions to literature for young adults.

Related Titles

The Beattys have written several works set in historical England. Holdfast, also set in the time of Elizabeth I, tells of a young Irish girl whose Irish wolfhound becomes a champion bear biter. Both King's Knight's Pawn and Witch Dog take place in the time of Charles I and Oliver Cromwell. The Royal Dirk is a romance set during the time of Bonnie Prince Charlie.

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