

## AS YOU LIKE IT AS A TYPICAL SHAKESPEAREAN ROMANTIC COMEDY

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### ABSTRACT

As You Like It is a typical Shakespearean romantic comedy. The structure deals with a love story which, though for a time frustrated, is in the end brought to a happy conclusion. There is a secondary action of strife and conflict (Orlando-Oliver, and the two Dukes) which impinges upon and obstructs the love story but which is likewise happily resolved before the end of the play. What gives Shakespeare's romantic comedies their uniqueness is the nature of the special conflict which for a time frustrates their love stories, for the characteristic on Shakespeare's romantic comedy deals with the conflict and comic resolution of attitudes to love. One of these attitudes is the rejection of love by persons who later succumb to it; another is the sentimental idealizing of it, and a third is the realistic concern with its physical aspect-a view generally serving to satirize and reduce the other two. Celia and Rosalind (disguised as Ganymede) Orlando and Touchstone, not to mention Phebe, Silvius and Audrey exhaust the gamut of attitude to love among them in As You Like It. Out of comic juxtaposition of these attitudes, the chief characters emerge with an ideal attitude- the best that can be hoped for in the world we know. Indeed, in As You Like It, the ideal attitude is represented throughout by the temperament of the heroine Rosalind.

As You Like It provides the stock ingredient of romance; a handsome, well mannered young hero the youngest of three brothers, two disguised princesses to be wooed and wed, and a banished, virtuous Duke to be restored to his rightful throne.

The basic story is a folk-tale or fairy tale-thus offering wide scope to the imagination. A man has died and left three sons, the eldest of whom is wicked while the youngest is virtuous and does deeds of courage and strength such as destroying a giant in the shape of Charles the wrestler. Orlando therefore wins the princess herself the victim of a wicked uncle, who has usurped her father's throne. Into this basic story-line there are all the elements of romance thrown in the romance of friendship between Rosalind and Celia, the romance of love at first sight, the typical lover of romance, Orlando the love shaken sonneteer hanging his verses upon hawthorn and carving his beloved's name upon the barks of plants.

The conventional issues of romance are not missing the sudden change of fortune betraying a beneficent disposer of events, the repentance of Oliver and the conversion of Frederick to a religious life whereby the banished duke is restored to his rightful prosperity. Above all, the spirit of adventure rules the play-the escape to the Forest of Arden of the two princesses, one disguised as a man, with curtly-axe upon her thigh, and Celia smirched with umber, accompanied by the court fool.

Romantic comedy, as Shakespeare perfected it, is far removed from the satiric comedy of which Ben Jonson is a celebrated exponent. But if folly is not ridiculed and vice not castigated, what is the comedy about in romantic comedy? In As You Like It one at times gets the impression that the wit is directed almost at random, not criticism by laughter but a buoyant sort of game, high spirits overflowing in the poetic enthusiasm of language. There is hardly any social satire in As You Like It. Touchstone and Jaques, the professional and the amateur fools, make fun instead of what they find in Arden-pastoral innocence and romantic love, life as it might be rather than life as it is. Thus we find the comedy is largely directed

towards ridiculing precisely those sentiments and behaviour which are expressed or represented seriously in the play as a whole.

Throughout *As You Like It* there is the practice of making fun of something presented seriously only a moment before or a moment after. It raises the question whether the play is divided against itself. However, the humour, we notice, is not critical of the ideas on which the serious action is based its contribution is of different kind Touchstone's remarks make fun of the ideal of marriage, not as a bad ideal, but as an ideal which life does not live up to. The fool throughout is representative of the side of human nature which runs counter to the idyllic and romantic. Touchstone's speech against the pastoral way of life once again emphasises that the ideal is ideal, but in important phase of human nature runs counter to it.

*As You Like It* is poetic and not satiric. The comic method is in use in the play, and the comic method here is the reverse of satire. The satirist presents life as it is and ridicules it because it is not ideal or as it should be. Shakespeare goes the other way about. He represents ideal life and then makes fun of it because it does not square with life as it ordinarily is.

In *As You Like It*, specially where the serious material is based on literary ideals rather than real life, the humorous perspective is never lost sight of Rosalind's sense of humour is the principal comic agency. Jaques and Touchstone primarily act as the vehicles of comic detachment.

Jaques' melancholy motivates a 'contemplative' mockery of Arden from outside. Touchstone is placed outside by his special status as a fool. The literary convention in the story he adopted from Lodge is related by Shakespeare to life as whole. The love affairs of the three pairs of lovers, Silvius and Phebe, Touchstone and Audrey, Orlando and Rosalind succeed one another in a sequence of scenes, each being played off against the others. The 'courting eclogue' pastoral romance convention -between Phebe and Silvius is broken up by Rosalind who reminds them that they are nature's creatures, and that love's purposes are contradicted by too absolute a cultivation of romantic liking or loathing Conventional sentiment is underscored by exaggerated downheartedness. Touchstone's affair with Audrey complements the spectacle of exaggerated sentiment by showing love reduced to its lowest common denominator, without any sentiment at all. Touchstone is a detached, objective and resigned "lover" But Touchstone's inclusion in the love theme of the play, as a representative of the unromantic in love, is not to undercut the play's romance : his realism serves to forestall the cynicism of the audience.

Romantic participation in love and humorous detachment from its follies, the two opposed attitude which are balanced against each other in the action as a whole, meet and are reconciled in Rosalind's personality. She is always aware of love's illusions even while being swept along by its deepest currents. Thus she has the power of combining wholehearted feeling and clear judgement and this gives the play its value. Her disguise is exploited by Shakespeare to give a humorous commentary on her own passionate love affair. Rosalind is not committed to the conventional language and attitudes of love, loaded as these are with sentimentality. Silvius and Phebe are her foils in this- they take their conventional feelings and language perfectly seriously.

The full realization of the balanced attitude towards love comes in the scene of disguised wooing which marks the climax of the play's romantic movement. Rosalind is able to look beyond her golden moment and mock the illusion that love is an ultimate experience. Ideally, love should be final as Orlando is convinced it is; but Rosalind is aware that is not so in reality. By the end of the scene, the illusions thrown up by feeling are mastered by laughter and so love is reconciled with judgement. Rosalind has been convinced of Orlando's love. Love is thus safe against life's unromantic contradictions. To

emphasize by humour the limitations in *As You Like It* the comic vision gives the material a poetic quality rather than a satiric one.

In *As You Like It* romance and comedy are amalgamated in an effective way. If in *Silvius and Phebe* is exhibited the ridiculous possibilities which romanticism can go to, in *Touchstone* Shakespeare includes a representative of just those aspects of love which are not romantic. By *Rosalind's* mockery a sense of love's limitations is kept alive at the very moments when we feel its power. The humour is an agency of achieving proportion of judgement and feeling about a seriously felt experience. But the ideals, though not deluding the eye of reason, are forever recreating themselves, and faith in those ideals is never extinguished. Thus the play's effect is poetic, not satiric. There is an aura of freshness, radiance and beauty about the play.

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