

Shakespeare's Thematic Approach in Drama with reference to "As You Like It"

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Theme Analysis

'As You Like It' is a happy Shakespearean comedy. The main setting is a forest where people go to escape the dishonesty and politics of court life. The forest represents the purity of Mother Nature and anyone who goes near it seems to absorb this purity to some extent. Duke Senior is shown to be the better of the two Dukes. He and his supporters decide to leave the deception of the court and reside in the forest. When Rosalind is banished, she and Celia, both shown to be good people, go there as well. Lastly, Duke Frederick goes to the forest to hunt Duke Senior, and when he reaches the edge he is converted and gives up his title

As You Like It is also a love story with the end of the play showing four different couples getting married. However, unlike the times in which it was written, the main person directing the courtship is the woman, Rosalind. Dressed as Ganymede, Rosalind is able to take advantage of her disguise by helping two pastoral characters unite, and also by planning her own wedding.

She even asks her own father if her beau can have her hand in marriage, something that would normally be handled by the male in the relationship.

Finally, *As You Like It* focuses on issues between brothers. As often happened at that time, one child received more inheritance than another. This causes tension between the family members such as Duke Senior and Duke Frederick, along with Oliver and Orlando. Duke Frederick and Oliver both want to destroy their brothers so they will not have to share the portion of wealth they received upon their father's death. The play works itself out however, when Orlando saves his brother's life earning his love and gratitude. When the forest brings Duke Frederick back to his honesty, Duke Senior solves the boy's land dispute.

As You Like It is a pleasurable play filled with feisty and witty language and unique characters. Its love of nature, love of falling in love, and love of families makes it easily accessible to all that read or see it.

Themes of the Play

A) Theme of Love

'*As You Like It*' is one of the best romantic comedies of Shakespeare. It is built on the theme of love. Love is the motif, the chief source of life and happiness. Referring to '*As you Like It*', a critic named Gordon remarks. "In this climate of romance, it is, of course, the rule that all the lovers shall love and love at once and love absolutely. Nothing else in this world is permitted". There are several characters in the play who love their beloveds

in their own way and own style. There are four couples in this comedy, each of a different quality and different measure.

The love of Rosalind and Orlando is intense. It is not sensual but ideal love. It flourishes in the Forest of Arden. Rosalind's love is unique and is an example of those who love at first sight. Orlando, too, is a romantic love and his love is spontaneous, firm and faithful. His love is marked by his steadfastness and loyalty to his mistress.

The love of Celia and Oliver is of a different kind. Their love-affair does not have the imaginative, fanciful and poetical quality of Rosalind-Orlando love. The suddenness and abruptness of love hints at sex attraction, but we are surprised at the vagaries of love, at the manner in which Cupid hits its victims. Thus their love is unnatural. It is also a love at first sight.

The love between Silvius and Phebe is traditional, pastoral love. Throughout the play it is one-sided love, though in the end the two are united in marriage. Silvius is a victim of love at first sight. The peculiarity of his passion is that he has given his heart to a woman who is disdainful and proud and does not reciprocate his love. He is a simple shepherd and loves phebe sincerely.

The love-affair of Touchstone and Audrey is prosaic. It serves as a foil to romantic love in the play. Other lovers in the play fall in love at first sight with beauty, but Touchstone

takes a fancy to ugliness. Audrey, the ugly, honest and chaste girl represents the peasant class of women.

Apart from these four pairs, good examples of love can be seen among Rosalind and Celia, Orlando and Adam. The love between Rosalind and Celia is more than sisterly love and does not undergo a change under adverse circumstances. The love between Orlando and Adam is an ideal example of servant-master love. Thus the play reflects the spirit of love.

(b) Idyllic pastoral life contrasted with sophisticated court life.

Shakespeare has presented a pleasant pastoral world and has converted the Forest of Arden into another Arcadia, where they 'fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world'. The very air of the place appears to breathe a spirit of philosophical poetry. All those who dwell in the forest of Arden feel contented and, in the words of the Duke Senior, 'And this our life exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

They find their hearts open for love and affection and their hearts do not harbor any ill-will or jealousy for others. In like the courtiers, they are free from artificiality, hypocrisy or cunningness. Toughness makes fun of the court life. With his piercing shafts of wit, he brings out the follies and foibles of men and manners practicing lies and double standards.

(c) Theme of Loyalty

The master-servant relationship between Orlando and Adam in the play brings out the theme of loyalty and trust in clear terms. Adam remained very loyal even to Orlando's father and now he serves Orlando devotedly and selflessly. On learning that Orlando is facing threat of life from his own elder brother Oliver, Adam offers all his savings to his master and vows to stand by Orlando through thick and thin. Orlando too takes proper care of Adam and looks to the need of Adam first before satisfying his own. Such a master-servant relationship is exemplary and idealistic.

(d) Theme of Mutual Affection

The two cousins – Rosalind and Celia are deeply attached to each other and no one, not even the despotic and unbecoming attitude of the usurper Duke can stand before the strong love bond that exist between them. When Duke Frederick tries to wean away his daughter from Rosalind, Celia strongly asserts that she has one soul with Rosalind. She says:-

“We still have slept together.

Rose at an instant, learn'd, play'd, eat together,

And where so ever we went, like Juno's swans,

Still we went coupled and inseparable”.

Shakespeare has presented variegated characters with all their idiosyncrasies, frailties and follies in such freak measure that they are a part of all of us in one way or the other. If we have romantic characters, we have cynics, philosophers, critics and rustics. All sorts of

characters jostle with one another Jaques, a melancholy character, finds this world a stage in which we have our entrances and exits and we have to play different roles on the stage of life.

In his words:

‘All the world’s a stage,

And all the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and their entrances.

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