

'As You Like It' as a Romantic comedy. ①

'As You Like It' has rightly been acclaimed as "the sweetest and happiest of shakespeare's comedies." shakespearean comedy shares the principal characteristics of Elizabethan comedy - its richness variety and complexity. There is hardly a play with only one story and none in which the plot does not include more than one thrilling incident or situation. Moreover there is always an exuberance of romantic sentiment which stirs the heart of the noble heroine no less than that of the disreputable courtesan. In order to enrich the stories with romantic situation and sentiment, shakespeare draws on fairy-love and mistaken identity, and various other intricate devices. In 'As You Like It' itself, Rosalind courts Orlando in male attire. The following definition of shakespearean comedy by Dowden brings into out essentials - "a delightful story conducted in some romantic region, by gracious and gallant persons, thwarted or ~~aided~~ aided by the mirthful gods, circumstances and arriving at fortunate issue."

* The world of shakespearean comedy is a world of fantasy, which the playwright's imagination endows with the semblance of life. The romantic comedy of shakespeare is, thus a perfect blending, of romantic and realism. It is different from the realistic comedy of intrigue and exposure practised by Ben Jonson and Middleton. Though the ultimate world of shakespeare's comedy is romantic poetic and imaginative, it is by no means unsubstantial. The settings are all imaginative, and characters and scene are viewed through casement, as it were which transform reality. The fundamental difference between classical and shakespeare comedy is that whereas the former is conservative, the latter is creative. The main interest of fractional comedy is the exposure of human vices and follies. Naturally it employs a satirical, common sense approach, but shakespearean comedy is a more venturesome and more imaginative undertaking. Its way is that of imagination rather than pure reason "it is an artist's vision, not a critic's disposition." Its heroes and heroines are voyagers in pursuit of happiness, a brave new world where in man's life may be fuller, his sensations more exquisite and his joys, more lasting and so more humane.]

The setting of 'As You Like It' is romantic in its unfamiliarity and remoteness, but where all the probable and improbable, fanciful and fantastic episodes occur as naturally and daily occurrences of life. The scene of

action is Arden, the forest-Elysium where "love alone of all the human passion has found an entrance". It is a romantic country where strange and stirring things happen. "Where music is the food of love" where "supereal and material exigencies offer no impediment to man's grasp at the opulence of merely sentimental existence". The central theme in "As You Like It", as in other Shakespeare comedies, is love, and the Phebe's famous utterance, "

"Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?" The theme of love is repeated in different pattern so that, we have as many as four pairs of lovers - Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Silvius and Phebe and Touchstone and Audrey. Love, by its variety, is enriched and made inexhaustible like the lights and shades of contrast. As a result we have different types of love - romantic, sentimental and prosaic.

Love is the main source of beautifying ^{and} enriching the romantic world of Shakespeare. The novelty of love-making in all its varieties is the main action of the comedy, which is made more piquant by the adoption of disguise. The disguise of sex itself becomes the simplest and most picturesque expedient to emphasize the romantic element. Apart from the disguise, there are other sources also. The supernatural, fantastic situations incident in which Shakespeare draws to create a romantic atmosphere.

X ('As You Like It' is romance intricate in which all the elements of the secular tradition are gathered in a light hearted compass. There is the romance of friendship in Rosalind and Celia, the romance of Adam's loyalty and romance of love at first sight which comes true in all principal love episodes. Orlando emerges as a typical lover of romance a lover turned poet hanging his odes on trees and planets. Similarly, we have the conventional issues of romance in the resolution of the plot - the sudden changes of fortune, the repentance of Oliver and the conversion of the Frederick to a religious life, whereby the vanished Duke returns from exile, and Orlando wins his father's inheritance. Above all there is the romantic spirit of adventure with which the play is filled.)

Like other romantic comedies of Shakespeare 'As You Like It' is also lyrical in spirit. The use of songs imports a sweet, lyrical spirit to the play, and makes it resonant with melody. The songs, by

invoking the carefree mood and conjuring up a woodland on a bare stage, help in idealising and poetising the pastoral setting of the play.

The real excellence of Shakespeare's romantic comedy is not so much in its romantic atmosphere as in characterisation - in the unity and adversity, logic and in consistency, vividness and incomprehensibility which mark his study of human personality. There are surprises, contrasts, incongruities, disguises and confusions but all these are used for exploration of character. Rosalind puts on male attire which deceives even her nearest kinsman. What is important here is not the deception caused by disguise, but Rosalind's intellectual brilliance which it reveals unlike the realistic comedy Shakespeare's romantic comedy is given to an exploration rather than an exposure of his characters. A study of subtleties of character is obviously the step of his dramatic art. Shakespeare analyses the complexities and explores the depth of character by bringing different attitudes into contrast. In 'As You Like It' the cheerfulness with which the Duke accepts his exile contrast with the cynicism of melancholy Jaques. Jaques however meets his real antagonist in the sprightly Rosalind who is out to win happiness. Jaques has retired from the world in disgust whereas Rosalind wants to enter in triumph like conqueror. The contrast of attitude frees the play from excess of sentimentality which infects a large part of Elizabethan literature. Touchstone who knows the disadvantages of the court as well as the forest is the most remarkable character from this point of view.

In Shakespearean's romantic comedy, the plot is invariably an analogue of different themes which are sometimes similar in spirit and sometimes disparate. In 'As You Like It' the different love episodes are concerned with different pairs of lovers. Shakespeare thus secures variety by making two essentially similar stories as divergent in detail as possible. Phebe belongs to a world entirely alien to Rosalind and Celia in spite of many resemblance are ~~won~~^{won} and won in different ways. Touchstone courts Audrey in his own characteristic fashion thus adding complexity to the play.

The principle in which Shakespeare bases his

romantic comedy is the compromise between love and humour. The solemnity of love is relieved by the generosity of laughter and the irresponsibility of the laughter by the seriousness of love. With help of his delicate, genial and impersonal humour, the theme of love is made more enchanting. Comic characters provide commentary on the main plot. The romantic love making between Rosalind and Orlando and of Celia and Oliver is set off by the absurdly sentimental courtships of Silvius and Phebe on the one hand and the burlesque wooing of Touchstone and Audrey on the other. This repetition of the theme on a lower plane helps to un sentimentalize a romantic play and provides an ironic commentary. It also helps to that hold the mirror of the same theme from the different angles of vision and thus produce an all inclusive view of life. Above all, it gives a sense of structural unity to the play.

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| ① Definition - Realistic comedy | ④ Use of songs |
| ② Atmosphere | ⑤ characterisation |
| ③ Treatment of love | ⑥ Plot construction |

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