

The Theme of Love and Romance Portrayed in *As You Like It*

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Abstract:

Love is the central theme in William Shakespeare's play *As you like it* because every scene makes references to it one way or another. There are four conventional couples (Rosalind & Orlando, Celia & Oliver, Phoebe & Silvius, Audrey & Touchstone) but the forms of love differ from one couple to other. Most of the relationships in *As You Like It* are based on the principle of love at first sight implying an abrupt and overwhelming falling in love. This can be seen with Rosalind and Orlando right at the beginning of the comedy as well as with Celia and Oliver later in the play. So far as the love of Celia and Oliver is concerned the audience does not know at what point of the plot they actually fell in love with each other. An overwhelming and abrupt falling in love is also experienced by Silvius and Phoebe and ends with marriage. A further type of love is also between Audrey and Touchstone. However, in the last act, Shakespeare unites all different pairs of lovers by marriage.

Key Words: Love, Romance, Courtship, Emotion and Marriage

Introduction:

With this spectrum of love relationships, a greater attention to its romantic expression than to its essence can be found in the play. On one side, the classical literary tradition of love can be found particularly in Orlando's poems and enthusiastic love expressions, until he is educated by Ganymede, as well as in Silvius's courting of Phoebe. When seeing her for the first time at court, Orlando is unable to express his feelings: "what passion hangs these weights upon my tongue?" (1.2.236). Having reached the Forest of Arden, Orlando begins writing love poems and hanging them on the trees

where Rosalind (already disguised as Ganymede) and Celia (Aliena).

Here Orlando follows the literary tradition of love when he urges to put his emotions into words and to display them. His poems, despite their poor poetic quality, depict romantic love in Shakespeare's *As You like it*.

Orlando sentimentalizes his experience of love, indulging himself into his feelings. When Silvius also falls in love with Phoebe, he believes his sentiments to be the truest that have ever been: "O, thou didst then never love so heartily!" (2.4.28). Silvius is not poet and does not put his feelings into

verse like Orlando does. His expressions of love mainly serve one purpose to convince Phoebe of accepting him where as Orlando does not directly woo Rosalind but writes love poetry merely for the joy of being in love. These have been only a few examples of the literary expression of love in *As You Like It*. On the other hand there is more realistic view of romantic love (by Rosalind) and a parody of it by (by Touchstone). It is significant that neither Rosalind nor Touchstone tend to express their love in verse.

In this context, Rosalind disguised as Ganymede teaches Orlando to distance himself from the exaggerated romantic love and to return to the reality of everyday life. Both Rosalind and Touchstone disapprove of the lovers' need to write poetry expressing romantic love. Both of them have a realistic view on it. This literary romantic love is contrasted with a more realistic approach to love. As has been already seen in the few examples above, Orlando and Silvius are the most exemplary characters of romance where as Rosalind and Touchstone demonstrate a realistic view on love, courtship and marriage. However this does not cause any problem in the relationship between Orlando and Rosalind because she teaches her beloved how to love in a more realistic way. Touchstone's unromantic interest in Audrey does not deter her either. Phoebe also rejects Silvius's advances and romantic love in general but later she accepts Silvius's proposal. Their connection is practical and not a romantic one. At the end, all relationships (romantic, realistic and practical) turn into marriage.

In the masterpiece *As You Like It* Shakespeare depicts four couples (Orlando and Rosalind, Oliver and Celia, Silvius and Phoebe and Touchstone and Audrey) and offers four different perspectives of love. The first type of love is the most poetic and romantic. It is the love at first sight and lover and beloved are meant for each other and none else. It is shown through the young love of Orlando and Rosalind in the beginning and blooms purely through Oliver and Celia at the end. The love between Orlando and Rosalind is called gentlemanly love but is fraught with barriers needing to be overcome. This kind of love is undermined by Touchstone who describes this type of love as dishonest; "the truest poetry is the most feigning". (Act 3, Scene 2). Orlando has to overcome many obstacles in order to be married. His love is tested by Rosalind and proved to be genuine. Rosalind also enjoys the wooing side of romantic love.

Conclusion:

Love is the central theme of *As You Like It*. like other romantic comedies of Shakespeare.

Following the tradition of a romantic comedy, *As You Like It* is a tale of love manifested in its varied forms. In many of the love stories it is love at first sight. This principle of "love at first sight" is seen in the love stories of Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, as well as Phoebe and Ganymede. The love story of Audrey and Touchstone is a parody of romantic love. Another form of love is between women, as in Rosalind and Celia's deep bond.

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