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ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Shakespeare's Pastoral-Comedy *As You Like It*

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Abstract:

This paper aims to analyse *As You Like It* both as a comedy, consisting of marriages, love affairs and songs, and as a pastoral work, praising the country life in the Forest of Arden. While doing so, the ideas on drama and poetry brought forward by Shakespeare's contemporaries Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), and Ben Jonson (1572-1632) together with Julius Caesar Scaliger's (1484-1558) ideas on comedy will be taken into consideration. It will be concluded that the power of love and tolerance is emphasized with the happy ending and reconciliations at the end of the play; therefore, as Sir Philip Sidney points out, the play achieves both to delight and teach. The dances, songs and marriages all delight the audience.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Pastoral, Comedy, Court and Rural.

Introduction:

Before delving into the play itself, it might be helpful to briefly consider William Shakespeare's background. Born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, William Shakespeare is accepted as one of the most popular and productive playwrights throughout the world. Although not much is known about his private life, there are thousands of articles and books regarding his literary career and works. He went to Stratford Grammar School. While he was 18, he married Anne Hathaway; and had three children. Around 1587, Shakespeare went to London to act and write for the London stage (Bloom 11-2; Urgan 225). Shakespeare died in 1616 at the age of 52.

Seven years after Shakespeare died, in 1623, *The First Folio*, containing his 36 plays, was published in London. William Shakespeare's plays are categorized as histories, comedies, and tragedies. Among his tragedies are *Hamlet* (1600 or 1602), *Othello* (1603), *Macbeth* (1606), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) and many others. *The Comedy of Errors* (1590), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1596), *All's Well That Ends Well* (1598), *As You Like It* (1599) are some of his comedies. *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, *King John* are his "chronicle history plays, a popular kind of drama based upon history books like Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicle* and presenting dramatically the events in the reigns of various English kings" (Smith 796). Shakespeare also wrote 154 sonnets.

It is supposed that Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It* at the beginning of 1600s. "Shakespeare based the play on *Rosalynde* (1590), a prose romance by Thomas Lodge" (Bevington). It would be appropriate to give a brief summary of the play before delving into the themes. Duke Frederick exiles his brother Duke, who now lives in a cave with his men in the Forest of Arden. Also, the hatred between Sir Rowland de Boys' sons constitutes a subplot in the play. Oliver stops his brother Orlando to get a good education, and plans him to be killed at a wrestling match with Charles but Orlando wins the match and the exiled Duke's daughter Rosalind fall in love with each other. However, as Duke Frederick now banishes the exiled Duke's daughter Rosalind, Frederick's daughter Celia leave with Rosalind to the Forest of Arden. The Duke's fool Touchstone accompanies the girls who are disguised as Ganymede and Aliena. Therefore, at the end of Act I almost all characters leave the court for the countryside, The Forest of Arden. In the end, Orlando and Oliver's middle brother Jacques de Bois announces that Duke Frederick converted as he talked to a hermit; therefore, he returned

his Dukeness to Duke Senior. Similarly, Orlando and Oliver make peace. However, at the end of the play, Orlando, Oliver, Touchstone and Silvius (a shepherd) get married to Rosalind, Celia, Audrey and Phoebe (a shepherdess), respectively.

Mixing the Pastoral with the Comedy:

The 16th century literary critic Julius Caesar Scaliger defines comedy as such: “Comedy is a dramatic poem, which is filled with intrigue, full of action, happy in its outcome and written in a popular style”. Parallel to his definition, *As You Like It* fulfills the requirements of comedy, defined by Scaliger in the sense that the play is full of action both in the court and in the forest, and the outcome of the play is happy with the marriages of four couples. *As You Like It* is a romantic comedy, in which the themes of love, tolerance and union come to the forefront. Reconciliation between opponent brothers, and marriage of several couples ensure a happy ending. Also, the play carries pastoral elements since most of the actions take place in the Forest of Arden with the addition of shepherds. Therefore, the simplicity of country life with the representation of actions in the Forest of Arden is idealized as compared to the complex life in the court. In his book, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams defines pastoral as such: “[t]he originator of the pastoral was the Greek poet Theocritus, who in the third century B.C. wrote poems representing the life of Sicilian shepherds” (210). Similar to the definition, Shakespeare represents the life of shepherds and their love story in the Forest of Arden. Therefore, Shakespeare expresses “[the] image of the supposed peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting” (Abrams 210). For instance, in act III, scene II, Corin and Touchstone have a conversation on life of a shepherd: “CORIN: And how like you this shepherd's life, Master Touchstone? / TOUCHSTONE: Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life ...” (56). Also, peace and reconciliation of the opponent brothers, and marriages take place in the forest.

The nature and the prey animals are praised by the shepherds and Jaques. Similar to that, the dialogue below illustrates the respect and love of a killed deer:

JAQUES: Which is he that killed the deer?

LORD: Sir, it was I.

JAQUES: Let's present him to the duke, like a Roman conqueror; and it would do well to set the deer's horns upon his head for a branch of victory.--Have you no song, forester, for this purpose? (IV. ii. 96)

Following this conversation, Jaques sings a song. As realized, songs accompany to the joyful atmosphere of the play. Similarly, the god of marriage Hymen sings his song as such:

[Sings.] Wedding is great Juno's crown;

O blessed bond of board and bed!

'Tis Hymen peoples every town;

High wedlock then be honoured;

Honour, high honour, and renown,

To Hymen, god of every town! (V. iv. 121)

Hymen praises and dignifies marriage and wedding as wedlock is honoured by him. Everyone dances and sings with the happy ending. At the end of the play, the epilogue is spoken by Rosalind, who says that “[i]t is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue ...” (125). In her epilogue, Rosalind praises love, as well. She states that: “I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of this play as please you: and I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women ... that between you and the women the play may please” (125).

As the title suggests and as mentioned in the epilogue clearly, Shakespeare wrote his play to entertain his audience. The love stories, dances and songs in a happy atmosphere at a forest contribute to this purpose: tolerance, goodwill, peace and love.

The Concept of Time in the Court and the Forest of Arden:

Throughout the play in many dialogues, the life of court is compared to that of country as an element of pastoral. That is, “the traditional contrast of court and country is developed in a way that is shaped by the contrast between everyday and holiday, as that antithesis has become part of Shakespeare’s art and sensibility” (Barber 6). Corin, a shepherd, compares the lives in the court and the country with Touchstone as Corin says that:

... those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour of the country is most mockable at the court. You told me you salute not at the court, but you kiss your hands; that courtesy would be uncleanly if courtiers were shepherds. (III. ii. 58)

In the court, Duke Frederick and Oliver are tyrant whereas they become easy-going as they arrive the Forest of Arden, which is idealized. Almost all conspirators take place in the court while all is well in the forest; therefore, Shakespeare idealizes the country life in this play. As C. L. Barber has put it, “The Forest of Arden ... is a region defined by an attitude of liberty from ordinary limitations, a festive place where the folly of romance can have its day” (6). As the reconciliations and marriages come true in the Forest of Arden, the pastoral motif provides “a benign and favo[u]red environment for the healing of the social stresses ...” (McFarland 28). Also, in Act I, Scene I, what the wrestler Charles says concerning the life in the forest reinforces the idea of the romanticized country life:

They say he is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England: they say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world. (9)

The well-known playwright Shakespeare’s some popular quotes exist in *As You Like It*. One of them is what Touchstone says about the wise men: “The more pity that fools may not speak wisely what wise men do foolishly” (I. ii. 14). There, Touchstone talks about the bias and prejudices of the societies towards the poor (fools in this case) who are not taken into consideration. Another well-known and mostly cited quote belongs to the melancholic Jaques:

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. (II. vii. 52)

Following that, Jaques explains the adventure of a lifetime: “infant”, “school-boy”, “lover”, “soldier” and the old man (52). There, Shakespeare implies that “... the roles we play in life are settled by the cycle of growth and decline” (Barber 8-9). Therefore, it can be said argued that time is an important theme in this play. In the court, everything depends on time-bound. For instance, Duke Frederick order Rosalind to leave the court in ten days. Similarly, the Duke orders Oliver to find in one year at the most. Yet, in the Forest of Arden, time is not a crucial element. As aforementioned, when Charles talks on life in the forest, he states that “... young gentlemen ... fleet the time carelessly” (I. i. 9). Another example is Celia’s words as she talks to Corin, the old shepherd. Celia says that “I like this place. And willingly could waste my time in it” (II. iv. 42). Celia does not specifically mention any limited hours that could be counted by clock as she talks on staying in the forest. Although she is a lady of the court, she likes to be in the forest. For such reasons, it seems that time is counted with hours or days in the court whereas it is regarded to be unlimited in the forest. There, in the forest, what the characters care is love. Love affairs come alive with comic but witty dialogues. One instance is as such:

ROSALIND:

O, my dear Orlando, how it grieves me to see thee wear thy heart in a scarf!

ORLANDO:

It is my arm.

ROSALIND:

I thought thy heart had been wounded with the claws of a lion.

ORLANDO:

Wounded it is, but with the eyes of a lady. (V. ii. 109)

As is the case in a typical romantic love plot, love becomes the meaning of life for the lovers. The play suggests different perspectives on the forms of lovethrough the representation of four love affairs and eight characters in love. At a wrestling match after Orlando defeats Charles, he falls in love with her at first sight. Also, love of God is praised with the introduction of the old religious man thanks to whom Duke Frederick grieves for his own personality, and begins to pay no mind to earthly power and goods. Also, it is realized that virtue is rewarded and hostility comes to an end between the brothers.

The play has a five-act-structure with no equal distribution of scenes in acts. In that sense, it does not meet the requirements advised by Ben Jonson, who believed in an equal distribution of scenes for each act. However, as Ben Jonson has put it, the stage is not overcrowded; therefore, the attention of the audience is not diverted.

The power of love and tolerance is emphasized with the happy ending and reconciliations at the end of the play; therefore, as Sir Philip Sidney points out, the play achieves both to delight and teach. The dances, songs and marriages all delight the audience. In addition to these, Sidney believes that a king needs to learn in the end as Duke Frederick learns to be tolerant and decent since he was, before that, a tyrant. This feature of the play brings a pleasurable instruction as Sidney favours in a comedy. In that sense, as both Sidney and Jonson argued, harmless human foils take place in this comedy.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the wicked ones, like Oliver and Duke Ferdinand, end up good at the end of the play. Also, the four love affairs end up with marriages and dances; therefore, good news make the audience like the play as the title *As You Like It* suggests. As Ruth Nevo puts it in her article, "... the return to nature from corrupt civilization allows the truth, simplicity and humility of innocence to replace the treachery, craft and arrogance of worldly sophistication" (24). Order is restored in the end as is the case in Shakespeare's almost all plays. The play is, to a large extent, written in verse. The shepherds and the fool talk in prose whereas the Dukes or Lords and many others speak in verse.

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