

**:: STRUCTURE ::****5.0 Objectives****5.1 Introduction****5.2 Shakespearean Comedy****5.3 Characteristics of Shakespearean Comedy****5.3.1 The Theme of Love and Usurpation of Justice****5.3.2 Complex Plot****5.3.3 Women Disguised as Men and Mistaken Identity****5.3.4 Shakespearean Fools**

- Check Your Progress – 1

**5.4 *As You Like It* as a Shakespearean Comedy****5.4.1 The Theme of Love and Usurpation of Justice in *As You Like It*****5.4.2 Complex Plot in *As You Like It*****5.4.3 Women Disguised as Men and Mistaken Identity in *As You Like It*****5.4.4 Shakespearean Fools in *As You Like It***

- Check Your Progress – 2

**5.5 Let Us Sum Up****5.6 Key Words****5.7 Books Suggested**

- ❖ Answer

---

**5.0 OBJECTIVES**

---

In this unit, we shall

- Study in brief the characteristics of Shakespearean Comedy

- Discuss *As You Like It* as a Shakespearean Comedy
- On completing this unit, you should be able to
- know what are the characteristics of Shakespearian Comedy
  - Discuss *As You Like It* as a comedy and specifically Shakespearean Comedy.

---

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

---

As discussed in the previous two units, William Shakespeare has a unique place in English Literature. He composed around 150 sonnets and wrote about 37 plays. His plays have a variety of themes, characters and subject matters. Shakespearean plays are by and large categorized into three viz. Comedies, Tragedies and Histories. These categories are not watertight compartments. As a result, some of his plays can fall into more than one category. Unlike his predecessor, Shakespeare did not follow a strict definition of tragedy and comedy. Hence, his tragedies often have comic elements in them, and his comedies often have some tragic elements in them. Shakespearean Comedies are not necessarily what a modern audience would expect from a comedy. There are obviously, many funny moments and hilarious characters that can certainly justify themselves as a comedy with some very dramatic unfolding of a story. Usually, a Shakespearean play can be defined as a comedy when it has a happy ending, often involving marriage or marriages.

In this unit, we are going to study the characteristics of Shakespearean Comedies briefly. We shall also see how *As You Like It* is a Shakespearian Comedy.

---

## 5.2 SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY

---

William Shakespeare's contribution to English Literature is unprecedented. He wrote about 150 sonnets and about 37 plays during his lifetime. His plays have such a wide range of characteristics that it is difficult to define them under a few categories. However, on the basis of certain salient features, Shakespearean plays can be put into three categories, namely Comedies, Tragedies and Histories. A typical Shakespearean comedy has a happy ending, usually involving marriage or marriages as the last scene.

---

## 5.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY

---

After having the brief introduction of the term Shakespearean Comedy, let's understand the characteristics of a Shakespearean Comedy.

### 5.3.1 The Theme of Love and Usurpation of Justice

The dominant and prevalent theme in Shakespearean Comedy was love. There can be seen a set of lovers who usually fall in 'love at first sight'. These pairs or pairs of lovers are separated and unite at the end. Thus,

here we can see the separation of lovers who ultimately overcome obstacles and reunite and happily live ever after in harmony. There is a clear conflict between the values of reason and control - Apollonian and values such as freedom and lust - Dionysian. It is interesting to note that most of the lovers, especially the male protagonists have no occupation or job but to fall in love. There are no details given whatsoever of their source of income or what do they do to earn their living. The world of Shakespearean comedies is a dreamlike reality that is quite 'romantic' and not 'realistic'. The full-time job of the young characters is to fall in love, get separated and ultimately get united at the end. Thus, love is one of the major themes of Shakespearean Comedy.

Usurpation of justice is yet another common theme in Shakespearean comedies. This is also one of the significant themes that leads to the rise of tension between good and evil characters. Usually, a rightful king or duke is removed from his position by a foul game of some conspirators. Such victim king or duke would exile to some forest, island or some far off land. However, followed by a series of events, the wrongdoers are punished, and the rightful kings or dukes are restored to their positions. Thus, in the end, justice is served, and as one of the titles of Shakespearean comedies says, 'all's well that ends well'.

Therefore we can say that 'love' and 'usurps of justice' are major themes of Shakespearean comedies. These comedies almost always end with a restoration of a rightful king or duke and a reunion of lovers leading to their marriage or marriages. In Shakespearean comedies, marriages are shown as the achievement of contentment and the promise of everlasting happiness.

### **5.3.2 Complex Plot**

A complex plot construction is yet another characteristic of Shakespearean comedies. A typical plot of a Shakespearean comedy begins with the introduction of protagonist characters. This leads to some forms of conflict or tragic events, such as the usurpation of justice, as discussed in the previous section. These conflicting events compel the protagonist characters to an adventurous journey of self-discovery. After much dramatic sequence of action, introspection and reflection, some form of reconciliation is achieved. The third act of the play usually serves the purpose of the climax and the final reconciliation. Finally, in the last act of the play, the conflict is resolved in a happy ending with a celebration of love and togetherness, mostly leading to marriage or marriages.

Complex and mixture of main plot and sub-plot are some of the trademark characteristics of Shakespearean Comedy. There are almost always more than one parallel narrative running throughout the play. This leads to complex plot construction and overlapping of sub-plots and the main plot. However, ultimately all the tension and confusions of subplots

and main plots are resolved, and by the end of the play, every plot 'ends well'. Thus, unlike tragedy, where reconciliation leads to death, a typical Shakespearean comedy ends with a comic and happy solution that almost always leads to marriage.

### **5.3.3 Women Disguised as Men and Mistaken Identity**

Another peculiar characteristic of Shakespearean comedy is characters disguised as the opposite gender, especially women disguised as men. This was very popular in Shakespearian times mainly due to the fact that the actors who used to perform the role of women were young male actors. This was used as a device to generate curiosity and excitement among the audience of all time. This also leads to the revelation and confession of lovers to their beloved in disguise without knowing that they are their beloveds.

Women disguised as men also lead to mistaken identity, which is yet another characteristic of the plot of a Shakespearean comedy. Due to the mistaken identity, it sometimes leads to love for a character who is not a real man, e.g. Phebe, a shepherdess in *As You Like It*, falls in love with Rosalind, a duke's daughter, who was disguised as a young man. On the other hand, sometimes these misunderstandings are intentionally planned by a villain to misguide the protagonist, for instance, in *Much Ado About Nothing* when Claudio is made to believe that his fiancé has been unfaithful to him by Don John's trick of mistaken identity.

Thus, female characters disguising as males is one of the most common characteristics of Shakespearean comedies. And it is due to this characteristic that mistaken identities occur that prolongs the narrative of the play. At the end of the play, the real identities of the disguised characters are revealed, and confusions are resolved.

### **5.3.4 Shakespearean Fools:**

The Shakespearean fool is a recurrent character in tragedies and comedies alike. These characters are usually court jesters or servants who are very clever and full of wisdom. Some of the most memorable dialogues of the Shakespearean plays are uttered by these fools. In fact, Shakespearean fools serve the purpose of a mouthpiece of Shakespeare to convey some of the most revolutionary ideas. These fools express their views on a wide range of themes, including human nature, philosophy of life, and meaning of love, among others. In Shakespearean tragedies, a fool provides comic relief, for example, the Gravediggers in *Hamlet* and the Porter in *Macbeth*. Whereas in comedies, a fool serves many purposes apart from amusing the audience, for instance, to introduce other characters or themes of the play as well. Feste, in *Twelfth Night*, not only introduces the theme of the play but also provides the closing remarks at the end of the play. Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, The Gravediggers in *Hamlet* and The Fool in *King Lear* are some of the most popular fools and clowns of Shakespearean plays.

• **Check Your Progress – 1**

**State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False':**

1. The setting of the Shakespearean comedies used to be 'dreamlike'.
2. All the women characters in the Shakespearean comedies were played women, actresses.
3. Almost all the Shakespearean comedies end in celebration and marriages.
4. The male protagonist in Shakespearean comedies was engaged in employment.
5. Love and usurpation of justice were not some of the major themes of Shakespearean comedies.
6. In Shakespearean comedy, reconciliation also results in death.
7. The Shakespearean Fool provides 'comic relief' to the audience in tragedies.

---

## **5.4 AS YOU LIKE IT AS A SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY**

---

In the previous section, we have seen some of the major characteristics of Shakespearean comedies. As discussed above, a typical Shakespearean comedy has a happy ending usually involving marriage or marriages as the last scene. In the following section, we are going to study *As You Like It* with reference to the characteristics of a Shakespearean Comedy.

### **5.4.1 The Theme of Love and Usurpation of Justice in *As You Like It***

As discussed in the previous section, that one of the dominant and prevalent themes in Shakespearean Comedy was love. The world of Shakespearean comedies is a dreamlike reality that is quite 'romantic' and not 'realistic'. The full-time job of the young characters is to fall in love, get separated and ultimately get united at the end. Thus, love is one of the major themes of Shakespearean Comedy.

Love is the central theme of most of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, and *As You Like It* is not an exception. As per the tradition of a romantic comedy, *As You Like It* depicts a series of parallel love stories in their varied forms. As common in many Shakespearean romantic comedies, in many of the love stories, lovers instantly fall in love with their first meeting. Thus, this theme of 'love at first sight' can be seen in the love stories of Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, and also in Phebe and Ganymede. On the other hand, Shakespeare presented a parody of romantic love with the love story of Audrey and Touchstone. Another form of a bond of love is shown between women, as in the profound understanding between Rosalind and Celia.

Usurpation of justice is yet another common theme in Shakespearean comedies. This is also one of the significant themes that leads to the rise of tension between good and evil characters. Usually, a rightful king or

duke is removed from his position by a foul game of some conspirators. Such victim king or duke would exile to some forest, island or some far off land. However, followed by a series of events, the wrongdoers are punished, and the rightful kings or dukes are restored to their positions. Thus, in the end, justice is served, and as one of the titles of Shakespearean comedies says, 'all's well that ends well'.

Usurpation of justice is also one of the significant themes of *As You Like It*. The new Duke Frederick takes away his position from his elder brother Duke Senior. Oliver, on the other hand, treats his younger brother Orlando with similar injustice and compel him to seek his fortune somewhere else. Thus, both Senior Duke and Orlando have to take refuge in the forest. It is through nature that justice is restored in a mysterious way.

Thus, both the primary characteristics of Shakespearean comedies are clearly present in *As You Like It*. Therefore we can say that 'love' and 'usurps of justice' are major themes of Shakespearean comedies, which can be seen in *As You Like It*. Further, a reunion of lovers leading to their marriage or marriages can also be seen in *As You Like It*. Thus, *As You Like It* depicts the theme of usurpation and injustice of the property of the other that provides the rising action. However, as a Shakespearean comedy has to end happiness and reconciliation, both Senior Duke and Orlando are served justice as Duke Frederick and Oliver undergoes the change of heart. Both Senior Duke and Orlando forgive their brothers, and thus, forgiveness and reconciliation prevail. Thus, the play ends happily and celebration and announcements of marriages.

#### **5.4.2 Complex Plot of *As You Like It*:**

A complex plot construction is yet another characteristic of Shakespearean comedies. A typical plot of a Shakespearean comedy begins with the introduction of protagonist characters which leads to some forms of conflict or tragic events such as usurpation of justice, as discussed in the previous section. Complex and mixture of main plot and sub-plot are some of the trademark characteristics of Shakespearean Comedy. There are almost always more than one parallel narrative running throughout the play. This leads to complex plot construction and overlapping of sub-plots and the main plot. These conflicting events compel the protagonist characters to an adventurous journey of self-discovery. After much dramatic sequence of action, introspection and reflection, some form of reconciliation is achieved. The third act of the play usually serves the purpose of the climax and the final reconciliation. Finally, in the last act of the play, the conflict is resolved in a happy ending with a celebration of love and togetherness, mostly leading to marriage or marriages.

The plot of *As You Like It* has two parallel stories running. The first story is of Oliver and his brother Orlando and the second of a Senior Duke and

his brother Fredrick. In both the stories, a brother is ill-treated by his own brother. When Oliver inherits the property after the death of his father, he kept his brother Orlando uneducated and bereft of any manners and training befitting to a gentleman. Orlando leaves the court and starts living in the Forest Arden. On the other hand, Fredrick usurps the court of Senior Duke and compels him to exile to the Forest Arden. In order to ensure safety, Rosalind disguised as a young man and assumed the name Ganymede and Celia disguised as a common shepherdess. Nevertheless, Fredric allows Rosalind, the daughter of Senior Duke, to stay in the court, avowing to the bond she has with his own daughter Celia. However, later he changed his mind and banished Rosalind from the court and hence, Rosalind takes refuge in the Forest Arden. Thus, three parties: first, Senior Duke and his loyal courtiers, second, Rosalind, Celia along with a court jester Touchstone and third Orlando started living in the forest. During the course of time, a series of couples fall in love that includes Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Phoebe and Silvis and last but not least, Audrey and Touchstone. Oliver heart changes as he meets a hermit and gives the Senior Duke his through the back. Oliver, too realizes his mistake and welcomes his brother Orlando to the court. Thus, the play comes to an end with forgiveness and reconciliation and hence, due to its complexity of structure and intermingling of the sub-plots and main plots, we can that *As You Like It* is out an out example of Shakespearean Comedy.

#### **5.4.3 Women Disguised as Men and Mistaken Identity in *As You Like It*:**

Another peculiar characteristic of Shakespearean comedy is characters disguised as the opposite gender, especially women disguised as men. This was very popular in Shakespearian times mainly due to the fact that the actors who used to perform the role of women were young male actors. This was used as a device to generate curiosity and excitement among the audience of all time. This also leads to the revelation and confession of lovers to their beloved in disguise without knowing that they are their beloveds.

In *As You Like It*, there are many instances of women disguised as men for various reasons. In order to ensure safety, for instance, Rosalind disguised as a young man and assumed the name Ganymede and Celia disguised as a common shepherdess. They meet Orlando and Oliver as men. Orlando, who's in love with Rosalind, reveals his feelings to Ganymede (who is actually Rosalind herself in the guise of a man). On the other hand, Celia also meets Oliver with revealing her identity as a woman. It was at the end of the play that both Rosalind and Celia as women and accept the proposal of Orlando and Oliver, respectively.

As discussed in the previous section, women disguised as men also lead to mistaken identity, which is yet another characteristic of the plot of a Shakespearean comedy. Due to the mistaken identity, it sometimes leads

to love for a character that is not a real man, e.g. Phebe, a shepherdess in *As You Like It*, falls in love with Rosalind, a duke's daughter, who was disguised as Ganymede, a young man. On the other hand, Phebe declines the proposal of Silvius, a shepherd who was in love with her. Thus, we can see the mistaken identity leads to confusion. Phebe, a shepherdess, declines a proposal of a real man, Silvius, for she is in love with a disguised man who's actually a woman, i.e. Rosalind.

Thus, female characters disguising as males is one of the most common characteristics of Shakespearean comedies that can be seen in *As You Like It*. And it is due to this characteristic that mistaken identities occur that prolongs the narrative of the play, which is also apparent in Phebe, Ganymede and Silvius love triangle. Nevertheless, by the end of the play, the real identities of the disguised characters are revealed, and confusions are resolved, and Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Phebe and Silvius and also Audrey and Touchstone are shown united in love and marriage.

#### **5.4.4 Shakespearean Fools in *As You Like It*:**

The Shakespearean fool is a recurrent character in tragedies and comedies alike. These characters are usually court jesters or servants who are very clever and full of wisdom. Some of the most memorable dialogues of the Shakespearean plays are uttered by these fools. In fact, Shakespearean fools serve the purpose of a mouthpiece of Shakespeare to convey some of the most revolutionary ideas. These fools express their views on a wide range of themes, including human nature, philosophy of life, and meaning of love, among others.

Touchstone in *As You Like It* is one of the most popular fools of Shakespearean plays. Touchstone is a court jester of Duke Fredrick. He has a vivid sense of humour and intelligence. Touchstone is portrayed as a selfless character, as he accompanies Celia to the forest in order to serve her and also to provide security to his mistress. He also serves the purpose of a mouthpiece of the author as he comments about almost all the characters. It is through his comments about the other characters that we come across the insight of the author as well. He falls in love with Audrey, a rustic goad-girl and ultimately gets married to her. Touchstone has uttered some of the most memorable dialogues of the Shakespearean comedies, e.g. "*The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.*" (Act V, Scene I).

Thus, Touchstone is one of the most famous fools of Shakespearean Comedy. He serves many purposes that include an amusing audience, providing additional information about the other characters and sharing the world view of the author.

• **Check Your Progress – 2**

Join A with B:

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>
1) Rosalind	a) falls in love with Phebe
2) Fredrick	b) falls in love with Ganymede
3) Celia	c) disguises as Ganymede
4) Touchstone Duke	d) usurps the position of Senior
5) Phebe	e) disguises as a common shepherd
6) Orlando	f) accompanies his mistress to the forest
7) Silvius	g) falls in love with Rosalind

---

## 5.5 LET US SUM UP

---

In this unit, you have learnt

- about the characteristics of Shakespearean Comedy and
- *As You Like It* as a Shakespearean Comedy

---

## 5.6 KEY WORDS

---

<b>Apollonian</b>	of or relating to the Greek god Apollo; a philosophical and literary concept advocating rational thinking and order
<b>Comedy</b>	a play that is meant to make people laugh and that has a happy ending
<b>Comic relief</b>	a relief from the emotional tension, especially of a drama that is provided by the interposition of a comic episode or element
<b>Conquer</b>	to take control of a country, city etc. through the use of force
<b>Dionysian</b>	of or related to the Greek god Dionysius; a philosophical and literary concept advocating irrational, emotional and instinctive thinking
<b>Disguise</b>	to change one's usual dress, appearance, voice etc. so that people will not recognize who the real person is
<b>Enchanted</b>	influenced by or as if by charm, attraction or magic
<b>Hilarious</b>	marked by or causing hilarity; extremely funny
<b>Hilarity</b>	boisterous merriment or laughter
<b>Norman</b>	one of the people from northern Europe and France who conquered England in 1066
<b>Pastoral</b>	of or related to the countryside (village) or to the lives of people such as shepherds or herdsmen who live in the country
<b>Plagiarism</b>	an act of using another person's words or ideas without

<b>Plagiarist</b>	giving credit to that person someone who uses another person's words or ideas without giving credit to that person; one who is involved in the act of plagiarism
<b>Predecessor</b>	someone of something that comes before something else
<b>Prose</b>	writing that is not poetry
<b>Protagonist</b>	the main character in a novel, play, film etc.
<b>Reconciliation</b>	the act of causing two people or groups to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement
<b>Salient</b>	very important or noticeable
<b>Setting</b>	the time, place and circumstances in which something (here story or a narrative) occurs or develops
<b>Tragedy</b>	a play that is serious in nature and theme and has a sad ending (such as the death of the main character/s)
<b>Unprecedented</b>	not done or experienced before
<b>Usurp</b>	to take and keep (soothing, such as power) in a forceful or violent way and especially without the right to do so
<b>Usurpation</b>	an act of usurping
<b>Verse</b>	writing in which words are arranged in a rhythmic pattern; a part of a poem or song

---

## 5.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED

---

- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1999. Print.
- Dusinberre, Juliet, ed. *AYL Arden 3 Shakespeare*. London: Thomson Learning, 2006. Print.
- Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961. Print.
- Abrams, M. H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Mason: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012. Print.

### ❖ ANSWERS:

#### Check Your Progress – 1

State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False':

1. The setting of the Shakespearean comedies used to be 'dreamlike'.  
**True**
2. All the women characters in the Shakespearean comedies were played women, actresses. **False**
3. Almost all the Shakespearean comedies end in celebration and marriages. **True**
4. The male protagonist in Shakespearean comedies was engaged in employment. **False**
5. Love and usurpation of justice were not some of the major themes of Shakespearean comedies. **False**

6. In Shakespearean comedy, reconciliation also results in death. **False**  
7. The Shakespearean Fool provides 'comic relief' to the audience in tragedies. **True**

**Check Your Progress – 2**

Join A with B:

**A**

- 1) Rosalind
- 2) Fredrick  
Duke
- 3) Celia
- 4) Touchstone  
forest
- 5) Phebe
- 6) Orlando
- 7) Silvius

**B**

- c) disguises as Ganymede
- d) usurps the position of Senior
- e) disguises as a common shepherd
- f) accompanies his mistress to the
- b) falls in love with Ganymede
- g) falls in love with Rosalind
- a) falls in love with Phebe