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**4.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit, we shall

- Study the plot and theme of the play *As You Like It*
- Study the characters, language and style of the play *As You Like It*.

On completing this unit, you should be able to

- know the plot and theme of *As You Like It* and
- the characters, language and style of *As You Like It*.

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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As discussed in the previous unit, Elizabethan Age was a golden period for English plays. English Literature owes a lot to Elizabethan Age as it has provided great literary heritage for the following generation. Along with others, William Shakespeare too was a gift of the Elizabethan Age not only to English literature but to the world. William Shakespeare was one of the most prominent contributors to the English language and literature. In the previous unit, we had also discussed his life and works along with a brief history of English drama. In this chapter, we are going to study one of the plays of Shakespeare, namely *As You Like It* (1599). It is one of the finest plays by William Shakespeare. It has some of the most memorable characters, speeches, themes etc. The play has been performed, adapted and translated into many languages and countries around the world. In this unit, we will study the characters, theme, plot and style of the play.

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## 4.2 AS YOU LIKE IT BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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### 4.2.1 Sources of *As You Like It*

*As You Like It* was written by William Shakespeare somewhere around 1599, but it was not published until 1623 in the *First Folio*. It is a pastoral comedy that was quite popular during the Elizabethan period. Whether the play was performed in England or not is not clear. However, after 1603 it started getting performed at various stages such as Wilton House, among others. *As You Like It* depicts the adventures of its heroine Rosalind runs away from the persecution of her uncle's court. She takes shelter in the Forest of Arden with her cousin Celia. In the forest, both the sisters come across a variety of extraordinary and enchanted characters. After a series of ups and downs in the play, both Rosalind and Celia eventually find their love in the Forest of Arden.

William Shakespeare is known to be a plagiarist who gets inspiration from a variety of his predecessors and contemporaries as well. However, it is interesting to note that he improvised the original sources beyond recognition. *As You Like It* was also not any exception in it. The story and plot of *As You Like It* was almost entirely taken from the popular work of Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde* (1590). Shakespeare added a wide range of dramatic characters in the play, which was not there in the original work. Further, Shakespeare also added wit and humour to the play as well which is his unique contribution to the English language. The play offered a wide range of Shakespearean poetic language and love poetry. The play depicted a marvellous comedy on love and life with intertwined narratives with a variety of elements. *As You Like It* offers a wide range of buffets to its viewers to pick and choose from, and thus, it stands by its title. Although the play is adapted from an older story, it offers a whole

new perspective to the plot and story with its freshness and spontaneity. Shakespeare has changed the original story to another level and elevated it beyond recognition with his unique poetic treatment.

• **Check Your Progress – 1**

**Q.1 State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False':**

1. *As You Like It* was originally written in 1623 by William Shakespeare.
2. Shakespeare took the story and plot of *As You Like It* from Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*.
3. Rosalind and Celia escaped to an island for their shelter.
4. Unique freshness, loving poetry and spontaneity are some of the features of *As You Like*.
5. Rosalind and Celia met many enchanting characters in the Forest of Arden.

**4.2.2 Setting and Themes of *As You Like It***

*As You Like It* is also entitled as a pastoral comedy because Shakespeare has employed the traditional elements of pastoral literature quite popular during the Elizabethan Period. Pastoral literature has its origin in the third century BC. In typical pastoral literature, an enchanted world is created by the author with mysterious elements in it. The world of a pastoral story is usually created in stark contrast with the real world. The characters of a pastoral story seek refuge in such an enchanted world from real-life fears, anxieties, uncertainties, and tensions. They are transported into some imagined, mythical place such as an island or forest where peace, endurance, satisfaction, and fulfilment are prevailing. In every age, some unique manners or devices are invented to describe their lost happiness. Usually, such devices are found in some far-removed land away from the everyday existence of ordinary human life. The pastoral was one such device identified and practised in late sixteenth-century England.

In a pastoral setting, some mythic and lost world is depicted as a humble, rural atmosphere that houses desirable and honest people. Hence, a typical pastoral setting has two contrasting worlds: a real and world of insecurity, deception and disloyalty, and another world is a mythical world where the lost innocence, loyalty and simplicity are found. *As You Like It* is a typical pastoral story that puts forward two contrasting worlds. The harsh real world is represented by the court of Duke Frederick and Oliver. Rosalind runs away from the persecution of her uncle's court to the forest. Here, the rural and mythical world is represented by the Forest of Arden, where Rosalind takes shelter with her cousin sister Celia. The court is depicted as a natural habitat of immoral and degenerated men such as Duke Frederick and Oliver. It is interesting to note that the gentle Duke Orlando is banished from the court, whereas Rosalind and Celia had to escape to save themselves from the persecution of the court. All these gentle folks have gone away from the court who used to once reside

there. Thus, the court is depicted as a natural home of corrupt and ruthless people. On the other hand, the Forest of Arden stands for an abode for the innocent and gentle folks.

The theme of a story means its underlying idea or a message that an author wants to convey to the readers or the viewers. A theme of a novel, play, short story or poem is that critical belief or understanding of life that the author attempts to convey. Usually, this belief, idea or understanding of an author transcends the socio-cultural barriers. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare wants to convey various themes such as love, usurpation of justice, court life and country life and above all, the theme of forgiveness or reconciliation. We shall see these themes in the following section.

Love is the central theme of most of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. *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 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.

Court life and country life are compared in *As You Like It*, and country life is shown to better place to be. Life in the country is celebrated in most parts of the play. The people ruled by the court of Duke Frederick undergo the fears of capricious injustice and even death threats. In the second Act, the first scene, the courtiers who followed the old duke into forced exile feel liberated in the 'desert city' in the forest despite the discomfort of the forest. This is in stark contrast with the comfortable but unjust court life. In a conversation between the court jester Touchstone and a shepherd, Corin tries to establish that satisfaction and peace of mind can be found in the country life and not in the perfumed, mannered life at court. Thus, the play highlights two contrasting worlds of court and country life where the county of forest life is highlighted to be superior. Finally, forgiveness and reconciliation are two of the most common themes in Shakespearean comedies. *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 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, reconciliation is restored. Thus, the play ends happily, and celebration and joy prevail.

- **Check Your Progress – 2**

**Q.1 Answer the following questions in brief:**

1) What is the setting of the play *As You Like It*?

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2) What are the characteristics of a typical pastoral story?

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3) What are the major themes of *As You Like It*?

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### **4.2.3 Plot Construction of *As You Like It***

The plot is some logical sequence or structure given to the events of the narrative in a story. Usually, the author conceived the plot of his story in very simple terms, a sentence that encompasses the entire canvass of the narrative: for example, the plot of *Christmas Carol* (1843) of Charles Dickens can be described as “a misanthrope is reformed through certain magical visitations on Christmas Eve,” or the plot of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) can be conceived as “a young couple destined to be married have first to overcome the barriers of pride and prejudice.” 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 also 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.

- **Check Your Progress – 3**

**Q.1 State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False':**

1. *Oliver treats his brother fairly after the death of his father.*
2. Fredrick usurps the throne of his brother Senior Duke.
3. Rosalind and Celia are real sisters.
4. Celia disguised as a young man to ensure safety in the forest.
5. Fredrick's heart changes as he meets a hermit.

**4.2.4 Characters of *As You Like It***

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of novels: 'novel of character' and 'novel of incident'. The novel of incident deals with the external conflict of the characters, whereas the novel of character deals with the internal conflict, dilemma struggle and ultimate enrichment of a character. The novel of character is therefore considered to be of greater value compared to that of an incident. The portrayal of vivid characters and their development is considered to be of higher-order writing skills in the world of fiction. According to E. M. Foster, there are two types of characters, namely 'round' and 'flat'. Round characters are the ones that show transformation in their personality and way of thinking. They may show a transformation from good to bad or bad to good. These round characters are also known as 'complex' or 'dynamic' characters. On the other hand, 'flat' characters remain unchanged and unmoved throughout the narrative. They undergo all the situations and hardships without displaying any change in their personality. If they are good, they remain good throughout the narrative, and if they are bad or below average, opportunist or any other type, they remain as they were at the beginning of the narrative. These flat characters are also known as simple characters. The variety of characters are also referred to as 'black', 'white', and 'grey' characters depending on the personality traits they possess. For instance, 'black' characters are villainous characters that display the darker and baser sides of human characters. 'White' characters are bright, pure, flawless and embodiment of good qualities. Interesting characters are 'grey'; they may be predominantly 'black' characters with some 'white' tint in their personality, or they may be predominantly 'white' characters with some 'black' or dark tint in their character. There may be a huge variety of 'grey' characters in creative writing.

In the play *As You Like It*, we come across a wide variety of characters. These characters are:

- Duke Senior: Duke Frederick's older brother and Rosalind's father
- Duke Frederick: Duke Senior's younger brother and his usurper, also Celia's father
- Rosalind: Duke Senior's daughter
- Celia: Duke Frederick's daughter and Rosalind's cousin
- Oliver de Boys: the eldest son and heir
- Jacques de Boys: the second son
- Orlando de Boys: the youngest son
- Adam: a faithful old servant who follows Orlando into exile
- Dennis: Oliver's servant who called Charles
- Touchstone, a court fool or jester
- Le Beau, a courtier
- Charles, a wrestler
- Lords and ladies in Duke Frederick's court
- Phebe: a proud shepherdess
- Silvius: a shepherd
- Audrey: a country girl
- Corin: an elderly shepherd
- William, a countryman
- Sir Oliver Martext, a curate
- Hymen: God of marriage

According to the aforesaid divisions of the characters, there can be two broad divisions of the characters: 'flat' and 'round'. In *As You Like It*, the character that falls under the characteristic of flat characters are: Orlando, Rosalind, Celia, Duke Senior, Touchstone, Jacques among other. These characters remain as they are throughout the course of the narrative of the play. Their goodness, wit, stupidity, melancholy etc., remain the same throughout the play. On the other hand, the characters that fall under the characteristic of round characters are Fredrick, Oliver and Phebe, among others. These characters show the change of their heart and mind. There can be seen a change of heart in the characters of Fredrick and Oliver, whereas Phebe's attitude towards Sulvius can be seen changing. Thus, we can see that there is a wide range of characters in the play *As You Like*.

- **Check Your Progress – 4**

**Q.1 State which are the characters and characteristics of 'Round' characters and which are not:**

**Characteristics:**

1. One who remains the same throughout a narrative? [**Flat / Round**]
2. One who displays no change of heart, mind or point of view? [**Flat / Round**]
3. One who changes from good to bad person? [**Flat / Round**]

4. One who has more than one dimension to his/her character? [**Flat / Round**]
5. One who changes from good to bad person? [**Flat / Round**]
6. One who remains simple and straightforward throughout a narrative? [**Flat / Round**]
7. One who plays various roles with various characters in a story? [**Flat / Round**]

**Characters:**

1. Orlando [**Flat / Round**]
2. Oliver [**Flat / Round**]
3. Rosalind [**Flat / Round**]
4. Cilia [**Flat / Round**]
5. Fredric [**Flat / Round**]
6. Phebe [**Flat / Round**]
7. Senior Duke [**Flat / Round**]

**4.2.5 Style and Language of *As You Like It***

Shakespeare has produced some of the most memorable lines in *As You Like It*. The language of Shakespeare in *As You Like It* is predominantly verse. There can be seen a general pattern in Shakespearean plays. The characters of nobility, such as Duke Senior, will use poetry while they talk. At the same time, characters from an ordinary backgrounds such as Audrey or Phebe will use prose. According to G. B. Shaw, Shakespeare has used prose language for just about 55% of the text in the play that appears more poetic to the reader or a viewer. As discussed above, the dramatic convention that Shakespeare used as such the characters of nobility used to converse in verse, and the characters of ordinary background would prose. However, Shakespeare deliberately overturned this convention in *As You Like It* this convention is deliberately overturned. For example, Rosalind, although coming from a noble background, is supposed to think and behave in a high poetic style. Nevertheless, she actually uses the prose while expressing the directness of her character as this is 'natural and suitable'. The love scenes in Act III, scene two, between Rosalind and Orlando are in prose. On the contrary, Silvius, an ordinary shepherd, expresses his love for Phebe in verse in Act II, Scene five. Further, the language of characters changes along with their mood. For example, Jaques, who is from a noble background, was using verse while expressing his 'melancholy' to Rosalind. He shifts to a prose dialogue as Orlando enters. Remember, Orlando is noble, but he is kept uncultured and uneducated by his brother Oliver.

Thus, there can be seen a mixture of prose and verse in the play. Shakespeare experimented a lot with the conventional usage of language of the time. However, the fact remains that some of the immortal dialogues are coming from this play, such as:

*“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."*

Jacques, (Act II, Scene VII)

*"The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool."*

Touchstone, (Act V, Scene I)

*"Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak."*

Rosalind, (Act III, Scene II)

*"I pray you, do not fall in love with me, for I am falser than vows made in wine."*

Rosalind, (Act III, Scene V)

### Check Your Progress – 5

Q.1 State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False':

- 1) *Almost half of the play As You Like It is in verse.*
- 2) Shakespeare used the fixed pattern for the language of nobility and others.
- 3) *As You Like It* has some memorable lines in it.
- 4) The speech "*All the world is a stage*" is spoken by Touchstone.
- 5) The line "*The fool doth think he is wise*" is also spoken by Touchstone.

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## 4.3 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, you have learnt about the famous Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. We have studied in detail about the plot and theme of the play. We have also understood the characters, language and style of the play.

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## 4.4 KEY WORDS

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|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Comedy</b>          | a play that is meant to make people laugh and that has a happy ending  |
| <b>Conquer</b>         | to take control of a country, city etc. through the use of force   |
| <b>Disguise</b>        | to change one's usual dress, appearance, voice etc. so that people will not recognize who the real person is |
| <b>Drama</b>           | a piece of writing that tells a story and is meant to be performed on a stage                                |
| <b>Enchanted</b>       | influenced by or as if by charm, attraction or magic   |
| <b>Medieval</b>        | of or related to the Middle Ages   |
| <b>Middle Age</b>      | the period of European history from about AD 500 to about 1500   |
| <b>Norman</b>          | one of the people from northern Europe and France who conquered England in 1066                              |
| <b>Norman Conquest</b> | conquering of England by Norman people in 1066   |
| <b>Novel</b>           | a long written story usually about imaginary characters and events   |

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| <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>  | Act of using another person's words or ideas without giving credit to that person  |
| <b>Plagiarist</b>  | 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>Renaissance</b> | the period of European history between the 14 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> centuries when there was a new interest in science and in ancient art and literature, especially in Italy |
| <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>Verse</b>       | writing in which words are arranged in a rhythmic pattern; a part of a poem or song  |

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#### 4.5 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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- Bloom, Herold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. Print.
- Shakespeare, William, and Juliet Dusinberre. *As You Like It*. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006. Print.
- Abrams, M H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999. Print.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Print.

#### ❖ ANSWERS:

##### • Check Your Progress – 1

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

1. *As You Like It* was originally written in 1623 by William Shakespeare. **False**
2. Shakespeare took the story and plot of *As You Like It* from Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*. **True**
3. Rosalind and Cilia escaped to an island for their shelter. **False**
4. Unique freshness, loving poetry and spontaneity are some of the features of *As You Like*. **True**
5. Rosalind and Cilia met many enchanting characters in the Forest of Arden. **True**

##### • Check Your Progress – 2

Answer the following questions in brief:

1) What is the setting of the play *As You Like It*?

**Answer:** The setting of *As You Like It* is pastoral, which was quite popular during the Elizabethan period. A pastoral story deals with a story where country life is depicted as simple, humble and the purest form of life.

2) What are the characteristics of a typical pastoral story?

**Answer:** In typical pastoral literature, an enchanted world is created by the author with mysterious elements in it. The world of a pastoral story is usually created in stark contrast with the real world. The characters of a pastoral story seek refuge in such an enchanted world from real-life fears, anxieties, uncertainties, and tensions. They are transported into some imagined, mythical place such as an island or forest where peace, endurance, satisfaction, and fulfilment are prevailing.

3) What are the major themes of *As You Like It*?

**Answer:** Shakespeare has employed various themes in *As You Like It*. Major themes employed by Shakespeare in *As You Like It* are romantic love, usurpation of justice, contrasting lives of court and country and last but not least, the theme of forgiveness or reconciliation.

#### • Check Your Progress – 3

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

1.0 Oliver treats his brother fairly after the death of his father. **False**

2.0 Fredrick usurps the throne of his brother Senior Duke. **True**

3.0 Rosalind and Cilia are real sisters. **False**

4.0 Cilia disguised as a young man to ensure safety in the forest. **False**

5.0 Fredrick's heart changes as he meets a hermit. **True**

#### • Check Your Progress – 4

State which are the characters and characteristics of 'Round' characters and which are not:

##### Characteristics:

1. One who remains the same throughout a narrative? [**Flat / Round**]
2. One who displays no change of heart, mind or point of view? [**Flat / Round**]
3. One who changes from good to bad person? [**Flat / Round**]
4. One who has more than one dimension to his/her character? [**Flat / Round**]
5. One who changes from good to bad person? [**Flat / Round**]
6. One who remains simple and straightforward throughout a narrative? [**Flat / Round**]
7. One who plays various roles with various characters in a story? [**Flat / Round**]

##### Characters:

1. Orlando [**Flat / Round**]
2. Oliver [**Flat / Round**]

3. Rosalind [**Flat / Round**]
4. Cilia [**Flat / Round**]
5. Fredric [**Flat / Round**]
6. Phebe [**Flat / Round**]
7. Senior Duke [**Flat / Round**]

• **Check Your Progress – 5**

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

- 1) *Almost half of the play As You Like It is in verse.* **True**
- 2) Shakespeare used the fixed pattern for the language of nobility and others. **False**
- 3) *As You Like It* has some memorable lines in it. **True**
- 4) The speech “*All the world is a stage*” is spoken by Touchstone. **False**
- 5) The line “*The fool doth think he is wise*” is also spoken by Touchstone. **True**