

AS YOU LIKE IT (An Essay)

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"*As You Like It*" may be considered as comparable to its predecessor "*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*" in every respect. Both, in the first place, belong to the species of "light comedy" the chief aim of which consists not so much in moving as ⁱⁿ amusing the audience. Theirs are not such stages as might present on them heroes and heroines mouthing about the thrilling secrets of the gigantic universe of thoughts and actions. They only delight us not by the significant glories of the materials contained in them but by the formal perfection of art exhibited in them.

No less akin are the plots of these two plays. Either of the two has its chief scene laid in a forest lying within several miles of the site of some noble residence in some foreign country. Several unlucky people, seeking their refuge from the cruel hand raging in the court come fleeing to the forest, where they find themselves entangled in some intrigues newly aroused in the microcosm of human society newly coming into existence there, till everything comes to a happy ending so common to Shakespearean comedies.

Yet, for all these parallelisms to be found between the two comedies, one cannot deny that there are still some fundamental differences to be observed between them, mostly, as might easily be supposed, in favour of the later work. For one of these differences runs my idle pen in this little piece of essay.

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"*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*" may have its own excellence in many other respects, but it has this one serious defect — the weakness of the playwright's touch in the realization of the characters of the play. Take up, for example, the two couples of men and women, the chief agents of the main theme of the drama—the loves in the forest. They are, it must be admitted, in a sense very active in their behaviour. They speak, they sing, they love, and, for their love, can sometimes even venture to leave everything to the devil and fly. But we are not told anything about the necessary motives, or reasonable causes, of their happy or unhappy love-affairs in which they were so audacious. Nor are they, in their sylvan life, any better than mere robots reacting directly to the dictates, in stead of those of their own indi-

vidual character, of the situations provided for them by the sportive fun of the supernatural inhabitants of the forest. For all the rhetorical ellaboration they make use of in their speeches they lack so much in individual idiosyncrasy that one may safely substitute one lover's speech for the other's in a similar situation without leaving any mark of irrelevance in the mood and sentiment of the speaker.

The forest of Arden is no world under such predominance of supernatural influences over the variety of human characters. It is the site of a real human society where we can meet almost every variety of ordinary living people, —real hunters, shepherds and shepherdesses, a village rustic and a parish priest. It is true, indeed, that there are among them some characters too faint to be really alive in the actual society of their age. — (Had that classical realist George Crabbe been a contemporary of Shakespeare's, he might have flung his bitter words of irony about the illusory loves of the "happy swains of sweet Auburn"* to this great dramatist for his weak realization of the "shepherd Silvius inamorato") — Yet we should not forget that throughout all the pictures of so many varieties of mankind that appear on the stage of this forest of Arden there shine the traces of a visible progress Shakespeare has made in his insight into the mysterious nuances of human mind. See the four loves that take place there. I admit they are all, in the celebrated phraseology of Shakespeare's great contemporary, "loves at first sight". Yet the remarkable fact is that each one of these chance affections has its own psychological necessity with which the cases of Theseus's courtiers are not endowed. Rosalind, as the match for Orlando, could not be supplanted by Celia. Touchstone could not love Phebe in stead of Audrey. Each one of them loved in such a way as no one else could love. The dictates of their own personal characters have much to do with these affairs.

(A) Rosalind and Orlando

It would be natural that these two young hearts, alike unfortunate in their family life, should have fallen compassionate with each other, even if it were only for that. And it is remarkable that Shakespeare, besides this, was cautious enough to introduce this unlucky woman, even before her first encounter with Orlando, as a maiden of tender heart whom her own misfortune had made the more sensitive to the ailments of the others. See how this tender-hearted maiden, while standing rather cool and aloof in her jocular conversation with

* the only pain, alas! they never feel. (*The Village* (1783) Bk. I.)

Touchstone, became the first person to give a ready compassionate exclamation "Alas!" at a courtier's report about the sorrows of the defeated wrestlers' parents (I, 2). Hers, indeed, was the good soil upon which Orlando's first address about his own miserable situation — so brief and so persuasive with the effect of frequent stops symbolizing the potentiality of his passion now under extreme restraint that it might well have moved even an uninterested ear — could fall fruitfully.

"If I be foiled, there's but one sham'd that was never gracious, if kill'd, but one dead that is willing to be so : I shall do my friend no wrong, for I have none to lament me : the world no injury, for in it I have nothing : only in the world I fill up a place, which may be better supplied, when I have made it empty."

Significantly enough it was Celia and not Rosalind herself that had showed the deeper interest in the probable destiny of the reckless young man before this disclosure of Orlando's person. And one has only to mark the visible change in Rosalind's attitude toward him that took place at this moment to understand the art of the playwright in describing the effect this impassioned speech of truth necessarily worked upon her heart. The following procedure where the two maidens are trying to encourage the unlucky youth shows what a great contrast, the tables having now been turned, exists between Rosalind's cries of real emotion and Celia's remarks of cooler reason.

Ros. *The little strength that I have, would it were with you !*

— (impassioned)

Cel. And mine to eke out hers.

— (not taking the initiative)

Ros. *Fare you well : pray heaven I be deceived in you.* — (you and I!)

Cel. Your heart desires be with you!

— (sounds rather formal)

.....

Ros. *Now Hercules be thy speed, young man !*

— (exclamation)

Cel. I would I were invisible, to catch the strong fellow by the leg.

— (Clever, yet these are words of reason.)

Ros. *O excellent young man!*

Cel. If I had a thunderbolt in mine eye, I can tell who should down.

— (a quite irrelevant, long-winded expression to be flung out in the climax of real excitement)

When the game was done and Orlando's unexpected victory, in stead of conferring honour upon him as it might reasonably well have done, only resulted in adding another page of misery to his unhappy personal history, Rosalind's compassion toward him came to take a shape more decisive and real. So moving in their emotional sincerity were her words with which she accompanied her little act of devotion — the presentation of her necklace to him. And here Shakespeare shows us another example of the marvellous psychological spontaneity of dramatic procedure by letting Celia, and not Rosalind, make the short address to her "gentle cousin",

"Let us go thank him and encourage him".

But for this quiet, little remark, intimidated Rosalind would have remained too shy to have her last significant conversation with her innocent admirer. This implied modesty on the part of Rosalind and Orlando gives their reciprocal tender feeling a tinge of graceful reality far deeper than what is to be found in those bewitched Athenian lovers.

This might have been a good beginning for a tragedy like "*Romeo and Juliet*" rather than for a light comedy as this present play really is, and, considering the deeper insight on the part of the playwright, the new "*Romeo and Juliet*" originated here might have grown up to be a work more realistic and, perhaps, the more moving for its realistic perfection. And it must be understood that there needs must be some gap of irrelevancy between this sober atmosphere of tragedy with which "*As You Like It*" begins and the lighter mood of comedy in which its later scenes develop. And these two lovers so tragically admirable in the beginning behave in the forest in such a mean way that they might make their idolaters wail. From this standpoint alone, "*As You Like It*" might well be regarded as a tragic failure of tragedy in which one finds a noble picture of life suffer a comical change into something poor and awkward. But for all this fault of comical metamorphosis one cannot deny this one thing that there is nothing illusory or hyperbolic in the motive of love engendered between Rosalind and Orlando.

(B) Celia and Oliver

" 'Twas I; but 'tis not I: — I do not shame
To tell you what I was, since my conversion
So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am." (IV, 3)

It would be a poetic fallacy to follow a romantic critic* and praise these words of repentant Oliver as “one of the refined beauties that distinguish Shakespeare’s metaphysical philosophy, to show us how a fine nature acting upon an inferior one through the subtle agency of love, operates beneficially to elevate and purify”, for, we must admit, beautiful as these lines are, they alone would be but too weak to move any maiden of ordinary mental build to love their speaker. Something else has to be sought to explain the psychological necessity of Celia’s love to Oliver. And happily enough we find this “something” in the invisible bond of potential human relation with which they were related to each other.

Celia’s friendship to Rosalind, and Rosalind’s love to Orlando, — with the indirect yet deep-rooted influence Rosalind’s afflictions in love might have worked upon her friend — could no doubt be strong enough factors that might have, even while they were strangers to each other, endeared the name of Oliver — brother to her friend’s lover — to Celia’s maidenly heart for all the reported foulness clinging about his name.

At her first encounter with Oliver, Celia is shown to be a maiden of keen sensibility to what is called in our modern phraseology “human relations” whose interest taken in that new-comer had been sharpened enough to notice even the else unobserved little slip of his tongue when he, in the midst of his affected indifference to the mishap he had experienced in the forest, spoke of himself for the first time in the *first* person and revealed who he really was.** Again, it is quite imaginable that Celia’s natural womanliness might have been the more enhanced in that strange human society where her only female companion was in the guise of valiant Ganymede and where, even the humble shepherdesses having been in love, she was the only woman forsaken by that mischievous child of Aphrodite.

And — “frailty, thy name is —”, frail indeed is the fortress of a womanly heart when it is sieged by human tears.

(C) Phebe and Silvius

It was Phebe’s pride that made her despise the poor shepherd’s persistent adoration, and it was also this very pride of hers that led her to fall in love with Ganymede.

“Sweet youth, (=Ganymede) I pray you, chide a year together.

* Charles Cowden Clarke

** cf. Oliver.....in which hurtling.....I awoke (IV, 3)

I had rather hear you chide than this man (=Silvius) woo." (III, 5)

It was quite natural for this fiery type of a girl who had heretofore been wearied by the prostrate courtship of that womanish shepherd to have found herself so strongly enchanted by the manly new-comer in whom the masculine touch of demeanour might have been the more strikingly observed because of the disguised maiden's defensive consciousness of her situation. And here Phebe knew, for the first time in her life, the delight that comes from utter devotion. For the first time in her life she knew the glow of the fire of love that could consume every fortress of vain pride within which her conscious self had heretofore kept its haughty throne.

In the very acme of this happy trance of hers comes the fatal moment of disillusionment. — Ganymede returning to his former natural self, the very object of her glowing devotion vanishes into thin air! From among the wrecks and ashes of her completely defeated "self", she barely gathers herself to declare

"I will not eat my word." (V, 4)

Her vacant eyes catch sight of her unhappy admirer, — once the butt of her slanderous despise and now the only medium by which alone she is to perform her last service to her now extinct idol. — I do not think we have to discuss what lies between her vanity and her love here. Enough, hers is a mind as void as the sky. — She cannot but take his hands.

"Now thou art mine.

Thy faith my fancy to thee combine.".....

(D) Audrey and Touchstone

The court-fool pretends himself to be such a love-adept to whom his present love-affair is "just a little toy in hand" (III, 3), and to whom a formal imperfection of marriage is to be welcome as "it will be a good excuse to leave his wife". And it would not be a process singular enough to be marvelled at if such a man, with all his skill in love-making and bombastic pedantry, should succeed in getting such a simple, credulous heart as Audrey's. And I admit Hazlitt was reasonable enough in his own way of thinking when he remarked upon this love-making,

"Touchstone is not in love, but he will have a mistress as a subject for the exercise of his grotesque humour and to show his contempt for the

passion by his indifference about the person”.

Yet the truth is that Shakespeare presents here the image of this motley with a deeper nuance of reality than what Hazlitt and his followers could discern in it. Could we not think it possible that Touchstone, having suffered so long under the veneered foulness overflowing Duke Frederick’s court, and having, ever since his arrival in this new sylvan world, found so much to be laughed at in the sickly sentiment of the young refugees, has here found himself *really* struck by something quite new, strange and admirable that shines in the heart of this simple country lass?

“A poor virgin, sir, an ill-favoured thing, sir, *but mine own*;—” (V, 4)

Could we not, in this brief (and significantly lacking the usual fluency of style characterizing his speech) address made to the Duke about Audrey, feel an honest glow of sincere admiration on the part of the *pretended* love-adept?

“A poor humour of mine, sir, to take that no man else will: rich honesty dwells like a miser, sir, in a poor house; *as your pearl in your foul oyster.*”

A motley should not be taken for what he pretends himself to be. He seldom lays bare the realities of his inner soul. And when he does, he does it in a marvellous way. And his is the bright soul with which, and only with which, one can look into the real heart of the “pearl in your foul oyster.”

Not that there are no other evidences of the spiritual excellence of this motley in the play. He is faithful enough to follow the unhappy daughters to the forest even at the probable cost of his own occupation and his very life. There is no speech of his in this play but shows us with its rhetoric perfection the wonderful sense he had of the nuances of human speech. And to have the sense of the nuances of human speech is to have the same kind of minute sense of the subtleties of human mind.

Jaques: And you to wrangling; for thy loving voyage
Is but for two months victuall’d. (V, 4)

This was the last slanderous remark given to Touchstone by Jaques departing at the end of the play. And TouchstoneO, Touchstone

silent ! Significant enough is this sudden taciturnity into which this ever-noisy, ever-jocular tattler fool plunged himself at the very end of this humorous play. Heard melodies might be sweet, but "those unheard are sweeter". Is it indeed going too far to say here that Touchstone's was a thought really too deep for tears or words so that he could not even allow himself to answer this melancholy pedant in his usual way ?

* * *

Along with this notable progress in the art of realization of characters in "*As You Like It*", goes that in the style of composition. Not that the earlier comedy lacks in the art of composition. There, Shakespeare indeed, is quite successful in allotting the most adequate style of speech to each species of men and women presented on the stage.* Yet I cannot deny this one fact

* All the characters in "*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*" may be classified into three types each with its own characteristic style of speech as well as of behaviour. There are, of course, some respective non-conformants within each group, like Lysander and Hermia in Theseus' group, Puck in Oberon's, or Bottom in Quince's. But the stylistic uniformity within each group of characters is so perfectly retained that the dissimilitude they bear to the other conformant members of the group they belong to loses its colour before the more striking difference that exists between any two of these three characteristic types. Thus Puck is more akin in his style of behaviour and speech to Oberon than he is to Bottom. Nor is Lysander more eccentric among the courtiers than he would be among the fairies. See how prosaic Bottom is in speech even while conversing with Titania and her attendants who never drop off from their natural style of perfect verse (III, 1). This is a rough table of the typical characteristics of these three groups.

	<i>Members</i>	<i>The Chief</i>	<i>Other Outstanding Characters</i>	<i>The General Characteristic of Behaviour</i>	<i>The General Form of Speech</i>	<i>Characteristic Symbols used in the Speeches</i>
(A)	People of the Court	Theseus	Hippolyta Lysander Hermia Demetrius Helena	Intellectual Affectation	Blank Verse	Abstract Ideas and Concepts
(B)	Fairies	Oberon	Titania Puck	Emotional Simplicity	Blank Verse variegated with occasional Short Lyrical Forms	Natural Symbols
(C)	Workers	Quince	Bottom Flute	Direct Physical Reaction to the Situations	Prose	Daily, Matter-of-fact Symbols

that the speeches as well as the characters in the later work are far more deeply individualized than in the earlier one. In "*As You Like It*" it seems that each speech is weighed to produce the most appropriate effect corresponding to the particular situation in which it is given and the particular person by which it is given.

A more liberal use of prose to be observed in the later play may first strike our eyes as suggestive considering the undeniable fact that the standardized verse form is the less happy medium to be employed in reproducing every delicate nuance of light and gloom that passes through each particular mood of each particular person at a particular moment in a particular situation.

But the most striking phenomenon in this way is the abundance of the subtler kinds of humour. There are of course many amusing scenes in "*A*

There is no such mannerism in the speech-style of the later play, "*As You Like It*". Verse and prose are not distributed in it according to the types of the speakers, as every character on the stage is allowed to speak in the very way his (or her) own humour likes best on the occasion, and not in the way dictated by the general characteristic of the human type he (or she) belongs to. Thus, for example, the poor old shepherd Corin (—that silly, rustic prattler ever ready to put his fingers in another's pie—) who "cannot even shear the fleece he grazes" speaks in perfect blank verse when he converses with the elegant refugees from the court (II, 4), while he is quite prosaic in his witty combat with Touchstone (III, 2). Oliver speaks in prose when he quarrels with Orlando (I, 1), and in verse when he talks with Celia (IV, 3).

Characteristic Features in Sentence-Structure *	*E.G. (1) <i>The number of the words of which one sentence consists in the first 50 lines of the scene where the group is first introduced into the play (the mean value)</i>	*E.G. (2) <i>The numbers of the words contained in the longest sentence in the same</i>	*E.G. (3) <i>The number of the nouns denoting abstract ideas in the same</i>
Remarkable Evidences of Capability in making Long-Winded Complex Sentences frequently with Abstract or Remote Ideas as their Subjects	12.5 (I ₁)	60	23
Variety	10.9 (II ₁)	41	7
General Predominance of Short Simple Sentences	8.4 (I ₂)	31	4

Midsummer-Night's Dream", but there are some scenes in "*As You Like It*" that entertain us in quite a different way. "*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*" mostly amuses us with its *visible* absurdities. When the rustic rehearsal of the Athenian workers was shattered by the mischievous Robin, when the wonderful effect of the "love-juice" reveals itself in the bower of the fairy queen where she is led to dote upon an ass-headed human simpleton, — these and many other occasions comparable to them will be enough to make the audience burst out in an effluence of loud laughter. Yet the real singularity of the amusing scenes in "*As You Like It*" lies in this fact that, besides these kinds of impetuous, visible absurdity, they so often contain something that really *tickles* you in a *calmer and subtler* fashion.

Take up, for example, the quiet statement

"Beauty provokes thieves sooner than gold". (I, 3)

uttered by Celia while conspiring with her friend about their plan of escape. What is stated in this little line is quite normal in meaning. Nor does it contain anything absurd enough to cause a storm of tearful laughter on the part of the audience. For a man of ordinary structure of mind it is indeed a remark hardly more than a mere commonplace. Yet sometimes the little, subtle absurdity concealed in this utterance may leave its light shade upon the subconsciousness of some of the audience. You may, after you have come out of the theatre, reflect upon it, and wish you had Celia standing near you so that you might cast a smile at her with a faint touch of bitterness in it and say..... "You conceited little fairy's child to have said that!"

Again, take up the scene of Duke Senior's sylvan banquet where Orlando thrusts in raging with his hungry excitement.

Orlando: Forbear, and eat no more!

Jaques: *Why, I have eat none yet.* (II, 7)

No speech can be more ingenious in its subtle amusing effect than this single line of silliness slipping off from the *unconscious* lips of the *always self-conscious* melancholy pedant utterly taken aback and struck absent-minded.

Yet it is when this Jaques, at the very end of the play, leaves the happy clan and starts for his renewed researches of melancholy truths of the world that he contributes his most to the play. This stands quite contradictory to Shakespeare's usual style of ending his play. Just recall how Fortinbras came in at the end of "*Hamlet*" to take care of the country the now cracked noble heart

had left behind, or how the two warring households of Verona were awakened to the necessity of mutual peace when the unlucky young souls "that had come forth from their fatal loins" were dead and buried. Indeed everything gets settled at the end of each play of his. Jaques' departure stands singular among these as a presentation of a new mysterious problem.*

There seems to be no fixed idea or principle of life retained by any character that emerges on the stage of the play. Shakespeare might here have well realized that psychological spontaneity hardly goes parallel with the consistency of individual ideas and principles. There is no person absolutely virtuous or wicked in this stage. Everybody speaks freely of one thing today and may speak of another quite contrary to it tomorrow. The Duke who declares so decisively in his celebrated speech that he would "never change" his present sylvan life leaves it without any trace of parting sorrow when he is reported of the restoration of his former glory. The *melancholy* Jaques shows himself jolly enough in the presence of Motley Touchstone (III, 3). Even the weak-minded love-stricken Orlando can once outwit the pedant Jaques, always his superior in scholarship (III, 2). Oliver becomes repentant and Orlando forgives him. After all, nobody in this play insists upon anything definitely. There is more freedom in the thoughts of these happy people than there is in those of any other noble characters in Shakespeare's more serious works. Here in this picture of a paradise of human freedom, Shakespeare seems to have allowed every character in the play to behave quite as he or she liked in order that he himself might study the real phases of the subtle nuances of human mind which would never have revealed themselves in any other place where the idea of life was more strictly defined and where there was the less liberty to be enjoyed.

These may sound to some people as nothing more than an idle guess of mine. It is quite as probable, it must be confessed, that, on the contrary, Shakespeare wrote "*As You Like It*" against his own principles. A genius may try to make a perfect plot first before he starts his work of creation. And even a genius may fail in making it perfect.

But, intentionally or unintentionally, here the play is with all the varie-

* There is one little thing to be remarked at the end of "*A Midsummer-Nights Dream*". Demetrius, among all the rest of the characters now rejoicing at the happy settlement of things, stands as the only person that is still under the influence of Puck's "love-juice". Yet subtle as the shade this little fact casts upon the stage of the play is, Demetrius' lot cannot be rendered the less accordant with his companies'. It could not be helped that things should turn out so, and the significance this little absurdity bears can hardly be a match to that of Jaques' case.

ties of human characters on its stage. And one thing is certain that it amuses us in its own way. The perfection of plot or the consistency of ideas may be of some importance in life. Yet it is of greater importance to realize that the veiled reality of life often reveals itself extempore — when it is not observed from any fixed point of view and the observer is not under the restraint of his own *principles*, —the poor product of his limited intelligence.

This is suggestive not only of what lies between these two comedies of Shakespeare but also of what lies between Shakespeare himself and his predecessors. One may be compelled to wonder at Great Tamburlaine's fiery defiance against heaven when he, even with his dying breath, speaks of furling his murderous "black streamers" in the firmament*. Yet Tamburlaine so perfectly consistent in his *principles* of life is a deformed ghost of humanity hardly fit to be alive on the stage of *real* life. No less unreal is Barabas, Marlowe's Jew of Malta, with his square Macchiavellian will firmly settled, while we feel something human in Lear and Shylock. Most characters in "*The Faerie Queen*" lose their flesh and blood when they are found to be too obedient to the dictates of Spenser's allegorical conceptions. The more consistent a character on the stage is in his principles, the more reality he loses as he is compelled to have all the *extempore* elements in his behaviour neglected. From one point of view the history of human progress has been the history of human discovery, and every piece of human discovery has been made in the world of elements and factors quite non-conformant to what can be perceived by any existent principles. What Greeks discovered with their sunny wisdom, what the great Nazarene contributed to human history with his ardent aspirations, what the Elizabethan forerunners added to the history of English literature with their luxurious talent and what Shakespeare added to what those Elizabethan forerunners had achieved—were all elements achieved *extempore* by the geniuses in spite of the respective spirits of the ages to which they appertained. Even Shakespeare, I admit, for all his sense of literary freedom, was obsessed by some kinds of fixed ideas. But at least in "*As You Like It*" we find him happily playing with his maximum sense of artistic freedom and with his maximum success in artistic realization of every extempore elements in human behaviour. And this is why I, among all the rest of his "great plays", find myself strangely attached to this little comedy about the Forest of Arden.

* C. Marlowe: *Tamburlaine the Great*, Part II, V, 3