

might be said to betray his prejudice. A glance at the treatment of themes in *As You Like It* will indicate that Shakespeare is for the most part balanced in his presentation. He observes all aspects of love, of the pastoral tradition, and generally refrains from overstating his case in any one direction. One might say, then, that his attitude or tone is balanced and tolerant, and that the humor of his presentation informs the entire play.

LOGIC After one has determined the themes and the author's attitude, and has observed the manner in which plot and character convey these themes, he has a final check remaining with which to evaluate his understanding of the play. He can attempt to discover whether or not this meaning is logically developed through the author's use of character and event. Even a play like *As You Like It*, which depends much more on emotional or aesthetic effect than it does on logic, does not contradict itself. If the themes seem contradictory or if the character relationships appear to contradict a theme, then there is a problem of comprehension. Usually such a problem is simply the result of lack of clarity; Shakespeare's treatment of love in this play, for example, could seem contradictory after a superficial reading. Silvius and Phebe have an idea of love which is diametrically opposed to that of Audrey and Touchstone—can they be said to be relevant to the same theme? The answer is, of course, that they simply exemplify different attitudes toward the same theme; Rosalind and Orlando, with their idealistic but practical approach, combine both attitudes which these two couples exhibit in the extreme.

Any interpretation of literature should stand up to this kind of logical test. If it does not, then either the work of art or the interpretation is a partial failure. This kind of logical check is a challenge to the student, for it usually forces him to confront his own thinking and, if necessary, to reconsider his ideas. This is a process which can often lead to a revised, and very often an improved, understanding of the work of art under consideration.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE MEANING OF *AS YOU LIKE IT*

QUESTION 13: Discuss Shakespeare's treatment of the theme of love in *As You Like It*.

ANSWER: Love, and its effect on the human personality, is Shakespeare's principal concern in this play. It is a motif which is introduced negatively in the opening scene, where one finds Oliver and Orlando at each other's throats—a fine example of the lack of brotherly love. Real love, however, is also introduced in the first act, when Rosalind and Orlando fall headlong in love with each other at first sight, without even knowing the proper identity of the object of their affections. There is also love of another kind introduced here, that which binds Rosalind and Celia closer than any two sisters are usually found to be.

Act II does not concern itself at length with romantic love, but it does show, in the persons of Orlando and Adam, a fine example of the love between servant and master. It is in Act III that the romances begin to develop seriously, however; Rosalind (as Ganymede) discovers Orlando's affections and Orlando expresses himself, through poetry, like the typical sighing, lovesick courtier.

After the charming courtliness of Orlando one sees a quite different approach to love, as Touchstone and Audrey pursue their rough-and-tumble romance on an extremely earthy level. Still another aspect, quite different from these other two, is evidenced in the "affection" of Phebe and Silvius; Silvius appears as a parody of the Elizabethan lover, and Phebe's niggling coyness marks her as a mockery of the disdainful mistress so familiar to the literature of the time.

It is in Acts III and IV that the love themes are pursued most vigorously, as one sees these three quite different romances being pursued. At the end of the play Rosalind and Orlando, with their healthy affections, wit, and common sense, appear as the ideal love; Touchstone and Audrey (for whom there is no prediction of long happiness) represent the extreme of sensuality, and Silvius and Phebe the extreme of artificiality. Rosalind and Orlando's affections partake of both extremes, but they achieve a balance which the others lack.

QUESTION 14: In what sense is *As You Like It* a traditional pastoral? In what sense is it a satire on the pastoral form?

ANSWER: Shakespeare presents a complex view of the pastoral in this play. The classic pastoral tradition is rooted in the

longing of the city man for the uncomplicated simplicity and sweetness of rustic life; from the time of Theocritus to Shakespeare's day the pastoral had become increasingly artificial, and presented an increasingly idealized view of the pleasures of country life. Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*, the immediate source of this play, presents the traditional aspect of the pastoral—the country is all sweetness and light, the court all intrigue and suspicion.

Shakespeare's view is considerably more complex and realistic than the traditional pastoral. The forest of Arden is obviously intended to be compared to the golden world of Greek antiquity and to Sherwood forest, where Robin Hood and his men had held sway. But life in Arden forest is never one of uncomplicated perfection; even as the banished Duke mentions the sweetness of adversity, Jaques laments the necessity of killing innocent deer for survival. Orlando at first sees the forest as a savage and inhospitable place; even Rosalind, who enters Arden exhausted and frightened, is not at first pleased by what she finds there.

Characters like Corin, Audrey, and William add to the realism of Shakespeare's presentation. They are nothing like the dainty shepherdesses and poetic shepherds of the golden world; they are uneducated, plain-spoken people who are much more concerned with their next meal than they are with romance, poetry, and etiquette. Silvius and Phebe, too, are obviously intended as a satiric comment on the pastoral tradition; they speak like characters out of the golden world, but they are patently foolish. Thus Arden cannot be seen as the perfect forest of the pastoral tradition, although it oftentimes is a charming place. It is also a place which shelters fear, bad weather, and, at times, death.

Yet Shakespeare retains some of the pastoral conventions. If Arden is imperfect, the court is much more so; it is at court that one finds brother plotting to kill brother. It is Duke Frederick, not his banished brother, who exiles people at a whim and sends helpless young girls out into the world with no resources other than their own wits. Touchstone is the voice who most consistently criticizes court life (although often unintentionally); when he discusses the protocol of argument he makes the court traditions look very foolish indeed.

Often the life in Arden forest compares favorably to life at court; often it looks incomparably better. The last word is left to the characters themselves, however; no matter how pleasant and romantic a spot Arden has been, they happily leave its confines for civilization as the play ends. *As You Like It* contains many elements of the traditional pastoral; it examines those elements during the course of the play, and its final attitude is one of balanced approval of both lives, including a consideration of the faults inherent in both.

QUESTION 15: What is the significance of the family relationships developed in *As You Like It*?

ANSWER: Although the brother-brother and cousin-cousin relationships can be connected to the love theme in this play, they are an important enough concern to be examined independently, as a separate theme. Like the pastoral, the story of brother pitted against brother is a familiar one in Elizabethan times; Shakespeare uses this familiar material in a somewhat new way. One sees the villainous older brother (Oliver) who is intent on disinheriting his two younger brothers; one also sees the clever and unscrupulous younger brother (Duke Frederick) who has succeeded in banishing his brother, the rightful Duke, to the depths of the forest. This theme of usurpation and family rivalry is linked to the theme of duty, for the bad relationship between Oliver and Orlando is contrasted to the love between Adam, the dutiful servant, and Orlando. The usurping Duke is also contrasted to Touchstone, another member of court, whose loyalty to Celia and Rosalind is unquestioned. Thus, through the use of these family relationships, Shakespeare illuminates the themes of love and duty.