

ROLE OF WOMEN IN 'AS YOU LIKE IT': A FEMINIST APPROACH

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Abstract

Shakespeare has remained popular over a number of centuries, his plays managing to retain universal appeal and each generation taking a different understanding to apply to their own lives. His plays analyzed and re-interpreted is that of gender. Female characters play an important role for the dramatic run of events in Shakespeare's dramas. In Elizabethan England, single women have been the property of their fathers and handed over to their future husbands through marriage. In Elizabethan time, women were considered as the weaker sex. The construction of female characters in Shakespeare's plays reflects the Elizabethan image of women in general.

Keywords: Shakespeare, As You Like It, Feminism, Rosalind

What is Feminism?

Feminism is in this world as one major issue in public life which is interesting to discuss until now. **Feminism is known as movement or theory of sexes.** The main purpose of feminism is to improve the position and degree of women to get equality as men.

Role of women in Shakespearean Age:

In Shakespeare's days, female parts were played by male actor. Shakespeare's presentations of roles of women are capable of performing. First-wave feminism didn't begin until the end of 19th century. Despite the fact that a single woman ruled England at the time of **William Shakespeare** although women considered as "**weaker sex**". In another way Shakespeare's multitude of strong female roles to support the argument that he was, for his time, a champion of women. It is says that,

"He was never afraid of women being the center of the play"

Gender and identity in As You Like IT:

As You Like It is one of Shakespeare's most highly comedies and most performed works which is based on **Thomas Lodge's** It is love story of Rosalind and Orlando in Forest of Arden. As center of the play we can call Rosalind, as one of Shakespeare's most engaging, witty, intelligent and lovable female characters.

One of the most aspects of As You Like It by William Shakespeare concerns the issues of gender. This issue generates a lot of interest and discussion because of complexity. The main reason for such a concern in the play is the **cross-dressing** and **role-playing**. The central love interest between Rosalind and Orlando calls in to question the conservative wisdom about men and women and their gender roles. Rosalind who has dressed her

self as a man who is pretending to be a women. In a very first Act,

**Touchstone: Thus men may grow wiser every day.
It is the first time that I ever heard breaking of ribs was sports for ladies.
[Act 1 Scene 2]**

So here we find that Touchstone doesn't think wrestling is a sport for "ladies" to enjoy. Yet, Rosalind sees the match.

As You Like It explores relationship and identity in depth; a major focus of the play being the relationship between Rosalind and Orlando. When Duke banished Rosalind then she moves to forest of Arden and wear as role of Ganymede.

**All the world's a stage,
And every man and women merely players.**

These lines, one of Shakespeare's most famous, are fitting for this paper ,reflect the idea that an individual's identity can be chosen activity by them when Rosalind flees in to the woods for safety, she turns herself as an attractive young boy , '**Ganymede**' to avoid rapist and thieves , challenges traditional ideas about what is means to be a man and women. The women in the play are strong female characters, but must become men to protect themselves and ultimately solve the problem of play.

A Role of Rosalind:

As a Renaissance time period, all the women's parts were played by boys. This is a fact that could not be ignored by audiences. Viewers would have seen Rosalind as the character being performed through costume and actions and Ganymede being portrayed as the natural representation. This view compromises the strength of Rosalind's character since it is **no longer a women doing a man's work but a man doing man's work which is worthy.**

Rosalind is a young noble woman who is banished from her home. She decides that while she is in exiles, she will disguise herself as a boy because she will be safer as a boy than she would be as a woman, she learns that the man she loves is also in a forest, and decided to stay in costume so she can test his love.

As a lady and a daughter, Rosalind is the ideal woman to show society. Rosalind's power as a possible feminist character is best exemplified in her interactions while cross-dressed as Ganymede. After she assumes the identity of the male Ganymede, Rosalind character.

Feminist views on Rosalind:

When taken into this context, 'As You Like It' reveals new depth and content. **Michael Shapira** delves into cross-gender devices in his book **Gender in play on the Shakespearean stage: Boy Heroines and Female pages**. Rosalind adopts "**three separate identities – Rosalind, Ganymede and again Rosalind.** (Shapiro 1994.p.119).In a first stage we find Rosalind as vibrant character attracted to Orlando, in next stage Ganymede serves as a mentor to Orlando. The third stage Rosalind is the one who acts according to advice she gives Orlando as Ganymede, Finally Rosalind win Orlando as a women. **From a liberal feminist standpoint, gender labels an exist and differences should be respected. In the liberal feminist views, 'Rosalind has failed to gain equality as she is only given as a man.**

Role of Celia and Phoebe:

Rosalind become man , but Celia remains a woman, but calls herself “**Aliena**” a clever Shakespearean pun of the word “**Alien**” for Celia acts an alien , that is , an outsider , but she has also “**alienated**” herself from her father and his rule. Some feminist critics believes that Celia deals with theme of homoeroticism. Phoebe’s ‘love at first sight’ for Ganymede is also worthy of attention.

Conclusion:

From above description we can conclude that Shakespeare presents women’s struggle to get equal rights as the men. Shakespeare chose to write about revolutionary of women, supporting feminism at a time when it was not widely accepted.

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