

Romance in the Plays of Shakespeare

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Abstract - Romantic love is a dominant theme in Shakespeare's plays. Friendship between males always overpowers the relation between females. In Shakespeare's play the main motive behind the love is always property and wealth and there is no place for real emotions and feelings. Love and reason keep little company together. Daughters are always forced by the wishes of their fathers, their real love, emotions are never let free. They are compelled to marry with the men whom they dislike. The struggle for the quest of identity especially for female characters is clearly exhibited in the plays of Shakespeare. Females are always abused by their lovers or by their husbands.

Keywords: - Shakespeare, plays, love, friendship, male, female, marriage, affairs, abuse, reason and money

Romance in the plays of Shakespeare

Shakespeare is known as a poet of romantic love. Merchant of Venice is a play about risk and love and for him these two are the same and one thing. In this play Bassanio borrowed from Antonio for a love-venture. He wished to travel to Belmont to win the hand of rich lady Portia. Bassanio's aim in wooing Portia, like that of many Shakespearean wooers, is of initially financial. Fenton in Merry Wives of Windsor accepts to Anne Page that although he first loved her for her money but now he really loves Anne. In Merchant of Venice Bassanio has great stress on Portia's wealth; it occupies first place in his priorities eclipsing Portia's beauty for Bassanio romance, debt and bridging loan are inextricably linked. He tells Antonio that his courtship is a plot "to get clear of all the debts I owe". Marriage is always a time of crisis in friendships and in families (as in Much Ado, Two Gentlemen of Verona). In the play Merchant of Venice every episode even the love, friendship, marriage, courtship revolves around the money. The love of Bassanio for Portia is not real, the very base of this love is money. On the other hand Antonio's love for his friend Bassanio is between two souls. Here money is nowhere. Marriage, in Shakespeare as in life is not always a happy ending; sometimes it is an unhappy beginning. Even when couples love passionately and reciprocally, happy endings are not guaranteed. Shakespeare had more reason than most to know about the hazards of love.

Shakespeare belongs to such a period when male friendship was regarded as romantic love. Antonio's love for Bassanio is considered as homosocial and homosexual. In "Two Gentlemen of Verona" the relationship of Valentine and Proteus is homosexual. In this play the male friendship got priority over romantic love. When Proteus meets Silvia, the beloved of his best friend Valentine, he is instantly in

love with her. He started loving Silvia and did not care about his best friend. Even for getting Silvia, he told Silvia's father about the plan of Valentine to elope with Silvia. Consequently Valentine is banished. Silvia went to forest to look for him. Proteus follows Silvia and when he failed to get Silvia's love he resorted to rape and at the same time Valentine reached there. Proteus apologized and Valentine forgave him and offered Silvia to Proteus. Here friendship is now more important than love and Silvia is reduced to a mere thing of exchange. Shakespeare again took the topic of love versus friendship in Winter's Tale. The same strong confidence in friendship is visible at the beginning of 'Two Noble Kinsmen' when one friend Arcite says for his friend Palamon: "We are one another's wife". However when both men fall in love with same woman then the situation is different. Discord is inevitable when "two at once woo one". Thus Two Noble Kinsmen introduces three pairs of friendship: Theseus – Pirithous, Palamon-Arcite, Emilia-Flavina. It is the only Renaissance play to highlight same-sex friendship among women.

Love and reason are two different things and it is apparent in the opening of Midsummer Night's Dream where Hermia's choice of husband – Lysander – clashes with her father who insists his daughter to marry Demetrius. From Roman comedy onwards this is a classic dramatic situation. In Shakespeare the consequences for the disobedient daughter who loves against her parents wish, can be severe. In Othello Desdemona marries against her father and she is cut off emotionally by her father. Same is the case of Jessica in Merchant of Venice. In Merry Wives of Windsor Anne Page's parents insisted her by force to marry to the wealthy husband of their choice. In all such situations Shakespeare gives his full support to the daughters. Helena concludes that reason and love are poles-apart. Irrationality can, however, have an unhealthy effect when one persists in loving someone who does not reciprocate. In Two Noble Kinsmen, the Jailer's daughter goes mad because of her one sided love for Palamon. In All's well that Ends well Helena runs after her one sided lover across France, Spain and Italy who has already rejected her love. Helena is not the only character of Shakespeare to persist in loving irrationally. Mariana in Measure for Measure feels the same way as Helena. Troilus and Cressida ends with the two lovers parted away for ever. Cressida eventually rejects Troilus. Troilus is a self-indulged lover. His love affair with Cressida is 'sport'. He views women as goods. Cressida makes the decision to follow her head not her heart.

Shakespeare in Comedy of Errors tried to reach for identity, from siblings and selfhood to wives and womanhood. Adriana strives her sexual and spiritual roles in marriage. Woman is viewed as both divine and dangerous. Women and their beauty persuade me to appreciate them as spiritually beautiful or as physical temptation. These two extremes of female stereotypes are represented in Comedy of Errors. Adriana tries to unite these two extremes by attending her husband's body and souls. Adriana sees her identity as a wife as a fusion of two different female stereotypes. In 'All's well that Ends well' faces a similar situation related to her identity in married life. She extends the search of selfhood in order to encompass the struggle faced by both Helena and her young husband, Bertram. For Elizabethan men, masculine honor was synonymous with military glory. And for women, honor had a different meaning: Virginity. Shakespeare's careful choice of female names indicates the reductive sexual stereotyping of women in his age. He gives Diana the name of goddess of chastity and gives Helena the

name of the queen whose sexual activity led to the Trojan war. Helena attained the identity as masculine, publicly active, desiring and choosing. Helena seeks an identity that her society does not permit. Being true to herself, when the values of society are against your personal values, is a big struggle. It is very clear from the predicament of both Helena and Katherine. Katherine says that the consequences of not being true to oneself are emotional damages.

Love and abuse is very common in Shakespeare's plays. The term abuse has a long practical history. Any culture that views women as an object owned and traded by men, that views women as spiritually evil, that views women intellectually as inferior, that views women as physically weak, is likely to lead to abuse. In The Shrew, Katherine is the best example of an abused woman. Her husband deprives her of food and sleep. Katherine gives in to the contrary man. In Othello Iago's wife, Emilia is a good example of abused wife whereas Iago fits the classic profile of the abuser. Iago believes that Othello has an affair with Emilia. He is a misogynist, he has very bad thinking about women in general and about Emilia in particular. Iago is very dangerous man. When Emilia came to know that her husband is responsible for Desdemona's death. She decided to speak out the truth before her husband. However, as is so often the case in abusive relationships, this news endangers her safety. Iago kills her before she tells the truth to the people. One of the most painful demonstrations of abuse is in a short scene in Troilus and Cressida. Cressida is forcibly made to leave her lover, Troilus and immediately on arrival in the enemy camp, she is wooed by her guard Diomedes. This scene is viewed as a scene of seduction. For Shakespeare, abuse is a story with only one ending – extinction. Katherine loses her personality, Emilia her life and Cressida her autonomy.

No doubt Shakespeare is a poet of romantic love. In most of Shakespeare's plays the love between male and female is not real love of feelings and emotions but the base of this love is money Bassanio's love for Portia is a good example. The friendship between two males in Shakespeare's plays is more strong than the relation between male and female. In 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' there is such type of friendship between Valentine and Proteus. In Shakespeare plays, love and reason move simultaneously. Daughters are forced to marry to the man of their father's choice. There is no place for girls' emotions and feelings. There is a quest for identity among Shakespearean female characters. They seem busy in proving their role as a wife. In Othello, The Shrew and Troilus And Cressida, love and abuse are inseparable. Whenever they are in love, they are abused also.

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