

Love and Marriage in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*

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Abstract

Shakespeare's plays deal with numerous themes of universal importance. The theme of love and marriage is at the centre of many of his plays. In addition to his plays, Shakespeare has shown his keen interest in this theme in his sonnets also. Most of his sonnets deal with the theme of love. If one closely goes through Shakespeare's plays, one finds that not only love is at the centre of his plays but also marriage is an important subject. This paper tries to explore how Shakespeare has dealt with the theme of love and marriage particularly in his last plays i.e. *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes, king of Sicilia, has a well ordered and prosperous family. He seems to be enjoying a good life with his wife, Hermione, until he becomes the victim of sexual jealousy. Consequently, the marital relationship turns rough. Similarly in *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, issues of love and marriage are at the centre of the plays. This paper tries to explore the nature of love, the nature of marriage, and the societal norms of 16th century English society.

Keywords : Family; Hierarchy; Love; Marriage; Patriarchy; Perception.

Introduction

This paper tries to explore Shakespeare's perspective on love and marriage in *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*. His sonnet no. 116 has also been studied to understand the meaning of love in his plays. In addition to critical analysis of these plays, this paper also focuses on the structure of the Elizabethan family and the status of women in 16th century English society. In the study of *The Winter's Tale*, the paper attempts to look the institution of marriage from different perspectives. Hermione who is innocent and pure is accused of adultery by her husband. The marriage of Hermione and Leontes is not a new one, like that of Desdemona and Othello. They already have a son and a new baby is expected. Leontes thinks that she has cuckolded him. Imogen, in *Cymbeline*, is forced for remarriage by her father, who is under influence of his second wife. She strongly stands against the

loveless marriage. She marries a man she loves but it displeases her father. In *The Tempest*, Prospero tries to ensure that the marriage of his daughter be governed by love. He tests Ferdinand's love for his daughter before handing her over to him. In this way, this paper tries to study love and marriage closely in these plays of Shakespeare.

Cymbeline, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* form a group belonging to the last period of Shakespeare's dramatic work. Comedies we cannot call them because of the strain of sadness that runs through the story of each. Nor are they tragedies since they end happily. They have been fittingly entitled "Romances" for their main incidents are romantic in that they lie outside the scope of common experience; there is a strange otherworldliness about them and a serenity casts sweetness and light over human relations. They are dramas of reconciliation between estranged kinsmen, between wrongs righted by repentance, not revenge; of forgiveness and peace. In each of them, the restoration of a child supposed to be dead is an important incident.

In Shakespeare's tragedies the innocent suffer and die along with the guilty. But his temper in *The Tempest* demanded not a tragic issue but an issue into joy – scenes of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace, where father is reunited with child (Alonso and Ferdinand) and brother with brother (Prospero and Antonio). The resolution of the discords as not a mere stage necessity; as it has a spiritual and ethical significance.

In *The Tempest* the wrong-doers are a coterie of criminals from Prospero's perfidious brother Antonio to Alonso. Magical powers which are at the command of Prospero have incensed the sea against these sinners. [Prospero is the rightful Duke of Milan, whose usurping brother, Antonio, had put him with his then three-year-old daughter, Miranda to sea on "a rotten carcass of a butt [boat]" to die, 12 years before the play begins]. The earth, the sky and the seas are now completely in his power, and Prospero can avenge himself if he wills. But Prospero decides that

"Yet with my nobler reason against my fury
Do I take part: the rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance".

What redeems them is "heart-sorrow and a clear life ensuing". Prospero plays the part of an earthly Providence intervening in the action to forestall the disaster and turn the menacing perils into a happy issue. Further, over the beauty of youth and the love of youth Shakespeare sheds in *The Tempest*, a mellowed light radiating with a tender beauty. Here, there is something wonderful, strangely beautiful and pathetic about the youthful Miranda and Ferdinand, removed from court life into nature's surroundings. In *The Tempest* the antithesis of the tragedies has been resolved into a noble

synthesis. Shakespeare has discovered that the secret of life's happiness lies in the attitude of "forgive and forget" not in being humanly human but in being ideally human. The result is that his characters have become deficient in human interest. Their significance have become more ethical and less dramatic.

'Love' in Shakespeare's Sonnet No. 116

It would be very convenient to study the meaning of love in Shakespeare's plays if we start from his sonnets. Love is the prominent theme in most of his sonnets. In sonnet no. 116, he uses both terms 'love' as well as 'marriage'. He writes in this sonnet:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove. (Sonnets 70)

In these lines, the poet tries to persuade the reader of the indestructible qualities of true love. True love is immeasurable and it never changes. It is noteworthy that the poet uses both terms 'love' and 'marriage' in these four lines. There are many interpretations of these four lines. Shakespeare seems to be saying that there is no reason why two people, who truly love each other, should not marry. Further, he goes on that true love cannot be shaken by impediments or by any other obstacles. If the nature of love is affected by the opposing forces like impediments or alteration, it is not a true love. He continues on love in the same sonnet:

O, no! it is an ever fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth is unknown, though his height be taken.
(Sonnets 70)

Shakespeare uses a beautiful imagery to define true love. For him, love is a fixed mark, a pole star, that stands constant and unchanged forever. Love becomes a guiding force to those who have lost their way. One cannot measure the worth of love. If we take the key words from this sonnet, they are of two types: first the words that represent the opposing forces of love and secondly the words that denote the strength of love. The words that represent the opposing forces of love are: impediments, alteration, bends, remove etc. On the other hand, the words that characterize a true love are: ever-fixed mark, star, never shaken etc.

Shakespeare tells that true love never changes. It is capable of weathering even the most harrowing of storms, or tempests and it always remains unshaken. These words of Shakespeare, which define a true love, would help in interpreting the love and marriage in his selected plays.

The Elizabethan Family and Love and Marriage in *The Winter's Tale*

The Winter's Tale deals primarily with family relationships. When the play opens, Leontes, king of Sicilia, has everything : a peaceful and ordered kingdom , a loving and accomplished wife, Hermione, a precocious and affectionate son, Mamillius who is also the only heir to the kingdom, a lifelong friend of kindred spirit, Polixenes, and finally he has a happy hope of second child as the queen Hermione is nine months' pregnant (Bloom 92). Leontes tries to prolong the stay of his friend, Polixenes, at his court but he fails to do so. So he requests his wife, Hermione, to persuade him. She succeeds in the task at which her husband failed. Being a king, and the head of the royal family, Leontes feels to have been superseded by his wife, particularly by a woman. He develops sexual jealousy. He starts thinking that his wife has an illicit relationship with his friend, Polixenes.

If we look at the relationship between Leontes and Hermione, they are not newly married couple. They have a son, Mamillius, and a happy hope of a second child. There is no instance of any tension in the relationship between husband and wife prior to this one. The feminist critics point to Leontes' state of mind and find that it was his patriarchal power which was challenged and superseded by a woman. Leontes might have felt insulted at being superseded by his wife. Charles Cowden Clarke writes:

The jealousy of Leontes, which occasions the distressful portion of the story, is not like the jealousy of Othello, cautiously and gradually introduced, artfully developed, fanned heightened and exasperated to its awful climax of explosion, it partakes more of the character of a paroxysm of disease; and quickly subsides into the humility of self-reproach and very abandonment to a meek and pliant repentance (41).

Clarke seems to be saying that the jealousy of Leontes is not like that of Othello. Othello's jealousy concludes with destructive end whereas Leontes's jealousy subsides into self-reproach. But one should not forget that Hermione survives only on the grace of destiny and on the support of Paulina. If we exclude Paulina from the scenario, Leontes' actions might prove more cruel and destructive than those of Othello's. If we

look at the institution of marriage in this play, Leontes and Hermione already have one son, Mamillius, and second is expected and therefore they are not newly married couple. It is very important to understand the forces that governed the family in Shakespeare's times. Lawrence Stones quotes the statement of James I to show the structure of Elizabethan family "The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth...kings are compared to fathers in families: for a king is truly *parens patriae*, the politic father of his people" (152). It is noteworthy that king James I compares the position of the king with that of a father in the family. Usually we tend to give more prominence to a king rather than a father but this statement presents the father in a more powerful position. James I probably tries to convey the idea that as each member of the family is supposed to be submissive to father, similarly the people are supposed to have the allegiance towards the king. So Stone seems to be pointing to the patriarchal structure of the Elizabethan society.

There is a category of critics who look at marriage as a tool of patriarchy to control a woman who tries to profess the freedom of her thought and action. They often quote Desdemona and Shrew. In *Othello*, Desdemona does not surrender to her father and she marries the man of her own choice. She prefers a marriage governed by love. But the critics find a traditional woman in Desdemona as a wife. As a wife, she is compelled to show obedience, silence and tolerance. Similarly, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherina shows herself as a submissive and obedient woman after marriage. While talking about the marriages in Shakespeare's times, Oliver Ford Davies throws light on the status of wife in the Elizabethan family:

...the law still allowed that the 'husband hath dominion over his wife, and may keep her by force within the bounds of duty, and may beat her', though not in a 'violent or cruel manner'. It was said a man might legally beat 'an outlaw, a traitor, a pagan, his villain, and his wife'.the whole duty of the wife...is to acknowledge her inferiority, the next to carry herself as inferior'. She must obey even a drunken, brawling husband, for 'it is not for a prisoner to break prison at his pleasure, because he has met with a rough jailer' (171).

Davies shows us the Elizabethan family in general and the status of wife in particular. He clearly shows that the Elizabethan family was male dominated. When a woman marries a man, she has to submit her will to the will of her husband. She must have a high level of tolerance

as a husband is privileged to beat her. Davies' statement seems to be applicable to the situation of Hermione. Hermione's only fault was that she was able to do the task at which her husband failed. Leontes might have felt to have been superseded by his wife Or the husband-wife relationship might not have been governed by love. But the question arises how could the conjugal relationship go so smooth so far without love. Or how could a loveless marriage go so longer? Leontes and Hermione are not newly married couple as Othello and Desdemona were. There was no friction in the relationship prior to Polixenes' arrival.

The Elizabethan society had predetermined gender roles. According to these roles, women were supposed to master only household subjects like sewing, spinning, cooking, and the household management etc. Their prime duties were childbearing and rearing. There were three female virtues for an Elizabethan woman. They were: obedience, chastity, and silence. The patriarchal society of 16th century observed these virtues in women. Shakespeare's plays prominently highlight the issues and controversies associated to these aspects. In *Cymbeline*, we find that Posthumous loves Imogen equally as she loves her; but when this love changes into marriage, Posthumous' love is shaken and now he starts looking at Imogen typically as men look at Elizabethan women. He believes in the false words of Iachimo and questions his wife's fidelity.

Why does Leontes suspect his wife as Posthumous does? Are they biased? Posthumous believes in auditory assurances while Leontes believes in visual appearances; but both of them prove wrong in their conclusions. So what could be probable reasons of such problems in marriages of the time. Were the marriages not taken as the guarantee of love and trust? Who controlled marriages? we need to go through the social history of 16th century England to find the answers of these questions. A daughter had to obey her father. When a daughter grew up, she had to accept a husband chosen by her father. The Elizabethan society had a biblical ground to force daughters to accept the husbands chosen by their fathers. Adam was chosen for Eve by her God - father, not by herself. This was to be highly regarded in letter and spirit by Renaissance women.

Marriage was an important event in the life of a woman. The Elizabethan fathers were worried about the virginity of their daughters, they often kept them under strict supervision. Virginity was the greatest gift a woman could offer to her husband. Oliver Ford Davies quotes the biblical statement "who so findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favour of the Lord" (169). The basic building blocks of society

were : marriage, reproduction and inheritance. It used to be the father's authority to decide the time of his daughter's marriage once he observed that his daughter had made her passage from childhood to adulthood. Commenting on the marriage of Shakespeare's time, Davies writes :

It assigned new privileges, advantages and obligations. It redefined social and sexual roles, rearranged patriarchal obligations, and confirmed new duties of status, authority and dependency. A woman could now raise children, hire servants, keep accounts and run a household, without rivals to her authority : small wonder then that it was the objective of most young women. Though her income and possessions would pass into the control of her husband, he had responsibilities to look after her, even to the extent of paying her debts. It has been calculated that in the sixteenth century 90 percent of adults would marry, some several times, and yet so high was the death rate that at any one time 50 percent of women might be single. Widows, rich and poor, populate plays of the period (169).

Through this description, Davies not only throws light on the change of situation in a woman's life after her marriage, but also he tries to find out why the plays of this period populate with widows, rich and poor. The description implies that there was no change in a woman's plight even after the change of situation. Marriage for a woman meant the transfer of her submission and obedience from the father to the husband. It also stood for the shift of her dependency from father to the husband. Moreover, a bride was expected to bring a good dowry for the husband. In this light, a daughter was considered to be a financial burden on her father, on the other hand, a son was considered to be good for the family as he would not only bring a good dowry but also would maintain the inheritance. So we find that marriages were more the privileges of fathers than the rights of daughters. In *The Winter's Tale*, Marriage probably did not guarantee mutual trust and love for Leontes so he suspects his wife and questions her fidelity.

Love and Marriage in *Cymbeline*

Cymbeline is also one of the plays that Shakespeare wrote at the last stage of his life. The issues of love and marriage are again at the centre of the play. When the play opens, Imogen has clandestinely married Posthumous. Her father, Cymbeline, tried to force her to marry a man she did not love. Imogen stands against the loveless marriage. She

shows it by going against her father's choice of husband. Cymbeline allows the ambitious Queen (Shakespeare has not mentioned her name. He has addressed her only as 'Queen) to interfere in the father - daughter relationship. Robert Grams Hunter throws a light on Cymbeline's character :

Cymbeline knows and sees nothing but is false. His ignorance and misapprehension are total, and serve as the source for the partial ignorance and misapprehensions of the other characters, and the near tragic misunderstandings that result from them. At the play's beginning, the king's moral blindness has created around him a dangerous atmosphere of sycophancy and deceit (5).

Hunter seems to be logical in his assessment of Cymbeline's character. Right from the beginning of the play, we find him under influence. His wife, the stepmother of Imogen, enthralles him and makes him act as per her plan. He is so much enthralled that he forgets the duties of a father. He forgets that he has manifold dignities i.e. of a king, father, husband and finally of a man. As a husband, he fails to understand his deceptive wife. As a king, his decisions prove to be immature and are highly criticized by his own courtiers. The Queen wanted to gain power and glory through him. She had a plan to enthrone her son, Cloten, by getting him married to Imogen. Therefore she aggravates Cymbeline against Imogen's disobedience towards him. As per her plan, it was necessary to get Posthumous, Imogen's self - chosen husband, banished. She succeeds in bringing out Posthumous' banishment.

It is noteworthy that the Queen, who represents absence of love in marriage, tries to bring about one more manipulative marriage (forced marriage of Imogen and Cloten). But the perspicacity of Imogen stands as a great obstacle in the fulfillment of Queen's desire. Unlike her father, she knows that Cloten is a wolf in sheep's clothing who represents the ambition of his mother. The presence of the Queen in the court was not only a presence of evil but also the absence of love in marital relationships. Imogen understands well that her stepmother loves only to gain power and position. So she decides to challenge this evil force in the family, however, she has to go against her own father in doing so. She secretly marries Posthumous and frustrates the ambitious efforts of her stepmother. Thus her decision not only symbolizes her strong protest to a loveless marriage but also her moral victory over evil.

Thus, as in *The Winter's Tale*, the lack of trust in love affects the marital relationship; similarly in this play, the lack of love in marriage not only

affects the family relationships but also gives space to dominance of evil in the family. In *The Winter's Tale*, we find that Leontes' love for his wife was vulnerable to evil forces as it was overlapped by sexual jealousy. Such a faded love affected the marital relationship to a great extent. One should not ignore the possibility of Leontes' decision to remarry, had he not been subject to Apollo's oracle that proclaimed that he would not get a heir to his kingdom until his lost daughter be found. At the end of the play, everyone is ready to see the love between Perdita and Florizel changing into marriage. But would this marriage be like Leontes and Hermione? Nothing could be said clearly as the play ends with the marriage.

Love and Marriage in *The Tempest*

The Tempest is considered to be the last play penned by Shakespeare. It would be very interesting to see his perspective on love and marriage in this play. Prospero, the duke of Milan, is banished by his own treacherous younger brother, Antonio. Prospero has a motherless, three years' old daughter, Miranda. He arrives at an uninhabited island along with her. As a father, it was his responsibility to bring up his daughter and find a good match for her when she is grown up. We find that he observes her passage from childhood to adulthood. Though he had neither power nor social support at the island, he brings up his daughter very carefully. He does not let her feel the absence of her mother by incorporating her role in himself. We can assess his success by observing the behaviour of Miranda.

Throughout the play, Prospero shows his anxiety of his daughter's future. As he is growing old, he wants to ensure a happy future of his daughter. Besides this, he is also warned by the intractable Caliban who tries to ravish Miranda. Probably he was worried about the insecure future of his daughter in case he dies before handing her over to a loving husband. Under this state of mind, he sets a storm in the sea through his magic and brings young Ferdinand ashore. Miranda is now grown up and therefore he wants a person for her who truly loves her. In other words, he wants that marriage of his daughter be governed by love. He is one of the rare fathers who allow their daughters to choose their husbands. He approves his daughter's choice but he wants to assure himself of Ferdinand's love for her. He makes Ferdinand to undergo the hard task of bearing logs. Ferdinand succeeds in this test and a father succeeds in finding a suitable match for his daughter. It is noteworthy that Prospero approves the marriage of his daughter with Ferdinand only when he is assured of his love for her.

Conclusion

In the study of Shakespeare's selected plays, we have found that the marriages were more the privileges of fathers than the rights of daughters. The concept of love is very complex in Shakespeare's plays. Leontes misunderstood his wife's love. Cymbeline failed to understand the deceptive love of his queen. Prospero adopts a practical method to test Ferdinand's love for his daughter. In the study of *The Winter's Tale*, we have found that the marriage probably did not guarantee love in Elizabethan times. A woman was probably considered a suspicious character. In *Cymbeline*, Cymbeline's remarriage does not bring love for him; on the other hand his daughter Imogen rejects a loveless marriage being forced on her. She marries a man she loves though at her father's displeasure. In *The Tempest*, which is considered to be Shakespeare's last play, Shakespeare seems to be giving his perspective on love and marriage through Miranda and Ferdinand relationship. Though we do not see the married life of the couple, Shakespeare probably denies the space of any roughness in their relationship as it is already tested and is confirmed to be governed by love; still nothing can be said in certain terms.

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