



WOMEN CHARACTERS IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS – A STUDY

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Abstract

Shakespeare has numerous strong female characters; nonetheless, it is impossible to analyse these characters in terms of social or political background. They occasionally exploit their spouses' support to pursue their own political ambitions in clandestine ways. Shakespeare can also use the Elizabethan theatrical habit of women passing for males to represent some women in a way that permits them to be taken seriously. The women always return to the traditional female role after the plays where he does that, and the resolution is marriage and declarations of their subservience to men. However, every guy in those civilizations is surrounded by women, some weak but many powerful. Even if she may be dressed in clothing that denotes her subservient status, such as head and face coverings, complete body wraps, etc., every man has a grandmother, mother, sister, or daughter who he knows to be powerful. Shakespeare's representation of powerful women is one of his most intriguing themes. This essay focuses on ten of the plays' most fascinating female characters.

(Keywords: Strong women, genius, society, wealth, power, intelligent, feminist)

Introduction

Shakespeare's women characters provide as proof of his genius. They are not drawn to antagonistic or condescending personalities. Others are chilly, arrogant, and contemptuous, while others are great, warm, and kind. Some people speak with confidence, while others do not. They range in age from the young, joyful Juliet to the seasoned, furious Margaret. The majorities, though, remains alive and continue to change and evolve throughout the drama. Their actions come from a genuine confrontation with life as they learn what it is to be a woman with self-sovereignty in a patriarchal society. This essay focuses on ten of the most compelling female characters from the plays. Cordelia in King Lear

In this play, King Lear decides to retire as king and bequeath all his estates and money to his three daughters. He wanted to share his money with them because of their assertions of love and affection for him. Goneril and Regan, the two oldest daughters, overstep the mark with their insincere remarks. According to her obligations as a daughter and the relationship between a father and daughter, Cordelia claims that she loves him. Enraged, he exiles her and tells her two prince suitors that they can take her, but not with the dowry they had anticipated. The King of France agrees to take her for herself after the Duke of Burgundy

declines. She has displayed amazing bravery by challenging her father. She is with him afterward, also imprisoned; she consoles him and nurtures him. When the other two have cruelly spurned Lear and he lies defeated and imprisoned in a dungeon, she is there. He has learned from her how a parent and daughter are connected. She has exhibited exceptional strength throughout, even when her sisters hang her. Lear passes away from heartbreak. Cordeliareveals her love through the line

"I love your Majesty
According to my bond, no more nor less" (Act I:Scene I)

1. Portia in Merchant of Venice

Portia is unique in that, being the only child of her late father and in the absence of a brother, she has been forced to assume a male persona in order to manage the sizable fortune he left her. By including a clause in his will forcing the affluent and powerful men who court her from all over the world to pass a test and choose from three caskets, one of which carries the approval to marry Portia, he has been able to govern her from beyond the grave. Antonio is reluctant to deliver the pound of flesh he has pledged to give when the Duke of Venice appoints a judge to preside over the case Shylock has filed against him. When making her judgment, Portia poses as a well-known young judge and exhibits amazing talent. Her knowledge, which is evident even to people who are oblivious of the fact that she is a powerful woman, is what gives her strength.

Portia gently says about Mercy -

"The quality of mercy is not strained, It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath it is twice blest; It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."(Act IV: Scene I)

2. Lady Macbeth in Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is regarded as a highly brave lady. She encourages her husband Macbeth to kill Duncan in the play's opening scene to show her dominance over him. She takes use of her sexuality to make fun of both him and his lack of guts. She appeals to his sense of obligation to her. She presses closer to him while he hesitates, until he finally moves forward. She appears to be a powerful woman, yet she lacks

the psychological fortitude to deal with her guilt. They separate after their Marriage breaks down. She has horrific nightmares before deciding to end her life in the room.

Lady Macbeth advises her husband -

"Look like the innocent flower, But be the serpent under" (Act I: Scene V)

3. Beatrice in Much Ado About Nothing

Shakespeare's comedy Much Ado About Nothing is a great example of how he can combine a mythological theme with a completely new modern love story. Everyone around Beatrice admires her for being a strong, self-reliant woman. Because she is respected in the family as a formidable, independent woman who shouldn't be trifled with, she doesn't need to appear as a man. She is highly intelligent and today would be seen as a feminist. She will never be told what to do or who to marry since she will always do as she pleases, yet she hates men anyway. She particularly hates Benedick, a soldier who stays at her uncle's, the governor of Messina, home and frequently visits the city. Shakespeare's banter between these two anti-marriage figures is astounding. Their friends trick them into thinking they are in love, nevertheless. Beatrice enlists Benedick's aid in a plot to get back at Claudio for betraying her cousin Hero, who was about to marry him. The decision to get married and the couple's affirmation of their love mark the play's conclusion. Beatrice resumes the usual feminine posture, although she does so with a clear advantage. Shakespeare's banter between these two anti-marriage figures is astounding. Their friends trick them into thinking they are in love, nevertheless. Beatrice enlists Benedick's aid in a plot to get back at Claudio for betraying her cousin Hero, who was about to marry him. The decision to get married and the couple's affirmation of their love mark the play's conclusion. Beatrice resumes the usual feminine posture, although she does so with a clear advantage.

Juliet in Romeo and Juliet

In today's society, Juliet wouldn't be seen as a woman, but when she is fourteen, her father, a successful merchant, plans to trade her for a union with a noble family. While he is going through that process, she is beginning to fall in love with the young Romeo. She just has one thought in mind, and that is to marry Romeo. This was not her father's choice because it is against the law for their families to interact because of a long-standing feud. She declines to wed the Count of Paris without explaining her decision to her father. Her father, Capulet, finds this to be extraordinarily daring for the time and just cannot comprehend it. He curses at her, makes threats to her, and even hits her. She refuses to submit, and in her desperation to find a way out without giving up her love for Romeo, she consults Friar Lawrence. He decides to use a medicine that will make her appear dead as a solution. Romeo will arrive and remove her from the tomb when she has been laid to rest. She takes the medicine despite her fear of waking up in a tomb full of dead. She is an extremely brave and determined woman who is unquestionably one of Shakespeare's strongest female characters.

“My only love sprung from my only hate
Too early seen unknown, and known too late”!
(Act I: Scene v)

Juliet complains that she saw Romeo and fell in love with him “too early,” before she knew he was her enemy. Almost everything happens to Juliet too early. She is told to prepare herself for marriage before she is ready, she marries Romeo before she can get her parents' permission, her marriage to Paris is moved forward twice, and Romeo arrives at her tomb before she has time to wake up.

4. Desdemona in Othello

Desdemona exhibits her fortitude at the beginning of the play when her father requests the Duke of Venice to forbid her marriage to the Moor, Othello, even though she even though when he strangles her to death. She has fallen in love with a black man, and he is against their marriage, which has already occurred in secret by that point. He has ideas about who he wants to marry her too. When the Duke asks her to explain herself, she persuades him with a

stunning speech. She strikes me as a modern woman in her speech—an autonomous lady who has been a nice daughter but is now prepared to stand up for herself with her spouse. It's unfortunate if her father doesn't like that. It is no longer his concern. At that time, saying things like that in a room full of strong guys needed a great deal of strength.

“Beshrew me if I would do such a wrong
for the whole world.” (Act IV : Scene iii)

Desdemona explains to Emilia that she would never consider being unfaithful, no matter the circumstances. The quote shows that Desdemona is so virtuous she cannot even understand why a woman would betray her husband. Desdemona's innocence is part of her undoing because she never stops to think about how her behavior might appear to someone who is viewing it with suspicion. Instead, she assumes that everyone will see her integrity and purity.

5. Rosalind in As You Like It

The play's main character is Rosalind. She can arrange everyone so that they serve her needs and desires while maintaining her disguise as a guy from the beginning to the conclusion. She wants to make the man she wants to marry someone who can be as powerful and equal her attributes.

Rosalind's effectiveness as an informed and endearing critic of both herself and others has a lot to do with the never-ending fascination of reading about her. Rosalind, however, completely gives herself over to the circumstances, in contrast to Jaques, who refuses to participate fully in life but has much to say about the idiocy of those around him. She chastises Silvius for his irrational devotion to Phoebe, and she challenges Orlando's thoughtless equation of Rosalind with a Platonic ideal, but still, she comes undone by her lover's inconsequential tardiness and faints at the sight of his blood. That Rosalind can play both sides of any field makes her identifiable to nearly everyone, and so, irresistible.

“Do you not know I am a woman? When I
think, I must speak. Sweet, say on”.
(Act III: Scene ii.)

Rosalind makes this wry comment to Celia about women having no filter and blurting out every thought they have. Rosalind recently learned that Orlando has appeared in the forest of Ardenne. Overwhelmed and giddy, Rosalind asks a slew of questions about his

6. Viola in Twelfth Night

After becoming shipwrecked off the coast of Illyria and losing her twin brother in the accident, Viola's first reaction is not to call for assistance as a defenseless woman, but rather to dress as a male and seek employment as a servant in the Duke's household. She can go wherever she wants since she is a man and not a child. Her strength can be shown in her capacity to adjust to her situation despite having been raised as a woman in a male-protective environment where all of her decisions were made for her. Not only does her ability to adapt reflect strength, but also her capacity to control her environment to get her own desired result, which is to marry the Duke.

“My father had a daughter loved a man / As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman / I should your lordship” (Act II: Scene. iv)

Viola hints to Orsino about her true feelings for him. Orsino does not pick up on the clues because he believes Viola is a man, and that the two of them are speaking man to man. Orsino assumes Viola is talking about a sister but the audience knows Viola is speaking about herself. However, even by disguising her comment concerning a woman, Viola comes very close here to admitting her love for Orsino, and therefore the quote has potential homoerotic connotations in that a man seems to be hinting at his love for another man.

10. Margaret of Anjou in four Historyplays

Margaret of Anjou is a character in four of Shakespeare's plays: Henry VI pts. 1, 2, 3, and Richard III. The historical Queen Margaret was the wife consort of King Henry VI of England. In Shakespeare's tetralogy, Henry is a weak king and a meek and mild man. Shakespeare's Margaret is a ruthless, ambitious, intelligent woman who dominates him completely. She becomes involved in the power games that are going on around her and takes her enemies on. She thrives in a man's world of politics and war, and even enters the battlefield in Henry VI

appearance, which Celia gently mocks. Rosalind's comment about a woman's lack of a filter reveals not only a deprecating self-awareness but also a non-judgmental acceptance of such behavior.

11. Hermia in A Midsummer Night's Dream

After presenting her case, Helen decides to flee with Lysander rather than marry Demetrius, the man her father has picked for her. She is warned that if she does not marry Demetrius, her sentence will be death as her father begs the Duke, Theseus, to employ the full force of the law to force her to obey. Hermia challenges her father and even the most dominant man in their society, like other strong female characters in Shakespeare. She does this while maintaining her composure and using a logical argument. She then bravely flees with her partner. Her capacity for calm assertiveness and her drive to take charge of her destiny serve as her greatest assets.

“If then true lovers have been ever crossed, It stands as an edict in destiny”. (Act I: Scene i)

Part 3 and stabs the Duke of York. She plays the role of a prophetess in Richard III, blaming the nobles for the demise of the House of Lancaster. Her predictions about them all come true; they are all betrayed in some fashion and are put to death.

Following the scene where Theseus issues an ultimatum and outlines Hermia's punishment if she persists in her disobedience, Hermia confesses to Lysander that fate must have doomed their love. Hermia's reference to fate and the possibility that she and Lysander are cosmically “crossed” echoes the language of *Romeo and Juliet*, the play Shakespeare wrote just before *Midsummer*. Of course, while the earlier play about “star-crossed lovers” ended tragically, this play ends happily.

Conclusion

Shakespeare has done a good job of focusing on the female characters in his plays. He challenges the wisdom of a power structure that demands people give up their person by producing strong, attractive, independent women who we admire. Some of his plays challenge conventional ways of behaving.

Some emphasize the importance of a man and a woman having respect for one another. Some portray the uncertainty a woman's mind experiences as she tries to comprehend the boundaries of her universe. Occasionally, a drama depicts the tragedy of a woman who, in her attempt to fit in, loses her identity and direction. To hear his voice, however, one must recognize the individuality and three-dimensional quality of his women characters. Like the men, the women too respond to a variety of forces in their environment and are troubled by the world they see. But that world differs from the one perceived by men. Shakespeare was a sensitive artist who lived in an era when a woman ruled England, so it seems to reason that he would have been influenced by this exceptional circumstance. Elizabeth I was not only a wonderful woman but

also a person of influence. She ruled for many years before Shakespeare was even born and far throughout his playwriting career.

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