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REVIEW OF SHAKESPEARE'S PASSIONATE CHARACTERS: A STUDY OF "OPHELIA"

Review of Shakespeare's Passionate Characters: A Study of "Ophelia"

Kumari Rekha

Research Scholar, CMJ University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

Abstract – It is assumed that the name Ophelia could be taken from a famous Italian pastoral novel called Arcadia where the name Ophelia belonged to a male character. However, the portrait of the tragic Ophelia as such was probably influenced by memories of Shakespeare's childhood. When he was sixteen years old, a young unmarried girl, Catherine Hamlet, drowned herself in the river Avon not far away from the town of Stratford, and this unhappy event firmly engraved in boy's fantasy, which after years created the vision of a touching girl called Ophelia

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BELOVED DAUGHTER AND SISTER

Ophelia represents the character of a young, naive and innocent girl who comes from a noble family of Denmark. She is a daughter of Polonius, the Lord Chamberlain of Claudius's court. It is evident that she is not familiar with matters of state and she spends her spare time by doing the needlepoint and by gathering flowers. In general, she does not talk too much and when she does, the audience has the impression of the intention that she hides her feelings. Therefore, it can be supposed that Shakespeare wanted the readers to think about the complexity of her character and not just to get the clear character description through long dialogues. Nevertheless, even these few words help to understand her personality. Although at first glance she seems angelic and very fragile, sometimes her sexuality breaks through the surface.

Since her childhood, Ophelia was raised by her father according to the actual traditions of obedience. She is used to blindly follow orders of someone else and in this case, people who have the strongest authority over Ophelia are two men, her father and brother. Consequently, it may be inferred that she symbolizes a mentally weak woman who is not experienced at all, and her inability to make a personal opinion leads to the fact that she is easy to manipulate.

In the scene where the brother, Leartes, asks her to discourage herself from getting closer with Hamlet, she begins to hesitate about Hamlet's love. Leartes does not want Hamlet to let Ophelia down. It can be assumed that his attitudes towards Hamlet were inspired by his father who is in permanent contact with King's family.

LAERTES:

For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favours, Hold it a fashion, and a toy in blood;

A violet in the youth of primy nature, Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting; The perfume and suppliance of a minute;

No more.

OPHELIA: LAERTES:

For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favours, Hold it a fashion, and a toy in blood;

A violet in the youth of primy nature, Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting; The perfume and suppliance of a minute;

No more.

No more but so? Think it no more. (I.3. 6-13)

Shortly afterwards, Polonius also wants to learn about the relationship between Hamlet and his daughter and despite her deep love for Hamlet, she is willing to obey father's orders. She stops seeing him and she does not accept his letters any more. Observing how Ophelia depicts Hamlet's feelings for her, no mention about her affection for him can be found.

POLONIUS:

Marry, well bethought!

'tis told me, he hath very oft of late

Given private time to you, and you yourself

*Have of your audience been most free and bounteous.
If it be so— as so 'tis put on me,*

OPHELIA: POLONIUS:

OPHELIA:

*And that in way of caution—I must tell you, You do not
understand yourself so clearly*

*As it behooves my daughter and your honour. What is
between you? Give me up the truth.*

*He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders of his
affection to me.*

*Affection? Pooh! You speak like a green girl, Unsifted
in such perilous circumstance.*

*Do you believe his tenders, as you call them? I do not
know, my lord, what I should think.*

(I.3. 96-110)

Her father and brother love Ophelia enormously and they make great efforts to protect her. But a question may be raised whether the father and brother act in this way in order to protect Ophelia or to protect the reputation of their family. Polonius fears that his daughter could be seduced and abused by Hamlet just because of Ophelia's indiscretion which would have serious consequences for the good name of the family. According to the unwritten rules of high society, the whole family would be put in a bad light.

LAERTES:

OPHELIA:

Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain

If with too credent ear you list his songs,

Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open

To his unmask'ed importunity.

*Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister, And keep you
in the rear of your affection, Out of the shot and
danger of desire.*

*The chariest maid is prodigal enough If she unmask
her beauty to the moon. Virtue itself 'scapes not
calumnious strokes. The canker galls the infants of the
spring Too oft before their buttons be disclosed, And in
the morn and liquid dew of youth*

Contagious blastments are most imminent.

Be wary then; best safety lies in fear.

Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep

As watchman to my heart.

(I.3. 32-49)

UNFULFILLED LOVE

At first, the young love between Ophelia and Hamlet develops very hopefully. Hamlet proves affection for Ophelia who reciprocates his love. However, the modifications of Hamlet's state of mind have a dramatic impact on their relationship. In deeper analysis of Hamlet's speech, it could be assumed that he still has deep feelings for Ophelia and eventually, after the revenge of Hamlet's father, he would like to get together with her.

Ophelia is forced by her father and the King to find out whether her refusal to continue the relationship made Hamlet insane. After having heard Hamlet's response, the King believes that there must be another cause of his madness. But it can be observed that Ophelia is very disappointed with Hamlet's confession. She is not able to protect herself against him and the answers without any self-confidence prove her inner pain. Moreover, nobody cares about her feelings; she remains lonely without any support although her father is present at this moment.

HAMLET:

OPHELIA: HAMLET:

OPHELIA:

*Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner
transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the
force of honesty can translate beauty into his
likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the
time gives it proof. I did love you once.*

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

*You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot
so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I
loved you not.*

I was the more deceived.

(III.1. 120-129)

It is obvious that even at this difficult moment she says very little. When Hamlet quits, the only revelation of her feelings in the whole tragedy can be brought to notice. These feelings of frustration, betrayal and even disillusion gradually bring her to knees.

OPHELIA:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!

*The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's, eye, tongue, sword,
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,*

The glass of fashion and the mould of form,

*The observed of all observers, quite, quite down! And
I, of ladies most deject and wretched,*

That suck'd the honey of his music vows,

*Now see that noble and most sovereign reason, Like
sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh; That
unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth Blasted
with ecstasy. O, woe is me,*

To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

(III.1. 159-170)

Probably it is not a coincidence that while talking about Hamlet, Ophelia unintentionally predicts her own destiny. Her voice will jangle, "like sweet bells", she will be soon, "that unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth" that "blasted with ecstasy".

INSANITY

As Hilský states, "Hamlet kills Ophelia before he kills Polonius' body" (508). Having experienced Hamlet's cruel humiliation and hearing about Hamlet's murder of her father, Ophelia begins to feel very confused. She does not have any strength to alleviate her suffering and she goes insane. In this state of madness, she reveals her opinion on young men who are, according to her, the epitome of the exploitation and unfaithfulness:

OPHELIA:

Indeed, without an oath, I'll make an end on't! [Sings.]

By Gis and by Saint Charity, Alack, and fie for shame!

Young men will do't if they come to't

By Cock, they are to blame.

*Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me, You promis'd me
to wed.'*

(He answers:)

*'So would I 'a' done, by yonder sun, An thou hadst not
come to my bed.'*

(IV.5. 63-71)

Hilský suggests that Ophelia's character is associated with two important themes of water and flowers. Her flowers carry ambiguous meaning that balance between traditional or flower speech and the feminine sensuality. Ophelia's violet is a traditional symbol of melancholy, fennel – the symbol of flattery, columbine – the symbol of ingratitude and infidelity, rue – the symbol of mourning and wishes. However, the wreaths woven of wildflowers, which decorates Ophelia's body resembling to a bride of the death, have obvious sexual connotations. The theme of water traditionally stands for madness and grief of women and girls (518).

LAERTES:

*Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia, And
therefore I forbid my tears; but yet*

It is our trick; nature her custom holds,

*Let shame say what it will. When these are gone, The
woman will be out. Adieu, my lord.*

I have a speech of fire, that fain would blaze

But that this folly drowns it.

(IV.7. 201-207)

Funeral

PRIEST:

Her obsequies have been as far enlarged

*As we have warranty. Her death was doubtful; And,
but that great command o'ersways the order, She
should in ground unsanctified have lodged*

*Till the last trumpet. For charitable prayers, Shards,
flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her. (V.1.
219-224)*

This speech clearly displays the customs of the Victorian era, when, according to a law, suicides could not have a proper Christian funeral because their action was considered to have been a serious sin. Considering the fact that the person who killed himself or herself could not confess the sins, committing suicide was considered to be more serious offense against the church law than the murder of another person. But even during this period, two exceptions existed. If a madman did not realize what he was doing, it was still possible to organize a church funeral.

While closely examining the text, it can be suggested that this case is not about a concession made by the Church because of Ophelia's madness, but it is done

under the pressure of the most influential person, the King. When the king decides to circumvent the supreme law of the Church, it is then obvious how important Ophelia's character is. Even after the death, the author sets a high value on her character. The King takes advantage of Ophelia's death so as to manipulate Learthes in order to become the King's sword.

IMPORTANCE OF OPHELIA IN THE TRAGEDY

We could not deny a great importance of Ophelia's role in the story. Her death results in an unexpected twist in the plot towards the end of the tragedy. When she dies, both her brother and Hamlet have nothing to live for any more. Finally, the king gets "the tool" to kill Hamlet. As Leartes remains the only one member of his beloved family and he has nothing to loose, nothing restrains him from the revenge of his father's murder as well as of the subsequent state of insanity of her sister caused by Hamlet's acts. By the end of the play, it is the character of Ophelia who is regarded as the tragic climax of the story.

CONCLUSION

Ophelia finds herself in a position of a single woman within a patriarchal society which is the main reason why she is often pulled apart by orders and suggestions proposed by her father, brother, the King and Hamlet. Her personality is torn to pieces by two commands: the need to obey her father and the voice of the heart that belongs to Hamlet. At the moment when these orders do not succeed or disappear she does not know what to do and she is lost. Consequently, she goes mad and dies, which is the only way for her to deliver herself from patriarchy.

3. 1.2 JULIET

And yet I wish but for the thing I have. My bounty is as boundless as the sea,

My love as deep; the more I give to thee, The more I have, for both are infinite.

(II.2. 138-141)

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

The play *Romeo and Juliet* is based on a poem called *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet* written by Arthur Broke. It is a translation of an Italian story *Giulietta* by Matto Bondello. Both works depict the story of a tragic love of two real people who lived in Verona. Shakespeare's main inspiration was Brooke's story. It is assumed that he did not use the original story by Bondello at all. The name of Juliet occurs as an example of faithful love (Spencer 217 – 218).

INNOCENT GIRL

When the play begins, Juliet is perceived as a charm, vulnerable and immature girl who has not reached her fourteenth birthday yet. She acts as an innocent and naïve child. Meanwhile, the audience can notice neither intensity nor complexity of her character.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

William Shakespeare paid exceptional attention to the character of Juliet. She is considered to be the central point of interest and focus of the whole tragedy. For the first time, Romeo meets Juliet in Capulet's house at the fair. In noisy environment of the carnival, among many tables and dancing couples, Romeo sees Juliet and they both fall in love at first sight which is a common phenomenon used in Shakespeare's works. But this particular meeting is a unique theatrical event because it is a sonnet that will play a major role there. In the middle of the noisy celebration, the author creates through the sonnet a very intimate space for the couple. Juliet is charmed by the unknown boy.

ROMEO: JULIET:

If I profane with my unworthiest hand

This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

*Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;*

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

*And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss. Have not
saints lips, and holy palmers too? Ay, pilgrim, lips
that they must use in prayer.*

*O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do! They
pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.*

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

(I.5. 98-110)

HEROIC WOMANHOOD

The contentious theme of forbidden love evokes Shakespeare to centre the play on Juliet because women are believed to be able to arouse stronger feelings concerning either love or hate. It is comprehensible that she, as a woman, is associated with deeper passion than Romeo.

Through their love Juliet blossoms into a real heroine. Consequently, her adulthood is attained thanks to her heroism. But it should be added that unlike many other heroines, she behaves like a heroine without perceiving it. It is the inseparable

part of her personality. Whenever a possibility occurs, she cannot act differently.

The most impressive Juliet's love confession to Romeo is based on paradox of images of light and dark. When Romeo says goodbye to Juliet and the lovers have to be apart, the light of the day turns into the darkness of the night.

LONELINESS

When Romeo leaves, Juliet finds herself without anyone with whom she could share feelings and emotions. There is nobody who would give her any advice on what to do. A fourteen-year-old girl remains lonely under the permanent pressure of the father who forces her to marry Paris:

JULIET:

Good father, I beseech you on my knees, Hear me with patience but to speak a word.

(III.5. 162-164)

Then she looks for help from her mother, still a young woman who never seems to show any interest in her daughter:

JULIET:

Is there no pity sitting in the clouds That sees into the bottom of my grief? O sweet my mother, cast me not away!

Delay this marriage for a month, a week;

(III.5. 205-208)

At long last, full of desperation and sincerity, Juliet turns to the Nurse:

JULIET:

O God!—O nurse, how shall this be prevented? Some comfort, Nurse.

(III.5. 213-214)

DESPERATION

In the second scene of the third act when the Nurse of Juliet announces that „he is dead”. Juliet thinks that the person who was killed was Romeo, but in fact it was her cousin Tybalt who became a victim of Romeo. This initially slight misunderstanding leads to Juliet's very tragic outburst of desperate emotions.

NURSE:

JULIET: NURSE:

Ah, well-a-day! he's dead, he's dead, he's dead! We are undone, lady, we are undone!

Alack the day! he's gone, he's kill'd, he's dead! Can heaven be so envious?

Romeo can,

Though heaven cannot. O Romeo, Romeo! Who ever would have thought it? Romeo!

JULIET:

What devil art thou that dost torment me thus? This torture should be roar'd in dismal hell. Hath Romeo slain himself? Say thou but „I,” And that bare vowel „I” shall poison more

Than the death-darting eye of cockatrice.

I am not I, if there be such an „I”;

Or those eyes shut that make thee answer „I.” If he be slain, say „I”; or if not, „no.”

Brief sounds determine of my weal or woe.

(III.2 39-54)

She seems rather distracted and she fails to be herself. The following speech is not usual for her character at all. She speaks like someone else. This particular way of speaking is rather typical for Romeo who speaks in the artificial manner at the beginning of the tragedy when he talks with the conventional rhetoric about unfulfilled love with Rosaline. This particular state of Juliet's mind represents her hopeless expression of her subconscious, which is more complex than it could be expected.

JULIET:

O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face! Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave? Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!

Dove-feather'd raven! wolvish-ravens lamb! Despised substance of divinest show!

Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st—

A damned saint, an honourable villain! O nature, what hadst thou to do in hell When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend In mortal paradise of such sweet flesh?

Was ever book containing such vile matter So fairly bound? O, that deceit should dwell In such a gorgeous palace!

(III.2. 76-88)

The turning point of Juliet's unusual behaviour occurs when the nurse begins to condemn Romeo because of the murder he has been accused of. Consequently, to demonstrate her commitment to Romeo, Juliet returns to her own way of speaking because she can not stand this condemnation; she defies and she defends the lover. Furthermore, she proves the limitless devotion to Romeo by forgiving him the murder of her beloved cousin.

Through the character of Juliet, the author proves his notable skills for the introduction of vague and ambiguous language into the tragedy. Juliet manages to speak in the ambiguous manner with the Nurse in the fifth scene of the third act when lady Capulet is convinced that her daughter mourns for the death of the beloved cousin Tybalt. On closer examination of the scene, it is obvious that Juliet talks about Romeo's expulsion from Verona.

JULIET:

Indeed I never shall be satisfied

With Romeo till I behold him— dead — Is my poor heart so for a kinsman vex'd. Madam, if you could find out but a man To bear a poison, I would temper it;

That Romeo should, upon receipt thereof, Soon sleep in quiet. O, how my heart abhors To hear him nam'd and cannot come to him, To wreak the love I bore my cousin Tybalt Upon his body that hath slaughter'd him!

(III.5. 96-105)

TRAGIC VICTIMS OF DESTINY

There is no doubt that Romeo loves Juliet. However, to make such a serious decision of committing suicide is the most extreme proof of love not very common for the man's character. Juliet's inner emotions justify her choice to kill herself as the highest representation of her feelings. Only the death can assure the preservation of their love.

As the audience sees this immense love from Juliet's point of view, they also must see the irony in her depiction of their relationship which she rejects to describe.

JULIET:

Conceit, more rich in matter than in words, Brags of his substance, not of ornament.

They are but beggars that can count their worth; But my true love is grown to such excess,

I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth.

(II.6. 30-35)

It is not possible to explain their deep love in words. While Juliet represents the passion and imagination, Romeo stands for the action in the play. In other words, the role of Romeo acts according to Juliet's initiation.

IMPORTANCE OF JULIET IN THE TRAGEDY

Juliet represents the most important character in the tragedy. Consciously or unconsciously, it is her who stands for the determiner of events in the play, not Romeo. Through her temper and happiness Romeo emerges from a dream world he has been living in. She saves his soul from being imprisoned under the influence of counterfeit feelings and emotions. Her simulated death incites him to kill himself and shortly afterwards their death results in a reconciliation of the warring families.

CONCLUSION

In the course of history, love has driven men and women to strange extremes. In this tragedy it is the love and passion that help Juliet to attain her womanhood. She does not want to be dependent on parents any more. Being prepared to take full responsibility for her actions, she expresses a desire to make decisions about her own life and to emerge from unconditional subordination to the parents. To prove her inner strength and devotion, she allows Romeo to leave Verona because otherwise, he would be arrested and convicted. Romeo's love is the most important thing in the world for her. At the end, she commits suicide, which is from a religious point of view one of the most serious crimes, rather than to live without him.

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