



*Journal of Advances and
Scholarly Researches in
Allied Education*

*Vol. VIII, Issue No. XV,
July-2014, ISSN 2230-7540*

REVIEW ARTICLE

WOMEN AS HEROINE IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY: AS YOU LIKE IT

AN
INTERNATIONALLY
INDEXED PEER
REVIEWED &
REFEREED JOURNAL

Women as Heroine in Shakespeare's Play: As You like It

Dr. Monika

Department of English, Kurukshetra

-----X-----

In Shakespeare the male and female character bear precisely the same relation to each other as they do in nature and in society they are not equal in prominence or in power but remain subordinate throughout.

Alvin Kerman after stating "Women always occupy a special place in the Shakespearean world". In the sixteenth century wives had given almost the same value. Discussing about women's education he argued that the nature of women was unchanging. As may not be changed not utterly delivered of affection. So let no man hope to change a woman from her proper and native nature.

Women as the queen of Shakespearean comedies. Most women in Shakespeare are sentimental and designed by providence to clinkers upon men by nature. All women, probably, agree with Shakespeare. However, the woman is the pillar on which the structure of the family is to stand. Man, however masterful, plays only a secondary role and the woman has to possess exceptional qualities or else the structure will collapse, Shakespeare clearly recognizes that it is for the woman to hold the balance, however precarious it may be at times, between realism and romanticism, lust and love, desire and illusion love and friendship marriage, and femininity. It would be too much to expect Shakespeare to attack the powers that his society had given to husband over their wives. But there seems no doubt that in all cases where husband treat their wives harshly. Shakespeare's sympathies are invariably with the wives who are morally superior to the men who reject them.

Shakespeare regards the role of sexes as complimentary and feels that as man is incomplete without woman. So woman is incomplete without man. It is not able that almost all women in Shakespeare – whether in comedies or tragedies accept their sexuality as a normal part of their life and are frank about it. As Shakespeare saw, in the world, a woman must have wits and brain and spirit as well as heart to succeed in life and in love. In the absence of these traits, they are likely to get magic ends.

Ruskin's view that "Shakespeare has no heroes but only heroines" is more true of his comedies than of his tragedies. It is significant that Shakespeare who gives importance to the power of love as an answer to fate should also give great importance to the redemptive principles of love symbolized in women. He gives this much importance to the heroine in his love tragedies, particularly Antony and Cleopatra where the fifth Act is devoted entirely to the triumphant death of Cleopatra.

In none of Shakespeare's four tragedies is woman the central figure. Shakespeare's tragic heroines gave a beauty and an appeal all their own. Shakespeare's sensitiveness to feminine charm and his power to discriminate its distinguishing quality are the chief means by which he makes his tragic heroines live; they are vibrant with a vitality all their own. When we study the four great tragedies of Shakespeare, we find that the tragic heroines of these plays represent qualities which taken together, reveal a pattern. Through these Shakespeare presents to us different aspects of femininity. Through a particular tragic heroine Shakespeare presents us with a specific aspect of the feminine characters pure and simple. We have to admit that as compared to Shakespeare's other characters, especially the tragic heroes, the tragic heroines are less complex in temperament and motivation. They are individualized less strongly than the tragic heroes, they don't have same three dimensional effect. Shakespeare must have had his own reason for this. The role and function of the hero in Shakespearean tragedy is far more important than that of the heroine.

The chief merit of the suffering women in Shakespeare is that they are model wives. They combine in their characters as the qualities that go to make an ideal spouse for an Elizabethan nobleman. Shakespeare has portrayed women in different roles in his plays – as a 'daughter' a 'wife' and a 'beloved'. Shakespeare creates his women by a single strong or exquisite inspiration, but he studies his men. His witty women are not a complex of all various qualities like Falstaff, his wicked women simply wicked like Goneril and Regan, not an inscrutable mystery of

iniquity like Iago. His women of intellect are bright, effective with ideas which they use as means of action or of enjoyment, but among them there is not a female Hamlet. Yet the women of Shakespeare have almost always the advantage of his men.

Shakespeare wrote a number of romantic comedies of which "As You Like It" is one of the finest. Rosalind one of the most unforgettable and most lovable heroines in the entire range of Shakespeare drama, of all the characters in "As You Like It". She is most elaborately and vividly drawn. She is one of Shakespeare's most convincing and life-like characters and she dominates the whole play in which she figures. She is vibrant and dynamic personality, pulsating with a zest for life. Indeed, it would seem that she represents the animating principle, which underlies the universe. Her gaiety and playfulness are infectious and her talk as well as her outlook upon life has an invigorating effect even upon the aged and the feeble to whom she imports an illusion of youthfulness.

Rosalind is one of the most magnificent of Shakespeare's heroines and critic after critic has vexed eloquent in praise of her sparkling and overflowing wit, her vivacity, her resourcefulness, her sportive gaiety and her natural tenderness. She is charming and we could not find a better companion to spend our time with, in careless abandon in Forest of Arden. Ruskin had Rosalind in mind when he said, "Shakespeare has no heroes but only heroines."

Certainly Rosalind is the most human figure in "As You Like It". While she expresses certain ideas in the play and is instrumental in communicating its basic theme, "It is not only Michael Manheim says about Rosalind that :

Her winning, delightful qualities are apparent not solely in lines important to the play's overall meaning, but are evident in a dozen seemingly insignificant ways. Her charm is found in off-hand statements, casual remarks and sudden outbursts of anger, love for Orlando, and mock masculine oaths and assertions in the disguise as Ganymede, the page.

The best characteristic of "As You Like It" is the divine beauty of Rosalind's character. She is girl of beauty-not on empty beauty but a beauty which is combined with grace and dignity. About Rosalind Mrs. Jameson says,

"Ever"thing about Rosalind breathes of "youth and youth's sweet as the dew-awakened blossoms, and light as the breeze that plays among them."

She is more than usually tall and is heavenly. Though she examines Rosalind in parcels, her appreciation leaves in our mind the essential charm that Rosalind possesses :

"It is a pretty youth not very pretty;

But, sure he's proud; and yet his

pride becomes him.

He'll make a proper man. The best thing in him.

Is his complexion, and faster than his tongue

Did make offence, his eye did heal it up." (III, V, 12-116)

Rosalind is a complex and challenging individual bold enough to masquerade as a boy and seek her fortunes in an unknown forest, but feminine enough to fall in love with a and some young man. She has never been seen before. Rosalind's sweet establishment is thoroughly saturated with humour and that too of the freshest and wholesomest quality. Her vivacity and wit are the two most outstanding qualities. She has the sprightliness of manner and sharpness of wit. Her vivacity appeals enormously. She is effervescent as the spirits of the animals and her mind thinks as rapidly as her heart feels.

Though Rosalind is a princess, she is a princess of Arcady; and notwithstanding the charming effect produced by her first scenes, we scarcely ever think of her with a reference to them or associate her with a court and the artificial appendages of her rank. As a daughter Rosalind is dutiful, faithful affectionate and obedient. When we met her for the first time, she is feeling very sad because her father, Duke Senior, has been banished by his younger brother, Duke Frederick and at present, he is living in the Forest of Arden like Robinhood with his merry men.

There is no doubt in our mind that Rosalind is the heart and soul of the play. Apart from her obvious femininity and woman qualities, what strikes us the most is that she is a woman of action, she may have been different in court under the watchful eye of her uncle. Rosalind represents an almost perfect balance of the characteristics, which Shakespeare's other woman characters have shown, she is the romantic but realistic, warm-hearted but ironic, witty but sympathetic, imaginative but practical, young but wise. Her significance to the play is obvious as she herself writes the play's major themes. In her position as the daughter of banished Duke and the friend of the Usurper's daughter, she exemplifies the theme of usurpation, responsibility and friendship, in her attachment for Orlando she helps develop the theme of love; in her progress from court to country and back again she illuminates the theme of the pastoral. After studying all the female characters, we come to the conclusion that it is Rosalind who is the queen of the play. She is most lovable, bright and vivacious. She, like the silver summer clouds, shifts her hues and forms even when we gaze at her. In some respect it is surprising that Rosalind has received so much praise from critics and from theatre audience. However, it seems that these features merely serve to make her more human, more real and to prevent her from

becoming so good as to be both unbelievable and unattractive. Her independence is attractive. She has a great fund of commonsense, but also a sense of fun.

After studying much about Shakespeare plays we came to the conclusion that William Shakespeare is a true feminist. His characters are life-living. Shakespearean characters are 'natural' and they are 'divine worth' of Shakespeare.

"The soul-life of a Shakespearean play is indeed, a thing of diving worth. Its perennial fire is as mysterious, as near and yet as far, as that of the sun, and like the sun it burns while generations pay.[Knight 1930, p.14]

"Shakespeare saw man and woman as equal in a world that declared them unequal." He regards the role of sexes as complimentary and feels that as man is incomplete without woman, so woman is incomplete without man. To Shakespeare, woman is the, pillar on which the structure of the family is to stand and so, she has to possess exceptional qualities or else the structure will collapse. Rosalind is undoubtedly a true representation of a heroine of the romantic comedies. She leads the action of the play and gives it a special charm of its own. Shakespeare thus is neither a feminist nor an anti-feminist. He looks at women as human being first and as women only secondarily. Thus Shakespeare's characters are gentle, kind, merry and humorous. This is more so with women who are charming and dominate the action Shakespeare has given us such a glittering array of heroines that Ruskin commented that "Shakespeare has only heroines and no heroes."

It is a world where a girl may easily blossom into a woman, with men having suppressed voices. It is a world where women not only match men but also come out winners. What is most prominent about Shakespeare heroine is that they generate an abundance of sunshine and happiness. Hence, Shakespeare's greatness as a writer of plays in which women play an important role and are dominant then man. We can't deny Shakespeare's respect and love for women actress in his works.

WORKS CITED

1. Alvin Kerman, the Revels History of Drama in English (London, 1977), III, P. 320.
2. Vives, the office and Duties of an Husband Sigs, E iii Jr., ElJr. Cited by Juliet Dusingberre in Shakespeare and the Nature of Women. (London, 1975), P. 199.
3. George Gordon, Shakespearean Comedy and Other Studies (London: U.U.P., 1965), p. 52.
4. Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard" Journal of the History of Ideas, XX, 1959, p. 202.
5. Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch (London, 1971), p. 209.
6. Martha Andersen – Thom, "Thinking About Women in their Prosperous Act: A Reply to Juliet Dusingberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, *Shakespeare Studies*, 11, 1978, p.263.
7. Dusingberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (London, 1975), p.73.
8. Op.Cit., pp. 207, 208.
9. Maynard Mack, Rescuing Shakespeare, International Shakespeare Association Occasional Paper No.1, 1979, p.8.
10. Carol Thomas Neely, Women and Men in Othello: "What shold such a fool/Do with so good a women? *Shakespeare Studies*, 10, 1978, p. 136.
11. Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* 1956, 9.44.
12. Martha Andersen, Thom, op. Cit. p. 274.
13. Dusingberre, op.cit. p. 308.
14. Virginia Woof, *A Room of One's Own* (15th impression, London, 1974), p. 351.
15. ChritsopherHuill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London, 1964), p. 351.