

Order vs. Counter-order: Love in Shakespeare's Plays

Liang Guo

King's College London, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710000, China

Abstract: *Love between men and women is the most moving content in Shakespeare's plays. Humanists in the Renaissance believed that love was a natural human right, the most natural, the most beautiful, the most noble and the most praiseworthy emotion in the world. Boys and girls break through the cage of medieval asceticism, burst out in true love of hot passion, mobilize the abundant energy, life's most happy activities and the most noble words and deeds into one -- this is shown incisively and vividly in Shakespeare's plays. However, the power of the Christian Church was still strong at that time, and the traditional religious concepts influenced social morality and ethics and constrained the thoughts of intellectuals. Shakespeare was no exception. According to the English literary critic Tillyard, "The Elizabethan conception of the world order is generally medieval, although many medieval details have been removed. It is the perfect work of God that the universe is a whole and everything has its place in it."¹ Christian theology holds that God created all things, and also created the divine order in which the universe operates, which regulates social ethics and morality. Tillyard said: "Because of this set of ideas in mind, it was Shakespeare who got Odysseus to mention that social order follows degrees and takes its place, and these are the organizations and activities that fit man's place in all existence."² Shakespeare said, "Take away the strings of Degree and listen. How many shrill noises will come out."³ Shakespeare's love believers, although they can sacrifice everything for love at the risk of life and death, but cannot offend the eternal order of male and female, they are willing to obey the order, each put himself in his place, only in this way can they enter into the happy Garden of Eden. Order is an important key word to understand Shakespeare's plays. Following the clue of order and anti-order, we can find a key to open the treasure house of Shakespeare's plays.*

Keywords: *Shakespeare's plays, love, women's rights, the order of the universe*

1. Introduction

In the modern western feminist movement, many scholars examined Shakespeare from the perspective of women's rights and were dissatisfied with his male chauvinism. They thought that Shakespeare belittled women and his thoughts were backward, which was not in line with his identity as a literary master. "Shakespeare here appears as "the patriarchal bard" said English literary critic Clare McCherlan^[4]. These views are biased, because they deviate from the historical background and social environment, which is a harsh criticism of Shakespeare.

When the European Renaissance and humanism movement gradually advanced, the barriers of medieval asceticism were opened up and the value of human beings was promoted. Shakespeare conform to the development of the times, he fully affirms human nature, sincerely praise love, shaped many radiant, bold pursuit of true love, dedicated for love of women. However, the foundation of the mainstream social values at that time did not waver. Constrained by the limitations of the times, his breakthrough could only go so far. When those girls in Shakespeare's play are immersed in passionate love, family rank, wealth and wealth are no longer insurmountable ladder. They dare to go against the decision of their parents and be loyal to the love they choose. Once they enter the palace of marriage, they will finally submit to the male power. Shakespeare, understandably, did not break free of old barriers. As Chen Duxiu said, "The ethical consciousness is the last consciousness of our final consciousness."^[5] Ethics is a deeply rooted concept in human society, which does not always go side by side with contemporary avant-garde

¹Shakespeare's Historical Plays by E.M.W.Tillyard. Publishing House: Huaxia Publishing House. Published in 2016. Translator: Mou Fang-fang. Chapter 1, sections 3-4.

²Shakespeare's Historical Plays by E.M.W.Tillyard. Publishing House: Huaxia Publishing House. Published in 2016. Translator: Mou Fang-fang. Chapter 1, sections 3-4.

³The Complete Works of Shakespeare New Revised First Folio [4]. Pp. 167-267. By William Shakespeare Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen. Published by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2007.

thoughts. Turkish scholar Karaman Hattis says: "It's not Shakespeare's fault that he plays on female themes. It is the social order and our culture that demands that mothers be limited and excluded. It is patriarchal culture that stifles mothers and women in general, who are excluded and denied by the patriarchal linguistic order."^[6]

When we review Shakespeare's writing, we also have to look at the driving forces behind it, to put ourselves in his place, why did he have to write the way he did, and what would he have done otherwise? Canadian scholar Carroll said: "The early seventeenth century dramatists, writing for a fiercely commercial theater, and for a bourgeois audience which identified with the city and against the court, had to address themselves to these real concerns of their time, concerns which were deeply involved with the question of woman's nature and her relationship with man."^[6] When I was an exchange student at the University of North Carolina in the United States, Dr. Vela, the professor of Shakespeare, emphasized: "Shakespeare plays are for acting. Only through the eyes of the audience can Shakespeare be understood." It is true that drama, unlike fiction and poetry, is for performance. It is a literary and artistic work that needs to be directly faced and approved by the audience to be born, and applauded and applauded by the audience to survive. As playwright and partner of the King's Men in London who is basically responsible for his own profits and losses economically, Shakespeare had to be as concerned about the box office value of the theatre as he was about expressing his ideas and making people willing to pay for tickets to see his plays. We can better understand Shakespeare's plays through the eyes of the audience sitting in the Globe Theatre.

2. Shakespeare in the Renaissance

2.1 Shakespeare's Conception of the Order of the Universe

2.1.1 "God's rules for the universe"

Shakespeare believed in the "doctrine of nature" that men and women should be governed because he believed that there was a higher "universal order" above it. To Christian Europeans, the logic of this cosmic order was perfect, unassailable, and unassailable. Ptolemaic astrology mapped out the orbits of the Earth-centered stars across the vast expanse of the sky. Look at the earth we live in, water, fire, earth, air four elements constitute all things; In the world of mortals, Kings and courtiers maintain their respective positions; The male, the female, the old, and the young have their own principles; The movement of the universe, the succession of dynasties and the reproduction of families are orderly. Tillyard says: "Creativity is a series of objects, from the lowest inanimate objects to the angels closest to the place of God in order. The hot and the cold, the dry and the wet, the heavy and the light, the big and the small, the tall and the low, all coexist in harmony. In this order, in the kingdom of heaven there are angels over angels, rank over rank, man over man, beast over beast, bird over bird, fish over fish; The worm that crawls on the earth, the bird that flies in the sky, the fish that dives in the deep sea are all tied to the most harmonious chain of order. There is nothing from man to the humblest worm that is not bound by this bond of order. How strong was the Elizabethan desire for systems and equivalents! For Shakespeare, the same is true of his concern with the political order."^[7] "God has laid down rules for the universe," Tillyard said. "The universe is a chain of existence in a kind of harmonious musical activity, akin to a dance, in its correspondence."^[8]

The Christian view of the order of the universe has some similarities with the Chinese Confucian view of "the unity of man and nature", "the nature does not change, so does the 'Tao'."^[9] The order of the universe, made by God, is eternal and inviolable. If the stars deviate from the right course, floods, earthquakes and disasters will befall them. If a courtier rebelled, there would be guilt and slaughter. Similarly, if men and women do not obey the order, they will also be punished. In Shakespeare's love plays, we can see the internal logic of this order and anti-order everywhere.

2.1.2 Shakespeare Was a Cool, Utilitarian Oralist

The Taming of the Shrew is a typical example of Shakespeare's harmonious order of male and female characters in romantic dramas. This comedy, criticized by feminists, tells the story of the gentleman Petruchio, who uses almost cruel methods to transform the rebellious rich girl Katharina into a gentle wife from a rebellious "shrew". Petruchio tormented Katharina in every way possible, forced her to walk long distances in the cold, denied her sleep, gave her no food, insulted her with such vile language as "the vulgar, the old, the ugly," and neglected her by being late for the wedding and by dressing up in a strange way. These measures brought about a new transformation in Katharina, and these words: "A woman should be as faithful and obedient to her husband as a courtesan is to a king; Therefore, subduing

your vain pride, fall on your knees and ask your husbands for mercy. To show my obedience, I shall kneel before my husband at his command, and give him the satisfaction of his heart." ^[10] Such a scenario may seem unthinkable, and it is hard for modern feminists to accept. In fact, through careful reading of the text, we can realize that Shakespeare's intention is not to derogate women, but really seems to believe that the purpose of abuser and victim is love. He explained, in a tongue-in-cheek way, that intelligent and beautiful women would lose their luster if they left God's order, and that only by returning to normality could they find themselves. Turkish scholar Ela İPEK GÜNDÜZ* points out that "All in all, Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew" continues to appeal the tastes of the readers/ audiences via its disputable subject matter." He points out that Katharina's transformation was voluntary because "In reality she knows that Petruchio loves her and he is true to her. His frankness attracts her in a society full of hypocrites. Furthermore, she admires Petruchio's living his true self and she responds his love with her new identity." ^[11] Letting all the characters in order to find themselves in love and publicizing nature is the pursuit of Shakespeare. From his own understanding, he sympathizes and praises men and women who obey the order, and mocks those who try to trespass -- just as he mercilessly condemns and flogs rebellious ministers who misbehave. He wrote it from his heart, and he had to write it in order to appeal to the audience. He was neither a male chauvinist nor a feminist, but a sober, utilitarian oralist.

3. How Shakespeare Brings Lovers in Pursuit of True Love into Order in Harmony

3.1 *The Matching Principle of Love*

Carole McKewin said: "The social norm that parents choose partners for their children actually maintains the political order among men. In addition, compensation must be made for the loss of paternal authority caused by giving away the daughter" ^[12] In Elizabethan times, women were considered property, and marriage was a form of exchange for value. The father decides the deal, and the patriarchal audience gauges the fairness of the deal. The lovers in Shakespeare's plays, such as Theseus and Hippolyta, Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, Petruchio and Catharina, Portia and Bassanio, Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra...Which pair did people at the time think was not a good match? Absolutely incompatible love can only be met with a hiss. Under the influence of humanism, the balance of trade has a new weight. The older generation pay more attention to family background and wealth, while the younger generation pay more attention to appearance, knowledge, demeanor and temperament. This has brought new changes and conflicts are inevitable. In "Othello", Desdemona, the daughter of the noble patriarchal, regardless of her father's opposition, insisted on marrying the black-faced Moor Othello, because she was moved by his military achievements, experience and heroism. In *Twelfth Night*, the beautiful and rich countess Olivia falls in love with Viola, who dresses up as a man and a servant. It is because of his appearance and knowledge that she sees him. Claire McEachern said: "that the knight would condescend to ally himself to him...and that Hero, like Desdemona, has 'made a gross revolt'" ^[13] For men, manliness and experience make up for what they want of birth, manners and learning for what they want of wealth; For women, relying on beauty, gentleness, intelligence and virtue can earn points. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katarina's naughty character devaluates her in the marriage market, scoring lower than her gentle sister Bianca. Petruchio's taming of her raised her score and brought her back from the brink of being unable to marry. Although the value of human beings has increased, the fundamental principle of matching love has not changed. An in-depth observation will reveal that Othello was actually a Moorish aristocrat born in a foreign land and the commander of the Venetian mercenary army with remarkable military achievements. Viola temporarily fell as a servant, the real family is not humble, in essence they are compatible. There is no story in Shakespeare where a prince marries a Cinderella or a princess marries a poor boy, because the audience can't accept that kind of unconventional love, the hidden eternal order is immutable. If anyone forgets who he is, he only brings shame on himself. In *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio, the butler, picks up the false letter that the maid dropped on the ground on purpose and mistakenly thinks that Olivia, the hostess, is in love with him. "A toad wants to eat the swan meat", he becomes so ugly that he is mocked mercilessly and severely punished.

3.2 *With Hardness Produces Softness and with Softness Subdues Firmness, Men and Women Seek Their Place in Order*

The Christian Church in the middle Ages despised women and did not believe that true love existed between men and women, and the legendary "chivalric love" was nothing more than an illusion generated by sexual repression. Humanists believe that love is a natural human right, a noble and beautiful human emotion. The mutual attraction between men and women can produce the force of a magnet. The love

described by Shakespeare is the true love of the world, and the eulogization of love reflects Shakespeare's humanism consciousness. But unlike the extreme humanists, Shakespeare kept a cool head. He saw the moral side effects of indulging his nature and did not want to let love burn everything down. American scholar Patricia Jean Saxon said: "While the Shakespeare canon, taken as a whole, treats female aggression and strength critically or at best ambivalently, the early and middle comedies often present positive models for female assertiveness."^[14] Gordana Galić Kakkonen and Ana Penjak said: "by positioning himself at the top of the hierarchical order, man subordinated women, junior men, children, slaves, domestic servants and nature, who were marginalized and stereotyped, and perceived as the other; within the cultural context of a society people take on roles and patterns of behavior characteristic of a man or of a woman and pass them to every new generation."^[15]

In Shakespeare's plays, men achieve the maximization of their value by using hardness to control softness, while women achieve the maximization of their value by using softness to overcome firmness. However, there is a limit to both of them. The eternal order is an unbreakable boundary. We can see that in "Julius Caesar", the Roman commander Antony was once a powerful hero, and his speech at Caesar's funeral flashed with the light of reason, which had a powerful role in turning the tide and the world around.^[16] However, in Antony and Cleopatra, Antony was deluded by the flirtatious Cleopatra, indulged in the gentle country, lost himself completely, and turned into an inept fool. His underling Philo said: "Hey, it's ridiculous that our boss is so infatuated with him. His gallant eyes, which had sparkled like those of a war-god in armor when he had commanded his army, were now fixed, rapturously, on a tawny face. His general's ambition, which had broken the buckles of his chest in fierce battle, had lost all normality and was willing to be a fan to cool a gypsy woman's lust. Observe that he, once one of the three pillars of the world, has become a whore."^[17] Cleopatra is happy to see Antony change from a lion into a wayward, ungrateful child, and her goal is to get him to step down from his throne and submit to her completely. For this reason, she did not hesitate to take national affairs as a child's game. In two naval battles, she deliberately retreated or even surrendered, in an attempt to further weaken Antony's strength and eliminate his ambition through defeat. When reproached by Anthony, she sent someone to pretend that she had killed herself, in the hope that she would gain pity. Unexpectedly by love dizzy Antony immediately committed suicide, Cleopatra also had to follow the destruction. "Antony and Cleopatra" is like a reverse "Taming of the Shrew", describing a woman's attempt to tame a man with tenderness. She succeeds and she fails. Because her femininity has broken the boundaries of the eternal order, fate will not let her get away with it.

4. Conclusion

The 39 plays written by Shakespeare in his lifetime vividly reflect the political, economic, ideological and moral outlook of the Renaissance era, and create a rich spiritual treasure house belonging to all mankind. The study of Shakespeare's plays is an important subject, and it is still a subject of great interest to scholars who have written about it for centuries, each trying to find his or her own key to unlock the treasure trove. This project follows Dr. Tillyard's new approach to Shakespeare's history plays from the perspective of the order of the universe. It is said that "love triumphs over all" and "love is above all" are the themes of Shakespeare's romantic comedies and love tragedies respectively. In fact, I found that all of Shakespeare's love plays have one theme: "Love must obey order."

References

- [1] Ela İPEK GÜNDÜZ. *Gendered Identities: Shakespeare's taming of the Shrew*. Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences, 2018.
- [2] Hatice Karaman. *The Mother, Who Is Not One: Reflections of Motherhood in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, the Tempest, and the Taming of the Shrew*. Gender Study, 2014.
- [3] Patricia Jean Saxon. *The Limits of Assertiveness: Modes of Female Identity in Shakespeare and the Stuart Dramatics*. 1977.