

## Portrayal of Women Characters in the plays of Shakespeare

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### Abstract

William Shakespeare has knitted the plot of his strongly on the basis of Freytag Pyramid Method and Hero's Journey. He chooses women characters so as to make the climax at the highest point to give the wider message to the readers, to attract the readers most, to provide the readers Catharsis effect, and to make his plays most succeed. Definition of climax says, "A Climax is a decisive moment containing the maximum intensity or major turning point in a plot" It is obvious that the higher the intensity of the climax, the higher the chance of success of the play. Characters are the important elements in the plays, short story and Drama. In the category of characters most important is Functional or Dynamic character. "A Dynamic Character is an important person in the story who brings inner change in the course of the story." In Shakespeare plays, women characters play the role as the Dynamic Characters as they suffer the most conflict in the play. It is due to them the play goes to higher climax and readers and audience take more delight and remain attached throughout the story. 1588-93 was the period of Shakespeare's Experimental Work. 1504-1600 was the period of great comedies and chronological plays. 1601-08 was the period of great tragedies. 1608-12 was the period of later comedies and Dramatic Romances.

**Key Words:** Freytag Pyramid Method, Hero's Journey, Climax, intensity, Dynamic Character, Inner change.

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### I. Introduction:

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as one of the greatest writers in the English language. He was born on 23 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was the eldest son of John Shakespeare, a prosperous glover and local dignitary, and Mary Arden, the daughter of a wealthy farmer. He went to King's New School – a reputable Stratford grammar school to Latin, Greek, theology and Rhetoric. He is said to have a Catholic upbringing.

William Shakespeare was eighteen when he got married with Anne Hathaway twenty-six years at the age. Together they had three children. The first daughter, Susanna, was born six months after the wedding and was later followed by twins Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet died when he was just 11 years old.

William Shakespeare's education started at home. At the age of seven in Petty School, he learnt his alphabet, numbers, the ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. Shakespeare attended Henley Street Home that was just a short walk from the Grammar School, the King's New School, on Church Street. The Grammar School's curriculum was prepared to teach students Latin, both spoken and written. William Shakespeare died on 23 April, 1616 at Stratford-upon-Avon, United Kingdom.

### Shakespeare Literary Output

Shakespeare Plays split into three categories: (1) Comedy (2) Tragedy, and (3) Histories. He wrote 14 Comedies, 12 Tragedies and 11 Histories. In poetry, William Shakespeare penned down 154 sonnets, 2 long narratives. He addressed 1-126 sonnets to a fair youth, his patron the Earl of Southampton and 127-152 sonnets (28 Sonnets) to Dark Lady.

### Elements of Shakespearean Comedies

- (i) Mistaken identity or Misconception
- (ii) Separation and Reconciliation
- (iii) Happy Endings
- (iv) Reason Versus Emotions

Themes are often subject to author's perception. "Theme is the main idea or underlying meaning a writer explores in a novel, short story, or any other literary work" (Kumar, 68). Theme of Shakespearean Comedies is Love. Themes come in two forms: (i) Major Theme, (ii) Minor Theme. Shakespeare plays are the part of either major theme or minor.

### **Theme of Shakespeare Plays:**

1. Theme of 'Macbeth' is too much ambitious that leads to destruction.
2. The Theme of 'Romeo and Juliet' is Love and Hate, Fate and Free Will, Life and Death.
3. Theme of 'Tempest' is nature, imprisonment and freedom.
4. Theme of 'Hamlet' is madness, revenge, sin and salvation.
5. Theme of 'King Lear' is Justice, Sight and blindness.
6. Theme of 'Othello' is Jealousy, Racism, and self-deception
7. Theme of 'Antony and Cleopatra' is 'The Enduring Nature of Love'.
8. Theme of 'Coriolanus' is Loyalty, Betrayal, and Arrogance.
9. Theme of 'Julius Caesar' is Loyalty, Betrayal, and Arrogance.
10. Theme of 'Timon of Athens' is Loyalty is hard to find.
11. Theme of 'Titus Andronicus' is Revenge.

### **Tragic Elements in Shakespeare Plays or Tragedies:**

All of Shakespeare's Tragedies contain at least one more of these elements:

- (i) A Tragic Hero
- (ii) A Dichotomy of Good and Evil
- (iii) A Tragic Waste
- (iv) Hamartia (The Hero's Tragic Flaw)
- (v) Issues of Fate or Fortune
- (vi) Greed
- (v) Foul Revenge
- (vi) The Paradox of Life
- (vii) Internal and external pressures
- (viii) Supernatural Elements

### **Women Characters in Shakespeare Plays**

"In the vitality of Shakespeare's characterization in particular, he is unparalleled; no one else has created so many men and women whom we accept and treat not as figments of a poet's brain, but as absolutely and completely alive...His plays are remarkable for their general truth to what is permanent in human nature." (

Women Characters in Shakespeare plays are Dynamic or functional in nature. The majority of Shakespeare's major female characters are young and involved in romantic plots that revolve around choosing a husband. The conflict between a father and daughter regarding who represents an ideal suitor had the potential to create serious quarrels in families, and Shakespeare repeatedly stages such quarrels in his writing. following are the main characters in Shakespeare plays.

Diana, in 'The Comedy of Errors', Volumnia, in 'Coriolanus', Katherine, in 'The Taming of the Shrew', Cressida, in 'Troilus and Cressida', Juliet, in 'Romeo and Juliet', Three Witches, in 'Macbeth', Desdemona, in 'Othello', Goneril, in 'King Lear', Isabella, in 'Measure for Measure', Rosaline (only referenced), in 'Romeo and Juliet', Margaret of Anjou, in 'Henry VI Part 1, Part 2, Part 3 and Richard III', The Princess of France, in 'Love's Labour's Lost', Viola, in 'Twelfth Night', Cleopatra, in 'Antony and Cleopatra', Hippolyta, in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Hermia, in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Titania, in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Emilia, in 'Othello', Beatrice, in 'Much Ado About Nothing', Lavinia Andronicus, in 'Titus Andronicus', Tamora, in 'Titus Andronicus', Bianca, in 'The Taming of the Shrew', Portia, in 'The Merchant of Venice', Paulina, in 'The Winter's Tale', Julia, in 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona', Helena, in 'All's Well that Ends Well', Helena, in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Hero, in 'Much Ado About Nothing', Lady Macbeth, in 'Macbeth', Celia, in 'As You Like It', Gertrude, in 'Hamlet', Hermione, in 'The Winter's Tale', Imogen, in 'Cymbeline', Miranda, in 'The Tempest', Olivia, in 'Twelfth Night', Ophelia, in 'Hamlet', Perdita, in 'The Winter's Tale', Regan, in 'King Lear', and Rosalind in 'As You Like It'

### **Role of Women Characters in Shakespeare Plays:**

Characterization is the main instrument for the success of a play. Shakespeare has a remarkable place in this art. "In many of William Shakespeare's plays, women play a central role in moving the plot forward. The women become catalysts for the drama that unfolds, especially in Shakespeare's tragedies, where the reactions of the other characters depend on the actions of the women. Role of women suppresses the role of male heroes in Shakespeare writings," (Granville-Barker, 64).

In 'Othello' Desdemona becomes stereotypical woman when she marries Othello. Her new personality affects her negatively as it ultimately leads to her demise.

In 'King Lear', Cordelia is presented strong and dynamic character. When the king Lear decides to retire as king and gives all his wealth to his three daughters based on the statement of their love. The two elder daughters, Goneril and Regan show hypocritical statement, but Cordelia says that she loves him according to her duty as a daughter and bond between a parent and child. The king banishes her in a great anger. In 'The Merchant of Venice', role of Portia is unusual. She has to perform the role of a man. She saves Antonio from losing one pound of his flesh, leads her lover Bassanio to the personality transformation that he seeks, and makes a happy ending possible for The Merchant of Venice.

In 'Macbeth', Lady Macbeth is presented very strong woman. She exercises power and encourages Macbeth to murder Duncan. In 'Macbeth', Lady Macbeth blurs gender lines by acting similar to a man for personal gain.

In 'Much Ado About Nothing', Beatrice is a feisty, independent woman. She is 'a pleasant spirited lady' with a very sharp tongue. She is highly intelligent and would be regarded as a feminist in our time. She is generous and loving. She wages a war of wits against Benedick and wins battle.

In 'Romeo and Juliet', Juliet displays inner strength, intelligence, brave, wit and independence. She is indeed strong character inspite of being 14 years girl.

In 'As You Like It', Rosalind is disguised as a man throughout, until the end. She organizes everything in a perfect manner. She wants to marry someone as can be fit and strong as she is.

In 'Hamlet', the women character, Ophelia is no fool.

"I do not know, my lord, what I should think."

'Hamlet love for her is wholly honourable...She sending back his letters and refusing to see him; till one day as she sees sewing in her closet, he suddenly breaks in upon her, dumbly distraught, suffering, mad.

Mad- for they love! My lord, I do not know;

But truly I do fear it.' (Granville-Barker, 229-230)

In Antony and Cleopatra, Cleopatra is a woman in power, of darker complexion and is embodiment of Orient Empire. "What, no more ceremony? See, my women! That kneel'd unto the buds. Admit him, sir." (Antony and Cleopatra, 67)

## **II. Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it is clear that women characters in Shakespeare plays are generally round character and dynamic or functional in nature. They have strong desire and heavy stamina to move the action fast. They all have ability to face all challenges and every situation. They are intelligent and capable to do the action fast that a tragedy or comedy needs. They are perfect in nature and have power to take the action to climax and bring a suitable catharsis effect that the readers or audience need. The characters are powerful enough to take his plays to stage and bring the play to dramatic scenes. Mostly plays are taken to stage in his own theatres. His plays due to dynamic role of female characters are fit for every type stage or every type of Drama. Shakespeare has put endless intensity in his female characters to create every type effect that a drama or play needs and the reader or audience desire for. No Shakespeare character is boring. They are unusual and fit to Freytag Pyramid, Hero Journey, or any king story line. Shakespeare plays have been immortal due to burning desire and high intensity, and all round personality. His character are loving in nature that make the plays or drama interesting and attractive. The Dilemma of the achievement of the extra height in love, where the comfort of the other is taken into account, dominates in the novel 'Memories of my Melancholic Whores'.

"...My heart skipped a beat. Looking for a dignified way out, I said: We would have made a good team. Well it's wrong of you to say so now, she said, because you are no good to me anymore even as a consolation," (Marquez, 40).

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