

SHAKESPEAREAN MOTIFS IN SHAW'S PLAY "*YOU NEVER CAN TELL*"

The article is dealing with the presence of Shakespearean elements in Shaw's *You never can tell*. These elements have long been recognized by scholars who have found in Shaw's play a number of specific quotations, allusions, and borrowings. The reasons vary, as to why these elements are present.

You Never Can Tell is an 1897 four-act play. It was published as a part of the volume of Shaw's plays entitled *Plays Pleasant*. The play is set in a seaside town and tells the story of Mrs Clandon and her three children. The play continues with confused identities, with the friendly and wise waiter, Walter (most commonly referred to by the characters as "William," because Dolly thinks he resembles Mr Shakespeare, dispensing his wisdom with the titular phrase "*You Never Can Tell*." [5] To follow Shakespearean influences on the Shawian drama *You never can tell* would be paraphrased variously. Like archetype, quotations, examples, images and setting.

Frederick McDowell points out Shaw's utilization of "archetypes in Shakespeare" and "mythic and archetypal dimensions in general." [2]. Miriam Chirico seeks to understand Shaw's play by studying "its use of archetypes of character and drama" in the context of "ancient Greek drama, the *commedia dell'arte*, " Shakespeare, or Wilde." [1]. Shaw provided his play with various archetypes and represented different characters one is a classical comic archetype in the comic senses and the second is the shape of a strong woman or Great mother.

The title of Shaw's play *You never can tell* gives clear indications that there is an influence of Shakespeare's way of addressing in his plays. Shaw's usual practice is to use titles that are either someone's name or denotatively descriptive, such as *Widowers' Houses*, *The Philanderer*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* to name a few. But *You Never Can Tell* resonates with a sort of whimsy, casualness, optimism, even a colloquial as well as a metaphorical quality, found in such Shakespearean titles as

Love's Labor's Lost, Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing.

Some scholars have also detected similarities between Shaw's characters and characters from Shakespeare's plays. For example, McDowell sees a resemblance between Shaw's Philip and Ariel of *The Tempest*, between Philip and Puck in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and between Philip and Mercutio with their "extroverted good-heartedness." The image of a strong woman was also one of the motifs concerned with using the same characters in Shakespearean comedies and Shavian *You never can tell*. Shakespeare and Shaw share a positive portrayal of women in their plays. A natural compatibility seems to exist between Shaw and Shakespeare on this subject, especially as reflected in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*. Not only does Shakespeare create such strong women as Sylvia, the Princess of France, Katherine, Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind, and Viola, to name a few, but he also pairs them with men who seem weak or, at the very least, less than admirable.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine is certainly a portrait of an extremely strong woman, mentally sharp, aggressive, verbal, willful, and independent, while the weak men of Padua are intimidated by her. By the end of the play, Katherine, far from being tamed, has learned to bide her time, and, in all circumstances, to match her behavior with the occasion.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia, who single-handedly manages a wealthy estate and is one of Shakespeare's finest female creations, shows integrity by abiding by her father's will, reveals intelligence and determination in rescuing Antonio from Shylock's legal grip. Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Rosalind in *As You Like It* give us two more examples of very strong, principled, and determined women, but Shakespeare's crowning achievement in his comedies is Viola in *Twelfth Night*, who finds herself in an extremely precarious, even dangerous, situation but remains steadfast to her value system and her moral code. Women in *You Never Can Tell*, especially Mrs. Clandon and Gloria, share the similar characteristics with Shakespeare's strong women. Mrs. Clandon, before the play has opened, has chosen, in order to protect her children, to leave her husband, raise her children on her own, move to the island of Madeira, write books on the twentieth-century lifestyle, help liberate other women, and raise her daughters with the same values. Some critics believe that the men in *You Never Can Tell* suffer in comparison to the women. Morgan states that Mrs. Clandon "does not lose control," asserts herself at the end and defeats Valentine, for it is with her, rather

than the daughter, that Valentine “really struggles for power in the ‘duel of sex.’” [3]

One factor of Shavian drama or new drama is sociality or families situations. *You Never Can Tell* uses three recurring family situations also found in Shakespeare: the presence of twins, *The Comedy of Errors* and the gender-opposite twins in *Twelfth Night*, Viola and Sebastian, who look so much alike that Olivia marries Viola’s twin Sebastian thinking that he is the same person as Viola/Cesario[1]

The second familial resemblance in Shaw and Shakespeare is the presence of separated or broken families, with which Shakespeare dealt almost exclusively in his comedies. In *The Comedy of Errors*, we know that the family was separated by a sea misfortune and have been apart ever since, and, while one twin is seeking his lost brother throughout the play (and for the past five years), the family —a lone exception in Shakespeare’s comedies — is eventually reunited. It is also the only comedy in which a mother appears. Other broken families are represented by Egeus-Hermia; Sylvia and the Duke of Milan; the Princess of France and the King of France; Baptista- Katherine Bianca; Portia, without a mother or a father; Shylock Jessica; Leonardo Hero; Duke Senior-Rosalind; Viola-Sebastian; and Olivia, who is mourning the loss of both the father and brother.

In Shakespeare’s day, life expectancy was much shorter than in Shaw’s time, and families broken up by the death of one or more family members was not uncommon. Shaw modernizes the motif in his play by having the family torn apart by separation, the mother having left the husband because of his violent and cruel nature. Moreover, in the single-parent family of *You Never Can Tell*, Shaw reverses the situation in Shakespeare’s comedies and has the mother raising her three children alone instead of the father.

Shaw’s *You Never Can Tell* maintains a similar tone through such characters as the genial waiter William, through the hijinks of Dolly and Philip, the lighthearted humor of Valentine. The direct quotations that quoted by Bernard Shaw in his play *You never can tell* represent one of the main motifs of his play. Moreover, direct quotations from Shakespeare are also present in Shaw’s play, such as “pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow” [4]. All these motifs have been classified in order to explain the influence of literary heritage on Shaw’s drama in spite of his attempts to get rid of the Shadow of classics.

Bibliography

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