



FATE AND FEMALE INDIVIDUALITY IN SHAKESPEARE'S *TWELFTH NIGHT*

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ABSTRACT

Fate and human agency are two crucial aspects of Shakespeare's drama. These two aspects are represented differently in both tragedy and comedy. In tragedies, 'Fate' or 'Fortuna' operates in contrast to the protagonist's free-will. In comedies, however, there is a complementary and correlative relationship between fate and human agency. In the *Twelfth Night*, for instance, 'Fate' and 'Human Agency' are operating parallel together rather than contrasting each other. As the article reveals, 'Fate' or 'Fortuna' functions on multiple levels and manifests itself through different incidents and co-incidents in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The purpose of this research, consequently, is to explore the relations between female individuality and Fate in Shakespeare's romantic comedy. The research is significant, for it sheds light on unexplored dramatic aspects in William Shakespeare's romantic comedy.

Key Words: Correlation, Fate, Individuality, Cyclic, Coincidences, Self-discovery

Introduction

Fate and human agency are two crucial aspects of Shakespearean plays. These two aspects, nonetheless, are represented differently in both tragedy and comedy. In tragedies, 'Fate' or 'Fortuna' operate in contrast to the protagonist's free-will. In Elizabethan tragedies, the tragic hero is presented as someone who challenges the natural order. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, for instance, the disruption of the natural order results due to the tragic hero's excessive desire for power and authority. "The tragic resolution may and often does involve the downfall and destruction of the tragic hero". (Williams, 2012:127). In Shakespearean tragedies, particularly, there is a contrast between the tragic heroes' free will and Fate. Any disruption of order and harmony in the natural order in each tragedy signals a grave conflict between the tragic

hero's free -will and Fate's unpredictable force. In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, for instance, " the disturbance of the natural order brought about by Lear's division of his kingdom, and the parallel disruption he creates within his own family" are the main *reasons* behind such tragedy (Bain, And Nic Amy, 2015:198).

Elizabethan dramatists held conventional medieval beliefs about the hierarchical order of the universe. "Because of an Elizabethan worldview that viewed all the elements of the universe as connected in a rigid hierarchical system, this disruption of the human social order actually affects the entire universe". (Chemers , 2010: 41). In classical plays, the hero's *tragic flaw*, or *Hamartia* , leads to the disruption of the natural order. Noticeably, the dialectical relationship between Human Agency and 'Fate' or 'Fortuna' differs in both comedies and

tragedies. "In tragedy fate is not an arbitrary person – it is we who are responsible, and we bring our fate upon ourselves." (Auden, And Arthur Kirsch, 2002:24). In comedies, however, "if fate is to appear comic, it must be arbitrary and appear to behave like a person, and the people who are subject to fate should not be responsible for what occurs." (Ibid). In the *Twelfth Night*, 'Fate' or 'Fortuna' functions on multiple levels and manifests itself through different incidents and co-incidents in the play. A crucial issue the current article tries to investigate is the extent Fate or Fortuna assists the heroine in her quest for selfhood.

Shakespeare's Plays within the Microcosm / Macrocosm Formula:

Generally, Shakespeare's plays reflect on philosophical and cosmological ideas prevalent during the Renaissance era. "The Renaissance inherited from the Middle Ages a theory of cosmos that had its origins in ancient principle of the universe" (Wells, 2009:11). The most common ancient principles "were the chain of being and the macrocosm/microcosm analogy." (Ibid.) According to such a principle, every single item is part of a larger system in the cosmos, and each item represents a symbolic image of such a system. The same principle has been applied to the complex relationship between Humans and the larger Universe. Accordingly, "an individual human was often imagined as a 'little world' (microcosm) reflecting the larger world of the cosmos (macrocosm). It was thought that there were analogies and correspondences between the two". (Bladen, 2011:7). Such a cosmological view had shaped Elizabethan thinking during the Renaissance era. Shakespearean in his plays, through a complex web of symbolic references, had reflected on the macrocosm/microcosm analogy. And his plays must be viewed "in terms of in the microcosm and macrocosm formula". (Plaisier, 2012:34).

The plotline in Shakespearean plays, whether comedy or tragedy, is constructed around the cyclical pattern of conflict and resolution. In comedies, any disruption in the natural order had to be followed by a miraculous resolution at the play's

ending. Multiple weddings at the play's ending mark a restoration of order and harmony after a temporal state of disorder and disarray. The concept of harmony draws its symbolic significance from the cosmological analogy of the macrocosm/microcosm. Such an "analogy held that a set of identical laws operated throughout the universe: bodies families, states, the cosmos itself were all framed to the same universal laws of being." (Wells, 2009: 11). More obvious reference to such cosmological analogy is Sir Toby Belch's speech in *Twelfth Night*, ; "our lives consist (ing) of the four elements" (2.3.9). (Ibid). In Tragedies, on the other hand, it is the tragic hero's uncalculated action which causes the disruption of order and harmony. "As in Christian mythology, the cause of (any) disruption of nature's harmony" (is) "human wickedness." (Ibid, 11-12. In Shakespeare's great tragedies such as *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, the natural order is disrupted as a result of the tragic hero's uncalculated action. In these tragedies, human agency is set against the capricious forces of Nature or Fate'. Here, the tragic hero has a "free-will but a fatal flaw causes" (King, Neil., And Sarah King 2002:74) his tragic downfall.

Fate and Human Agency in Shakespearean Romantic Comedies:

Unlike tragedies, Fate and human agency in Shakespearean comedies are complementary rather than conflicting with each other. 'Fate' or 'Fortuna' directly assists, or even necessitates, the heroine's quest for self-realization in Shakespearean comedies. Allegorically, the female protagonists in comedies somehow act as an agent of 'Fate'. In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, there exists some sort of correlation between the heroine's quest for selfhood and Fate's unpredictable and capricious force. For instance, the incidents of the loss and the reunification of the twin brother and sister, Viola and Sebastian, highlight the role of Fate in the play. Here, the motif of the 'Sea' carries symbolic implications of loss and self-discovery. It can be viewed as a symbol of Fate's uncontrolled and unpredictable force in the play which miraculously brings the identical twins together, as it earlier separated them. Moreover, the shipwreck incident

which changes Viola's destiny also entails a journey of selfhood. "The journey in water entails deaths and rebirth as well as the stripping off the mask of a persona and the discovering of the real self" (Auden, 2002: 26). Noticeably, the shipwreck event is the only tragic incident in *Twelfth Night*. Ironically though, it positively affects the final outcome of the play.

The Cyclic Pattern of 'Fate' and 'Human Agency' in *Twelfth Night*:

In *Twelfth Night*, the cyclic pattern of events and dramatic incidents is compatible with the female protagonist's course of action. Throughout various dramatic situations, numerous characters make clear references to 'Fate' or 'Fortuna'. Ironically, fate's sudden twist of events brings unexpected outcome to Olivia –Viola's relationship when Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, accidentally appears and joins Olivia in a happy marriage. Here, the loss and unification of Sebastian and Viola, as two missing halves, is signaled in the play as a sign of divine intervention. Each twin has to undergo a journey of self-discovery separately in order to reach a state of self-realization. Ironically, the twin's unification affects the densities of the conflicting characters. "The lovers in fact in a situation beyond the control of any individual; only a benevolent *Fate*, by bringing the twins together, can solve their problems." (Wells, 2015:253). Noticeably, the cyclic pattern of the "benevolent fate" in *Twelfth Night* is in accord with the cyclic sequence of incidents in the plot structure. This is evident through 'a cycle of changes' in characters' personalities as they encounter a series of dramatic incidents and coincidents. Interestingly, most incidents and dramatic events in *Twelfth Night* are interrelated and interconnected in a logical sequence. For instance, the final plot- twist in *Twelfth Night* provides a logical solution for a sequence of incidents and coincidents. Such a dramatic twist happens when the twin brother and sister, Sebastian and Viola, accidentally meet each other. Here, the separated twins represent "two halves of a whole" (Sullivan, And Meriem Pagès, 2016:234).

Antonio exclaimed at the striking similarity between the twin brother and sister: "An apple cleft

in two" (5. 1. 208-209). It seems the world of *Twelfth Night* "is comprised of halves seeking other halves". (Ibid). Each of these two halves makes his / her journey separately, and the cyclical journey of each of the two missing halves will be completed in the final Act as they get united as one completed whole.

The motif of the journey is a common feature of *Shakespearean comedies*. Rosalind's journey from Court to the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* highlights themes of self-discovery and selfhood. The motif of the journey is also apparent in *The Merchant of Venice*. Portia's journey back and forth between Venice and Belmont in *The Merchant of Venice* takes a cyclical pattern. Similar motif recurs in Shakespeare's in *Much Ado About Nothing*. It is reflected in the manners young lovers go through the cyclic pattern of deceit and reconciliation. Such a pattern is also related to aspects of self-discovery and self-hood, particularly with regard to young lovers' transformation from deception into self-awareness. The plot's cyclical pattern, interestingly, can be traced in both Shakespearean tragedy and Comedy:

The idea of 'tragedy' here seems indebted to the overarching scheme of the medieval English cycle plays, in which human failure and death are ultimately to be understood as a part of a larger cosmic plan aimed at eventual restoration of order and harmony. (McEachern, 2013: 51).

Shakespeare in his plays draws on Classic and Renaissance ideas. Classic thinkers, particularly, "held a mystical vision of the cosmic cycle", and they view "the universe passed from the rule of love to the rule of strife and back again, so that although 'things never cease from continual shifting'" (Salingar, 1974:133). In tragedies, the 'cycle of changes' in the protagonist's 'fortune' deviates from 'strife-reconciliation' pattern, common in comedies. Hero's tragic downfall in tragedies follows a sudden rise of power. A quite opposite 'cyclical pattern' is to be found in *Twelfth Night*, where the conflicting young lovers reach reconciliation after *temporary disputes* and confusion. A collective wedding in the play's ending signals the restoration of order and harmony in the play.

Correlation between ‘Female Agency’ and ‘Fate’ in *Twelfth Night*

A correlation between ‘Fate’ s unpredictable force and female protagonist’s quest for selfhood exists in Shakespeare’s romantic comedies. ‘Fortuna’ in comedies does not only “ follow a cycle, like Nature”, but it appears that it “ cannot complete her cycle without the disguise, either”. (Ibid,25). Interestingly, Viola’s disguise in *Twelfth Night* occurs as a result of sudden misfortune. In comedies, the heroine so often miraculously is being rescued from subsequent confusions by a sudden twist of events, particularly at the play’s ending. Here “ the idea of ‘fortune’ touches a wide span of meanings: haphazard, chance, accident, coincidence, luck, wealth, the unpredictable, adversity, the force of circumstance, even fate.” (Ibid,129). Fate in Shakespearean comedies, particularly in *Twelfth Night*, presents itself in the form of ‘ chance’ or coincidence’. *The dichotomy of fate and chance is more obvious in the opening lines Twelfth Night*, in which Viola attributes her own miraculous survival to *twist of Fate*, or ‘Perchance’:

VIOLA

And what should I do in Illyria?

My brother he is in Elysium.

Perchance he is not drown’d.—What think you, sailors?

CAPTAIN

It is perchance that you yourself were saved.

VIOLA

O, my poor brother! And so **perchance** may he be. (1.2.3-7).(Emphasis Added).

In the above speech, ‘Fate’ or ‘Fortuna’ is depicted as an uncontrollable and unpredictable force that moves the events of the play. Even though *Twelfth Night* offers no clear references to any supernatural forces, it nevertheless contains numerous incidents and coincidences which give indications about the role of ‘Fate’ or even ‘Divine Intervention’ such as, among others, “shipwreck, twins, disguises, exile and magical resolution” (Jan, Firdaus: 2003 : 150). The incident

of the shipwreck which resulted in the separation of the twin brother and sister has been attributed to the capricious force of ‘Fortune’ or ‘Chance’. “The words "perchance", "fate" and "fortune" are reiterated frequently in the play to suggest the capricious nature of life”. (Ibid, 141). Although ‘Fortuna’ or ‘Perchance’ brings about multiple states of confusions and misunderstandings in *Twelfth Night*, yet ironically it assists in bringing the romantic happy ending:

The world of *Twelfth Night* is governed by chance and fortune. It is by chance that Viola survives the shipwreck. The same is true of Sebastian. They happen to be identical twins. It is also just by chance that Antonio comes to rescue Cesario in the duel under the impression of Sebastian, and Andrew Aguecheek strikes Sebastian under the impression of Cesario. All this can be attributed to chance. (Ibid, 141).

In the *Twelfth Night*, notably, characters on multiple occasions refer to the benevolent role of Fortune or Fate. In a comic scene which parodies Orsino and Olivia’s states of confusion in the main plot in *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio in the sub-plot attributes his ‘self-deluded’ love situation to Fortune :

MALVOLIO

‘Tis but fortune, all is fortune. Maria once told me she did affect me, and I have heard herself come thus near, that, should she fancy, (2.5.18-20). (Emphasis Added)

The linking of ‘Fortune’ or ‘Fate’ and deception is also implicated in Countess Olivia’s confused state of mind after falling in love with Cesario/ Viola. In the following soliloquy, Olivia attributes her mistaken love for Oresino’s messenger to the capricious force of Fate:

OLIVIA

I do I know not what and fear to find

Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind.

Fate, show thy force. Ourselves we do not owe.

What is decreed must be, and be this so. (1.5. 252-255).(Emphasis Added).

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, fate necessitates, or even assists, the act of disguise by the female protagonist. "This convention of linking disguise and 'Fortune' came ultimately from classical comedy. But in the Elizabethan theatre, it seems to have been Shakespeare, more than anyone else, who reintroduced it to the stage". (Salingar, 1974: 26). A link between disguise and fate can be inferred in Viola's speech when she reveals her true identity to both Orsino and Olivia:

VIOLA

If nothing lets to make us happy both
But this my **masculine usurp'd attire**,
Do not embrace me till each circumstance
Of place, time, **fortune**, do cohere and jump
That I am Viola: (5.1.235-239). (Emphasis Added).

Viola's disguise in *Twelfth Night*, similar to Portia and Rosalind's acts of disguises in both *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice* plays a crucial role in bringing deluded lovers into a state of self-realization, Not only does Viola's disguise correct Orsino and Olivia 's misconceptions about love and courtship, but it also contributes to restoring order and harmony to Illyria's community. Sebastian and Viola miraculously find each other by a strange coincidence. "The pattern of coincidences" takes different forms in Shakespeare's comedies such as the reunification "of two pairs of twin brothers, lords, and servants." .(Penda, 2016:222). In romantic comedies, the pattern of 'coincidence' is apparent where disguise is also a common motif. Sebastian's following speech to Olivia, after the major confusions are resolved, is significant for it implicitly refers to the complex the relation between 'Fate' and disguise :

[Sebastian to OLIVIA]:

...., lady, you have been mistook:
But **nature** to her bias drew in that.
You would have **been contracted to a maid**;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived,
You are betroth'd both to a maid and
man. (5.1. 245-250). (Emphasis Added).

Sebastian in the above speech refers to benevolent forces beyond the characters' comprehension. Nature produces a *similar effect as* Fate and they are almost identical. Duke Orsino exclaims once he encounters the two identical twins: '*One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,/ A natural perspective, that is and is not!*'(5.1.200-201). Whereas " Fortune (coincidence) does not appear to be a direct agent in producing the happy ending of a comedy, its place is taken by conscious deception or trickery involving some form of disguise as a necessary means" (Salingar, 25). Ironically, the happy ending is not possible without the female protagonist's physical and verbal trickeries. In other words, "misfortune produces disguise, and disguise the return of prosperity" (Ibid). Here, the female protagonist's quest for selfhood does not only defuse and rectify lovers' follies and misconceptions, but it also contributes to the community's common good.

Conclusion

Fate and human agency are two crucial aspects of Shakespearean plays. These two aspects are represented differently in both tragedy and comedy. Unlike tragedies, fate and human agency in comedies complete each others. In comedies, Fate or Fortuna functions as an invisible 'arbitrary' agent, assisting the heroin in achieving selfhood. In the *Twelfth Night*, particularly, Fate manifests itself through multiple incidents ad coincides. There is also a complementary and correlative relation between Fate's unpredicted force and the female protagonist's quest for selfhood. Ironically, the happy ending is not possible in the play without the female protagonist's physical and verbal trickeries. In other words, fate necessitates disguise, and this also assists in the restoration of order and harmony to the larger community.

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