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QUEER SHAKESPEARE

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ABSTRACT

Queer theory emerged as gay and lesbian studies, which in turn was academic wing of gay rights movement. Literary and cultural studies that focused on sexuality as a key category was an offshoot of a wide ranging social and activist movement through the 1960s and early 1970s. This article wants to seek some seeds of queerism in the writings of our old classical master William Shakespeare.

QUEER THEORY: WHAT & WHY?

The word 'queer' originally an insult for marginalized sexualities and other deviants, was in the late '80's reclaimed and invested with new meanings by activist in America. Formerly, with the words 'gay', 'lesbian', 'homosexual', we had define ourselves in relation to homosexuality. 'Queer' constituted a rejection of the hetero-homo binary, and a conception of sexualities as non-essential shifting and transitional, a post-structuralist understanding of sexual identities. Queer aimed to provide an approach open to all those oppressed by the hegemony of heterosexual norms-whether they themselves are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender etc. Queer theory emerged with thinkers like Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Leo Bersani, David Halperin, Jonathon Dollimore. Queer theory has, for some now moved beyond a necessary association with sexuality. Halperin, somewhat controversially, explains-

"Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without essence" (David Halperin, cited in [www.theory.uk](http://www.theory.uk) ).

SEXUALITY IN SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND:

In Elizabethan England, sex between people of the same gender was a crime. The punishment was death. At the same time, same-sex friendship, an especially friendship between men, was often expressed in language that seems romantic or even erotic to a modern reader. Close friends were expected to be physically affectionate, which meant it wasn't unusual for people of same gender to embraced, kiss or share a bed. Because passionate non-sexual love between people of the same gender was encouraged, its hard to know how same sex desire was understood by the people who experienced it, or how often they acted on these desires. Regardless of their sexual feelings or behaviors, a person in Shakespeare's time would not have identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, as those designations did not exists. At the same time Elizabethans recognized that people of the same gender did sometimes have sex with each other.

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**SHAKESPEARE AS THE QUEER ICON:**

On Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> February (2019) professors Bruce Smith (University Southern California) come to southampton to deliver the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Stonwall lecture. The Stonwall lecture series is organized by Professor Mark Cronwal and aims to explore the rich heritage that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) history, modern to educate the present about the past and to promote social justice and inclusivity. Exciting by, this was the first time that the lecture look back beyond modern history into the early modern period.

Bruce's lecture was titled to queer or not to queer Shakespeare prospect fifty years after Stonwall and he began by reminding as that in 2019- 50 years after Stonwall Riots that are often. Seen as marking the beginning of the modern gay rights movement the question of whether to Queer to Shakespeare or not seems perfectly reasonable in 1969 conversely, many would have been aghast at the notion Bruce outlined and etymology of the verb 'to queer', noting that is essentially means to undermine heteronormative ideas of gender and sexuality by examining something in light of the cultural priorities of queer theory the lecture aim to queer each of the four meaning of the noun Shakespeare; 1) the historical Shakespeare, the man named William Shakespeare who lived in England around the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; 2) Shakespeare as author function in other words the cultural projection of Shakespeare as a variety of figures and places; 3) the collected works of Shakespeare as transitional cultural icon.

Amongst other things, it was ported out that the historical Shakespeare was very sure of his masculinity but there is not a shred of evidence that he was queer. Questions were asked about why we want Shakespeare as author function to be queer and it was that the whole dispute over whether Shakespeare was the real author his place is very queer, with the Oxfordians accidentally acting as queer critics.

Bruce also spoke about a number of the queer characters with in the collected works of Shakespeare and the explicitly queer depiction, of them in the center. In thinking about Shakespeare as a cultural icon Bruce made the point that it is not uncommon to find Shakespeare depicted in street graffiti and that this in affect brings him 'down to size' turning a high cultural icon into low culture which itself is a form of queering. Bruce brought everything by reminding as that why we can queer Shakespeare in a number of ways it is also the true that Shakespeare queers as, challenging us to queer our own ideas about gender the liner development of such things.

**QUEER READING OF TWELFTH NIGHT**

After watching a film "Shakespeare in Love", a heartbroken farewell to his beloved and immortalizes her in a new play that he begins to write as the film credits roll. When he first meets her, she is determined to act upon the Elizabethan stage despite its ban of female performers. Shakespeare writes his actress into a plot where once again, she must disguise herself as a man, only to fall in love and be unable to declare it due to her newly assumed gender.

It is obvious that the plot of 'Shakespeare in love' is fictional: There is no evidence that Shakespeare based the character of Viola upon real life. But the film introduce us with some factual elements of 'Twelfth Night': the way in which gender can be constructed or performed, by any one with the means to do so. However, while 'Shakespeare in Love' toys but briefly with the means queerness of Shakespeare having relationship with a person who dresses as a man., the plot ultimately reinforces heteronormativity.

**GENDER AS PERFORMANCE**

Because female performer were banned from the English dramatic stage in Shakespeare time, they male, female or somewhere in between were played by men. While the audience would certainly suspend their own disbelief over the actual gender identity of the actors, the effects of this casting should not be underestimated. First of all, it would have inevitability lent an extra frisson to the heterosexual relationship portrayed onstage, which would only be further enhanced by a play like 'Twelfth Night', where we have a boy actor pretending to be a man. But secondly, as Bruce R. Smith has pointed, it implies that gender.

“is like a suit of clothes that can be put on and taken off at will than a matter of biological destiny.....However temporary such cross-dressing may be, it serves to remind audiences that masculinity is a matter of appearances”.

**WAS HAMLET GAY:** There is many variations on this theory. One idea is this: Hamlet is closeted bisexual. He is in love with Ophelia and the two have an established relationship. He never got to pursue any relationship with Horatio or any other man for some complex reasons. For one thing, due to his status, he probably wouldn't want people knowing he is not straight. And two, he is already in a relationship with Ophelia and despite him being a hole sometimes, the two are still in love with each other. Furthermore, Horatio is gay and in love with hamlet but can't pursue any relationship with, him, due to the reason above. If we have gone through Hamartia theory, we can say this is the most feasible aspect of it.

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