

Theme in 'shakespeare in love'

Literature, William Shakespeare



Describe one idea worth learning about in the text. Explain why it was worth learning about. John Madden's Shakespeare in love is a 'romantic comedy' set in sixteenth century England. Through its two unfortunate protagonists, Will Shakespeare 'a lowly player' with writer's block and wealthy Viola De Lesseps who dreams of 'love as there has never been in a play,' it explores the idea of 'the truth and nature of love' in the Elizabethan era.

Madden portrays the harsh realities of the time through filmatic techniques such as dialogue, motifs and costuming to constantly remind the viewer throughout the film that the romance that is shared by Will and Viola cannot last in sixteenth century England. This is worth learning about because as a 21st century viewer I become more able to appreciate the struggle faced by the two protagonists, especially Viola as a woman, in the name of love.

Madden makes it clear to the viewer from the beginning of the film Shakespeare in Love, that the truth of love in sixteenth century England which is based on the idea of marriage as a method of obtaining social or financial gain divides the two protagonists who are separated by the class system. Madden enhances this key idea through the use of dialogue in Will and Viola's conversations. Viola is quicker to come to terms with the inevitable idea that their love is 'too flattering sweet to be substantial. The two are living in a brief 'dream', which can only last until Viola's marriage to Wessex. " Master Will, poet dearest to my heart, I beseech you, banish me from yours -I am to marry Lord Wessex-a daughter's duty. " However Will and Viola continue to pursue their risky love, getting caught up in the romance and Will boasts to Viola " for one kiss, I would defy a thousand

Wessexes! " As a twenty-first century teenager, the concept of a class system preventing two people who love each other from being together was new to me.

However I admired and appreciated the two protagonists for going against the rules of society and seeing each other in secret trying to convince themselves that " love knows nothing of rank or riverbank. " Throughout the film we are reminded through the various recurring motifs, that Will and Viola's love is one that will not last the expectations and realities of Elizabethan England. The river Thames is a constant setting focus in the film, being the large body of water that not only divides Will and Viola, but The Rose Theatre and The Curtain Theatre.

The Thames is spoken of and shown in large establishing wide shots throughout the film. This helps to remind the viewers that Will and Viola are separated, not just by the river but the laws of society that forbid one of the lower class masses to love a wealthy upper class woman. " Oh Will, as Thomas Kent my heart belongs to you but as Viola the river divides us and I must marry Wessex a week from Saturday. " Often when Will and Viola are together they are shown with the river as a background always highlighting the rift that the class system has created between them, they can never openly be together.

This is also shown in the extensive use of disguise used throughout the film. Viola dresses as a boy, ' Thomas Kent,' so she might act in Will's plays. Will also disguises himself as a woman so he can go with Viola to Greenwich. This motif is an allusion to the play that Will Shakespeare would later write,

Twelfth Night, but its main purpose is to remind us that in order to be together in public they must appear as disguised forms of themselves, they cannot openly declare their love. The only occasion when Will and Viola can express their love for each other in public is in the opening performance of Will's new play Romeo and Juliet.

This shows the viewer that only in the theatrical world can these two really be together, this was interesting to see as the nature of love in sixteenth century England means that the two protagonists will fall in love but the truth of love in this era means that if they are not from the same class in society then they cannot be together. It was worth learning about the risks Will and Viola take in order to try and fit into each other's worlds as it made me invest much more emotion into their relationship.

Shakespeare in Love won an academy award for its use of costuming in the film, which is reflected when we see Viola throughout the film. She is dressed immaculately in elaborate gowns with intricate beading often shown in regal colours such as red and gold which highlight her wealth and status and remind the viewer that she is too above Will for their relationship to be acceptable in Elizabethan society. This is contrasted when we first see Will, he is clearly one of the masses in his worn workman boots, plain white hirt and ink stained hands. He relies on his words for a living. Viola and Will are from separate worlds and are only equals in the opening performance of Romeo and Juliet where Will is dressed in equal amounts of finery as Viola. This shows that only in the make-believe world of the theatre can these two be equal and accepted. The idea that they cannot marry each other even

though they are in love is hard to grasp in the modern day and is the reason why many were unsatisfied by the ending of the film.

However it is worth learning that " love can spring between a queen and the poor vagabond who plays the king. " We see Will and Viola defy " rank and riverbank" in an awe-inspiring way but we learn that despite their risk taking, there is not always a happy ending. An unfortunate life is particularly likely for Viola because as a woman, during this era she had fewer rights. " Will she breed? ...Yes, if she does not send her back. " Women also suffered greater consequences if they were to be caught acting in the theatre.

This was a foreign idea for me to be learning about because as a twenty first century girl seeing actors regarded as ' two-a-penny' in the Elizabethan era was strange and hugely contrasting to the celebrity status actors enjoy today. So it can be seen that the truth of love in Elizabethan England separates the two protagonists who are without control over their own relationships and life choices, a reality for the time that is hardly seen in twenty-first century New Zealand making this theme in the film almost alien to a modern teenage girl like myself.

John Madden successfully portrays the constrictions of Elizabethan England and the trials Will and Viola must undergo to be together through his use of dialogue, motifs and costuming. Even the queen ' cannot part a couple who have been joined before God" and it is worth learning that we don't always get a happy ending in life.