

Summary of shakespeares sister by virginia woolf

Literature



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Many brilliant women's contributions have been lost forever in history due to the repression and opportunities lost in patriarchal systems. "Shakespeare's Sister" is a fictional story, but hits home for many women writers. Virginia Woolf's story shows how she contemplated women in Shakespearian time. Woolf was expressing her gratitude about being born into a time where she was granted opportunities. Shakespeare was the most brilliant male writer of his time despite misdeeds in his youth. However since women did not count at the time, it will never be known if he was the most brilliant writer of his time. The loss of so many contributions to society might never be rectified, but Woolf at least acknowledges the contributions that might have been. "Shakespeare's Sister" is a beautifully crafted what if story by Woolf.

Woolf clearly thought about the women in Shakespeare's time before writing this piece. She was concerned with Shakespeare's sister's lack of education. "But she was not sent to school" (Woolf). Another issue was the forced marriage. Shakespeare's sister "cried out that marriage was hateful to her, and for that she was severely beaten by her father" (Woolf). Although Shakespeare's sister had a gift of writing and acting, her parents did not encourage it. Woolf must have compared Shakespeare's fictional sister to her own position. She must have been grateful that she had an education and avoided a forced marriage.

Shakespeare, being a male, had every opportunity of the time. "

Shakespeare himself went...to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin—Ovid, Virgil, and Horace—and the elements of grammar and logic" (Woolf). Even though he squandered these opportunities in the story by getting a girl pregnant and then marrying her, Shakespeare went to London and became famous. Because he was male, the patriarchal system

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blamed the women, not the man. Despite his misconduct, Shakespeare was still given the chance to become famous in London.

After arriving in London, Shakespeare's sister was not given a chance. Men treated her like a prostitute. Finally she was given an opportunity by "Nick Greene the actor-manager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman" (Woolf). Her intellect was lost among her hormones and tragic fate. This leads to "who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?—killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses stop now outside the Elephant and Castle" (Woolf). All of the potential and contributions that could have been made possible through Shakespeare's sister was cut short with her suicide.

Woolf put a lot of thought into the plight of women during Shakespearian times. The topic must have come from pity of the quandary of the women during that time. She pointed out that even though an equally talented fictional sister existed, Shakespeare would have succeeded not his sister. The success would be solely based on gender, not talent. Despite Shakespeare's follies, he was allowed a chance to thrive. Even when Shakespeare's sister obeyed, she was stifled due to gender. The hopelessness of Shakespeare's sister's fate was because of her femininity. No one will ever know the contributions that the real women in history could have made due to the patriarchal systems of the past.

Work Cited

Woolf, Virginia. "Shakespeare's Sister." 1929.

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