

"Ophelia; Do not believe his vows; they are brokers!"
A Study of Unrewarded Love in Selected Shakespeare's Tragic Plays

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Abstract

Along with the great deal of academic works of analyses concerning the tragic plays of **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616), the study tries to make a different view of critical perusal regarding the selected great tragic plays of Shakespeare. It portrays the condition of unrewarded (one-sided or unrequited) love profitless passions that never being appreciated or even considered by some of the main characters in the **selected pure tragic plays** of Shakespeare as **A.C. Bradley** (1851-1935) considered, including Hamlet, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, and King Lear due to their picturing of the continuous struggle for different goals and reasons in their plots which concern **both individuals and communities** as well.

The findings contribute to a broader appreciation of Shakespeare's artistic genius in capturing the intricacies of human emotions and relationships, presenting an enduring depiction of love's complexities and its potential for heartbreak. As a result, this study offers valuable insights into the enduring relevance of Shakespeare's tragedies, enriching our understanding of human nature and the enduring themes of **unrewarded (unreciprocated) love** that continue to captivate audiences to this day. The study relies on **analytical approach** to draw deeper analyses of characters and adopts MLA style for documentation, and ends up with the conclusions and works cited.

Key Words: Unrewarded, love, tragedy, Shakespeare, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear.

Note: The research is based on an M.A thesis or a PH.D dissertation (No)

I. Introduction

William Shakespeare was an extraordinarily prolific English (if not universal) playwright and sonneteer. He authored 38 surviving plays, along with 154 sonnets and numerous other poems. In his plays, he skillfully portrayed human interactions, often showcasing negative examples of immoral behavior. Notably, both John Dryden and Samuel Johnson hailed Shakespeare as the greatest modern writer, while Matthew Arnold and Ralph Waldo Emerson went as far as to see him in a semi-divine light. He is considered a conservative figure, upholding the values of the "Elizabethan World Picture," according to prevailing beliefs of his time. On the other hand, Thomas Carlyle viewed Shakespeare as an illustrious figure, almost akin to a radiant monarch. More contemporary critics have interpreted his works as advocating liberal or even radical perspectives, championing the cause of underprivileged classes and feminism (Stephan 43).

A.C. Bradley, (Andrew Cecil Bradley) was an English literary scholar and best remembered for his work on Shakespeare, believed that Shakespeare's tragic protagonists possessed unique and exceptional abilities, and this greatness consistently prevailed in their stories. He placed significant importance on exploring the inner workings of their minds and its influences that might not fully comprehend especially in love affairs and passions for romantic sympathies. This focus on the psychological aspect aligned with a contemporary 'scientific' fascination with psychology. Interestingly, Bradley's ideas ran parallel to those of **Sigmund Freud**, who, in the same year, delved into the subconscious of Shakespeare's heroes in his work, "Psychopathology of Everyday Life" (23). Further, Bradley declares: "With Shakespeare the mere fact and story of consciousness replaces both action and idea. It is the imminence of action which brings that consciousness into prominence, but it remains independent of action... The usurpation by the mind of both practical action and purposeful idea in tragedy ... is the most important feature of Shakespeare's relations with the tragic form" (ibid).

Bradley delineates the nineteenth-century tradition of "character analysis." He places significant emphasis on the idea that the downfall of the tragic hero primarily stems from their own actions. These heroes are typically individuals of high social standing or public importance, possessing exceptional qualities. However, they also exhibit a notable "**one-sidedness**," being predisposed in certain directions, particularly in matters of love, and lacking the ability to resist these impulses. According to Bradley, the ultimate

governing force in the world of tragedy is a moral order that shapes the character's inherent inclinations and their subsequent actions. As a result, the hero bears moral responsibility for their choices and must face the consequences of their deeds (26).

During Shakespeare's time, women were confined by the strict rules and conventions of the patriarchal Elizabethan era. In Shakespeare's works, male and female characters are portrayed with a relationship that mirrors the natural dynamics of society (Farahbakhsh 101). He meticulously observed and depicted women in his writings, presenting both positive and negative attitudes towards his female characters. He perceived women as the pillars of the family structure, recognizing their crucial role in maintaining its stability; without their strength, the whole structure would collapse (Rani 2). **According to Virginia Woolf**, Shakespeare is a writer who skillfully portrays women characters in his tragedies without projecting any personal biases or vices. With his remarkable talent for understanding human behavior, Shakespeare captures the plight of women in a patriarchal society. His women characters possess depth and richness that transcend the constraints of their time, making Shakespeare's themes timeless and relevant across generations (Ibid 4).

II. Unrewarded Love, Analysis and Discussion

Love holds a universal and timeless nature. Despite the differences in Elizabethan and twentieth-century views on love, certain conditions have always been acknowledged as vital for establishing and sustaining relationships between men and women. It would be unjust to argue that modern critics cannot grasp the mindset of the Elizabethan era, as attitudes from the sixteenth century can still be understood in light of insights from the twentieth century. In any relationship, love must be mutual, as the ability to love is just as crucial as the desire to be loved. Love should honor the individuality of both partners and continually renew itself. Being objective and realistically appreciating one's partner are essential aspects of a strong bond between a man and a woman (Herford 11).

In the perspective of Shakespeare's mature tragedy, passion was thought to undermine the rejuvenating power of love, leading to the disintegration of the relationships. The regenerative aspect is crucial for the existence of love, but in Shakespeare's tragic unions, love does not thrive; instead, it consumes and depletes the lives of those involved. Othello and Macbeth recognize their

impending downfall, attributing it to the failure of love. Antony remains trapped by his infatuation with Egypt, while Cleopatra dies aspiring to a noble love that may never be realized. Those advocating for the transformation of passion into love in death overlook Shakespeare's message that excessive passion weakens relationships (Evans 115).

Ultimately, isolation becomes the conclusion of love in tragedy. The bonds of affection, threatened by illusions, deceit, and intense passion, cannot withstand the strain of tragic circumstances, leading to their severance. Unable to find solace or healing in each other's company, lovers retreat into isolation. Ophelia, Desdemona, and Lady Macbeth withdraw into a world of delusions and fragmented thoughts. Macbeth and Othello lose their nobility, while Antony dies embracing thoughts of his past glory. In these tragic tales, none of the characters love wisely or well (Eagleton 77). Shakespeare introduces qualities that deviate from the "natural and happy proportions" of ideal love. These shortcomings might not be immediately apparent, but as the stories unfold, illusions, deceit, and excessive passion combine to afflict each couple. The narratives emphasize pain, misery, and frustration, while pleasure and fulfillment remain conspicuously absent.

II.i. Othello's Incomplete Love for Desdemona

Love, in **Othello (1604)**, is a force that overcomes large obstacles and is tripped up by small ones. It is eternal, yet derail-able. It provides Othello with intensity but not direction and gives Desdemona access to his heart but not his mind. Types of love and what that means are different between different characters. **Harold Andrew Mason** (1911-1993), a literary critic, states that Othello finds that love in marriage needs time to build trust, and his enemy works too quickly for him to take that time. The immediate attraction between the couple works on passion, and Desdemona (Othello's wife and love) builds on that passion a steadfast devotion whose speed and strength Othello cannot equal. To uncover any flaws in Othello and Desdemona's love, a thorough analysis of the opening scenes is necessary. **Often, her father's warning, "Look to her, Moor!"** is overlooked, and critical judgment is subdued by Othello's account of their courtship and Desdemona's expressions of affection towards him. Their words create a false image of love, a mirage of happiness that deceives the two lovers. While Shakespeare has explored illusory love in his comedies, in Othello, the superficiality of infatuation gives way to a destructive and shattering illusion. It is commonly

understood that the initial excitement of attraction must be tempered with awareness, but Othello and Desdemona persist in their ignorance, even as their marriage calls for a deeper understanding. The lack of insight ultimately proves to be their downfall (143).

Mason, further, provides valuable insight into the potential danger of illusions in Othello's love. Only in his final moments does Othello realize that he loved unwisely. The astute reader gains this understanding from the nature of Othello's declarations of affection in the opening scenes. It becomes apparent that Desdemona was initially drawn to Othello due to his exotic travels. She was captivated not by Othello as an individual but by the romanticized image of someone different from the conventional "wealthy, curled darlings" of Venice. She fell for the allure of a man whose adventures and journeys had taken him far beyond the familiar (145):

Wherein of anters vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose
heads touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak. Such was my process,
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Grew beneath their shoulders. (1. 3. 139-44)

Shakespeare portrays Othello's unwavering trust in love with compassion, but he also consistently reminds the audience of the deceptive nature of this emotion. Upon Othello's arrival in Cyprus, he finds his wife in the presence of Montano, the Governor of the island. Despite the potential danger of a Turkish invasion (of which the officials might not yet be aware of its failure), He turned to her and said (Clark 19):

If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy, for
I fear My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate. (2. 1. 187-91)

Ignoring the dramatic irony in Othello's statement, it is intriguing to observe that this scene contradicts his previous promise before the Senate, exposing a breach of trust and undermining his commitment to prioritize duty over affection. Othello fails to grasp the true nature of the passion that has taken hold of him. Iago's manipulative role becomes possible due to the pervasive illusion of love, which distorts even Othello's military instincts, leading him to renounce what he cherishes so deeply in this particular scene (Eagleton 62). In one of the last scenes, Othello says:

'Twas I that kill'd her. O, the more angel she,
And you the blacker devil! She turn'd to folly, and she was a whore.
(5.2. 200-210)

When Desdemona is stirred by Othello's words, she initiates a painful effort to engage in a rational discussion with her husband. Othello, in turn, **encourages her to pray for forgiveness from any wrongdoing in her soul**, leading to a growing sense of dread within her. This misinterpretation on his part further solidifies his belief in her guilt. Just as strongly as Desdemona is certain of Othello's genuine intention to harm her, he is equally convinced of her culpability. Despite the logical understanding that she is innocent and has no reason to be afraid, Desdemona still harbors a fear of her husband (Bradley 197).

Tragically, Desdemona seems to possess the knowledge of her impending demise. It is she, not Othello, who requests Emilia to lay out her marriage sheets on the bed, instructing her to use them as her burial shroud if she were to pass away first. In the final moment we observe Desdemona prior to waking up and discovering Othello's menacing gaze above her, she softly sings a melody she acquired from her mother's maid as she utters "She was in love; and he proved mad / And did forsake her. She had a song of willow. / . . . / And she died singing it. That song tonight / Will not go from my mind" (4.3.27-30). Like the audience, Desdemona seems able only to watch as her husband is driven insane with jealousy. Though she maintains to the end that she is "guiltless," **Desdemona also forgives her husband**. Her forgiveness of Othello may help the audience to forgive him as well. He tells her to pray to God and confess her sins before he kills her because of a false story of treason that Iago (a villain) formed to her through the handkerchief.

Thus, Desdemona portrayed constant loyalty and deep affection as Othello's devoted spouse. Her profound love for her husband, referred to as "the Moor," was potent enough to prompt her choice of becoming Othello's wife, even when it meant prioritizing this commitment over the conflicting duty of being a dutiful daughter to her father. Shakespeare depicts Desdemona's complete surrender of her heart, stating that her feelings were so intense that they aligned perfectly with Othello's attributes. This portrayal of Desdemona's submission to Othello's authority can be unsettling when viewed through a feminist perspective (. However, it was relatively simple to manipulate Othello's beliefs, planting the seeds of doubt that Desdemona was betraying him. The outcome of this manipulation is predictable, culminating in Othello mistreating his wife to the point of physically striking her. This treatment leaves Desdemona burdened with self-doubt, wondering if she had committed some transgression that upset her beloved partner. Shakespeare employs the symbol of the handkerchief, which becomes representative of the disintegration of Othello's and Desdemona's marital bond (Eagleton 68). **And eventually she was not rewarded for her genuine feeling of love to her spouse.**

II.ii. Ophelia's Unappreciated Love from Hamlet

In *Hamlet* (1599-1601), Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius, embodies notions of femininity and vulnerability. Additionally, she serves as a channel for Hamlet to externalize his frustrations, particularly those directed towards his mother. Ophelia's role in *Hamlet* is significant because she illustrates a delicate emotional state to the viewers. The name "Ophelia," of Greek origin, conveys meanings of "aid" and "help." This name is most famous for its association with the tragic heroine in William Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*. While Ophelia's narrative is profoundly tragic, the name also symbolizes beauty and selflessness. In contrast to Hamlet's outspoken nature, Ophelia's silence draws attention, thus attracting an audience. Whereas Hamlet experiences solitude, Ophelia grapples with loneliness. In the past, the term "oneliness" existed before the concept of loneliness emerged. Similar to its counterpart "solitude," "oneliness" wasn't inherently considered negative, melancholic, or socially lacking (Rani 39).

Hamlet wrote love letters to Ophelia because she shows them to Polonius. In addition, Hamlet tells Ophelia, "I did love you once" (III.i. 117). He professes his love for Ophelia again to Laertes, Gertrude, and Claudius after Ophelia has died, saying, "I loved Ophelia. Hamlet's affection for Ophelia is

profound, yet **his mother's behavior has tainted his thoughts and relegated his love to a sort dislike and hatred**. The underlying issue lies in his venting of anger towards the innocent Ophelia, exemplified by his coarse language in the play's scene. This mistreatment stems from his feigned madness, driven by his desire for revenge against his uncle, King Claudius, who is responsible for his father's death (Clark 69). Laertes, her brother, cautions her against falling in love with Hamlet, who is, according to Laertes, too far above her by birth to be able to love her honorably, and due to his position in the state, it may be impossible for him to marry her. Once, Ophelia whispered:

He took me by the wrist and held me har
Then goes he to the length of all his arm
‘And, with his other hand thus o’er his brow
.He falls to such perusal of my face (II.I.209-213)

A frightened Ophelia recounts Hamlet’s unruly behavior towards her when he burst into her chamber, gripping her by the wrist and concentrating hard on her face. Later on, hamlet said "**The pangs of despised love**" (III.ii. 311), he may be referring here to his relationship with Ophelia, who has been instructed by her father to spurn Hamlet’s affections. **Hamlet further uttered; "We are arrant knaves all; believe none of us"** (III.i.76) says that all men are downright scoundrels and Ophelia should not believe any of them.

Hamlet's unkindness towards Ophelia stems from his redirection of the anger he feels about his mother Gertrude's marriage to Claudius. In essence, Hamlet's language implies that he channels his feelings of fury and repulsion towards his mother onto women in general, including Ophelia. He says to Ophelia, "**God has given you one face and you make yourselves another**" (III.ii.76). He maintains unstable relationships with his mother and Ophelia. He disregards both women and openly mistreats them. In the beginning of the play, Hamlet's attitude towards Ophelia appears quite positive. However, as the story progresses, it becomes evident that he struggles to connect with her. **Psychologically**, Hamlet is afraid that his lack of sexual interest renders him valueless, so he harshly punishes Gertrude and Ophelia for not sharing his disinterest. Hamlet ridicules Ophelia's makeup, her flirty behavior, and other

signs of her sexuality, and once again advises her to enter a convent before leaving (Beeley 48).

Ophelia once again prays for Hamlet's mental well-being, but he responds harshly by asserting that women like her use makeup to deceive men and lead them into sin. Hamlet attributes his own insanity to their perceived promiscuity and expresses a desire to see an end to all marriages. He reiterates his suggestion that Ophelia should become a nun, and then he leaves the scene. Initially polite to Ophelia, Hamlet's demeanor suddenly changes as he disavows his love for her, inquires about her father's whereabouts, criticizes women in general, and advises her to enter a convent (Dillon 47). **Ophelia's last words** are directed at Hamlet, her father, or perhaps herself and her lost innocence, before she tragically drowns herself:

“And will a not come again? / No, no, he is dead,
/ Go to thy death-bed, / He never will come again. / ...
/ God a mercy on his soul. And of all Christian souls.
God buy you.” (IV, vii. 132-134)

Ophelia's final act of drowning amidst flowers and singing represents her submission to her profound femininity. Paradoxically, her watery suicide, which immerses her in the timeless universal essence of womanhood, serves as a poignant reminder to the characters of her unique humanity. Hamlet eventually recognizes the lifeless body as that of Ophelia. In the midst of his sorrow, Laertes leaps into her grave and blames Hamlet for her demise. Hamlet then steps forward, and he and Laertes engage in a confrontation. **Amidst this struggle, Hamlet passionately asserts his own love and sorrow for Ophelia. Thus, her love was not rewarded or appreciated by Hamlet** due to some factors that were none of her cause but as she was the daughter of Polonius whom hated by her love or she loved unstable person in the terms of love and passions (Burt 15).

II.iii. Cordelia as a Victim of her Paternal Love:

"**King Lear**" (1606) narrates the tale of an aging British monarch named Lear and his three daughters: Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. When he asks them to prove their affection in exchange for a portion of his kingdom, all but Cordelia manage to flatter him sufficiently. Despite Cordelia's evident deep love, she is banished. In contrast, Regan and Goneril swiftly demonstrate

their disdain for Lear. They expel him from their homes in a state of partial madness, with only his most devoted servants to safeguard him (Flower 64).

Meanwhile, the illegitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester, Edmund, endeavors to seize power from his father and older brother, Edgar. His plot involves killing his father and having Edgar exiled. As the French army, commanded by Cordelia and her new spouse, the King of France, arrives in Britain, Goneril competes with Regan for Edmund's affections. Ultimately, Goneril poisons her sister. Yet, when her husband Albany confronts her about her cruelty, Goneril takes her own life offstage. Edmund captures Cordelia, leading to her execution. His change of heart arrives too late to save her. In a final duel, Edgar kills his malevolent half-brother. Both Gloucester and Lear succumb to their sorrow and die. The play concludes with Albany ascending to the throne of Britain, following the bloodshed that has unfolded (Iyengar 485).

Cordelia, the youngest of King Lear's three daughters, holds a special place in his heart. Her primary qualities include unwavering devotion, kindness, beauty, and a remarkable commitment to honesty—sometimes to an extreme extent. Cordelia embodies virtue and faithfulness within the context of King Lear. Her character is defined by honesty, innocence, and courage. At the start of the play, she resists the temptation to excessively flatter her father, even though she's aware that such flattery would serve her political interests (Rees 58).

Throughout the narrative, she stands in stark contrast to Goneril and Regan, her sisters who lack honesty and genuine affection, and who manipulate their father for selfish gains. Cordelia remains Lear's favored daughter until she refuses to indulge in false praise, which results in her being disowned without a dowry. As she replied her father:

I love your majesty

According to my bond, no more nor less. (I.i.56-57)

These two lines are Cordelia's eventual reply to Lear's request for his daughters to express their love for him. Cordelia's lines in this moment symbolize her integrity, which stands in contrast to the deceit and manipulation that characterize many other characters in the play. It also introduces the theme of honesty versus flattery and the consequences of misjudgment. The theme of societal cohesion is examined, encompassing family affection and the connections between rulers and their subjects. Cordelia's choice of the term "bond" instead of "bonds" is noteworthy as it

highlights her dual role as Lear's daughter and subject. The daughters of Lear find it challenging to distinguish between these two roles.

This response highlights Cordelia's genuine and sincere nature. She is not willing to falsely exaggerate her feelings just to gain a larger share of the kingdom. This contrasts sharply with her sisters' insincere expressions of love, which are driven by their desire for power and wealth. Unfortunately, King Lear misunderstands Cordelia's response as a lack of love and becomes extremely angry, ultimately disowning her and dividing the kingdom between Goneril and Regan. This decision sets off a chain of events that leads to the tragedy and turmoil that unfolds throughout the rest of the play (Iyengar 481).

Later, King Lear expresses his frustration and disappointment with his youngest daughter, Cordelia, who refuses to participate in the public display of love that her sisters engage in. When he said:

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child. (I.iv. 76-77)

Cordelia's response is honest but not overly exaggerated like her sisters', which leads Lear to perceive it as ungrateful and thankless. The metaphor "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child" illustrates Lear's deep emotional pain caused by Cordelia's refusal to flatter him with insincere declarations. He compares the experience to being bitten by a serpent, suggesting that the wound inflicted by an ungrateful child hurts even more than the venomous bite of a snake. This line captures Lear's growing realization that his plan to retire and depend on his daughters might not bring the happiness and care he anticipated.

The lines, again, foreshadow the central themes of the play, including the unraveling of familial bonds, the nature of true love, and the consequences of misjudgment. Lear's emotional journey throughout the play involves coming to terms with the true nature of his daughters' affections and his own mistakes in assessing them (Zia'ee & Shamsa'ee 221). **As a result, Cordelia is discarded from the kingdom and deprived from the inheritance.**

Subsequently, Lear's two older daughters, Goneril and Regan, who only pretended to love him, take control of the kingdom and sent their father off to a forest far from the monarchy and had been cast out into a storm by them. Cordelia, having heard of her father's plight, returns with a French army to restore him to power and provide him with care. As Lear realizes his mistake, he faces madness and suffering. she came back with her husband, the King

of France, and assembles an army to confront her malevolent sisters and reclaim her father's realm. Cordelia's actions here showcase her love, loyalty, and compassion for her father. Despite the way he mistreated her earlier, she forgives him and seeks to protect and support him during his time of need. Her willingness to go against her sisters and their political ambitions demonstrates her integrity and genuine affection for Lear, she tells her father that she still loves him (Flower 121):

O dear father,

It is thy business that I go about. (IV.iv. 89-90)

When Cordelia reappears after her banishment, she is at the head of an invading army, she rescued her father and the kingdom, but she was injured and led to her death. Her demise serves as a representation of an unjust world due to her displays of purity and devotion to her father, even after he had mistreated her. Her death lacks any rationale, **underscoring the notion that virtuous actions can be met with unwarranted consequences** (Zia'ee & Shamsa'ee 223). **Unfortunately**, Cordelia's efforts to rescue her father lead to tragedy. The play's resolution brings a moment of reunion between Lear and Cordelia, but their happiness is short-lived. Cordelia is unjustly imprisoned, and her untimely death marks one of the most heart-wrenching moments of the play. Her character is a symbol of pure, selfless love and contrasts with the deceitful and power-hungry actions of other characters, **and she was not awarded a paternal love that she deserved to have!**

II.iv. Other Unrewarded Love Plots

In the play of **Romeo and Juliet (1597)**, the main protagonists, Romeo and Juliet, defy their feuding families and fall in love. Eventually, they both tragically end their lives due to their own decisions. Their choices realistically lead them to this unfortunate outcome. Juliet chose to prioritize her love for Romeo over her family's wishes, causing a rift. The play revolves around romantic love, particularly the intense instant connection between Romeo and Juliet. The love depicted in Romeo and Juliet is a powerful, intense, and overwhelming force that surpasses all other values, loyalties, and emotions. The play ends dramatically with a tragic resolution, Romeo, believing Juliet is dead, drinks poison at her tomb (Iyenger 195). Juliet awakens to find Romeo dead, and in her grief, she stabs herself. Their deaths prompt their families, the Montagues and Capulets, to reconcile and end their feud. The play concludes with a sense of sorrow and a lesson on the

consequences of hatred and impulsive actions, and **this time true love was not rewarded!**

Further, in the play "**Antony and Cleopatra**" (1607), Cleopatra holds the position of Egypt's queen. Upon meeting Antony, she falls deeply in love with him and her entire focus becomes seeking joy and fulfillment through their relationship. Despite her other hidden ambitions, her affection for Antony becomes the central driving force in her life. This devotion persists even though she faces accusations of being a scandalous woman. Tragically, Cleopatra remains unaware that her playful actions to capture Antony's attention often lead to misunderstandings. Nevertheless, her commitment to Antony remains steadfast, surpassing even his initial commitment to her. Additionally, when faced with dire circumstances, Cleopatra doesn't betray Antony to save herself. From the beginning, she hopes for Antony to marry her, even though he is already married. Her feelings for him are strong, but her actions sometimes lead to unintended consequences in their relationship (Burt 98).

Cleopatra and Mark Antony died by suicide. After their defeat in the Battle of Actium against Octavian's forces, their situation became dire. Antony believed falsely that Cleopatra had died, and in despair, he fell on his own sword, ending his life. Cleopatra, upon learning of Antony's death, was devastated. Facing capture and the possibility of being paraded as a prisoner in Rome, she chose to end her own life. Cleopatra and Mark Antony's love story is often seen as one of history's most passionate and tragic romances and **again was not awarded!**

Apart from Shakespeare, other tragic plays from other playwrights such as **The Duchess of Malfi** (1613) by John Webster (c.1580-1630s), it a Jacobean revenge tragedy. It tells the story of the spirited duchess and her love for her trustworthy steward Antonio. They marry secretly, despite the opposition of her two brothers, Ferdinand (the Duke of Calabria) and the Cardinal. The Duchess, strong-willed, brave, passionate, proud, and a loving wife and mother is the most psychologically complex female Character portrayed with great insight and poetic power. A noble and courageous Duchess is the source of all action in the play. She secretly marries Antonio, her steward, against the wishes of her brothers who want to control her inheritance and keep her from remarrying (Farahbakhsh 112).

In the play's climactic scene, the Duchess and her family are confined in her palace. Her brothers have orchestrated a scheme to kill her and her family. They have hired Bosola, a former employee, to carry out the murders. Bosola suffocated the Duchess and her children using a curtain, an act that emphasizes the play's themes of power abuse and corruption. This harsh and sorrowful event underscores the tragic outcome of the Duchess's defiance against her male relatives' control, illustrating the dire repercussions of her pursuit of personal freedom and happiness that could be found in her true love for Antonio, **but unfortunately this also was not awarded!**

III. Conclusion

In the context of Shakespeare's tragic plays, the theme of unrewarded love is intricately integrated into the plots, offering a clear depiction of the complex societal conventions and gender relations that seemed to be characterized mostly in the Elizabethan age rather than other eras of drama. The tragic heroines - Ophelia in "Hamlet," Desdemona in "Othello," Cordelia in "King Lear," Juliet in "Romeo and Juliet," Cleopatra in "Antony and Cleopatra", and even in Webster's play "The Duchess of Malfi", all stand as poignant symbols of how women's love was often misunderstood, unreciprocated, and underappreciated during this tumultuous period.

Ophelia's unrequited affection for Hamlet embodies the fragility of innocence amid the complexity of courtly politics. Similarly, Desdemona's love for Othello is genuine and unblemished, yet she fell victim to the insidious machinations of Iago's manipulation and Othello's corrosive jealousy. Despite her loyalty and steadfast devotion, she becomes collateral damage in a society marred by racism and male insecurity. Cordelia's authentic love for her father, King Lear, paints a tragic picture of how familial love too can be met with indifference and misunderstanding. Cordelia's eventual tragic fate delineates how even the most pure-hearted expressions of love could be crushed under the weight of misguided power dynamics.

The iconic love story of Romeo and Juliet is marked by a steady passion that transcends their feuding families. Further, the suicide of both of Cleopatra and Antony encapsulates the entanglement of love and political power. Additionally, it's worth mentioning that even the tragic plays of the contenders of Shakespeare such as Webster's The Duchess of Malfi had a tragic ending further underscores the vulnerability of women, and the

duchess's secret marriage to Antonio and defiance of her brothers' wishes brings about her brutal demise. The Duchess's desire for personal happiness and love is shattered by a patriarchal society that seeks to control and restrict her agency. Thus, these tragedies serve as upsetting reminders that even the most profound and genuine expressions of love were often thwarted by the prevailing societal attitudes towards women, rendering them powerless against the currents of their time.

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(«أوليفيا، لاتصدقى وعوده، إنهم سماصرة!» دراسة عن الحب غير المكافئ في
مسرحيات شكسبير المساوية المختارة)

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مستخلص البحث:

إلى جانب الكم الكبير من الأعمال الأكاديمية التحليلية المتعلقة بالمسرحيات التراجيدية لوليام شكسبير (1564-1616)، تحاول الدراسة تقديم رؤية مختلفة للاطلاع النقدي فيما يتعلق بالمسرحيات التراجيدية العظيمة المختارة لشكسبير. إنه يصور حالة الحب غير المكافئ (أحادي الجانب أو غير المتبادل) (والعواطف غير المربحة التي لم يتم تقديرها أو حتى أخذها بعين الاعتبار من قبل بعض الشخصيات الرئيسية في مسرحيات شكسبير المساوية النقية المختارة كما اعتبرها إيه سي برادلي (1851-1935)، بما في ذلك هاملت، عطيل، روميو وجولييت، ماكبث، والملك لير بسبب تصويرهم للصراع المستمر من أجل أهداف وأسباب مختلفة في حكايتهم التي تهم الأفراد والمجتمعات أيضاً. وتساهم النتائج في تقدير أوسع لعبقرية شكسبير الفنية في التقاط تعقيدات المشاعر والعلاقات الإنسانية، وتقديم تصوير دائم لتعقيدات الحب وإمكانية حزنه. ونتيجة لذلك، تقدم هذه الدراسة رؤى قيمة حول الأهمية الدائمة لمآسي شكسبير، مما يثري فهمنا للطبيعة البشرية والموضوعات الدائمة للحب غير المكافئ) غير المتبادل (الذي يستمر في أسر الجماهير حتى يومنا هذا. تعتمد الدراسة على المنهج التحليلي لاستخلاص تحليلات أعمق للشخصيات، وتعتمد أسلوب MLA في التوثيق، وتنتهي بالاستنتاجات والأعمال المستشهد بها.

كلمات المفتاحية: بلا مكافأة، الحب، المأساة، شكسبير، هاملت، عطيل، الملك لير.