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SSN

In A Midsummer Night's Dream (MND), Much Ado About Nothing (Ado), As You Like It (AYL), and Twelfth Night (TN) by William Shakespeare, four universal insights about love are that people in love tolerate abuse from those they desire, their love for others is often unrequited, young lovers quickly change their minds, and outsiders frequently meddle in the love lives of others.

First of all, the romantic comedies reveal that people sometimes permit those whom they love to mistreat them. For example, the character Helena in MND loves a man who casts her aside for another and then threatens to harm her if she doesn't leave him alone. Similarly, Hero from the play Ado still wants to marry Claudio even after he believes false accusations and treats her cruelly. And the young shepherd in AYL continues to pursue Phebe despite the disdain she shows for him. Strangely enough, Phebe finds herself attracted to Ganymede immediately after the youth makes unkind remarks about her desirability. The last illustration of mistreatment comes from TN. In this comedy, Cesario's love for Orsino is unwavering even after he threatens to kill her in order to spite Olivia. The reactions of the characters in the four plays demonstrate the level of abuse humans will allow when they are in love.

Secondly, the romantic comedies show that people often love those who do not return their affection. In MND, for example, Demetrius does not return Helena's love for him. The theme of unrequited love is not as apparent in Ado; nonetheless, Hero continues to love Claudio during the brief interlude between his rejection at the wedding and their reconciliation. Two more examples of unrequited love come from AYL. In this comedy, Phebe does not reciprocate when Silvius expresses his love for her. Instead, Phebe finds herself attracted to Ganymede, but her fondness for the youth is an obvious waste of time. The remaining play, TN, has a high incidence of lovers pursuing those who do not love them in return. For instance, Olivia falls for Cesario, who secretly loves Duke Orsino. Orsino, in turn, loves Olivia even though she rejects him. In addition,

Sir Andrew and Malvolio hope to marry Olivia, but they have absolutely no chance with the beautiful young woman. The frequency of unrequited love that occurs throughout the comedies makes it a universal insight.

Still another universal insight which appears in all four plays is that lovers can rapidly change their minds about those they love. For instance, in MND a few drops of an herb applied to the eyelids cause Demetrius and Lysander to be instantly smitten with Helena. An antidote applied to Lysander's eyelids a short time later causes him to once again fall in love with Hermia. Numerous examples of the mutability of love also occur in Ado. On two separate occasions Claudio quickly changes his feelings about Hero. When the truth comes out, he immediately decides that he loves her after all. Moreover, Beatrice and Benedick start out as adversaries but become lovers a short time later. The characters from MND and Ado are not the only who struggle with how they feel. During a lengthy passage from AYL, Phebe vacillates about her feelings for Ganymede. She begins by saying, "Think not I love him, though I ask for him; / 'Tis but a peevish boy--yet he talks so well" (3.5.110-11). In the last play that we studied, Viola of TN is the only character who marries her first love. Olivia seems content to discover that she has married Sebastian rather than Cesario. Meanwhile, Duke Orsino readily shifts his affections on learning Cesario's true identity. The ease and speed with which the comedies' different characters change their feelings reinforce the theme of love's mutability.

Finally, the actions of various characters in the comedies reveal that outsiders freely meddle in the love lives of others. One of the most amusing parts of MND involves the complications which arise when Oberon uses magic to make Demetrius fall for Helena. In contrast, the opposition Hermia and Lysander encounter from Egeus is not amusing. Hermia's father offers no reason why the two should not marry, but Egeus is willing to put his daughter to death rather than let her marry the man she loves. Similarly, in the play Ado Leonato tells Hero to marry Don Pedro when he is under the

false impression that Don Pedro is about to propose. Later on, Margaret and Hero scheme to make Beatrice think that Benedick loves her. Meanwhile, Don Pedro and Claudio conspire to make Benedick think that Beatrice loves him. Although many of the characters in Ado have good intentions, Don John interferes in the romance between Claudio and Hero simply because he is mean. What motivates Rosalind in AYL is sympathy for Silvius. When she overhears Phebe rejecting Silvius' overtures, Rosalind declares, "Sell when you can; you are not for all markets" (3.5.60). Her blunt statement is accurate, but it is not really Rosalind's concern. Toward the end of the play, Rosalind intervenes again by making Phebe promise to marry Silvius if she cannot marry Ganymede. Additional instances of meddling occur in TN. In one scene, Cesario tells Duke Orsino that he loves a woman who is about Orsino's age. Although he has no idea who the woman is, Orsino tells Cesario that the woman is not worthy of him and to choose a younger woman. In another scene, a desire for revenge causes Maria, Sir Toby, and Fabian to interfere in Malvolio's love life. The three arrange for the unfortunate Malvolio to find a letter which makes him conclude that Olivia loves him. In a variety of situations throughout the plays, the futures of others undergo changes because of outside interference.

Undoubtedly, the comedies of William Shakespeare offer countless insights into human behavior. Four of his universal insights about love are that people in love permit those they adore to mistreat them, their affection for others is not always returned, young lovers can rapidly alter their feelings, and outsiders frequently interfere in the romantic lives of those they know.

*Assigned topic for this sample essay (different from your topic):*

Identify and give supporting examples of several universal insights about love that Shakespeare reveals in the four romantic comedies we have read. (Examples of universal insights are that young lovers are impetuous and that young people are often obsessed with finding a partner.)