



Shakespeare: A critical analysis

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Love and Feminism'

Speaker:

How is love represented in Midsummer Night's Dream? Catherine Belsey

Catherine Belsey:

My interest in Shakespeare is in finding things that, topics that, treatments that we can recognise and yet differentiate ourselves from, for example; in Midsummer Nights Dream, the whole thing is engineered the whole plot is engineered by this love juice, this magic juice, and you might you might treat it with total contempt were it not for the fact that poor Demetrius gets married on the basis of the love juice this stabilising social public relationship is based on the totally anarchic activity of Puck, that the mistakes that Puck has made with this magic juice. Now it seems to me that that for us is very odd and very anachronistic and maybe it's just a loose end and how do we account for it, but if we think in terms of historical difference, maybe this is a period at which the idea of marriage based on romantic love is very new, and the idea that romantic love is a moral force is not quite yet established.

Ania Loomba:

The play opens with a very patriarchal set up where womens marriage and womens right to choose their lovers is being denied by the Duke, and then these lovers sort of all escape into the forest where of course a male fairy is denying the right of a female fairy to keep a little boy. So in that sense the play, the structure, of the play moves from one kind of male power to another kind of male power. But then what happens in the play is quite disturbing I think, because on the one hand the lovers get to marry whom they want, but this is very much within sort of the couples structures I mean Midsummer Nights Dream ends with dotted couples all over the stage and sort of disturbing symmetry it seems to me they're almost more figures left out, out of these sort of endless heterosexual couplings. And Titania gives up her struggle to the little Indian boy quite easily. Of course you know it involves a whole lot of charade but I think it's a play which is quite disturbing and it's not very easy to recover a feminist perspective from the play, although if you look at you know my take as a feminist is, that I don't need a feminist text to do a feminist reading, I rather like very patriarchal texts because they allow me to see how gender might have been constructed.