Dream Works: Lovers And Families In Shakespeare's Plays

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What is the matter with Shakespeare’s families? Why do so many of his tragic plays involve injuries and betrayals committed between parents and children, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers? How do these plays respond to changes in the understanding and organization of the family during the English Renaissance? Works by Shakespeare and other Renaissance writers rarely provide a straightforward expression of either older or newer beliefs about the family and marriage. What their texts can show us, instead, are the conflicts and contradictions that emerged as writers examined family relationships during this period. This item appears in the collection Marriage and Family in Shakespeare’s England. Tags: illustration religion 17th century Britain Christianity. Return to Top.

Renaissance records of Shakespeare’s plays in performance are scarce, but a detailed account of an original production of Macbeth has survived, thanks to Dr. Simon Forman. Earliest known text: First Folio (1623). Othello (1604-1605) Othello, a valiant Moorish general in the service of Venice, falls prey to the devious schemes of his false friend, Iago. Earliest known text: Quarto (1622). The sweet whispers shared by young Tudor lovers throughout the realm were often referred to as “naught but pure Romeo and Juliet.” Earliest known text: Quarto (1597). Timon of Athens (1607-1608) Written late in Shakespeare’s career, Timon of Athens is criticized as an underdeveloped tragedy, likely co-written by George Wilkins or Cyril Tourneur. One of Shakespeare’s great comedies, As You Like It subverts the traditional rules of romance, confusing gender roles, nature, and politics. Read More. Hamlet. An immortal tale of a vengeful Danish prince quite possibly driven to madness, Hamlet, Shakespeare’s most widely performed play, is filled with startling insight into humankind’s unconscious desires. Widely considered Shakespeare’s most intellectually challenging comedy, Love’s Labour’s Lost nevertheless offers a feast of broad, farcical humor, plot twists, Elizabethan cultural allusions, and irrepressibly clever turns-of-phrase. Read More. Macbeth. RSC Shakespeare Complete Works Edition: Editor’s Blog. Popular. Tags.
Considered one of Shakespeare’s greatest plays, King Lear has been a popular source for artists. American artist Edward Austin Abbey made many atmospheric paintings based on The Bard’s work, but his King Lear is perhaps his best, if not biggest. In this scene, Cordelia is banished by elderly father and king, Lear, for not flattering him, instead speaking honestly of her love. Her elder sisters, Regan and Goneril look on, while the King of France impressed with her honesty, kisses her hand likely to symbolise their betrothal. In Shakespeare’s comedies, sex is not only connected to marriage, but postdates it. Prospero in The Tempest insists to his prospective son-in-law that he not break the virgin-knot of his intended bride, Miranda, before all sanctimonious ceremonies may With full and holy rite be ministered, lest barren hate, sour-eyed disdain, and discord . . . bestrew The union of your bed with weeds so loathly That you shall hate it both (4.1.15-22). In A Midsummer Night’s Dream, the two romantic couples, Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena, are found sleeping together on the ground after their night of adventure in the Forest of Arden, in a configuration so suggestively erotic that Duke Theseus, happening upon them during his morning hunt, jests, Saint Valentine is past.