FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Shakespeare on Love and Lust
Maurice Charney
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Shrewdly capitalizing on the marquee recognition factor of Shakespeare in Love, Charney, Distinguished Professor of English at Rutgers University and past president of the Shakespeare Association of America, has compiled a briskly authoritative discussion of the complex range of sexual and romantic imagery in Shakespeare's work.

Unlike the film, however, which wittily cobbled together an ersatz Elizabethan English to couch the set pieces of poetry, Shakespeare on Love and Lust (with no particular theoretical axe to grind) places the era's genre conventions and language on the bare stage, spelling out the bawdy puns and the sexual euphemisms. Armed with no more than the observation that Shakespeare (no Platonic lover of the Ideal, but no Puritan either) never separated the physical stimulus of love from its more spiritual twin, Charney attentively connects the early comedies to the "problem plays" and late romances, showing how Shakespeare subverted the neat demarcations of comedy and tragedy, even if he cannot explain why.

It is the original audience for Romeo and Juliet for whom the journeyman author must have felt the need to force-feed its opening note of sacrificial doom, for the borrowed plot had too many earmarks of high comedy: a love-sick swain, clownish bawdy humor, intercepted love letters and, the classic plot resolution of comedies, marriage. Paradoxically, the lovers? suicides in Antony and Cleopatra have a kind of victorious exuberance, even comedy, that defies its tragic tenor. Even in the spiritual union of the two lovers in Othello, Shakespeare's only domestic tragedy, Charney notes, is based on a comic tale of a husband who imagined himself a cuckold.

The only theory of love in Shakespeare that consistently holds true is that love is instantaneous, expressed always with wild excess, and that love first inflames the very imagination of the lover—another way of saying Shakespeare was theatrically expedient. What Charney cannot give us, though he ponders its absence, is the answer to the larger question: what does love mean? What biographical sea-change explains the witty buoyancy of his early female ingenues yielding to the sexual disgust, the misogynistic cruelty that surely informs

Hamlet's taunts to Ophelia and his mother; for King Lear's stunning rant about lechery?

Shakespeare on Love and Lust, with or without its title's tie-in to the film's cover art, is alive with informed readings and provoking asides, a serious general guide.

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