Words and Weddings*:* Shifts in the Vocabulary of Marriage and Literature

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While literature abounds with versions of arrangements and courtships leading to marriage, the morphology of words involving these human relationships, along with major societal shifts and changes reflected in literature, reveal changing behaviors within marital relationships. As shown through the differences in words associated with weddings, as well as mining well-known and well-documented Greek, Elizabethan, Romantic, and Victorian literary works, changes occurred in how marriage is portrayed within society and its written works, which offer insights into societal views of relationships. The language of love – words and weddings - is rife with a wonderful array of vocabulary whose usage evokes the supreme romance of worship as well as the terrible aches and pains of scorned relationships and unhappy marriages.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

Marriage has always been vital to a civilized society, yet its meaning has changed quite a lot over the centuries of human civilizations. Prior to civilization, there is no evidence of marriage. Men simply chose a woman whom they liked from a tribe, usually their own, and "when children were born, they belonged to the whole community. This is associated with the perception that humans want sexual variety. (Levine) However, things changed when sexual morality was developed and has since influenced the social life of the people" (Ridgwell). In other words, once humans developed moral and societal codes to keep a civilization civilized, marital relations were also highly regulated by these codes.

Before delving into these changes however, which are varied and many, we revert back to ancient times and the first evidences of actual marriages. "Group marriages" of around thirty people, where everyone shared sexual relations and chipped in to raise children and grow food

were the first types of unions. Indeed, it sometimes does take a village. Marriages, as we in modern times know it be, evolved "in Mesopotamia at 2350 BC", and was practiced by the "Romans, Greeks, and Hebrews. However, the union was never about love or religion. The primary purpose of the marriage is to ensure that the man's children are biologically his, and so women were treated as mere 'property'. (Ridgwell). After all, a civilized civilization can only survive by a constant supply of people. Raising more people – children - to replace the elders is paramount to a society.

Women were long seen as property, as they were seen as the producers of children and heirs, but by "around 1563" humans then moved into the religious realm where no marriage could be legal without church approval. "By this time, men already respected their wives and divorce was forbidden" (Ridgwell). Morality rose during the centuries leading up to the 1500s and though marriages of rank and convenience sans romance abounded, love dared peek out and shine within the rare marriage. Mostly though, love and romance were to found outside of marriage in the roles of concubines, mistresses, and lovers. Love and romance have always been desired; however to find those ingredients *within* marriage is a very modern idea. Modern marriages now have a very large emphasis on love, romance and compatibility. In the past, rank, titles, family ties, or societal were very much a reason for marital bonds. In modern times, those mandates are no longer a part of most marriages; a rise in individualism, women's roles, and changing societies contributed to such profound transformation.

Along with such vast changes within society, came changes in how marriage is reflected in words and literature. Focusing the theoretical lens, New Historicism emerges brightly, as this particular theory seeks to "read literature as a product of the historical context in which it was written. The text reflects the historical and sociological moment in which it was produced. New

Historicists will examine structures of power within the literary text and to consider how political visions and historical premises of the period may be questioned or subverted" (Barry). New Historicism will be the key literary theory that will be used to focus upon the various societal changes that occurred within the literature of the ancient world and onward through modern times.

CHANGES IN WORD USAGE

Humans have been writing about marriage, which, as we see, may or may not have included romantic love, since the earliest known written text, *Gilgamesh*, to the present. Throughout the ages literature has reflected marital norms, and includes much evidence for how the words used to describe marriages are intimately intertwined.

In circa 2100 BC, a precursor to biblical stories was etched in stone in Sumerian cuneiform, telling the story of Gilgamesh. Within this ancient story, Ishtar, a woman, boldly asking Gilgamesh to marry her, who then scorns her. It is not the taming, but the turn of the shrew, the switching of boy meets girl, boy loses girl…this earliest text epic switches the traditional gender roles yet shows just how important love within marriage is: "Be thou my husband, let me be thy wife, and I will set thee in a chariot [embossed] with precious stones and gold, with wheels made of gold, and shafts of sapphires" (Gilgamesh 9).

Note that the words *husband* and *wife* appear, and there is certainly affection within the sentiments. However, we also see the emerging societal expectations of a "good match" in the fact that a marriage will result in riches and security in the form of "precious stones and gold", and such. Within this one ancient line, we see marriage's history unfold – the need of a good match, the need of love, and the need for security and a better life together. History though, has

a long way to go towards combining all of these ancient ideas. Words and weddings will have to undergo myriad ups and downs to reach this point of having it all.

. As we have discussed, throughout history, marriage was extremely important to society and childrearing, and the words and axioms associated with these unions had to keep pace. Words such as: acquaintance, chummy, close, connected, heavy, inseparable, monogamous, rocky, serious, sexual, and intimately, all evoke different levels of relationship feelings and realities, and were used in different eras. *Rocky* is a more modern description, *acquaintance* may have been used to describe an arranged marriage based on family ties, or rank. Words such as *heavy, inseparable, or intimate* mean a more serious bond; such words were being used from around the 1500s.

Words of love and romance may remain the same, but the meanings change to reflect the changing society. To *make love,* the meaning of which is sexual, is more modern; around 1950; however, *to make love* also was used in the 1500s, through many more centuries, to describe more chaste courtship and some "amorous caressing", but not the full sexual act as it means today (Harper).

The pinnacle word of any relationship is *love,* which dates from the 13th Century, and comes from the "Old English *lufian* (verb) – "to feel love for, cherish, show love" etc., or *lufu* (noun) – "feeling of love, romantic sexual attraction, affection, friendliness", etc." (Harper). The Greeks used the word *philo*, for love. The use of the word and concept of *love*, is shown in various ways throughout literature, yet it is interesting to note the striking similarities in which love and the concept of love was used even with the spanning of many centuries. The varying

levels of the meaning, along with the striking similarities can be seen in just these few examples

that say and mean the same thing during different times:

CONCEPT	VARIOUS QUOTES ON CONCEPTS
Love is Blind:	Love is Blind: "Love is blind al day and may nat see". (Chaucer, 1386).
	Love and knowledge live not together (Cotgrave, 1611).
	'Tis impossible to love and be wise. (1666)
	When love is in the case, the doctor is an ass. (L'Estrange, 1667).
	Though love is blind, 'tis not for want of eyes (Fuller, 1732).
	Marriage is a lottery. (Smiles, 1875)
Love will find a way:	Love and pease porridge will make their way (Head and Kirkman, 1674).
	Love will find a way through paths where wolves fear to prey. (Lord Byron, 1788)
	Love will find a way (Proverb).
	Marry first and love will follow. (1714)
Better to love a rich man, than a poor one:	Love lasteth as long as the money endureth. (Caxton, 1474)
	Love does much but money does all. (Greene, 1587)
	Who marrieth for love without money; hath merry nights and sorry days (1666).
And then there are the quotes and proverbs that reference love, but…one must wonder whether the subject be human or ham:	He loves bacon well that licks the swine-sty door. (Fuller, 1678).
…the ones that hurt:	" I must love you and leave you (Bridge 1917).

And, the ones that say love me, but not my money:	"I love you well, but touch not my pocket, (1732, Fuller)
Finally, there is the practical:	Love me, love my dog. (12th Century)

(Source: *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Proverbs*. Wordsworth Reference. 1994. Hertfordshire, England. Print.)

From this enlightening, at times, humorous, romp through the words and phrases of marriages, relationships, and love, we see these concepts within the greater body of literature. From these smattering of quotes, we also can discern a rise in the pattern of love and marriage being spoken and written about during the 1600s. As shall be discussed later, the Romanticism literary era began in the 1700s, just prior to, and during, the time periods of many of the above quotes (Levine, Coontz). The rise of love and emphasis on romance of the Romantic era is no accident; this time period brought major changes, from King George throwing England into an uncertain state, with his mental illness and unstableness, the eventual loss of the American colonies from its successful Revolution, Napoleon's rise and fall, the French Revolution follows, the decline of the aristocracy, the rise of industry, and the rise in literacy rates as more people lived in cities and entered the non-agricultural workforce. Life was better in some ways, but the old ways were being swept aside. People lived longer and there was more individualism. Why not try to be happy then? Indeed, there is a strong connection between societal events and shifts and the words used in an era to describe the language of courtship, love and marriage, which are key in our investigation into how words and weddings are intertwined (Levine).

Words and weddings connections are found throughout the history of literature. Love and marriage within written works portray everything from Medieval love and sex, to the Jane

Austen marriage plot, which is solely focused on attempts to make the best marital match possible (Gray). But what happens next, to the many unhappy marriages within literature? Austen's works, for example, typically stop at the time of marriage. It is as if the end of a woman's journey ends when the man is permanently caught. There is not much to showcase actual married life, but for the cursory *they lived happily ever after*.

Some endeavors on the subject of marriage and literature focus on what is the best way to portray marriage in literature, which, to some, is to put aside happiness and go straight for the angst or "failures" (McGrath/Jamison, New York Times). Apart from Jane Austen, and notably, the Romantics and Victorians, such angst is seen in vast quantities throughout literature, as we will discuss below. Just one example is one of the best known blow-offs by any character, that of Ophelia by Hamlet. "Get thee to a nunnery!" (Shakespeare 568). Surely, this goes straight for angst's jugular. Of course, the relationship never materializes, Ophelia, in love with the Prince of Denmark, drowns herself and the relationship is no doubt a colossal failure, ending in enigmatic heartbreak and death.

Then, there is the more anthropological approach of couples "relearning" about one another through the marital relationship. Such concepts of learning and adapting to one another aligns much more with later, modern marriages – ones based on actual romantic relationships versus mere family ties, rank, and "business-like" arrangements. However, this "relearning" could only come about with societal changes *allowing* that relearning. Such relearning also means relearning one's self. Jane Eyre, the famous Bronte heroine, demands equality and respect within her marriage, something that women just didn't do in times past. No longer relegated to the parlor, to sit quietly in the background, this new woman forces a relearning of gender roles upon her male love interest: 'Do you think', she demands of Rochester, 'I am an

automaton? – a machine without feelings?" (Bronte 147). By asserting herself, Jane not only aligns herself to the relationship, but also provides a path for adaptation within the male role. Jane and Rochester's eventual marriage clearly shows a true, realistic relationship rather than a contractual marital bond.

Evidence is solid that words, literature and societal shifts play large roles in the adaptation of marriages, and we will discover these in detail further in this exploration. Here though, we begin a particular timeline in order to delve into specifics: some of the great civilizations, world events, and authors, and how their particular words and weddings were portrayed in literature. Beginning with Greece, we see one of the first great civilizations that preserved speeches and literature which also focused on marital relationships.

THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE IN ANCIENT GREECE

Greek history can be traced back to the Mesolithic period in 8300 BC; however, we will focus on the Classical period, to the death of Cleopatra, which represents the "end of the Ancient Greece" period (Ancient Greece). In this flourishing Greek civilization, literature reflects certain words and ideas swirling around the Greek *agoras* that described marriages. The Greeks honored love, but "inheritance was more important than feelings" (Coontz). As throughout most of human history, a marriage of business ties, rank, production of heirs, and family bonds prevailed. Parents, mainly fathers, arranged advantageous marriages, but were "more interested in expanding a business or forging an alliance between families than finding a kind and loving mate for their daughters, and it was possible that the bride and groom had never met let alone had a chance to fall in love and even the potential for compatibility seems to have played little or no

role in the matchmaking" (Hays). Procreation of children, producing heirs, and raising children was the foremost focus of marriage.

This concept is firmly reflected in Homer's *The Odyssey:* "Look at your fine clothes, lying here neglected — with your marriage not far off, the day you should be decked out in all your glory and offer elegant dress to those who form your escort. That's how a bride's good name goes out across the world and it brings her father and queenly mother joy" (Homer 6.17, 40). The words to describe a bride are very virginal, pure, and introspective: "*spotless linen, too shy, his bride, glowing, fair*". Words used to describe men are more outside of the personal description: "*lusty bachelors, crisp shirts*"; these show the disparity in how words described the weddings (bride and groom). But then we do get some romance: "two hearts that work as one" (Homer). These ideas are very Greek and very much how most civilizations viewed marriage; it was foremost a contract between families, to produce the greatest stock so to speak, but if love came into play, all the better. Love certainly was hovering over all relationships as hope.

However, as in later eras, there was a shift in Greece pertaining to marriage. Such a solid union "lost some of its appeal" as the years wore on. One Roman magistrate described marriage as "legalized hardship" and the historian Plautus once said to his wife: "Enough is enough, woman. Save your voice. You'll need it to nag me tomorrow". There was even allowance for liberal divorces; a man could divorce a wife simply because "he didn't like her anymore" (Hays). Indeed, the "use of literature as historical evidences of marriage…are not mere works of fiction but they mirror the society and the era in which these literatures are made" (Brooke).

Note the words of marriage: "*nag, legalized hardship*". This is hardly romantic or even affectionate. And, note the address "Enough is enough, woman". Said woman does not have a

name within the literature. Addressed as *the woman* without a name clearly shows how society, as reflected in the literature, viewed women as property during this time. She did not have a voice and thus, the words used to describe a wife – *nag* – affected the wedding – *hardship*. A marriage to a "nag" has no chance of it being anything but a hardship! Clearly, words and weddings tie together; anyone reading this then or now would conclude that marriage was no fun.

That said, "people have always fallen in love, and throughout the ages many couples have loved each other deeply. But only rarely in history, has love been seen as the main reason for getting married." "…in many cultures, love has been seen as a desirable outcome of marriage but not as a good reason for getting married in the first place (Coontz)". We see this was the case in Ancient Greece.

Another word used during this time period, and even in today's modern headlines is the word "mistress", which is the feminine form of "master". The moniker, *Mistress*, then and now, refers to the "other woman", a woman having a sexual relationship with a married man. As in, "the Senator's mistress", or "the King's mistress", she is oftentimes seen as a predator or one who deliberately steals another woman's man. But many men have referred to the mistress as simply a normal and regular part of his life. Here, in Ancient Greece, the 4th Century Athenian Orator, Demosthenes, said: "We have mistresses for pleasure, concubines to care for our daily body's needs and wives to bear us legitimate children." (Demosthenes). Of course, the word *matrimony*, using the root, *mater*, meaning mother, implies matrimony for the sole purpose of making the wife a mother, thus producing an heir and another citizen to keep the culture going.

ROMANS AND LOVE

From Ancient Greece, we arrive in another great civilization, the Roman Empire, which expands on the idea of wife and mistress. Relationships become a bit more complicated, as do the words used to describe them. In Rome, "wife-swapping was a career move - Statesman Marcus Porcius Cato divorces his wife and marries her off to his ally Hortensius in order to strengthen family bonds; after Hortensius dies, Cato remarries her.". 6th Century Europe had leaders acquiring numerous wives for "strategic reasons"; fast-forward to the 12th Century and humans loved many – "Upper-class marriages are often arranged before the couple has met. Aristocrats believe love is incompatible with marriage and can flourish only in adultery (Coontz)".

Cicero, the famous Roman politician, orator, lawyer and philosopher talks of another type of swapping: "My refutation would be framed in considerably more forceful terms if I did not feel inhibited by the fact that the woman's husband- sorry, I mean brother, I always make that slip- is my personal enemy." (Cicero) This chess-move type of relationship was commonplace and used for power and political purposes; however, lest we think swapping partners, using wives for political gain, and indulging in mistresses were the only fish in the sea, we see that the marital ocean was actually poetically stocked with expressions of love.

On her wedding day, when a bride was escorted through the streets towards her groom's home, she spoke the words "ubi tu caius ibi ego caia", translated to, "where you are Caisus there I am Caia" (Hersch). Note the sentiment of *wherever you go, I go.* This is quite affectionate and harkens later quotes of love finding a way: Lord Byron's 1788, "Love will find a way through

paths where wolves fear to prey", and the Proverb, "Love will find a way". It also harkens to the "we are one" phrase of describing a deep, romantic love.

As we have seen, marriage was not typically founded on love, but the hope is always there that love will find its way into a marriage. The words spoken at the start of many marriages, both ancient and modern, respect that this hope was alive and well, and a much hoped for outcome. Such pattern is repeated throughout most of human civilization; there was no need for passionate and heartfelt love as a prerequisite or priority, yet love was ultimately a much desired outcome.

As an aside, think of what makes humans happy. One may use the words, *money, power, a healthy relationship,* and *love,* to describe happiness. One may hear that helping others, or nurturing someone creates happiness. We all have "an intense desire to be loved and nurtured", and this need for love and need to give love is "hard-wired and deep-seated because fulfillment of this desire enhances our happiness levels" (Raghunathan). If this is so hard-wired, why then, didn't humans seek love from the start despite the need to raise children, and keep order in society? As we travel down the road of marital history and the words involved, we are learning *how* marriage evolved, and even *why*, but why did the institution of marriage last so long without love and nurturing as a priority? One could argue that nurturing and providing for the security and comfort of a wife and children is a kind of love, even if it did not have the romantic component. Psychology says that "most people feel that they are not yet "ready" to be generous: they feel that they need to achieve greater wealth and success first, before they can start being generous" (Raghunathan). Perhaps society had to take care of their progress first, before being generous in love.

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Indeed, much progress and change occurred from Greece and Roman times through to the Elizabethan era. Here, from 1558 through 1603, the "golden age" of England thrived under Elizabeth I's long reign, bringing vibrancy, enlightenment and tolerant to England. Too, the unmatched beauty of the words of Shakespeare arrived on the world stage. This was such an important age for the subject of words as a whole; "the period 1500–1659 saw the introduction of between 10,000 and 25,000 new words into the language, with the practice of neologizing culminating in the Elizabethan period" (Watson). So many new words being introduced also impacted the words of weddings.

Queen Elizabeth herself never married, never had children, and remained quite an independent woman and ruler. However, the fact that the Queen never married and never produced an heir remained a major issue of the day. Despite Elizabeth I being independent and single, here in the late 1500, early 1600s, the idea of marriage remained rooted in social and familiar ties. It was "generally considered foolish to marry for love, although love may occur in marriage" (Love and Marriage). Children were still the desired outcome of any marriage, wives were still considered the property of their husbands, and divorce was extremely uncommon. If one divorced, one was usually cast aside within the social circle. Even here, centuries removed from Greece and Roman domination, we still see humans marrying for the good of society rather than for love. Though hope still remained that love would find its way.

Such societal concepts of marriage are found in abundance within the works of William Shakespeare. The linguistics of Shakespeare have few equals, and many phrases and words were coined within his plays. Why were these ideas different in this particular time period?

"Not only was print and trade accelerating exchange with other languages, but also because the disappearance of grammatical inflections within English allowed words to be easily converted from one part of speech to another. In fact, "the period 1500–1659 saw the introduction of between 10,000 and 25,000 new words into the language, with the practice of neologizing culminating in the Elizabethan period" (Shakespeare prevailed in this competition, not only by systematically providing instant glossaries, but also by finding other ways to make the verbal innovations both memorable and thematically crucial" (Watson).

In other words, "the economy of words in England was changing because words were rapidly becoming easier to manufacture, thanks to the ferment of immigration and urbanization, and to the loss of inflections that had prevented the kind of zero-derivation neologisms favored especially by Shakespeare, in which (for instance) an existing noun becomes a verb. At the same time, due to some of the same social changes, the business of teaching upwardly mobile behavior thrived" (Watson).

Shakespeare "invented over 1700 of common words by changing nouns into verbs, changing verbs into adjectives, connecting words never before used together, adding prefixes and suffixes, and devising words wholly original" (Mabillard). There was an emphasis on poetry at Court and through society and word games were popular (Lenker). Such use of words impacted weddings and how people are described: "*bedroom, blushing, courtship, generous, obscene, swagger, barefaced"*. Note that though most of these are very descriptive of the person, many not very desirable. In this age of questioning public life (the Church) versus private life (following the old faith or another faith), gender roles (why weren't women allowed to perform on stage in their own country?), and the rise of doubting religion (Henry VIII break with Rome; his divorces, etc.), the questions also extended towards men and women's relationships (Lenker). *Can I really trust him/her? If not, this has major implications forever…for the rest of my life….is it worth it*? Should one "wear one's heart on one's sleeve" (Othello)? Does "the lady doth protest too much" (Hamlet)?

There are so many different types of love and marriage within Shakespeare, yet we see major shifts amounting to: a general acceptance of what marital reality is, the still-sought after

romantic love, and a defiance of the parents' choice of marital partner. In the world of

Shakespeare, love is part of the human condition and it comes in many forms, can change, is

wonderful when it works, yet can lead to death when it doesn't.

> "The Shakesperean norm of love may be described somewhat as follows. Love is a
> passion, kindling heart, brain, and senses alike in natural and happy proportions; ardent
> but not sensual, tender but not sentimental, pure but not ascetic, moral but not puritanic,
> joyous but not frivolous, mirthful and witty but not cynical. His lovers look forward to
> marriage as a matter of course, and they neither anticipate its rights nor turn their
> affections elsewhere. They commonly love at first sight and once for all. Love-relations
> which do not contemplate marriage occur rarely and in subordination to other dramatic
> purposes. Tragedy like that of Gretchen does not attract him. Romeo's amour with
> Rosalind is a mere foil to his greater passion, Cassio's with Bianca merely a mesh in the
> network of Iago's intrigue; Claudio's with Juliet is the indispensable condition of the plot.
> The course of love rarely runs smooth; but rival suitors proposed by parents are quietly
> resisted or merrily abused, never, even by the gentlest, accepted" (Herford) .

Love in Shakespeare, indeed, rarely runs smooth. There is tragic love, unrequited love, deep

love, and humorous love. But society itself was running smoother. England had changed in

substantial ways in this era, to allow such different types of love to have their place. Poetry,

music, plays, and literature all flourished, and the world was expanding. Colonies were being

established in the New World – America – and there was an expansionist mindset in England.

Terrible plagues had already ravished up to half of the population of Europe, leaving a wide

shortage in labor. Thus, laborers could demand better wages and working conditions. Literacy

rates rose, education was expanded, though still mostly for the nobility, but overall living

conditions and life expectancies were better.

Still, women were considered inferior to men, and were expected to marry and produce

children, within the best marriage one could muster. It is interesting then, that given the still-

standing societal norms of arranged marriages based on rank, family ties and power,

Shakespeare's plays of love that resists these norms prospered. This interesting dichotomy is

found within his plays, bringing different words to describe love. We also see a psychology at play within relationships that is different and delves deeper into motives and meaning.

To his supposed love, Hamlet dismisses Ophelia with bitter words: "If you do marry, I'll give you this stain on your dowry: even if you are as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, you will not escape calamity. Go to a convent. Farewell. Or if you really do need to marry, marry a fool. Smart men know what cuckolds you make of them. To a convent, go, and quickly, too. Farewell." (Shakespeare 365) What happened to the realistic Shakespeare lover who "looks forward to marriage as a matter of course, and they neither anticipate its rights nor turn their affections elsewhere" (Herford)? What happened to the need to nurture? Hamlet is cruel towards Ophelia and tells her to "Get thee to a nunnery" (372). Is he really angry at his mother, but directing it towards the female that is present in front of him? Is he being spied on and thus, hiding his true feelings? Is he simply untrusting of love? Or is it him – is he just frustrated with his life and his target is whoever is in front of him? It could be all, or none, of these things; the point here is, psychology comes into play within Shakespeare's love relationships. Again, Shakespeare brought love into the general human condition, and comes in many forms.

Imogen in *Cymbeline* says "I see before me, man; nor here, nor here, Nor what ensues, but have a fog in them, That I cannot look through" (Shakespeare) Remember the tried and true concept of love is blind; everyone from Chaucer of the 1386 to Smiles of 1875 has been quoted in different variations of same. Seems Shakespeare was simply rehashing that concept as well, his particular love is blinded by fog. Macbeth, and ambitious love, states: "Fair is foul and fouls is fair: Hover through the **fog** and filthy air." (Macbeth Act I- Scene I, 12-13)

Blindness, fog, not seeing – all symbols reminding humans that they are obscure, isolated, and uncertain. The realities of life and love are hard to bear in the starkness of the full sun.

The starkness of truth – Science – was also felt during the reign of Shakespeare's great works, as society began to doubt religion and the known realms of science was rising. Humans had to deal with realities in life and love, yet they still remained much in the fog in order to survive, and their traditions often proved too ingrained to create sweeping change. Too harsh a reality sets humans afoul; they still need hope to reign forever. Therefore, it is interesting how Shakespeare's words about love and marriage did not exactly reflect the realities of Elizabethan marriages, still steeped in traditions and arrangements. Instead, Shakespeare subverted the marital norms of the day, creating a gap between reality and stage.

> However, Shakespeare saw what was occurring and what historians have since identified. "The sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries as a crucial period in the history of the family in Britain. At the beginning of this period, most marriages were arranged, not by the two people getting married, but by their parents and other relatives. Gradually, during these centuries, these understandings of marriage and family changed" based somewhat on changes in religion and how the church viewed marriage. The married couple became more important and, increasingly, people came to think of the family as centered on parents and their children—what we refer to as the *nuclear family*. The social and cultural transformation of the family took place gradually and unevenly. 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" (Layson, Phillips).

Love throughout literature, was certainly expressive of feelings. Yet Shakespeare's language brought the language of love to a higher "intensity and expression rare in these days." (Bevington 485). In *The Comedy of Errors:* "For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall, A drop of water in the breaking gulf, And take unmingled thence that drop again, Without addition or diminishing, As take from me thyself and not me too; (II, ii. 127.)

Shakespeare's words impacted weddings from his day, through the present. From the time of the Elizabethan age, though change was slow in many ways, human marriages do not revert back to the marriages of the past. In fact, from this era onwards, we take those words, spewing more and more intensity and take the differing meanings of weddings, and we bring them closer and closer to our modern world.

THE ROMANTICISM MOVEMENT

From the agoras of Greece, to the Forum of Roman times, through the grandeur of Shakespeare's England, we now arrive at the 18th Century, a world that has survived the Dark Ages, Medieval times, wars, plagues, and a few Renaissances. Here in the 18th Century, building on the past, and Shakespeare's grand words within the realm of love and marriage, is where "love gains ground (Coontz)". From here onward through modern times, love plays a central and large role in marriage, romance and the choosing of a mate. Note the word, *choose,* or *choice.* Prior to this, family rank and ties chose marriage for their children. Now, an individual was much more open to choosing their spouse. How did society change so much that people, especially women, now had choices when it came to marriage? Why and how did people come to want and need love in marriage? What changed in the world to allow romantic love, which is very individualistic, to prosper?

The rise of individualism, freedom of thought, and longer life spans all contributed to the rise of love and Romanticism and the need for love within a marriage. These changes converged together for this shift from marriage being a family and business-like transaction to it being a love match.

As we have seen, words and weddings have evolved much from era to era. Here, much

later in history, during the 1700s through the mid-19th Century, a movement known as the Romantic movement took place amidst many major world events. Namely, the American Revolution took place resulting in England's eventual loss of the colonies. England's King George's uncertain, mentally unstable state threw England into even more turmoil. Napoleon's conquests and ambitions rose and fell, truth and science began to replace religion or, at least, religion was questioned even more, placing new doubts in the minds of humans and their place in the world. The aristocracy and its age-old system of human hierarchy and rank is now in its decline, while industry is on the rise. People are living differently than they ever were; they are now moving away from the country and its way of life in farming and agriculture, towards city life, a more industrialized, urban environment. Overall, life in the Romantic period is beginning to look very different for England and the world.

As these major changes were occurring in England, those changes eventually pushed their way into the marital vernacular. There was a shift in viewpoint, a rise in individualism, the economy was shifting, and societal rules that governed English society for so long loosened their grip. People's life expectancies rose by about 10 years, they were healthier as a whole; an unhappy marriage was too much to bear for too long. Love and affection were now ideal, if not essential, for people to live with each other for a longer period of time. Such shifts allowed romance to blossom: "the modern fascination with self-definition and self-invention, the notion that adolescence is naturally a time of rebellion in which one "finds oneself," the idea that the best path to faith is through individual choice, the idea that government exists to serve the individuals who have created it: all of these are products of the romantic celebration of the individual at the expense of society and tradition" (Brians). The world, and its authors,

recognized these changes and began writing with love in mind. Romanticism brought with it a world that now insisted on love within a marriage.

One of the most popular Romantic authors was Jane Austen, with her famous "marriage plot" structure of her novels. Such plot is a device that focuses almost exclusively on courtship, rituals, and obstacles with the ultimate prize of the best marriage one can muster. In the history of marriage, this plotting traditionally involved almost everything else *but* love.

How did Romantics define love? Love, to the Greeks, was purity, to Shakespeare it was a lusty defiance of tradition to follow one's heart, even if it led to death. To others, love actually meant devotion, loyalty, trust, and duty, but not true affectionate or romantic love. To the Romantics however, love meant having true passion for a partner, caring, mutual interests and mutual respect and desirability. In other words, two people had to *like* one another, as well as *love* one another, which is a major difference in how spouses view one another's role their respective lives.

No longer were women seeking men simply for socioeconomic considerations, stability, a provider for their children, and a household, according to their parents' wishes. No longer were men looking for the largest dowry, good "stock" for their children, and a furthering of their family's power. Sure, there were still many couples who followed this traditional route, but this shift led more and more couples down a marital path of *choosing* a truly desirable partner, creating an actual relationship beyond just income, constancy and comfort. Men and women realized that they had to live longer with the same person in this fast changing world of the 1700s and beyond, with life expectancy on the rise, and more of a focus on individual desires. Thus,

the marriage plot relied less and less on power, money, rank, and family ties, and instead relied on, and even insisted on, love.

This can all be found in an excellent example of Romantic writing: Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, which paves a path towards a desire and need for romance and love within the traditional rituals of courtship. Austen expresses her character's emotions very candidly: "She saw nobody in whose favour she could wish to overcome her own shyness and reserve. The men appeared to her all coarse, the women all pert, everybody underbred (343)". Fanny, the heroine of the story, is seen trying to *choose* her future mate.

Moreso than using mere words, Romanticism brought *feeling phrases* to the marital bond, complete with "sentiment and subjectivity, social or mental structures, or transactions and strategic choice"(Levine 1). Fanny Price, the heroine of Austen's *Mansfield Park* novel, saw the men she met as "coarse", and puts aside rank and a good-on-paper marriage, to hold out for her true match. For Fanny, it was all or nothing. Fanny may not have been able to express her views during another time period when women had little choices and options and were considered property of men. But in this, the Romantic era, women were gaining independence. Women could work as a governesses and such, and make their own money. Therefore, Fanny had more of a choice, options, and voice within the marriage realm, which changed marriage itself.

These *feeling phrases* are scattered throughout Mansfield Park: Fanny's mother married an "inferior" man, pushing Fanny herself towards more individualistic way of seeking a marriage: "Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without further expense to anybody (Austen 6)". This is in sharp contrast to the women we have seen through the Greek, and Elizabethan times whose roles

were wife and mother. Women did not vote, did not go to school, and did not really have a voice that was noticed beyond the walls of her home or society.

Fanny also did not believe her world empty if she did not become a wife and mother: She could find "immediate consolation in some pursuit, or some train of thought at hand. Her plants, her books – her writing desk, and her works of charity and ingenuity, were all within her reach…she could scarcely see an object in that room which had not an interesting remembrance connected with it (133)". This freedom of the mind that Fanny had, this contentedness within herself that was untied to any marital bond, are words that may describe the Romantic movement's words and weddings.

However, Fanny does wind up marrying for love, yet for her, the marriage felt natural: he "became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire: "With such a regard for her, indeed, as his had long been, a regard founded on the most endearing claims of innocence and helplessness, and completed by every recommendation of growing worth, what could be more natural…? (409)".

This phrasing of feelings extended to the men as well as we see in Fanny's ultimate choice of husband: "Edmund now believed himself perfectly acquainted with all that Fanny could tell, or could leave to be conjectured, of her sentiments (36)". *Freedom, consolation, regard, natural,* her *sentiments*…all words used within an era of revolution, rising industry and urbanization, and more choices and respect for women. We did not see the words of *freedom, natural, her sentiments* – to describe marriage in Greece. Indeed, those in Ancient times were more apt to say "inheritance was more important than feelings" (Coontz). Here though, feelings gain more important than inheritance, which is reflected within the literature. It took many, many

centuries, but arriving at the cusp of the modern world, we see how the words of weddings have completely flipped from inheritance being the foremost important, to feelings being the top marital prize. Thus, the insistence on love led to different words used to describe a loving bond, and even led to more of an emotional phrasing – *feeling phrases* - to describe love within marriage.

THE VICTORIAN ERA

The words of weddings were rapidly changing, the vernacular now gained feelings, phrases, and more emotional wording. Humans continue that tradition as we now enter the Victorian era, where Queen Victoria and Price Albert reigned within a true love match, and a partnership in both official realm and private residence. Marriages from here onward, are now *relationships.*

What defines a relationship? According to one of our modern dictionaries, it is "the relation connecting or binding participants in a relationship; a state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings; a romantic or passionate attachment"(Merriam Webster).

Remember the Greeks and their descriptions of brides and grooms and marriage: "*spotless linen, too shy, his bride, glowing, fair*"; and "*lusty bachelors, crisp shirts*"? Now, a relationship is about *connecting, relations, dealings, romantic, passionate*… Also, note how the definition of relationship does not mention marriage. Relationships of old, such as they were, were all about marriage. Now, they do not necessarily have to include marriage; the emphasis is on the bond between two people, rather than the societal bond of marriage.

But there was still some time to go before marriages waned and relationships truly took hold. Humans still had to go through Victorian England where strict rankings of marriage began

to soften, creating blurrier lines within Victorian marriages. There were many different reasons for this blurring, but it is well documented that Victorian societal changes "truly affected marriages in this era" (Amigoni 13).

The aristocracy of England was on the decline. Whereas the privileged sons of England used to pass their days in "pure leisure", that was now going out of fashion and "losing favor" (Mitchell 22). Instead of being idle, hunting, going on progress (to different country houses), and living the privileged life, in Victorian England, the sons – especially the eldest "heir" son - were "expected to do something useful, such as sit in Parliament, take part in local affairs, or use his influence for a charitable cause" (Mitchell 22).

And lest we think that only the heirs, or sons, were part of this shift, the softening of restrictions and blurrier lines extended to the daughters as well. During this time, a woman was made Baroness for the first time ever. Women were gaining independence. And though the aristocracy, rank and tradition were still a very solid part of English society, people did begin to loosen the strict adherence to social expectations (Mitchell 22). This shifting of societal norms contributed to a Victorian marriage shift that included equality. With *choice,* a seeking of love and affection, and the creation of actual bonds beyond mere marriage contracts, these changes eventually allowed men and women to break rank, be more assertive, individualistic, and ultimately, equal within their marriages.

There were other shifts beyond the aristocracy that moved these changes into the mainstream society. There was increased literacy for all during the Victorian era, leading to increased individualism and especially, independence for women. These Victorian marriage turns reflected "…an important shift in the conception of matrimony in England over the course

of the Victorian period, from an ideal of marriage as total merging towards an increasing

recognition of distinction-within-union. Second, the practice of sharing metaphor can serve in a

novel, not just as a marker, but as a microcosm of conjugal compatibility; even in novels that end

as soon as the lovers marry, these dialogues permit the reader to witness, in essence, *a marital

relationship*" (Gray).

The words of these new weddings involving choice and love are reflected within the

literature of Victorian England. One of the most beloved and well-known novels of the

Victorianis Age is, *Jane Eyre*, written by Charlotte Bronte. The heroine, Jane, asserts herself and

speaks her mind, something that women rarely showed in literature and within their own homes.

However, Jane represents a new, assertive, unique woman: "I will not be your English Celine

Varens" (Bronte 102, 272). Jane boldly declares her wish to retain her individuality within her

marriage; she also "demands equality and respect. 'Do you think', she demands of Rochester, 'I

am an automaton? – a machine without feelings?" (Bronte 147).

Jane Eyre was an orphan, worked as a governess, who ultimately married whom she

chose. And, no matter if she was born "below rank" from her boss and future husband, Mr.

Rochester, Jane was able to break through her lower rank and began to crack the traditional and

normal ideal of being a woman that "stressed passivity" (Amigoni 196). Jane was not passive,

asserting her wants and needs within her relationship. The words associated with this eventual

wedding are clearly seen as different from other time periods. *Demand, equality, respect, I will

not be*….Jane serves up this punch of assertive words even before her wedding day. The fact that

Rochester agrees and marries her anyway, is testament to the filtering effect of a changing

society all the way down the ranks. As the upper crust was loosening its traditions and norms, so

were the lower ranks questioning and subverting those rules. Too, this filtering extended not only

from rank to rank, but from gender to gender. Traditional male and female roles were being questioned and adapted to these changing values. (Mitchell 22).

WORDS AND WEDDINGS – IS THERE A PERFECT MATCH?

A solid romp through centuries of marriage has provided words and phrases fitting the times that a certain piece of literature was written. Indeed, literature and the specific vocabulary used provide keen insights into marital shifts. Some eras focused more on major events and historical changes, while others focused on more subtle shifts and how they are portrayed. All centuries had their evolutions, revolutions, shifts, and events, and we have seen a steady rise from arranged marriages based on business-type reasons, to the more modern insistence on love. One criticism therefore, begs to be addressed: which one works better? Does literature render a verdict on whether an arrangement for the good of society or individual will is the better system?

From *Gilgamesh*, to Chaucer, to Shakespeare, *Jane Eyre*, and beyond, marriage has been a firm focus in literature. Whether it is happy like *Jane Eyre*, or dysfunctional like *Anna Karenina,* there are many, many stories involving marriage – the good, the bad, the sad, the ugly, the terror, the joy of it all. Stories include practical matters such as who will raise the children and who will go out and get the food, to keeping a wife pure so men know who their children are. Later, marriage moved beyond practicalities towards meaning. As we moved through Greece and Rome and England, we saw more individual words; as we arrived later, with life expectancy and culture on the rise, we saw more phrases and meanings. Switching things up, marriages of the past were written about from the outside looking in. Later stories such as Jane Eyre, we see an *inside* view of that relationship and marriage. This perspective affected literature; later works are much more infused with individual feelings and relationships. Remember Cotgrave's "Love

and knowledge live not together" (Cotgrave, 1611)? That is an outsider's view; there are no specifics and no individuals are spoken of. It is a sweeping view of love and marriage.

Jump ahead a bit more than two centuries to 1847 and *Jane Eyre*, and we see the insider's view: "I will not be your English Celine Varens" (Bronte 102, 272). "Do you think', she demands of Rochester, 'I am an automaton? – a machine without feelings?" (Bronte 147). Here, a woman uses "I" and "you"; instead of using an almost proverb-style of writing such as Cotgrave's, we now see a character who has evolved along the marital journey to speak her mind and choose her mate. Because no matter the style of writing or words used, marriage has claimed its enduring place within all of literature.

Therefore, if we rely on the words of weddings, as we have throughout this journey, literature indeed renders a verdict. It does not hold guilty one system or another, nor does it scorn one people's ways over another. Think about it: literature leaves that for people to decide. It's not as if we change a work to make ourselves feel better. We may criticize, write something else, write a lie, write the truth, one person may love a work while another one hates it. People may agree that words and weddings are interconnected, while others may never see that connection. Some people decide to marry; others decide not to.

Furthering the criticism is that of course, mere words and the *lingua franca* of a people cannot fully capture the importance and gravity of what marriage means to society and its inhabitants. We cannot just use words and vocabulary to show marital shifts. We must look at history and events; we have used the New Historicism theory to explain some of these events, however, it is beyond the scope to pinpoint every change, every literary work, every time period, in order to explain the words of weddings. However, giving even a glimpse, as we have in this

paper, shows just how much literature indeed reflects how humans have structured our brief lives.

The world's bank of literature is bursting with versions of arrangements and courtships leading to marriage, and there is ample evidence that the morphology of words involving love and marriage, along with major societal shifts and changes reflected in literature, contributed to our understanding of the myriad changes within marital relationships. As shown through morphology, vocabulary, phrasing and usage of words associated with marriage, along with mining a sampling of Greek, Elizabethan, Romantic, and Victorian literary works, we see how many, many changes occurred in what marriage meant to society. What has not changed is that marriage still means something to human existence, whether it is on the rise, decline, or find itself amongst major shifts. This official pairing off of people appears everlasting and somehow necessary to the human structure of existence.

Therefore, literature cannot render which is the better system, but rather, gives a reader tools in which to gain insight into themselves; which is the better choice for *them,* not society. Which time periods, ages, and movements have best reflected the ability of humans to evolve and adapt to its changing societal norms? Literature opens those questions up to debate and debate we do. They beauty of literature and its words and weddings, allows each person to decide that connection for themselves.

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