

# Dowry System and Natural Law in Shakespeare

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Dowry was an important even decisive factor of forming a marriage in Renaissance, which was illustrated in Shakespeare's plays. "No dowry, no marriage" was a common social phenomenon in Europe. Dowry was essentially a way of the actualization of male power in the context of patriarchal society, and the dowry system in Renaissance provided a unique angle to observe the social and family relationships, and the conflict between marriage freedom of children and actualization of parental power at that time. Shakespeare's arrangement of dowry and marriage shows his satire to the unreasonable existing law. Actually we can find his inclination for natural law and consistence with Pufendorf who believes that family is the primary form of society, and marriage is the most primitive form of socialization, which is the requirement of natural law.

*Keywords:* Dowry, Shakespeare, Pufendorf, natural law

## 1. Introduction

After new criticism prevailed in the whole field of literary criticism in last century, Stephen Greenblatt, the founder of new historicism, turned the trend of literary criticism that focused on the close-reading and analysis of the text itself back to the social context of works, including history, politics, culture, society, class and so on. So just as Greenblatt pointed out, literary works is the product of "social energy"<sup>1</sup>, not only documenting the social forces that constitute and form history and society but also feature prominently in the social processes themselves which fashion both individual identity and the socio-historical situation. Therefore, it may proper to say literary texts are the reflection of ideology, then exert influence on ideology in turn. That's why this paper aims at doing some research on dowry system in Shakespeare's plays, which helps us to understand the creation of these texts and how it influences people's thoughts.

Family is the core of life in Shakespeare's era. Its importance is far beyond what modern people can imagine. It is of great significance in the dimensions of religion, morality, politics and the universe. Traditionally people believed that the whole world consisted of several related entities: individuals, families, states and finally the cosmos. Each smaller entity is regarded as "a part and a pattern" of each larger entity: that is, each smaller entity is not only a part of the larger entity, but also similar in structure and function. Therefore, individual must be a

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<sup>1</sup> Social energy, according to Stephen Greenblatt, is associated with repeatable forms of pleasure and interest, with the capacity to arouse disquiet, pain, fear, the beating of the heart, pity, laughter, tension, relief, wonder. See *Shakespearean Negotiation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

member of the family, family is a member of the state or federation, and the state or commonwealth is a part of the cosmos. Between these levels, a complex corresponding or similar system can be observed. The body metaphor theory of this period regarded everything as an interdependent and interrelated organic whole, and the micro world is the epitome of the macro world. Thus, “a state is no other than a greate familie; and a familie no other than a greate bodye...” (Young, 2009, p, 29). According to the body metaphor theory, the social members are considered to be an integral part of the body and a necessary body organ though they play different roles. The loss of good social members would cause social physical damage, and malignant social members will lead to social physical diseases. Just as the limbs and organs of the body are connected with each other and interdependent, family members are connected not only by the blood tie, but also by emotional and practical interdependence. The survival of the family requires each family member to play his own role and perform his role function, that is, the father assumes the responsibility of the father, the mother completes the responsibility of the mother, and the children fulfill the obligations of the children. Family is the first and smallest social mechanism of human participation. It is not only regarded as the creation and channel of life giving power in the universe, but also the source and basis of other larger social mechanisms. From the perspective of social function, the family is a direct factor affecting good order for the church and the Federation. In addition, because it crosses the constraints of time and space, the family is also considered to be related to the whole cosmic order. The descendants of the family continue the life of their parents from generation to generation. The past, present and future are connected by the family blood. Parents are believed to love their children like God, and convey the grace of heaven through daily rituals and prayers, so as to connect heaven with the earth through the family. Family is the epitome of society and the cosmos, and it is also an integral part of society and the universe. Individuals must be members of the family, the family is members of the state or federation, and the Federation is a part of the universe; Man’s own micro world corresponds to the macro world he participates in. The being of an individual would be meaningless without family and community.

Family is the primary form of socialization. The establishment of the country must rely on a large population. A large number of individual people are the premise and necessary condition for the establishment of the country. Therefore, the solution of population production has become the basis for the establishment and existence of the country. At the same time, the development of the country is inseparable from people with socialization experience. Otherwise, the society will stagnate or even collapse, and the family is the key to solve these two problems. Marriage is the most primitive form of socialization. Marriage is not only the physiological combination of men and women, but also their social combination. “The first of the adventitious states in which a man is set by some prior human act is marriage. Marriage may be called the first example of social life and at the same time the seed-bed of the human race” (Pufendorf, 1991, p. 120). Marriage is the requirement of natural law and the result of socialization.

### **Marriage in Renaissance**

Reflecting developments and changes of human society and culture, marriage is one of the permanent relationship in human society, which is the basis of forming family. Marriage is a special kind of social relationship, representing both physical and social combination between man and woman. That is to say, marriage is influenced, even decided by customs and laws. Such social attribute requires that marriage is closely

related to social developmental level in certain historic phase and influenced by its economy, law and culture. Renaissance was an important phase of transformation of western countries from Middle Age to early modern and great changes had taken place in people's ideas and society. As an important part of customs and laws marriage system has also changed a lot. Shakespeare's Plays involved many aspects of social life at that time, including the change of marriage system, which tended to be secular. "The late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a period of growing secularization, with European States like Venice making greater claims to authority over institutions, including marriage" (Ferraro, 2001, p. 5). The right to decide people's marriage transferred from priest to male parent, and instead of consent between man and woman there were a lot of rituals and laws necessary to validity of a marriage daughters and young children other than the eldest son can only be controlled economically by the father or elder brother, while illegitimate children are directly excluded. The father takes this opportunity to control the children's economy and marriage and demands absolute obedience and dignity to the children. Bruce disagreed with Trevelyan who argued:

Wife beating was a recognised right of man, and was practised without shame by high as well as low.... The daughter who refused to marry the gentleman of her parents' choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room, without any shock being inflicted on public opinion. Marriage was not an affair of personal affection, but of family avarice. (Young, 2009, p. 35)

Bruce believed forced marriages are rare but he admitted that parents sometimes applied pressure, and even threatened to "disown" the child. Obviously, There is no doubt that children can resist arranged arrangements if they are prepared to give up their inheritance and family status.

Before the middle ages, the inheritance system in Europe implemented the equal distribution of all sons, and the restrictions on women's inheritance were relaxed in the later stage, so that women can exercise greater power in the public sphere. However, due to the loose inheritance rules, the division of inheritance scattered the originally concentrated family wealth and power, resulting in the weakening of the extended family. In response, Europe in the 10th and 11th centuries saw a movement towards the inheritance of the eldest son: the whole property of a family would be distributed to the eldest son, not to the children. At the same time, a daughter's dowry—money or property given by her family when she married—replaced her inheritance. This series of changes helped to protect the power of the extended family, but reduced women's economic independence. In fact, due to the limitations of social production mode and productivity, she may not be able to survive without her family. The conflict and reconcile between individual who get to grasp freedom of marriage and parents who take up a very authoritarian stance make special tension and scenes in Shakespearean plays, which fascinates the audience a lot and have great influence on their feelings. Reflecting the development of that period, various kinds of marriage, such as elopement, secret marriage, and arranged marriage, appeared in Shakespeare's plays. The relationship between these families was complicated. They fight and unite as needed. Marriage was the most efficient way to enrich family power and get union, and dowry is the fatal element to realize the purpose of a marriage.

Family was the heart of society, so in patriarchy society people thought children and wives' compliance to father and husband as important as the subjects' obedience to monarch. In some sense, family served as medium to strengthen paternalism. Conforming to a patriarchal model, marriages among aristocracy should be "arranged by families with a view to securing advantage or alliances" (Sokol, 2003, p. 30). Marriage union usually took

place in families belonging to the same party. Before humanists affirmed the positiveness of human emotion and ask for the liberation of human nature, marriage had been an emotionless business between families, and an arrangement for making mutual profits in the long term and giving birth to child to expand the family. At that time, women were just regarded as property belong to her father, then her husband. So marriage based on the mutual profits rather than mutual love, and it was arranged by parents instead of children themselves. Husband and wife took unequal position of master-slave rather than mates, constructing a marriage without love. However, marital relationship appeared a new trend in literary works of Renaissance. Although wife's submission to husband was still emphasized, they were more like mates. And the image of wife as weak and indecisive has been changed into a smart and brilliant one of new type. Nevertheless, dowry was still the decisive factor of forming a marriage.

### **Dowry as Twin of Marriage**

Marriage was a way of promoting one's status and dowry is the major element of forming a marriage.<sup>2</sup> We may not figure out why renaissance people cared about dowry so much. However, negotiating the amount of bride's dowry was very natural, for husband took the control of his wife's property though she still held the ownership of it. So actually dowry played an important role in the expansion of a patriarchal family and male power, and indisputably became the most attractive thing for the wooers, as we can see in Shakespeare plays. The large amount of dowry that Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew* took from their father was the decisive factor of forming their marriage. The reason, even not the single one, at least the most important one, for why Bassanio made proposal to Portia is that he needed her dowry to repay his debt to Antonio. Petruchio declared "if thou know one rich enough to be Petruchio's wife...be she as foul as was Florentius' love, as old as Sybil...if wealthily, then happily in Padua" (SHR, 1.2.45, 67-72). What's more, in other Shakespeare plays, when comes to marriage, dowry appears to be a question unavoidable. A marriage with no dowry seems impossible to exist for people from all walks of life at that time, which Shakespeare revealed in his *Measure for Measure*. The fates of the three female protagonists were greatly influenced by their dowry. Juliet couldn't get married for that her dowry was in the hand of her relatives; Isabelle intended to spend her whole life as a nun at convent because she has no dowry; and Mariana faced the fate of abandonment when her brother failed in business and could not afford her dowry.

As it was mentioned above, marriage was the most effective way of forming alliance between two families, which was common in Renaissance, for at that time "society was conceived of as a collection of households, with a marital couple, or a person who had once been half of a marital couple, as the core of each" (Robin & Laesen, 2007, p. 239). Since family was the core of society, its membership functioned as strong linkage of the social structure. Thus the male patriarch never ignored the importance of giving their daughter or female relatives a large number of dowry so as to unite with a equal or higher family to get alliance and profits, though the benefits of the male heir was what he cared most. Apart from being motivated by interest relationship, the male patriarch had to prepare dowry for females in his family to fit the law's demand. The law required that the male patriarch,

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<sup>2</sup> It was popular at that time to marry for dowry or at least with economic purpose, as revealed by the saying "He who marries for love and no money, hath good nights but sorry days." (David Cressey, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 261)

the father or the brother if the father had died, provide females in the family with dowry.<sup>3</sup> Of course, there were a lot of poor family of underclass could not afford females' dowry, so these women had to go to work for dowry with low payment and put themselves in danger. Even some females of leading class were sent to convent where they kept virginity so as to preserve their family honor, because "the sexual honor of a woman was not only hers....it was tied to a calculus of honor more complex, which involved both the family and the man who dominated it....The honor of the entire family and the men responsible it revolved about the conservation of a daughter's virginity" (King, 1991, p. 29). In 15th century, women's value was associated with chastity according to the economic and social system of Renaissance. So when women reached the age of marriage, but her family could not afford a good dowry and failed to marry her to avoid disgrace<sup>4</sup>, the parents would send her to convent instead of finding her a husband because the convent entrance fee was much lower. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare kept it a mystery why Isabella went to convent. However, it could be inferred from the text that her family had declined. Her brother, Claudio, when his affair with Juliet was uncovered, explained "only for propagation of a dowry remaining in the coffer of her friends, from whom we thought it meet to hide our love till time had made them for us" (MM, 1.2.118, 146-150). Obviously, he hid their love because he failed to provide property suitable to his beloved Juliet's dowry and get married to her. Traditionally, marriage had been regarded as the alliance between two families, so the bride's family would give her huge amount of dowry and accordingly the wooers should have matched property. Thus it was a common scene in Shakespeare that in the process of proposal the male protagonists or the wooers would prove their qualification of making proposal and it's a matched marriage, such as Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice* and Lucilius in *The Life of Timon of Athens*.<sup>5</sup> It may be a reasonable conclusion that Isabella and Claudio came from a declined family. Apparently, Claudio should take the responsibility of preparing dowry for her sister after their father died, but he was even powerless about his own marriage. Therefore, the fate of Isabella was destined to serve the god in convent so as to keep her chastity. The other heroine in the play, Mariana, betrothed to Angelo, faced the danger of losing her engagement for her dowry had gone into the sea with her brother in a shipwreck. In Renaissance, marriage contract would be signed with the assistance of witness and decide the amount of dowry. "Marriage in Shakespeare's time was a matter of negotiation" (Raffield & Watt, 1988, p. 51), which was popular at that time, but it may seem weird for Today's people to bargain about daughter's dowry. Anyway, the amount of dowry was written in the marriage contract. If it is broken, the marriage could be canceled. That's why Angelo intended to abandon Mariana, "for that her promised proportions came short of composition" (MM, 5.1.203, 215-216). Marriage between royal families was more significant as it would provide a kind of unique dowry, land, the foundation of feudatory system. The land was everlasting guarantee of royal membership. Sometimes, it influenced or even decided a country's national security and brought political or military advantage. "In Shakespeare's historical plays, where

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<sup>3</sup> Both Roman law and the city-law of Venice required the brother should prepare dowry for his sister if the father died or got dementia; if the father didn't have male heir, other males in this family had duty to prepare dowry. More information see Letizia Panizza, ed. *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, p. 183. Europe Humanities Research Center University of Oxford, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> In a patriarchal society, women's virginity was what men cared most and connected with family honor, but if there was adult girl in a family that could not provide her dowry and find her a husband, it would be dangerous to disgrace the family in case of her losing chastity, even by violence, but it's not rare in Renaissance. See Margret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance*, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Antonio borrowed 3000 krone from Shylock to help Bassanio marry Portia: because of 3 talents from his master, Timon, Lucilius could get the consent of his father-in-law to marry his daughter.

dynastic issues are at stake, a royal misalliance or royal marriage without suitable dowry is seen as either impossible or highly ill advised” (Sokol & Sokol, 2003, p. 70). There is no denying that Henry V took his marriage as an excuse for ruling France legally and getting an important manor as his bride’s dowry, which made England obtain military advantage over France. For England this marriage actually brought a period of relative peace. Henry IV’s marriage with Margaret turned out to be an opposite example. Instead of marrying to a lady who would bring large dowry and probable peace with France, Henry VI chose Margaret as his bride, who brought neither dowry nor political advantage. This marriage was the beginning of a series of disasters.

As the foundation of a family, the importance of dowry in Renaissance needs no more proof. It is no exaggeration to say that to great extent women’s fate depends on her dowry, and it goes much deeper than that. Shakespeare’s arrangements of dowry in his play reflect the ideology of that period. Dowry was not only about women, but “a matter of fundamental economic, social, and family significance” (Sokol & Sokol, 2003, p. 72).

### **Dowry as the Way of Actualizing Patriarch Power**

According to teaching of the early Christianity, only the will a man and a woman was necessary to a valid marriage. However, in the secularization of late medieval society, the will of patriarch became the first and foremost factor of forming a marriage, especially in the upper class. Child’s freedom of choosing mate was rejected by patriarchal ideology. Children’s subordination to parents was required by law and religion. 17th puritan conduct books revealed the hierarchy of a family, in which “father must be acknowledged as the head “ who has been given the authority by god to govern his family, wife, children, and servants in his household. By God’s law Parents “hath a force of law to bind children from taking wives or husbands, without or against their parents consent” (Gouge, 2006, p. 320). Marriage was a matter of preserving family benefits and seeking alliance, and dowry involved the shift of family property, so male patriarch took the control of family member’s marriage, which was protected by the law. Many city-states in Italy all prescribed that one getting married without parents consent would be punished severely.<sup>6</sup> Economic punishment was most popular but not harshest. In 16th century, some regional laws of France allowed parents force religious vocation on unwilling children, and specified the death penalty for those who married under the age of 25 without parental consent.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps, because of the religious reasons, there was no death penalty for marrying without parents’ consent in England, though the protestant had put forward.<sup>8</sup> Actually many problems related to marriage were focus of arguments between protestants and Catholics, including parental consent to children’s marriage. Shakespeare applied it in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to challenge the patriarchal ideology of his age. Hermia, the disobedient daughter of Egeus, went against her father’ will and rejected Demetrius who her father ordered her to marry. Instead, she insisted on marrying her beloved Lysander, which enraged her father and he made a request to the Duke that he would dispose of her to death according to the law unless she consents to marry Demetrius. Of course, in reality and literary works, parents would made use of economic methods to force their children act at his will. It’s so

<sup>6</sup> The law of Padua stipulated women married without parental consent be deprived of her dowry. Other places in Italy, such as Veneto had similar laws. See Trevor Dean, K.J.P.Lowe, eds. *Marriage in Italy, 1300-1650*, Cambridge university Press, 1998, p.91 and James S.Grubb, *Provincial Families of the Renaissance: Private and Public Life in the Veneto*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Flandrin, Jean-Louis (1979). *Families in Former Times*. Trans. Richard Southern. London: Cambridge University Press, p130-8.

<sup>8</sup> “protestant marriage regulations stressed the importance of parental consent more than Catholic ones...”. Diana Robin, Anne R. Laesen. Eds. *Encyclopedia of Women in the Renaissance*. Santa Barbara:-ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2007, p. 240.

difficult and dangerous for renaissance women to work to make a living. Their whole life depended much on the dowry she was given, so deprivation of dowry was a quite severe punishment and forced many women to follow father's will, marrying someone he arranged.

In Shakespeare's plays there was a common scene. When a daughter chose a mate against her father's will, she would face the threat of being deprived of dowry. The most typical example might be Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. Possessing beauty, wisdom and huge inheritance as dower, she had everything except the freedom of choosing a mate. Her fate was still under the control of her father though he had died. She had to decide her marriage in accordance with his will or she would lose everything. "I may neither choose whom I would nor refuse I dislike—so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father" (MV, 1.2.1, 22-23). In another play *The Life of Timon of Athens* Shakespeare gave a similar example. An old man called Athenian came to Timon for his servant Lucilius was in love with Athenian's daughter. Athenian declared "if in her marriage my consent be missing.... dispossess her all" (TIM, 1.1. 138-143). It might sound cruel but it was true that for Renaissance women dowry was not sign or symbol of parents' love, but a weapon in male patriarch's hand to get women's obedience. Even the father died, this power will be shifted to other males in the family. That's why Juliet in *Measure for Measure* could not marry Claudio, for her dowry was kept by her kins.

In Renaissance women's dowry included two parts. One part was the dowry her family, usually her father or other male relative, provided her. The other part came from her future husband, which was the focus of negotiation in the process of making marriage contract. Considering the future life of the young couple, especially the possible widowhood of daughter<sup>9</sup>, the bride's family would try to increase this part of amount. In fact, it's more like a promise to assure the widowhood of woman for she would get this marriage portion only after her husband's death. However, on the contrary, the bridegroom's family tried to reduce this part of amount in case the wife would take away these property if her husband died. Just as it was mentioned before, marriage was a matter of negotiation in Shakespeare's age. Thus when making covenants with Baptista, in order to match Katharina's huge dowry, Petruchio promised "be it that she survive me, in all my lands and leases" (SHR, 2.1. 123-125). When Gremio and Tranio, disguised himself as Lucentio made proposal to Bianca, ironically Baptista made it an auction of his daughter, claiming "That can assure my daughter greatest dower, shall have Bianca's love" (SHR, 2.1.336, 336-337). Gremio and Tranio bid against each other to get Bianca. However, Baptista pointed out the property Lucentio assured belonged to his father, so he needed his father come to Padua and make Bianca the assurance, otherwise, she would marry Gremio. Apparently, the dower provided by male's family was the way his father controlled his marriage.

Shakespeare's age was in the mixture of the declining of aristocracy and the rising of bourgeois. It's no strange that the parents made use of their children's marriage to get money. Some even bought the wardship of young heiress and then keep her unmarried for whole life or marry her to his son so as to get her dowry. The most ridiculous is that they did it in the name of the law. Shakespeare showed satire to these absurd things in a subtle way. Lucentio knew his father would not agree to provide a large part of fortune as dower, so he cheated Bianca into making a secret marriage without both parents' consent, which broke the law. Their punishment dropped upon them in a weird way. Making the bet with Petruchio, Baptista lost 20,000 krone that supposed to be

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<sup>9</sup> In Renaissance, women didn't have the right to inherit her husband's property, so she could only live by her dowry and dower assured by her husband when they made marriage contract.

Bianca's dowry, fulfilling the rule of law. The nature of this behavior was imposing economic sanctions on the disobedient children. However, using an absurd way to realize the purpose of the sacred law is Shakespeare's greatest irony to this tyrannic, unreasonable and inhuman law system.

### Conclusion

The meaning of the law lies in protecting the order of society. As the embodiment of the ruling class, it served for the ideology of the ruling class. Therefore, the law in a patriarchal society was certain to maintain the power of male patriarchs, then ignore or overlook the benefits of other family members. The spirit of the law is associated with the ideology of a country, such as its culture, customs and moral principles. The law is not simply the representative of state power or a system of professional skill, but reflect the vast socio-cultural context. The renaissance was a period in which the politic and economic system of European countries were in major revolution, and thus caused great changes in people's life and thoughts. It was also an important phase of the development of western legal thoughts. Humanists reaffirmed "human is the yardstick of everything". That is to say, the standard of making judgment about right and wrong, good and evil lies in whether it meets the needs of man or not, which may sound ridiculous in terms of epistemology. But as a standard to judge the culture, politics, and social system, it's impossible to find a better one. Just as Marx once argued "Society is not based on the law, which is the illusion of jurists. On the contrary, the law should be based on the society"<sup>10</sup>, the law should adjust to the social reality, keep pace with the times and change with the society. Although the municipal civil law and church law at this time emphasize the authority of patriarchy, the power of men to control the family and the due obedience of wives and children, this is by no means the reason for male parents to use this as a weapon to control wives and children. While emphasizing the father's status as God and king in the family, he also emphasizes that he should love his children like God. The establishment of a harmonious family order requires all family members to fulfill their obligations, obligations precede power, and the authority of parents is based on the obligation of raising children. Natural law requires people to be socialized and imposes an obligation on parents to take care of their children. "To prevent negligence, nature has implanted in parents a most tender affection for them. Exercise of that care requires the power to direct the children's actions...for they lack judgment" (Pufendorf, 1991, p. 124), so the children need to obey their parents.

Shakespeare did not completely deny the authority of parents over their children. In *Othello*, the marriage between Desdemona and Othello against her father's will failed to achieve good results, which seems to indicate that children sometimes lack rational thinking and judgment and need the guidance of parents. However, Shakespeare fully shows the conflict between children's marriage will and autonomy and patriarchal parental ideology and the resulting family disorder. The current customs and laws violate the spirit of natural law and affect the stability of the family, society and even the country. Researches showed that in Elizabeth's age 1/3 of the brides went to the church were pregnant.<sup>11</sup> This number clearly indicated that the stringent law at that time had become discordant with the social reality. When the old morality and old system are alienated into the power

<sup>10</sup> 《馬克思恩格斯全集》第六卷，北京：人民出版社，1961年，p. 292.

<sup>11</sup> See Stephen Orgel and A.R.Braunmuller, eds., *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, New York: Penguin Group, 2002, p. xlvi; another statistic is 1/5 (see Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 219). This phenomenon proves that people's thoughts changed and the constrains power of the law was weakening.



of oppressing people, a new morality and new system that respects human freedom and dignity should be established.

Marriage had been alienated into a link between two families, an emotionless combination of family benefits. But in Renaissance marriage became the combination of two loving people, for in the process of reinterpreting natural law humanist found legal basis against autocratic system. There should be a balance between personal freedom of marriage and patriarch domination. Shakespeare didn't simply reject the authority of parents or praise children's fight for freedom of marriage. He saw the complexity of life, and the conflicts in ideology. He heard voices of all kinds of people. His works were collective creation rather than his own. He demonstrated the social problems to audience in a vivid way and made them think about it. "A number of Elizabethan and Jacobean writers centered their works on enforced marriages of sorts that occasioned misery, murder, or suicide. By contrast, Shakespeare encompassed such topics within larger consideration of social, family, or political relations... (Sokol & Sokol, 2003, p. 34). Shakespeare's attitudes toward the law was complicated and ambiguous. On the one hand, he knew the importance of maintaining the law; on the other hand, he was aware of the injustice of the existing law. In Shakespeare's plays, it was clearly demonstrated that marriage based on emotion was gradually replacing marriage based on alliance, that the existing law became discordant with the social reality and that it would be a tragedy to control one's freedom of marriage. Arranged marriages are based on the wills of Patriarchal parents rather than mutual affection of couples and thus contrary to human nature and inevitably arouse various forms of resistance. Sometimes women took the way of secret marriage to resist the male's oppression. Although secret marriages are relatively rare, they also make people worried because they are valid even without public ceremony. Consequently they threaten or destroy the social order. As for the conflicts between parents and children on marriage issue, Shakespeare and Pufendorf made an agreement. Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* expresses Shakespeare's argument: "reason my son/Should choose himself a wife, but as good reason/The father (all whose joy is nothing else/But fair posterity) should hold some counsel In such a business" (4.4. 406-10). On the premise of recognizing individual freedom of marriage, in order to establish a "natural" harmonious order, parents' opinions should also be paid attention to. Pufendorf believes that children's filial piety clearly requires the consent of their father on marriage, rather than choosing a spouse against their father's wishes. However, if children actually have contract and marry against their parents' wishes, "it seems that it is not invalid by natural law" (Pufendorf, 1991, p. 127).

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