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Author
Richmond, Hugh Macrae

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AMATORY MAGNETISM: SHAKESPEARE'S ALGORITHM

by Hugh Macrae Richmond, U. C. Berkeley

Many years ago, under the influence of Bertrand Russell's applications of symbolic logic to other fields than mathematics and theoretical physics, I attempted to create an algorithm to define the permutations of Shakespeare's view of sexuality, based on the various amatory relationships in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The editor of a journal to whom I submitted the first draft responded that he was sure that what I said was significant but he could not understand it, and I realized that my procedure was premature. As I now find that my ideas of forty years ago are receiving modest recognition, it occurs to me that my formulation might finally be viable. Let me begin by defining the formulas encoding classic patterns in Shakespeare's amatory relationships, using a model transposed from magnetic theory of similar poles repelling, opposites attracting.

The basic factors are simple: sexual attraction in an individual for another is identified by a plus, and lack of it by a minus, so that In "All's Well" Helena's relation to Bertrand would appear simply as H+ –B. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream" Hermia's relationship with Lysander initially would be represented as H+ +L. This absurdly simple encoding will serve to record all the various permutations of the young lovers relationships in "Dream," which start as Hel+ -Dem+ -Her+ +Lys. This last double-plus in the pattern is apparently unstable, so the overall formula thus evolves (under the supposed influence of Puck's flower) to Her+ –Lys + –Hel– +Dem. This new formulation has eliminated the conjunction of a precarious + + relationship, and in looking at Shakespeare's other plays I find that this is usually the case in sexual relations. One can argue that this is because there is no story line in a sustained positive relationship, or that Shakespeare perceived inaccessibility of the beloved to be essential to sustained emotional attraction. This match to metallic magnetism (in which two positive poles repel each other) would account for the previous attraction of Hermia and Lysander only because an artificial insulation occurs in the opposition by Hermia's father Egeus, preventing the mutual repudiation – which finally occurs only when the two lovers are mutually accessible in the forest. So the actual formula for the opening situation in I.i is really Hel+ -Dem+ -Her+ (-Eg-) +Lys

This assertion that two positives constitute inevitable repulsions is corroborated by this first phase of the total pattern of relationships in the forest, in which Lysander ultimately rejects the available Hermia for the inaccessible Helena. Meanwhile, once Helena angrily abandons him in a suicidal mood, Demetrius reverts to pursuit of her, while her attraction to him disappears: she instantly refuses him, so that the next pattern is Her+ –Lys+ -Hel- +Dem, thus restoring the basic pattern of amatory attractions: only pluses can persist with minuses.

However, the young lovers are not the only amorous pairs in the play: I.i opens with a relation between two seeming positives: Theseus and Hippolyta. However, their initial pattern illustrates this is a paradoxical consequence of their instable original mutual hate, seen on the battlefield: expressible as Hi– –Th. Since they are now reconciled it appears

that two minuses coincide with a potential progression to two equally instable pluses (all as in magnetic poles). For, on close examination of I.i , most interpreters detect in Hippolyta an alienation from the male hostility to Hermia shown by Theseus and Egeus: "Come, my Hippolyta: what cheer, my love?" hints that as an Amazon she is not sympathetic to the patriarchal outcome, hence opposed to Theseus once more.

Another "Dream" couple is Oberon and Titania. As Shakespearean spirits they tend to be like the pagan gods – abstractions of human values or psychological forces. They represent the interdependence of male and female principles, in this case complicated by the presence of the Indian Boy – perhaps an icon of what happens on the intervention of children into a marriage. Oberon is attracted to the Indian boy because of Titania's preoccupation with isolating the boy, which in turn is sustained by Oberon's competition for him, so that the pattern here proves to be Ob- -Ti+ (-Ob+) Ind (the boy's emotional orientation is never specified). The first double negative seemingly is unsustainable, and soon predictably switches to the norm, with the intervention of the initially reluctant Bottom, involving Oberon and Titania's distraction from the boy. Once Titania is alternatively involved, and Oberon has the boy, the latter's interest fades for Oberon, and he becomes re-attracted to the otherwise involved Titania: Bo- +Ti- +Ob. This pattern is seemingly arbitrarily resolved by Puck's flower, but by my formula it results from Titania's wearying of Bottom's increasingly positive responses to her courtship, thus leading to a restored stable marital relationship Ob+ (-M-) +Ti. Bottom is left with his dream/fantasy of becoming indeed a romantic lover in the vein of the lover-deprived Pyramus: he is almost like a Method actor training for the part.

All the relationships are finally stabilized by emotionally-enforcing marital contracts, despite all of them now involving the volatile two positives - for in every case this precarious emotional condition is over-ruled by the neutralizing force of the power of the social contract of marriage, resulting in the multiple stable patterns of:

Lys+(-M-)+Hel/ Dem+(-M-)+Her/ Th+(-M-) +Hi/ Ob-(+M+) –Ti

The external social contract of marriage is seemingly, for Shakespeare, the only effective neutralizer of the volatility in sexual relations. Their involuntary reinstitution of this contract may further confirm the reconciliation of Oberon and Titania, after the catharsis of her distraction by Bottom from the previous tension over the Indian boy.

Now I imagine that this elementary mathematical formulation of a potential sexual pattern in Shakespeare may seem arbitrary, or at best local. So let us apply it to some of the more notable sexual pairings in his plays. Shakespeare's amatory norm of + - attraction appears strongly in the basic pattern of "Twelfth Night." Viola is attracted to Orsino, who sees her only as a boy, while he pursues the inaccessible, mourning Olivia, who is attracted to the doubly-inaccessible pseudo-male Viola. The resulting initial formulation reads thus: Vi+ –Or+ –Ol+ –Vi and is only finally adjusted by intrusion of the marriages of Olivia and Sebastian, and Viola to Orsino.

Another alternative element of the pattern of negative factors precipitating attraction lies in the intrusion of an outside force inhibiting a relationship (such as Egeus intruded on Hermia Lysander). The aging Moor Othello attracts the naïve Venetian Desdemona,

opposed by her father Brabantio and Venetian racism. In "Troilus and Cressida" the Trojan Paris is attracted to the married Greek Helena, and Troilus to the repatriatable Greek Cressida. Romeo pursues the unresponsive Rosaline only to succumb to the greater attractions of the even less accessible Juliet. Egyptian Cleopatra involves the married Roman Antony, and when his wife Fulvia dies, he restores this necessary barrier by promptly marrying Octavia before returning to Cleopatra.

Some of the most noted sexual gyrations are found in "Much Ado," with two pairs of lovers in rapidly reversing mutual attitudes. The more recognized is the reconciliation of Beatrice and Benedick, involving a startling reversal of mutual antipathy, supposedly resulting from deception by their friends. Our formula produces a different explanation. The intensely negative relationship between the pair at the start of "Much Ado" can only be the result of the customary catastrophic outcome associated with a previous double positive, of which the shattering clearly preceded the play's opening. Beatrice says to Benedick: "You always end with a jade's trick: I know you of old." (I.i.136) And later: Don Pedro says "Come, lady, come; you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick." To which Beatrice responds: "Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile; and I gavehim use for it, a double heart for his single one: marry, once before he won it of me with false dice, therefore your grace may well say I have lost it." (II.i.253-9)

Seemingly Benedick felt the need to introduce a higher tension into the previously excessively positive relationship by abandoning Beatrice. In this case the external force modifying this fluctuating pattern is the pressure of friends leading to the imposition of the social contract of marriage. Meanwhile, the seemingly mutual positives of Hero and Claudio are diversified thrice: by the negative intervention of Don Pedro, the plot of Don John, and the pretended death of Hero – a sequence of negatives intensifying Claudio's ultimate commitment to the now alienated Hero.

We can conclude that in Shakespeare the essential prerequisite for a passionate relationship is the existence of a major obstacle: either the resistance or unavailability of the beloved. The supreme example of this is surely the seduction of Lady Anne by Richard of Gloucester, murderer of her husband and father-in-law, beside the very corpse of the latter, which she is accompanying ("Richard III," I.ii). This extreme situation is a catalyst of the highest sexual intensity. Our ultimate formula for a dynamic sexual relation in Shakespeare might well then be $X+ (–)Y$ in which the bracketed factor represent the necessary resistance either in the beloved or from some external obstacle, but one that is replaceable, in the event of a subsequent precarious mutuality, by an unemotional legal marriage contract, functioning as a stabilizing structure imposed by society thus: $X+(-M-)+Y$. Not only does this formula confirm the remarkable consistency of Shakespeare's interpretation of sexual relationships, it suggests that his recurrent pattern of final marriage is not simply a plot convention but an absolute requirement of his sense of marriage as a uniquely stabilizing force in society – a view to which modern sociologists are increasingly committed.

But it also formalizes the paradox of the literary recurrence of "love/hate" relationships between the sexes. In "Pride and Prejudice" the snobbish Darcy is nevertheless compulsively drawn to the aloof Elizabeth, whose detachment is as much overcome by

the intervention of his hostile aunt as by his rescue of her eloping sister, who seems initially to have ensured his inaccessibility to a degenerate family. Obviously, that relationship did not require a magic flower to precipitate it. And indeed neither do the plot variations in "Dream," for some of my students followed up these interpretations by staging a playlet including only the four young lovers, without any fairy or magical intrusions. They did it in modern dress and the resulting progression of love/hate behavior seemed perfectly intelligible and plausible options in any modern love affair, to the rest of the class. Perhaps magic in Shakespeare is merely an objective correlative of various intangible conditioning of human nature, for which he offers the latent formula I have uncovered.

I would like to know if this formulation is now intelligible, acceptable, useful, or invalid. Please send comment to: hmr@berkeley.edu