

Sinful Acts

In *Fire from Heaven*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Flea*, the authors take a stance on men and women committing sinful acts and using it as a main position in their work. They write from a very religious perspective which is probably due to the time period in which their work was written about. They develop this idea in very different perspectives to get their point across. They express this position vividly throughout their work.

David Underdown didn't live in this time period, but his work was a work of history and his ideas coincided with those of the Puritans. He uses these ideas to take a position on the Puritan's side and to better explain the good they were trying to achieve. The Puritans of Dorchester as we have learned about our reading, were a very religious group who wanted to create the perfect society. Their mission in Dorchester was to make extinct all the sinful acts of the townspeople. The struggle they started soon ended in failure. They were a definite influence upon his work. His views of sexual misconduct between married men and women being worse than that between unmarried people probably come from his growing up in a more modern world. The Puritans probably did distinguish some, but it wasn't very prominent or apparent. His makes this point clear in the passage, "Misbehavior among married people was especially serious, as it was likely to disrupt existing families, which were of course regarded as the essential foundations of any ordered, virtuous society(p.66)." The Puritan influence is very prominent in excerpt from the previous quote, "families,... the essential foundations of any ordered, virtuous society(p.66)." Underdown also makes a reference to the others towns in the area and how the Puritan presence made a difference, "It is unlikely that Dorchester people were any more, or any less, loose in their sexual habits than their neighbors in other place. But stories of their misdeeds even in the years of the puritan ascendancy are abundant(p.66)." With this passage the author shows how the presence of the Puritans changed the total view of the town and its people.

Underdown used the sinful acts between men and women to draw out people and draw a greater conclusion. This greater conclusion being the cause of the Puritans and how virtuous they actually were. The point of laying a mark on people is easy to see in the excerpt, "An assault charge against Parkins in July 1629 was followed by a scattering of others for swearing, drinking and absence from church. But it was his sexual promiscuity that really marked him out(p.67)." The charges against were serious and undoubtably frowned upon, but the fact that he was sexually promiscuous is what separated him from society. The fact that he, "In September 1629 he was alleged to be abusing his position as trustee for a neighbor imprisoned for debt, by sleeping with his wife(p.67)." Some other accounts of his misbehavior are in the passage, "In May 1634 the constables found him in a upstairs room at Christopher Jenkin's notoriously disorderly house with an unmarried woman named Sarah Harris, and in the following August he was accused of having raped Mary Jefferies(p.67)." There was a lot of shame in being involved in such acts even if the person did not participate willingly. A case like this was mentioned in the passage, "In January 1635 a more plausible charge of rape was made by Basil Cooke, daughter of a respectable alehousekeeper, William Cooke. Even then the girl's parents waited five days before going to the magistrates, during which time Parkins's friends the Hasselburys (in whose house the incident occurred) offered Basil's mother five pounds to hush it up(p.68)." There were many other incidents like these written in detail throughout *Fire from Heaven*. Through all these documentations Underdown draws up the big picture of how all these incidents of sin helped overthrow the Puritans. He draws his conclusion from the thought that the Puritans just couldn't break the Dorchester townspeople from their sinful habits.

Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing* is a play of passion and deceit.

The plot draws its strength from the thought of a sinful act committed between a man and woman. Shakespeare was a very insightful person to create such complex plots. He creates sort of small play within the play itself. One of the plays within the play *Much Ado About Nothing* is the conflict between Hero and Claudio. The author throws out his passion in the passage spoke by Claudio, Out on thee, seeming! I will write against it.

You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;
But you are more intemperate in your blood
Than Venus, or those pamp' red animals
That rage in savage sensuality (p.96)

In that passage Claudio is denouncing Hero's plea of innocence. He was over come by the idea that Hero had sexual relations with another before. The lines of this passage display his anger fluently. Hero has no voice, she has been denounced throughly by just about everyone. She tries to speak out in her own defense in the passage, "O, God defend me! How am I beset! What kind of catechizing call you this(p.97)." and the in the passage, "I talked with no man at that hour, my lord(p.97)." Though she makes these pleas Don Pedro just slams the door in her face in the passage ,

Why, then are you no maiden. Leonato,
I am sorry you must hear. Upon mine honor
Myself, my brother, and this grieved Count
Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night
Talk with a ruffian at her chamber window
Who hath indeed, most like a liberal villain,
Confessed the vile encounters they have had
A thousand times in secret(p.97).

The truth is finally revealed and Hero's honor is restored, but she is thought to be dead. So, Claudio agrees to marry another and it turned out to be Hero. The author uses Hero's supposable affair to bring the audience into the play with the anger and passion that resulted. Then he finished up the play with a happy ending. The major position of his play was how wrong it would have been for Hero to cheat on him. Shakespeare illustrated this play very well, having followed through so well with Claudio and Hero.

John Donne writes a poem of great beauty in the *Flea*. He uses a flea sucking blood from a man and a woman to justify an act of sin. He presents this in the passage, "Yet this enjoys before it woo, And pampered swells with one blood made of two, And this, alas, is more than we would do(Lines 7-9,*The Flea*)." He describes the flea's blood of being more than one, hence the man and woman. He goes on to say that the bond the flea created is stronger than any marital ceremony. He claims the flea is their marriage and killing it would kill part of them. He conveys this idea in the following excerpts, "This flea is you and I, and this our marriage bed and marriage temple is; Though parents grudge, and you, we are met and cloistered in these living walls of jet. Though use make you apt to kill me, let not to that, self-murder added be, and sacrilege, three sins in killing three(Lines 12-18)." He describes what they have as a bond for life and also a right to do what they please because what they have is beautiful and pure to the fullest extent of life. This act of sin is transformed in Donne's poem to a just and beautiful display of affection between two consenting adults.

These authors use the position of sinful acts as a strengthening point for their corresponding works of literature. They take the same idea and transform it into their basis for their work. David Underdown used this idea to exaggerate the importance of the Puritan presence. Shakespeare took this idea and made it add an element of passion and anger to give a climax to the story. While Donne used this idea bring beauty and love to a unjust act. The idea of a sinful act taking place never changed from author to author, but the way they used it was magnificent to literature itself.
