

***Shakespeare in Love* Discussion Questions**

April 24, 2012

“Playwrights teach us nothing about love. They make it pretty, they make it comical, or they make it lust, but they cannot make it true.”—*Queen Elizabeth*, *Shakespeare in Love*
Given what have read and seen in *The Invention of Love* and *Shakespeare in Love*, to what extent do you agree with this statement?

Tom Stoppard has been known for writing plays that are intellectually dazzling, but his early work largely shies away from love. In fact, Stoppard himself once admitted, “I don't know how to write love. I try to write it properly, and it just comes out embarrassing. It's either childish or it's rude.”¹ *The Invention of Love* and *Shakespeare in Love* are fairly recent attempts to write love stories. Is Stoppard successful? How does Stoppard's treatment of love in the *Shakespeare in Love* compare to his treatment of love in *The Invention of Love*?

How does the film compare to Stoppard's plays? What elements of a Stoppardian play appear in *Shakespeare in Love*?

In October 2011, Disney Theatrical Productions announced that Stoppard was adapting the screenplay for the stage.² In your opinion, can this film be successfully adapted to the stage? Why or why not?

In the film, Shakespeare needed a muse in order to write *Romeo and Juliet*. Similarly, *The Invention of Love* suggests that A.E. Housman's poems stemmed from his unrequited love for Moses Jackson. In other words, the writers needed to be in love in order to write about love. For a playwright to write about something (say, love or loss), is it necessary for him/her to have experienced it firsthand?

In *Shakespeare in Love*, Stoppard incorporates parts of *Romeo and Juliet* (and ideas from *Twelfth Night*) into his own story. Lines from other Shakespeare plays are sprinkled throughout the dialogue, as well. This technique isn't new, of course—most notably, he has borrowed from Shakespeare in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Dogge's Hamlet*, and *Cahoot's Macbeth*. Why the obsession with Shakespeare? What conclusions can we draw about Stoppard's attitude toward Shakespeare?

¹ Source: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/e/a/1999/02/14/STYLE14438.dtl&ao=all#ixzz1spPvlv3R>

²Source: <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118044864?categoryid=15&cs=1&cmpid=RSS%7CNews%7CLatestNews>

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