

The Role of Shakespeare in the Establishment of British Theater

Dr. V. HANUMANTHAI AH

M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Principal

Veda and Sanskrit College, Mulapet, Nellore-524201, SPSR Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.

I. INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare, commonly known as the Bard of Avon and frequently referred to as England's national poet, was an English playwright, actor, and poet who was born on April 26, 1564, and died on April 23, 1616. He was a well-known member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men starting in 1594 and was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Shakespeare composed plays in his twenties that depicted the whole spectrum of human emotions and conflicts, but the written record offers little insight into how his working life influenced his work. William Shakespeare's plays are well-known worldwide and have been performed for more than 400 years in numerous towns, cities, and metropolises. However, there is significant uncertainty about William Shakespeare's personal background. There are two primary sources that provide historians with a basic outline of his life. One source is his works, plays, poems and sonnets, and the other is official documentation such as church and court records. However, these provide only brief sketches of specific events in his life and provide little information about the person who experienced these events.

HISTORY PLAYS

William Shakespeare experimented with plays in three genres during the start of his career: comedy, history, and tragedy. As his career developed, he improved these pieces. But during his early career, history was the genre that captured his interest the most. Undoubtedly, England's unexpected triumph over the renowned Spanish Armada in 1588 sparked interest in the topic as suitable material for play. This triumph fueled the public's increasing interest in seeing a description of the pivotal conflicts and intrigues that molded England's fate as the preeminent Protestant nation in Europe.

The astute and ambitious Elizabeth I, the "maiden queen" of England, who was widely regarded as the flower of the Tudor line, bolstered this position of power. Henry V, the Lancaster monarch who played a key role in establishing the English empire in France, apparently foreshadowed Elizabeth's strength of character and patriotic spirit. Many critics believe that Shakespeare wrote the history to trace the course of events that led to the Tudors becoming England's greatest kings and queens. Since the Tudors traced their lineage back to the Lancasters, it was an easy move for Shakespeare to flatter his sovereign and delight his audience with nationalistic spectacles that reinforced the belief that England was the promised land. Whatever his reasons for composing historical plays, Shakespeare must surely be seen as an innovator of a form for which there was no model in classical or medieval drama. However, he undoubtedly learned a lot from his immediate predecessors - especially from Christopher Marlowe, whose *Edward II* (c. 1592) dealt with the theme of a weak king who almost destroyed the kingdom with his selfish and self-indulgent behavior. From Marlowe, Shakespeare also inherited the idea that the purpose of a history play was to revive the moral dilemmas of power politics and apply those lessons to contemporary government. Contemporaries heeded such lessons, as is amply illustrated by Elizabeth's remark when reading the life of one of her predecessors: —I am Richard II.

Shakespeare's contribution to the genre of history plays is represented by two tetralogies (two series of four plays each), each covering a period of English history. He wrote two other plays dealing with English kings, *King John* and *Henry VIII*, but they are not specifically connected to the tetralogies in theme or structure. *Edward III*, written sometime between 1589 and 1595, on the other hand, is closely related to the second tetralogy in terms of theme, structure, and history. *Edward III* is the grandfather of *Richard II*. and his victory in France is repeated by *Henry V*. Muriel Bradbrook has pointed out the structural similarities between *Edward III*. and *Henry V*. Like the second tetralogy as a whole, *Edward III* deals with the education of a prince. *King Edward*, like *Prince Hal*, first neglects his duties and endangers the realm by putting personal pleasure above the needs of his country. The Countess of Salisbury begins to educate him in responsibility, and *Queen Philippa* completes the process by teaching him compassion. By the end of the play, *Edward* has become what Shakespeare calls *Henry V*, "the mirror of all Christian kings."

THE ROLE OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ENGLISH DRAMA

The time after James I's rule until the theaters closed in 1642 is also included in the term Elizabethan drama, as is the start of poetic drama (1588–1600). Nonetheless, contemporary critics often call the decline Caroline drama and the mature period Jacobean drama. Going back to this difference, Elizabethan theater would comprise the works of Lyle, Peele, Greene, Marlowe, and Shakespeare's early plays. William Shakespeare, regarded as England's national poet and the greatest English-speaking author in history, wrote more plays than any other playwright. His work has had a significant impact on later theater, with researchers reinterpreting the million words of text he wrote and students memorizing his lyrical lyrics. His work is still honored at many theater festivals across the world. The "Bard of Avon" was born into a poor family in Elizabethan England, produced a number of sonnets and at least 37 plays, established the renowned Globe Theater, and contributed to the evolution of the English language.

In Shakespeare's day, the difference between tragedy and comedy was very crucial. Although some of Shakespeare's tragic figures, like Romeo or Macbeth, clearly meet Aristotle's definition of this kind, Elizabethan tragedy was the well-known tale of a great man or woman brought low by hubris or fate. Shakespeare's First Folio separates the plays into three genres: comedy, tragedy, and Histories. The latter category includes plays that chronicle the lives of English kings, but these plays themselves frequently veered toward the comic (the Falstaffian subplots of both parts of Henry IV. The Pistol-Fluellen meeting of Henry V.) or tragic (such as Richard II or Richard III).

Almost from the beginning, then, Shakespeare's method consisted in blending the previously antagonistic visions of comedy and tragedy in ways that still seem novel and surprising. There are more laughs in the tragedy Hamlet than in a comedy like *The Merchant of Venice*, and some modern critics go so far as to regard King Lear as at once the height of Shakespeare's tragic achievement and a kind of divine comedy, or even an absurd farce. *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy constructed from comic material (the story of young lovers trying to overcome the obstacle of parental disapproval) and in Shakespeare's later tragedy of romantic love Antony and Cleopatra there is a lot of poignant humor at the expense of the middleaged lovers who struggle to maintain their passion usually associated with adolescence. Some of Shakespeare's comedies—*Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*—seem so far removed from the optimism usually associated with the genre that they have been qualified as "problem comedies." Shakespeare therefore united the three main streams of literature: verse, poetry and drama. He imparted his eloquence and variety to the versification of the Old English language, yielding the highest expressions with the flexibility of language. The second, sonnets and poetry, were structurally linked. He added economy and intensity to the language. In the third and most important area, drama, he saved the language from obscurity and vastness and infused it with actuality and liveliness.

Shakespeare's work in prose, poetry and drama marked the beginning of the modernization of the English language by introducing words and expressions, style and form to the language. The blank verse of his early plays is quite different from his later plays. He is often beautiful, but his sentences tend to start, pause and end at the end of lines, with the risk of monotony. Once Shakespeare had mastered traditional blank verse, he began to interrupt and change its flow. This technique unleashes a new power and flexibility in poetry in plays like *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. For example, Shakespeare uses it to express the confusion in Hamlet's mind:

"Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly— And prais'd be rashness for it—let us know Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well ..." Hamlet, Act 5,

While it is true that Shakespeare created many new words (the Oxford English Dictionary records over 2,000), an article in *National Geographic* points to the findings of historian Jonathan Hope, who wrote in "Shakespeare's 'Native English'" that "Victorian scholars who read the texts for the first editions of the OED, they paid special attention to Shakespeare: his texts were more thoroughly read and more often quoted, so that he is often credited with the first use of words or meanings of words that may actually be found in other writers". However, William Shakespeare created a new epoch in world literature. The ideas of the Renaissance, the ideology of humanism are expressed by him in the most realistic way. Shakespeare believes in man. He hates injustice. His games became popular all over the world because of his realistic characters. The history of English drama is reflected in Shakespeare's works. The development of his characters sets him apart from his predecessors (Marlowe and others). Shakespeare's characters do not remain static, they change as the action progresses.

Needless to say, Shakespeare's contribution to the development of English drama is incalculable. His work on the King James Bible alone shaped the imagination of generations of people. When it comes to tragedy, it is quite important for several reasons. First, tragedy was mainly a Western invention of the Greeks, but it was lost for a long time. Some scholars even assume that no one but the Greeks could have written a proper tragedy. Perhaps this was due to historical circumstances. In light of this, it is significant that Shakespeare wrote successful tragedies. For this reason it can be said that he revived the Greek form for generations. Even ordinary

people of that time understood his speech. The soliloquies in his plays are not long; the dialogues are true to life. Many famous English sayings come from his works.

MAIN DRAMA

Henry VI, Part I, wr. 1589-1590, ex. 1592, pb. 1623; Edward III, d. C. 1589-1595, pb. 1596; Henry VI., part II, pr. C. 1590-1591, pb. 1594; Henry VI., part III, pr. C. 1590-1591, pb. 1595; Richard III, pr. C. 1592-1593, pb. 1597; Comedy of Errors, pr. C. 1592-1594, pb. 1623; Taming of the Shrew, pr. C. 1593-1594, pb. 1623; Titus Andronicus, ob., pb. 1594; Two Gentlemen of Verona, pr. C. 1594-1595, pb. 1623; Love's Labour's Lost, pr. C. 1594-1595 (revised 1597 for judicial enforcement), pb. 1598; Romeo and Juliet, pr. C. 1595-1596, pb. 1597; Richard II, pr. C. 1595-1596, pb. 1600; A Midsummer Night's Dream, pr. C. 1595-1596, pb. 1600; King John, pr. C. 1596-1597, pb. 1623; Merchant of Venice, pr. C. 1596-1597, pb. 1600; Henry IV, part I, pr. C. 1597-1598, pb. 1598; The Merry Wives of Windsor, pr. 1597 (revised ca. 1600-1601), pb. 1602; Henry IV, part II, pr. 1598, pb. 1600; Much ado about nothing, pr. C. 1598-1599, pb. 1600; Jindřich V., pr. C. 1598-1599, pb. 1600; Julius Caesar, b. C. 1599-1600, pb. 1623; As you like it, pr. C. 1599-1600, pb. 1623; Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, pr.

C. 1600-1601, pb. 1603; Twelfth Night: Or, What You Want, pr. C. 1600-1602, pb. 1623; Troilus and Cressida, pr. C. 1601-1602, pb. 1609; All's well that ends well, pr. C. 1602-1603, pb. 1623; Othello, Moor of Venice, pr. 1604, pb. 1622 (revised 1623); Measure for Measure, dia. 1604, pb. 1623; King Lear, pr. C. 1605-1606, pb. 1608; Macbeth, pr. 1606, pb. 1623; Antony and Cleopatra, pr. C. 1606-1607, pb. 1623; Coriolanus, pr. C. 1607-1608, pb. 1623; Timon of Athens, pr. C. 1607-1608, pb. 1623; Pericles, Prince of Tyria, pr. C. 1607-1608, pb. 1609; Cymbeline, pr. C. 1609-1610, pb. 1623; A winter's tale, pr. C. 1610-1611, pb. 1623; Storm, pr. 1611, pb. 1623; Two noble relatives, pr. C. 1612-1613, pb. 1634 (with John Fletcher); Henry VIII., pr. 1613, pb. 1623 (with Fletcher).

ANOTHER MAJOR WORK

Poetry: Venus and Adonis, 1593; The Rape of Lucrece, 1594; The Passionate Pilgrim, 1599 (a collection of poems by Shakespeare and others); Phoenix and Tortoise, 1601; A Lover's Complaint, 1609; Sonnets, 1609.

ANALYSIS OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Shakespeare's two portraits show two aspects of his personality. He was extremely curious in people's intentions and behavior, on the one hand. He was able to compose his masterpieces and create characters that are more well-known than some of the most significant persons in global history because to his curiosity and linguistic prowess. Shakespeare, on the other hand, was driven only by bourgeois instincts, reflecting his middle-class upbringing; he was more interested in accumulating property and enhancing his social position in Stratford than he was in ensuring that his plays would be preserved for future generations. Had his partners not published the First Folio, there would have been no Shakespeare as he is known today: still playing and enjoying himself, the most studied and translated writer, the greatest poet and dramatist in English and perhaps any language.

Shakespeare's success may be attributed to at least two other factors in addition to his talent at developing a wide range of endearing characters. One is his passion for experimenting with words, from the most rudimentary pun to some of the best poetry in the world. Although his love of vocabulary can occasionally make him challenging to read, particularly for younger pupils, a well-played rendition usually makes the content obvious. Its openness—the lack of any restricting dogma, morality, or point of view—is its second quality. Shakespeare was able to depict a wide variety of human conduct, including the good, the evil, and the unconcerned. Thus, the universality of his appeal might be explained by the expansiveness of his vision and language. Shakespeare has frequently been criticized for not adhering to any didactic viewpoint. He does not, however, have no obligations; rather, it is focused on what is human. Renaissance humanism, a blend of Christianity and classicism, is the foundation of his expansive perspective and is perhaps the finest evolution of the Western intellect. Shakespeare's demeanor, which, like his bourgeois tendencies, defies the romantic notion of the artist, clearly reflected the same generous view. Ben Jonson, a friendly opponent and ferocious satirist, said it best when he remarked, "He was truly honest and of an open and free nature," and "He was not of age but forever." His contemporaries frequently lauded him.

II. CONCLUSION

Shakespeare is regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time because of his plays, sonnets, and diction. More people see his plays than those of any other author. We wouldn't have common expressions like "clean as driven snow" or "plain sight" without Shakespeare. We wouldn't want well-known quotes like "damn Macbeth" or "your own true self" from Hamlet. He is still known globally because of this.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Reich, John J.; Cunningham, Lawrence S. (2005), *Culture And Values: A Survey of the Humanities*, Thomson Wadsworth, p. 102, ISBN 9780534582272
- [2]. "WilliamShakespeare". *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*.*Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved 14 June 2007.
- [3]. "William Shakespeare". *MSN Encarta Online Encyclopedia*. Archived from the original on 10 April 2008. Retrieved 14 June 2007.
- [4]. "William Shakespeare". *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 14 June 2007.
- [5]. Chambers, Edmund Kerchever (1944). *Shakespearean Gleanings*. Oxford University Press.
- [6]. The *Literary Encyclopedia* entry on William Shakespeare by Lois Potter, University of Delaware, accessed 22 June 2006
- [7]. *The Columbia Dictionary of Shakespeare Quotations*, edited by Mary Foakes and Reginald Foakes, June 1998.
- [8]. Frye, Roland Mushat *Shakespeare* Routledge, 2005, page 118.
- [9]. Levenson, Jill L. "Introduction" to *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, Oxford University Press, 2000, pages 49–50. In her discussion about gamma the play's genre, Levenson quotes scholar H.B. Charlton *Romeo and Juliet* creating a new genre of "romantic tragedy."
- [10]. Clemen, Wolfgang H., *Shakespeare's Soliloquies* Routledge, 1987, page 179.
- [11]. Millgate, Michael and Wilson, Keith, *Thomas Hardy Reappraised: Essays in Honour of Michael Millgate* University of Toronto Press, 2006, 38.
- [12]. Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.
- [13]. Brown, John Russell. *Shakespeare: The Tragedies*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- [14]. Danson, Lawrence. *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. [15]. De Grazia, Margreta, and Stanley Wells, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to*