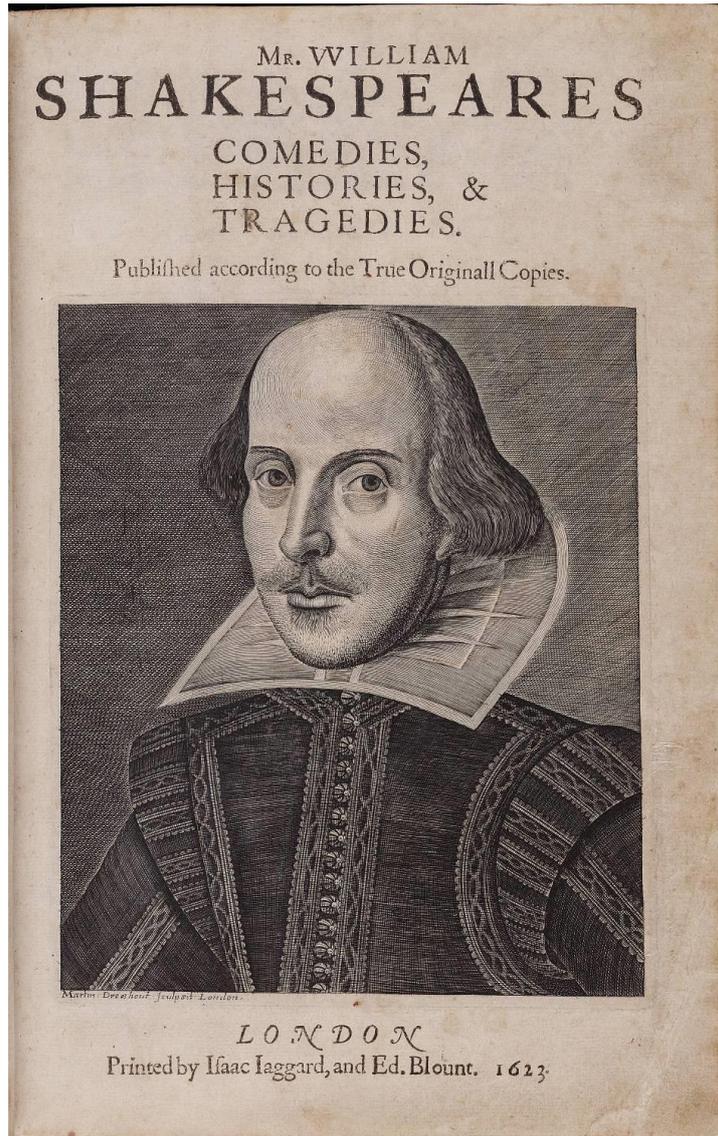


Shakespeare's Plays Reflect the Cultural and Social Conditions of the Elizabethan Age

Dr. R. C. Vasuki

A. P. C. Mahalaxmi College for Women, Thoothukudi, India



Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare

Acute Power of Observation

To understand the personality of Shakespeare you have to go to his place. From an attentive study of his place we find that Shakespeare was endowed with an acute power of

observation of all phenomena of life. Nothing escaped his burning gaze. The features of every phenomenon were registered in his mind. Habits, characters, countenance, costume, landscape, emotions, seasons, state affairs, events witnessed, reports heard and chronicle read, and traffic in the streets and stars in the heaven, misery and pomp, wise and honour, health and sickness, vigour, frailty, stench and sweet smells, cunning and pity, birds and animals and games- Every shape and condition and element became an image in his mind for use of his art. He was a handsome poet with ready wit and a well-shaped man. The most admirable quality of Shakespeare- the man is his broad humanity. This paper attempts to highlight Shakespeare's culture and society.

Bright Women Characters

Shakespeare reflected the culture and society of his day especially in his comedies. He has given intelligent and sometimes powerful female characters. Women are shown as the root and heart of matter. He has pictured characters from Cleopatra to Miranda covering a full span and a wide range of characters with virtues and brightened grace of women. No one can ever forget glittering heroines like Rosalines, Violas and Portias. They are supporters to put man in their place - charming and rebellious.

Love and Marriage

A recurring theme, especially in his comedies, was love and marriage. Shakespeare reflected the culture and society of his day (and how it was changing) through his examination of the ways in which his characters decided or gained permission to marry and the ways in which love affected this choice. In Shakespeare's day, love was still pretty inconsequential a factor when it came to marriage. For the most part, marriages were still arranged by families as a sort of business deal or, if the families were important enough, a political alliance.

Love was not, generally speaking, the motivating force for marriage in the world around Shakespeare, yet in many of his plays (and most all of his comedies) lovers are attempting to defy parental or societal conventions and make their own decisions about whom they will marry based upon love and not social or political connection. This was a very new idea at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century, and, as such, was a fascinating subject for Shakespeare to examine in his plays.

Examples

Some of the examples of this in the plays that jump out are Romeo and Juliet in the play of the same title, Lysander and Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Helena and Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well* (in this case, Helena tries to manipulate political connections in order to marry for love), Valentine and Silvia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Othello and Desdemona in *Othello*, and Bianca and Lucentio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The list could go on, but this gives us an idea of how pervasive the theme of marrying for love versus social convention was in Shakespeare's plays.

Revealing Social Flaws

Shakespeare wrote in detail about the way that society functioned, in fact, he revealed the flaws in the way that society functioned by developing characters who acted outside the expectations of society. He is famous for creating strong female characters who stood up to social expectations to express themselves and attain their needs (Kate from the *Taming of the Shrew*). He laughed at the absurdity of love and relationships (*Midsummer Night's Dream*), exposed lust and greed (*Hamlet*) and highlighted the dominance of the human spirit (*Twelfth Night*). Most importantly, he showed that often, a character's greatest strength is also his or her greatest weakness (*Hamlet*, or any character, for that matter).

Influenced by the World around Him

Shakespeare was also influenced by the world around him. He describes the sights and sounds of London in his plays. His works include observations about current political struggles, the fear of diseases, and the popular language of the city's tradesmen and other professionals. Shakespeare's knowledge of the English countryside is also clear. His works include descriptions of deep forests, local flowers, and the ancient popular traditions of rural people.

Some Examples How Shakespeare Impacted World around Him

It would be impossible to list all of the ways in which Shakespeare's works have influenced world culture. But we can give a few important examples. The first example would have to include his great effect on the English language. During his time, the English language was changing. Many new words from other languages were being added.

Shakespeare used his sharp mind and poetic inventiveness to create hundreds of new words and rework old ones. For example, he created the verb "to torture" and the noun forms of "critic," "mountaineer" and "eyeball." Many common expressions in English come from his plays. These include "pomp and circumstance" from "Othello," "full circle" from "King Lear" and "one fell swoop" from "Macbeth."

With the words of praise by Ben Jonson, a playwright who lived during Shakespeare's time we could say that he could hold us by magic through the ages.

"Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age, but for all time!"

Works Consulted

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Dr. R. C. Vasuki
Principal and Associate Professor of English
A. P. C. Mahalaxmi College for Women
Thoothukudi 628 002
Tamilnadu
India
rcvasuki@gmail.com