

Review Article

An Overview of Factors Influenced Shakespeare's Life & Works

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INTRODUCTION

The term Renaissance seems to have been first used by French historian Jules Michelet in 'historic de France'. It was then immediately taken up by other scholars. The term renaissance means "rebirth". The epoch of European history that it known as the renaissance was the period of the revival of learning, with the consequent impetus to literature and art that occurred in the fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. For six hundred years after the death of St. Augustine, Europe was enveloped in a mist of intellectual darkness, the ancient classic learning being preserved in only a few monasteries." During the Elizabethan age there was the revival of classical learning. It is generally said that the new learning came about through the capture of Constantinople by the turks in 1453. The scholar fled to Italy which in turn became the fountain head of the new learning. In the later half of fifteenth century France, England and Germany sent their scholars to drink this wonderful new spring of inspiration. Because of this new learning not only the Poetry of Homer but philosophy of Plato, and the criticism and science of Aristotle were revealed to the wondering eyes of awakening west. Before the end of fifteenth century the intellect of a young man. The renaissance brought the new spirit of inquiry into the ideal of the church. Saturated with the new spirit of Renaissance, the religious minded men criticised the faith of the church by the light of their new reading of the Christian scriptures. Thus there gradually came into being schism from Rome on such question as transubstantiation, and supreme authority of Pope. Renaissance intellectuals distinguished themselves by their flagrant antiauthoritarianism. In England one was not opposed to the other both the forces blended and cooperated. The Reformation in England tend to be humanistic and renaissance was not divorced from morality, as it was in Italy. A great uplifting of the spirit was produced by these two movements. In the first place the

mediaeval obsession with death and the other world was replaced by the very joy of living. Secondly, quest for knowledge unbound and unexplored became the keynote of the age. It the last decade of the fifteenth century Columbus and Cabot discovered America and Vasco-de-Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope. As the Sixteenth century advanced more and more ships crossed the Atlantic to return with riches and wonders, man had no longer nay need to look to past for glories. These adventures exercised a great influence on literature. Shakespeare's. The tempest tell us a magic Island which was the product of freshness of imagination created by the new Voyages.

SEARCH FOR CAREER

It is certain that a few years after his marriage roughly, about 1584, Shakespeare let his native town to seek his fortune. Why he did so is not known. The most popular explanation, which appeared after his death, is that, he was convicted of poaching on the estate of a local magnate, Sir Thomas Lucy, and that he fled to escape consequences, Then, until 1592, when he reappears as a rising actor, Shakespeare disappear from his view. During this period he is said to have wandered through the country, finally coming to London. Where he performed various menial offices, including holding that of horses at stage door. On the face of them such tales are not improbable, but they grew up when the dramatist had become a half mythical figure. The most recent attempt (1949) to bridge this gap in Shakespeare's life is a suggestion that he may have spent much of the time in the low countries on service with the armies of the Earl of Leicester.

INFLUENCES ON SHAKESPEARE

One of the most important features which makes Shakespeare a greatest- Dramatist is the enormous receptivity of poet and the influence of other writers from whom he assimilated the vast and varied mass of information and made his own. He has marvelously imaginative and creative mind, but he invents few, He simply take a on old play or an old poem, makes it over quickly and lo ! this old familiar material glows with the deepest thoughts and the tendrest feelings than ennoble our humanity and each new generation of man find it more wonderful than the last"1 Shakespeare's genius was flexible to a marvelous degree. He adapted himself to the most diverse material, and seemed to use it all with equal odour and joy.

PRINTING AND EDUCATION

Printing which Caxton had introduced in previous ages, had its full effect. Education naturally received a great impetus from the new learning. Previously, education had been in hands of church. But with the Renaissance, began secular education. A reading Public was formed during the Elizabethan age and the new literature was welcomed by the people. In this age the tremendous impetus received from the Renaissance from the reformation and from the exploration of new worlds. It was marked by a strong national spirit, by patriotism, by religious tolerance, by social content, by intellectual progress and by unbounded enthusiasm. Life and more life and its achieving joys and raptures held them fascinated. They aimed to draining the cup of life to the dregs. To exhaust all possibilities of life, material and spiritual, to enjoy all taht life may yield, and to know all that life may mean this goal the Elizabeth set before them. They had very sound view about education. No academic education would do for them. Education was broad based upon all the needs of human nature. Music on the one hand, proficiency in field sport on the other, were parts of education. Education too was towards increasing the pleasure of the cultivated senses as well as of cultivated mind.

RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS

The most important characteristic feature of the age was the comparative religious tolerance, which was largely due to Quen's influence. The frightful excesses of the religious war known as the thirty year's war on the continent found no parallel in England. Upon her accession Elizabeth found the whole kingdom divided against, itself; the North was largely catholic, while southern countries were as strongly Protestant. Scotland had followed the reformation in its own intense way, while Ireland remained true to its old religious traditions, and both countries were openly rebellious. The court made up of both parties, witnessed the revival intrigues of those

who sought to gain the royal favour. It was due partly to the intense absorption of men's minds in religious questions that the preceding Century, though an age of advancing learning, produced Scarcely any literature worthy of the name.

THE NEW CLASSICAL INFLUENCE

The renaissance implied a great perception of beauty and polish in green and Latin scholars. This beauty and this polish were sought by Renaissance men of letters to be incorporated in their native literature. Further, It meant the birth of a kind of imitative tendency implied in term "classicism" E. Albery: "By the time of Elizabethan age, there was an ardent revival in the study of Greek, which brought a dazzling light into many dark places of intellect.1 "The new classical influences were a great benefit. They tempered and polished the earlier rudeness of English literature. In the sphere of imagination, the influence of the classical literature was great, especially thorough its mythology. The poets seized on the ancient myth, with all the eagerness of children.

TRANSLATION

The age witnessed translation into English of important foreign books. Legois and Cazamian remarks "The rich soil was fertilized by a deep layer of translation. by 1579 many of great books of ancient and modern times had been translated into English almost all of them by 1603, the end of Elizabeth's reign. Some of the translations formed current reading and some became as popular as the writing of English authors" Many translations were as popular as original works. Sir Thomas North translated Plutarch's lives. By the quality of his idiomatic English produced a really national book. With a less sure and a more fanciful touch, but with a style which is full of go, John Flario in 1603 gave Montaigne's essays. They were the most widely known of foreign productions. No. less popular were the translation in Verse e.g., Metaphores by Arthur Golding, Aristo's Orlando Furioo Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata translated by Richard Carew. Through translations every thing was placed at the service of the reader who know none but his mother tongue. Side by side with these patent and frankly avowed translations, dissimulated borrowing and plagiarizing were frequent in the period.

ABUNDANCE OF OUTPUT

After the lean years of the preceding epoch, the prodigal output of the Elizabethan age is almost embarrassing. The interest shown in literary subject is quite amazing to a more chastened generation. The historical and political conditions of the country encouraged a healthy production

of literature. Pamphlets and treatise were freely written. Some times writers used of indulge in abuses which were of personal and scurrilous character. The literary question became almost of national importance. To a great extent the controversies of the day were puerile enough, but at least they indicated a lively interest in literature of the period.

THE NEW ROMANTIC ELEMENT

The romantic quest is for the remote, the wonderful, and the beautiful. All these desires were abundantly fed during the Elizabethan age, which is the first and greatest romantic epoch of English literature. On the one hand, there was the revolt against the past, whose grasp was too feeble to hold in restraint the lusty youth of the Elizabethan age; on the other, there was a daring and resolute spirit of adventure in literary as well as in other regions and most important of all there was an unmistakable buoyancy and freshness in the strong wind of the spirit. It was the ardent youth of English literature, and achievement was worthy of it.

Among of foreign influence one was incontestably dominant, that of Italy. Elizabethan literature which come to be the expression of the national genius, had its birth in Italianism. The literature of England was enriched by an immense looting of Italian treasures, and the spoils carried back to the island were there exhibited, not only as marvellous work of art, but also object of reprobation. The meeting between the English and the Italian spirit which had already enriched Chaucer's poetry brought a wealth of splendor to sixteenth century. Italy gave the keynote to the new culture, and Elizabethan courtiers found the principles of refinement in the *Crlegiano* of Castiglione, translated by Thomas Hobyin 1561. The development of the theater and of English novel owes much to the stories and lively dramatic tales of Baccacio, Cinthoio, Bendello, Staroparola, and others.

THE SPIRIT OF INDEPENDENCE

Though there was influences of the foreign literature, yet the strict application of the rules was over looked. In this respect Emile. Legouis and Cazamian has observed: "for all the extensive borrowing from abroad and avowed respect for ancient precedents and traditional rules of conduct, and in spite of passing fashions which temporarily made a law of the strange of the centric, the general impression conveyed is one of frank and free boldness. A wide initiative was felt to individuals."¹ Shakespeare borrowed freely, but by the alembic of his creative imagination he transformed the dross into Gold. Spenser introduced Spenserian stanza, and from his works we get the impression of inventiveness and intrepidity. On the

whole the outlook of the writers during this age was broad and independent.

PROSE

For the first time prose rises to a position of first, rate importance. The most important prose writers who exhibits well the influence of Renaissance on English Prose are Erasmus, sir Thomas More, Lyly, and Sidney. We find them markedly influenced both in their style and thought content by the revival of the antique classical learning. Sidney in *Areadia*, Lyly in *Euphues*, and Hooker in the *Laws of Ecclesiastical polity* write an English which is away from the language of common speech, and is either too heavy laden. however in his sententiousness and cogency comes near Tacitus and turns away from the prolixity, diffuseness, and ornamentation associated with ciceronian prose. Bacon stands as a representative of the materialistic, Machiavellian facet of the Renaissance. He combines in him the dispassionate pursuit of truth and the keen desire for material advance.

POETRY

Poetry enjoyed its heyday during the Elizabethan age. the whole age lived in a state of poetic fervour. Songs, lyrics and sonnets were produced in plenty, and English became a nest of singing birds. In versification there was a marked improvement. Sir Thomas wyatt and Earl of surrey were pioneers of the new poetry in England. They gave English poetry a new sense of grace, dignity, delicacy, and harmony. Further they were highly influenced by the love poetry of Petrarch and they did their best to imitate it. It goes to the credit of wyatt to have introduced the sonnet in English literature and surrey to have first written blank verse. Both the sonnet and blank verse were later to be practised by Vast of the best English poets. Melody and Pictorialism were introduced in poetry by Spenser. He has been recognised as the touch stone of English Poetic Sensibility. In him we have fine expression of Renaissance ideal of adventure and active life which is expressed in "The faerie Queen", and nationalism in *Shepherd's Calendar*. Associated with Spenser are the minor poets, Thomas Sackville, Michael Drayton, and George Chapman. Donne was the most independent of the Elizabethan poets. His poems like a *Valediction: for bidding mourning, Aire and Angels* and the *Extasie* are all intensely personal and reveal a powerful and complex being.

DRAMA

The revival of ancient classical learning scored in first clear impact of English drama in the middle of sixteenth century. Previous to this there had been a pretty vigorous native

tradition of drama, particularly comedy. This tradition had its origin in the liturgical drama and had progressed through the miracle and the mystery, and later the morality, to the interlude, The first English regular tragedy Gorboduc and comedy Ralph Roister Doister were very much imitations of classical tragedy and comedy. Gorboduc is a slavish imitation of senecan tragedy. Like senecan tragedy, it has revenge as the tragic motive, has most of its important incidents (mostly murders) narrated on the stage by messengers, has much of rhetoric and verbose declamation, has a ghost among its dramatic personae, and so forth. It is indeed a good instance of the "blood and thunder" Kind of tragedy. Ralph Roister is modeled upon Plautus and Terence. Later on, the "University wits" Struck a note of independence in their dramatic work. In their hands drama began to realize its latent potentialities, and the exuberance and vitality which typify Elizabethan Drama first made themselves felt. In their imagination they were all fired by the new literature which showed them new dimensions of human capability. They were humanist through and through. all of them Lyly, Green, Peele, Nash, Lodge, Marlow and Kyd-show in their dramatic work not, of course, a slavish tendency to ape the ancients but a chemical action of renaissance learning on the native genius fired by the enthusiasm of discovery and aspiration so typical of Elizabethan age. The university with prepared the ground for Shakespeare and made notable contribution to the growth of Drama during Elizabethan Age. Thus the Elizabethan drama is not a Minerva like creation, springing full grown from the head of one man; it is rather an orderly through rapid development in which many men bore the past. with regard to the development of different dramatic types, tragedy developed first; in Shakespeare all kinds received attention, tragedy most of all. In post-Shakespearean drama light comedy was a very popular species, Partly because the tragic note of exalted pity had degenerated into melodrama and horrors. A special work is perhaps necessary on the masque, which during this time had a brief but brilliant career. The masque is a sort of dramatic performance composed for some particular festive occasions distinguished by ornate stage sitting, by lyric, music and dancing, and by allegorical characters. It finds a place in Shakespeare's Tempest and other plays; it is strongly developed in the works of Johnson, Fletcher and other poets of the time; and it attains climax during the next age in the Comus (1637) of Milton.

MAKING OF SHAKESPEARE'S MIND

To understand Shakespeare and his work it is necessary for us to study the growth of Shakespeare's mind and Art. according to Dr. Edward Dowden "Shakespeare in 1590, Shakespeare in 1600, and Shakespeare in 1610, was one and the same living entity; but the adolescent

Shakespeare differed from the adult, and again from Shakespeare in the supremacy of his ripened manhood, as much as the slender stem, graceful and pliant, spreading its first leaves to the sunshine of May, differs from the moving expanse of greenery, visible a century later, which is hard to comprehend and probe with the eye in its infinite details, Shakespeare marvelously increased from year to year. He grew in wisdom and in knowledge not less but more than other men. He was not merely a centre for drifting capital of knowledge. Each faculty expended, and become more energetic, while at the same time the structural arrangement of the man's whole nature became more complex and involved."1 Shakespeare's power of thought increased steadily as years went by, both in sure grasp of the known, and in brooding intensity of gaze upon the unknown. His emotions instead of losing their energy and subtlety as youth deepened into manhood.

BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

It is a strange irony that we know little about world's most famous write, Wiliam Shakespeare. We move in a atmosphere of guess work illumined by few occasional flashes of history. He was bon in Stratford-upon-Avon, in Warwickshire, on April 23rd 1564. He was the son of John Shakespeare a prosperous tradesman of the town, who a little later became its high Bailiff or Mayor. His mother Mary Arden was a daughter of a well to do fame of Warwickshire. The body may have attended the grammar-school of the town, though Ben Jonson, himself a competent Scholar, affirmed that Shakespeare knew "small Latin and less Greek." Financial misfortunes presently overtook his father, and when he was about fourteen, he was taken from School that he might help the family by earning money on his own account. In year 1582, before he was nineteen years of age, he married Anney Hathaway, who was eight years his senior, the daughter of well to do woman of neighbouring village of hotter. This marriage was hasty and speculation has busied itself over the some what ill assorted match. Three children were born to him Susannah and the twins, Judith and Hamnet. Two of their children Susannah and Judith, married. But only one of Shakespeare's grand children reached maturity, and with her death in 1669 of 1670 the poet's family became extinct.

ROLE OF HAMLET

Hamlet is most widely read, the most discussed and probably the most beloved of all Shakespeare's plays. The hero is, perhaps the most wonderfully conceived character in all literature. As long as men are superior to their environment, as long as they fail in action because they are great in imagination, as long as they fail in action because they are great in imagination, as long as

happiness is out of the reach of those who need it most, and the good things of the world turn sour to the taste because of one defect which cannot be done away-so long will readers find in the poetry of Hamlet some consolation for the harshness of life.

KING LEAR PLAY

Lear is the finest Specimen of deep tragedy in English drama, and for that very reason it is one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. In King Lear, it was chiefly the power of monstrous and apparent cureless evil in the great world that filled Shakespeare's soul with horror, and perhaps forced him some times to yield to the infirmity of misanthropy and despair to cry no, no, no life, and to take refuge in the thought that this fitful fever is a dream that must soon fade into a dream less sleep; until, to free himself from the perilous stuff that weighed upon his heart, he summoned to his aid his so potent art; and brought this stuff into the stormy music of his greatest poem which seems to cry.

THE CAUSE OF TRAGEDY IN MACBETH

Shakespeare's third great tragedy. Macbeth has taken rank with many critics as the greatest of his dramatic achievements. Macbeth is indeed the tragedy of unchecked will destroying itself. Though Macbeth, the hero of the tragedy, is a man of rich endowments, yet he is none the less a criminal who stops at nothing to gain his end. The great moral issue at stake are not revealed at first. The whole action is raised to a supernatural plane by the appearance of the witches. Macbeth's ambitious wife fashions her husband to desperate deeds for going power. No sooner has Macbeth won the crown than he begins to pay his debt to heaven. He advances in the path of evil.

OTHELLO PERCEPTION

Othello is, in the popular conception, simply the tragedy of jealousy as Macbeth is simply the tragedy of ambition. Naïve readers and critic's fancy in their innocence that Shakespeare, at a certain period of his life, determined to study one or two interesting and dangerous passions, and to put us on guard against them. Following out this intention, he wrote a play on jealousy and all the evils that attend it. In Othello there are a number of different kinds of jealousy. Bianca is jealous of her supposed rival in Cassio's affections; Roderigo, the 'gulled gentleman', begins as an absurd but honorable lover, and under the influence of jealousy ends as a potential murderer; and as we have seen, both; the villain and the hero are jealous." Othello is a complex story of how a noble and upright but isolated man is subjected to temptation in the area of his being where he is most vulnerable – his difference in race.

In a way Othello is much less a study of jealousy than a new and more powerful study of wickedness in its might. The umbilical cord that connects the master with his work leads, not to the character of Othello, but to that of Iago. Othello is the only one of Shakespeare's tragedies, which does not treat of national events, but is a family of tragedy what was later known as tragedy domestic. We see here a great man who is at the same time a great child; a noble though impetuous nature, as unsuspecting as it is unworldly. We see young woman, all gentleness and nobility of heart, who lives only for him, she has chosen, and who dies with solicitude for her murderer on her lips. And we see these two elect natures ruined by the simplicity which makes them an easy prey to wickedness. It is a sharply limited study of single and very special forms of passion, the growth of suspicion in the mind of a lover with African blood and temperament great example nobility of power of wickedness over unsuspecting nobility.

OTHER TRAGEDIES OF SHAKESPEARE

The tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra seems to be based upon a much clouded philosophy of man and his sufferings, yet the hero and heroine contrive to be uncomplicated souls clear and unequivocal in their tragic characters. They have been faulty and they have sinned but they show commendable desire to do right and to make up for past shortcomings before they die. Both engage in agonized soul searching. Both confess and repent. They are, to a degree, objects lessons made to show the wages of sin, but what is noble in them stands free in the face of death. This tragedy is the supreme expression in Shakespeare of love as value as triumphant over time through a consideration of human relationship in love, the weakness which makes possible the downfall of the tragic hero, a weakness more over which is given a social reference by being consistently related to the presentation of a society in advance stages of decay. We find that it is the lust of Antony and Cleopatra which is finally responsible for their ruins. Antony's love is described as a manifestation of 'dotage' which has, moreover, reached the point at which it can no longer be tolerated, at which it 'overflows the measure'; his former martial virtues, through which he maintained his position of responsibility as triple pillar of the world the phrase is one which will be repeatedly echoed in the course of the political action-have been shamefully abandoned, have become, in the scathing comment of the common soldier.

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