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THE BIOGRAPHY OF SHAKESPEARE REFLECTED IN HIS PLAY HAMLET

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Abstract

In his literary work, William Shakespeare covered various topics addressing the social and political aspects of the British community. He shed considerable light on many issues about human social life. He is widely recognized as the father of the English literature for his dramatic views and stances against the government; as he spent his entire life seeking people's rights whether verbally or written. William Shakespeare uniquely enriched the English literature with his masterpiece writings. Moreover, his works, particularly plays, still entertain his audience greatly due to the symbolic messages embedded into the plots and scenarios. For example, Hamlet is one of his state-of-art tragic plays in which various social themes are portrayed such as marriage and revenge. He also intended to deliver a special message to the readers of that time through the play characters. Furthermore, he expressed his views of fighting societal traditions and customs that do not meet today's norms. For example, the murder of king Hamlet represents typical treachery. The playwright was very creative in writing interesting plays. One of the scenes that often attract the readers is when Hamlet asks the children players to perform the same scene of his father's murder because he wants to see the reaction of his uncle Claudius. Hamlet seeks to take the revenge of his father's death, and regain the hands lost to Denmark. This situation accounts for the sense of a troposphere at the start of the play.

Keywords: Biography Reflected Work Revenge Tragedy Murder Rage Hamlet

Definition of Terms

Biography: The story of a person's life written by someone else.

Reflected: To send back light heat or sound.

Work: Something that requires physical or mental efforts.

Revenge: Something that you do to punish someone who hurts you.

Tragedy: An event or situation that causes great sadness.

Murder: The crime of purposefully killing a person illegally.

Rage: Great anger.

Introduction

William Shakespeare is widely recognized as the father of English Literature (Bate, 2008). His work cannot whatsoever be comparable with any other literary work in terms of quantity and quality. Therefore, he never had and will never have a rival all over the world. Moreover, throughout the English; and perhaps any other culture, literature, no one has written thirty-five plays except William Shakespeare. Nevertheless, many critics have expressed great wonderment why William Shakespeare never wrote novels, arguing that it is seldom to have a seasoned play-writer who has zero novel production. Nonetheless, his great literary heritage still makes him one of a kind. Shakespeare was an actor, playwright, poet, and theatre entrepreneur in London during late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras. He was baptized on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England, in the Holy Trinity Church. At age 18, he married Anne Hathaway from whom he had three children. He died in his home town of Stratford on 23 April 1616 aged 52. Although much is known about than those of other Elizabethan and Jacobean writers, few personal biographical facts remain partially revealed, which is unsurprising in the light of his social status as a commoner, the low esteem in which his profession was held, and the general lack of interest of the time in the personal lives of writers. Literature is perceived as a reflection of real-life situations, regardless of the genre used in the concerned literary work. Among key literary genres is drama, which mirrors real-life situations, yet performed in a theatre by different roleplayers who represent real human characters. In other words, the audience is likely to watch real-scenarios and incidents that they may have experienced before. Anthony Burgess points out that "Drama is the most natural of the arts, being based on one of the most fundamental of the human and animals' faculties, the faculty of imitation it is through imitation that animals learn to fight, climb, hunt. It is through imitation that children learn to talk to perform great number complicated human functions. This imitative faculty, or as we call it memetic faculty, makes us all actors almost from the cradle" (English Literature, p. 44).

Hamlet

Prince Hamlet is a university student who enjoys contemplating difficult philosophical questions. When his father, King of Denmark, is killed, he returns home to find evidence of a foul play in his father's death. The Ghost of Hamlet (the murdered king) tells Prince Hamlet that his uncle Claudius is the murderer. Throughout the rest of the play, Hamlet seeks to prove Claudius' guilt before he takes action against him. However, Hamlet is pensive and extreme at times even brooding. He constantly overuses his intellect while ignoring his emotions and what "feels right." His extreme logic causes him to delay his revenge against Claudius until the final scene of the play takes place when he kills Claudius and proves that he has progressed into a truly existential character (p. 2).

Shakespeare's life

Shakespeare was born on 26 April 1564 and was baptized on 23 April 1616. He was an English poet, playwright, and actor. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England national poet and the "Bard of Avon." His extant works, including collaborations, consist of almost 39 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays were translated into every major living language and are still performed more often than those of any other playwright. William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, an alderman and a successful glover originally from Snitterfield, and Mary Arden, the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and was baptized there on 26 April 1564. His actual date of birth remains unknown, yet it is traditionally observed on 23 April, Saint George's Day. This date, which can be traced back to an 18th-century scholar's mistake, has proved appealing to biographers because he died on 23 April 1616. He was the third child of eight and the eldest surviving son.

Background about the play

The play was written during the Elizabethan area. The plot was taken from a Latin legend. However, Shakespeare adapted the plot to suit the Elizabethan audiences. It was a revenge tragedy which was preferable at that time. Shakespeare enriches the Elizabethan Theater in particular and the British Literature in general.

Most of the characters' names are borrowed (Hamlet was derived from the Medieval story-Amleth-by moving the last letter to the front to become Hamlet). Claudius' name comes from the Roman history, Gertrude, which was also borrowed from German Language.

The play revolves around Hamlet who decides to take revenge of his father who was killed by Claudius) and to inherit both the throne and Gertrude (King Hamlet's wife) whom he was in love with her. Therefore, he killed his brother and married her. Hamlet did not directly take revenge for his uncle; rather, he delayed the revenge to ensure that Claudius indeed killed his father.

The ghost of his father told him the entire story in detail, but he is still reluctant. Therefore, he decided to compose a play in which one of its scene emulates what exactly happened to his father. He wants to see the reaction of his uncle who was very uncomfortable watching the scene. More specifically, the scene when his uncle was on his knees asking God for forgiveness made he ask himself if he indeed killed him. Therefore, he delayed taking the revenge until he found him committing the sin. Eventually, he killed his consultant thinking that he was Claudius.

Biography of Shakespeare reflected in his play Hamlet

In reality, Shakespeare was an actor and a playwright. This was reflected in the play (Hamlet). Hamlet wanted to make sure that Claudius indeed killed his father. He composed a scene of a play, which portrayed Claudius killing his brother). He had children perform the play while he was watching Claudius' reactions to the scene. This was a reflection of Shakespeare's own life. Holy Trinity Church, where Shakespeare was baptized, was

reflected in Hamlet too. After the death of Ophelia, the clergyman refused to bury Ophelia in the church because she had committed a suicide. Shakespeare's father was prosperous at the time of William's birth, thus, both Shakespeare and Hamlet live in a luxurious life. Furthermore, on November 28th 1582 at Temple Grafton near Stratford, the 18-year-old Shakespeare married the 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. Two neighbors of Hathaway, Fulk Sandalls and John Richardson, posted bond ensuring that no legal impediments existed to the union. The ceremony may have been arranged in some haste. Six months later, their first daughter, Susanna, was born on 26 May 1583.

Based on the above mentioned, there was a great similarity between the haste of Shakespeare real marriage and that of Gertrude (Hamlet's mother). This was a real reflection of Shakespeare's biography which was depicted on Hamlet. The name Hamlet was taken from the medieval story of Amelth. The letter of the name was back warded to form Hamlet. Thus, he reflected his son's name on the title of the play. Throughout his career, Shakespeare spent his time between London and Stratford. Hamlet's life was also spent between France and Denmark. This was a mirror of Shakespeare life in Hamlet.

There was no concrete document proving that Shakespeare did not attend college, the same thing for Hamlet who did not complete his college studies. Shakespeare's life was dominated by grief for the loss of his son. Similarly, Hamlet's life was full of sorrow for the murder of his father. Therefore, this was a clear reflection of the two lives on the literary work. What distinguishes Shakespeare's role in this play is that he played the role of Hamlet's father in a form of a ghost.

Moreover, Shakespeare also depicted his wife, Anne, in Hamlet. For example, Schoenbaum (1991) indicates that "Shakespeare's will scarcely mentions his wife, Anne, who was probably entitled to one-third of his estate automatically" (p. 275). Moreover, Greenblatt (2005) argues that Shakespeare "did make a point, however, of leaving her „my second best bed“, a bequest that has led to much speculation." (pp. 145-46). In the same vein, Schoenbaum (1987) noted that "some scholars see the bequest as an insult to Anne, whereas others believe that the second-best bed would have been the matrimonial bed and therefore rich in significance." (pp. 301-303). Thus, one may conclude that Shakespeare left his wife – Anne – in the same form that Hamlet did to his sweetheart Ophelia.

Furthermore, Ringler (1997) points out that "the actors in Shakespeare's company included the famous Richard Burbage, William Kempe, Henry Condell and John Heminges. Burbage played the leading role in the first performances of many of Shakespeare's plays, including Richard III, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear." (p., 127).

Therefore, Hamlet also has children players. He once asked one them to kill his brother by poisoning his ear. Ironically, the same thing is depicted in the scene when his uncle Claudius kill hamlet's father. This suggests that some of the play scenes indeed reflect Shakespeare's real-life situations.

Conclusion

In this paper, we attempt to reflect the biography of Shakespeare on one of his most prominent tragedies (Hamlet). We will support our critical analysis with some famous quotes from literature in order to shed some light on the views of the critics. First, Bradley (1991) points out that “many critics believe that Shakespeare's greatest tragedies represent the peak of his art. The titular hero of one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies, Hamlet, has probably been discussed more than any other Shakespearean character, especially for his famous soliloquy which begins „To be or not to be; that is the question“.” (p., 86). Bradley (1991) continues his remarks indicating that “unlike the introverted Hamlet, whose fatal flaw is hesitation, the heroes of the tragedies that followed, Othello and King Lear, are undone by hasty errors of judgment.” (86). Furthermore, Dowden (1881) argues that “some commentators have seen this change in mood as evidence of a more serene view of life on Shakespeare's part, but it may merely reflect the theatrical fashion of the day.” (p., 60). This again suggests that there is substantial analogy between Shakespeare and Hamlet, which is the essence of this paper.

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