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INFLUENCE OF SHAKESPEARE AND ANCIENT GREEK DRAMATISTS ON THOMAS
HARDY IN CREATING HIS HEROINES

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ABSTRACT

The charismatic influence of William Shakespeare ranges from theatre and literature to modern day cinemas, Western philosophy and the English language itself. He is undeniably considered as the greatest writer in the history of the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He altered European theatre by escalating prospects concerning what could be accomplished through innovation in characterization, plot, language and genre. His writings have also impacted a large number of notable novelists and poets over the years, including Herman Melville, Charles Dickens and Maya Angelou, etc and still continue to influence new authors of present time. Shakespeare is known to have a great influence on a large number of writers in the following centuries, including major novelists such as Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens and William Faulkner, etc. The present paper 'Influence of Shakespeare and Ancient Greek Dramatists on Thomas Hardy in creating his Heroines' is an attempt to assess the impact of legends on legendary novelist Thomas Hardy in creating the legendary marvels of English literature, which are all time favorite.

Keywords - characterization, impacted, influence, innovation, prospects

It is said that Shakespeare was of his age and he is also of all ages. Shakespeare has given as a multitude of characters but none resembles others. Most of his character are either borrowed or connected from his predecessors, nevertheless his time moulds them in an inimitable way to touch our heart and remain there forever. We get such characters like Cleopatra, Romeo, Juliet, Lear, Macbeth, Hamlet, Shylock, Othello, etc whom we daily meet around us of course with a different personality but having some short of temperament. It is this identification of human being's mankind to Shakespeare and created an irresistible passion to drink Shakespeare or to have a holy dip in the aesthetic works of Shakespeare.

Like other mankind Thomas Hardy was also very much influenced by Shakespeare. Throughout the prime time of his literary compositions, Hardy has been drinking deep of Shakespeare; during some of them one might be sufficient, were it is not that the effect of Shakespeare upon Hardy was of a peculiar, subtle and for reaching kind. Those who would understand Hardy's nature must submit to a relation who may seem

tedious yet cannot be wholly avoided; for the thread of the Shakespeare an influence runs so close to the center of Hardy's being that we can, with patience, watch it gradually merge into the very substance of his soul.

The most striking fact that emerges from comparison of Shakespeare with Hardy is that their vision of life through tragic aspect. Tragedy, the noblest form of literature, tells in dignified language a moving story which usually ends in death. Its purpose is to give pleasure, not by delighting them as in comedy, but by moving them to deep spiritual experience by releasing in them a storm of pity and terror that will expend itself and be succeeded by a 'calm of mind, all passion spent.'

Hardy is considered as a great tragic novelist as Shakespeare, a tragic dramatist. Like Shakespeare's four great tragedies, Hardy also produced four great novels: Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure, The Mayor of Caster Bridge and The Return of the Native. Hardy found life a tale of woes and sufferings and pain. But the tragic vision of both the artistes is quite different from each other.

Shakespeare's tragic heroes are men of high rank and status. They are kings, princes, generals and warriors. His tragic heroes are an exceptional creature with uncommon qualities of head and heart. His fate affects the destiny of the whole nation. He falls from prosperity to adversity excites feelings of pity and terror. But Hardy's heroes and heroines are different from those of Shakespeare. They are very ordinary individuals, not kings or warriors. They belong to the lower sections of society. Tess is a humble dairymaid; Henchard is an illiterate hay-trusser and Giles is a poor wood-cutter. Thus they belong to the humblest ranks of society. But they are worthy of being tragic protagonists. They have their own individualities. For example, Tess is a 'Pure Woman'; Henchard is 'a man of character' the qualities of their head and heart place them above their common fellow beings. Another important feature of Shakespeare's tragic hero is that he suffers from a 'tragic flaw'. This tragic flaw ultimately becomes the cause of tragedy. There is always some marked tendency to act in a particular way which leads to the undoing of a Shakespearean tragic hero. But Hardy's tragic heroes and heroines are free from the 'tragic flaw' in the Shakespearean sense of the term. They do not show a marked tendency to act in a particular manner. Their actions are largely determined by their circumstances which are beyond their control.

In Shakespeare, character is destiny; but in Hardy 'destiny is character'. In Shakespeare's tragedy it is the character himself who decides his destiny. In Hardy's novels destiny plays an active role. No doubt, in the Mayor of Caster Bridge and in the Return of the Native, character plays vital role in bringing about the tragedy. Hen Chard's 'wrong headedness' is responsible for his unending sufferings. Likewise, Eustacia's sufferings result from the excessive love of the splendor of city life and also from her extreme hunger for love. But in these novels, as also in Tess, it is the role of destiny that mainly brings about the downfall. In spite of her best efforts and intentions, Tess succumbs to her destiny. In Hardy destiny takes the form of chance. Tess is full of such chance happenings which do not have anything to do with the character of Tess. So is the case with Henchard in the mayor of Caster Bridge. Hen Chard's disaster is caused more by destiny than by character. In fact, malicious destiny or chance or fate is responsible for the tragedy of a Hadrian hero or heroine.

Like Shakespeare Hardy's tragic vision is seldom depressing; it is always elevating. Hardy's tragic novel does not dishearten or discourage. In the words of critic, "It is elevating and stimulating, it does not shake our faith in life and all the more it strengthens us. It does not make us light-hearted but make us wiser and better." Though a Hadrian tragedy leaves an impression of tragic waste, it certainly does not leave of moral dissatisfaction. Much good is wasted at the end; but evil gets its own reward. Alec is killed in the end. Even Angle Clare is a loser. His heart is totally broken when Tess is hanged at the end. Thus Hardy's tragedy is the soul-tragedy. It reveals to us the essential nobility and greatness of the human soul. Tess fights till the end but she ultimately leaves an impression of the greatness of soul. Henchard may look like a beast at times but he reaches Aristotelian heights.

In Hardy's scheme of tragedy, society and environment play vital roles. In Shakespeare, society is subordinate to the tragic hero; but in Hardy the tragic hero or the heroine acts according to the dictates of the society. In this sense Hardy democratizes tragedy. His tragic novels are thus marked with a note of modernism. This is the originality of Hardy as a tragic artist. Here Hardy's view of women has been compared with that of Shakespeare. According to H. C. Duffin -

"The touch stone of a novelist's power and the rock upon which he most frequently splits, is his handling of women."

As we go through the history of England, the country has seen the two golden ages, not only in prosperity but also in literary achievements. It is worth surprising that both the periods were ruled by Queens, Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria. Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy are the most famous figure of these ages respectively. We can have a common attitude of society and the writer's personal view towards women through the literature of these two literary figures.

George Gordon in his book 'Shakespearian Comedy and Other Studies' disclose his view about Shakespeare's women-

"Of all the angles of approach to Shakespearian comedy, the master angle is and must be the angle of femininity."

A certain clear headedness, a frankness in facing facts, a power of deciding what is to be done, are the peculiar and distinguish marks of Shakespeare's happy women. They remember that they are women having waxen hearts and that is why they break down altogether, for a moment when they are by themselves. But in public, their courage never fails them. With every pang of affection and anxiety they only grew wittier. They even exult in their peculiar power of being cool and decisive in exact proportion to the strength of their passion and the sentimentality of their men.

Shakespeare is not of the opinion that most women are sentimental by nature and designed by providence to be clingers upon men. He pays them high compliment of supposing that they may have knowledge, shrewdness, wit and courage without ceasing to be wholly feminine and the objects of desire on his ideal woman the heart and head sway equal.

Shakespeare seems to say in the comedy of Twelfth Night through Orsino "in woman alone not in all women you will find that perfect harmony and balance of the parts of human nature, which is the basis and first condition of a happy life."

Most of the Shakespeare's young heroines like Juliet's Desdemona, Othello's Miranda are under the care of mother or father though he has left most of the young woman to take of herself. The Rosalind's Portia and Beatrices need no mothers. Most of them have father, who are preferred to mothers. Sometimes he is passed over even when he exists. There is Julia a sentimental young lady in 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' who always ignores her father. She leaves home without leaving message for her old father and when she is asked for to do so by her maid she replies.

All that is mine, I leave at thy dispose. My goods, my lands, my reputation."

The sentimental clinging Julia who satisfies every convention for young women in love is abandoned by her lover. Shakespeare is of the opinion that a woman must have wits and brain and spirit as well as heart to succeed in life and love.

In the tragedies of Shakespeare Ophelia the heroine of Hamlet the young wife of Othello is one of the tragic failures in Shakespeare's world in which success in life is not given to the merely innocent and loving tragic heroines like Ophelia and Desdemona have lined as sentimental woman and in a world of dumb ideas and feelings Shakespeare never liked such woman. But the woman he admired was the women who carried their destinies with them and in speaking and thinking as well as in feeling were the equals and superiors of men.

It is sometimes complained that Shakespeare in his comedies is careless of his woman that having first made them attraction he gives some of them in the end, very doubtful husbands. Proteus and Julia, Oliver and Celia, Claudio and Hero Bertram and Helena, Angelo and Mariana are examples of such unhappy alliances.

Happy marriages have no annals of which plays can be made and unhappy marriages did not seem to Shakespeare on the whole, a subject for comedy. According to H. C. Duffin

"Thomas Hardy has a deep understanding of woman. He is almost like John Ford a specialist in women. Profound, as is comprehension of human nature itself it is in the female personality, that he is marvelously learned."

Like Shakespeare, Hardy was not feminist perhaps it was easier to be feminist under the Virgin Queen Elizabeth I than under Victoria who worshiped and wept for Albert.

Hardy has pictured all his women as clear and distinct from each other as primary colors. On the other hand Hardy has no really unlikable women whereas he has several very unlikable men. Hardy's pictures of womanhood with love and admiration, the text of the novels is scattered freely with observations on the sex, which seems to indicate a general attitude that can only be called cynical. Some of them are indeed dramatic but they are uttered with a certain zest.

"When you have made up your mind to marry, says Reuben Davy to his son Dick, take the first respectable body that comes to hand. She is as good as any other they be all alike in the ground work, is only in the flourishers, there is a difference."

Hardy's favorite heroine is a country girl with a race of culture. Sue, Tess, Bathsheba, Elizabeth-Jane, Marty, Tabitha-lark all are pure country born & bred and nearly have some sight cultural background. Of the ten principle heroines, five are brought to tragic ends after great suffering though they escape the ultimate tragedy; women suffer more than the men it may be because woman is a weaker vessel. But surely some of the grimness may be due to a hurt idealism to Hardy's sense of the gulf between woman's possible best and her actual achievement towards it.

As H.C. Duffin says, 'Hardy's view of woman is influenced by Shakespeare cruel satire in the, Trolins, on all that the world esteemed noblest in human nature was inspired not by hate but by a wounded love of mankind the fierce dissatisfaction and disillusion that came between a Joyous acceptance of the raptures of life and the large sad comprehending forgiveness of its baseness.

Hardy's estimate of woman is high but tempered and conditioned by keen observation of the realities around lives.

Thomas Hardy was very much influenced by the Greek Dramatist also. Perhaps more important was the study of Greek authors which he undertook. It is surprising to know that though he had no university education, he could follow the original Greek and even correct the English translations of Greek plays. Prof. Rutland writes:

"It seems no exaggerated claim that if any purely literary influence could be held responsible for what has been called Hardy's 'Twilight View of life', it would be that great and somber art whose Leit Motif is 'call no man happy while he lives.' In Hardy's copy of the Antigone, a line is drawn against the words: 'For the future, and the instant, and the past this law suffice; nothing comes to the life of mortals for removed at east from calamity.'" And again:

"The significance for English literature of Hardy's study of Greek drama lies in the effect which that studies and in confirming the cast of his thought: and this it would be hard to overestimate."

It gives an idea of the great value which Hardy set to these studies from the fact that on obtaining a prize for writing the best essay on architecture, he converted it into English translations of Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus in Bohn's Greek studies on during night and spare hours, when he was working as an architect. Thus, we can very well imagine the influence which they had casted on Hardy.

Conclusion

Hardy's novels are illuminated with a galaxy of fine women characters. The Wessex novels are rich so far as female characters are concerned. Hardy is undoubtedly an expert painter. He shows a great power of portraying his woman. In many aspects he has been compared with Shakespeare so far as his heroines are concerned.

There is an astonishing range and variety of Hardy's women characters. All the women characters are distinguished from one another. Hardy is always conscious of differences of personality, subtle distinctions and social status. There is a vast variety in Hardy's delineation of women characters.

Another important feature of Hardy's women characters is that his women are more vital than men. A close scrutiny of his novels reveals a marked contrast between his male and female characters. Hardy had an instinctive liking for his women beautiful, interesting, fascinating, and more vital in the human drama represented in his novels. But, like Shakespeare's heroines, with Hardy it would be wrong to say that 'he has no heroes, but only heroines'. His male characters such as Hen Chard, Clym, Jude, Oak, etc. are quite energetic and alive.

Hardy's major heroines are represented as patiently suffering creatures. Out of his ten principle heroines, five are brought to tragic ends after great suffering and the rest endure great suffering; in the case of two, Tess and Eustacia, we get the soul's tragedy more harrowing and painful than in the case of men. This is all due to Hardy's realistic observation of life.

Hardy shows astonishing skill in portraying the female mind and heart. He had a deep insight into female psychology. He found women more instinctive and impulsive than men. In fact Hardy does not handle masculine psychology with the same penetration. His male characters are either sensual or effeminate or else victims of a kind of internal attention. He doubtless discovered in women a complexity, which remained more prominent before his eyes, a submission to instinct which involved her in more intimate relations with the whole order of things.

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