

Songs role in the plays of Shakespeare relevant to the present era

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Abstract

William Shakespeare was an English dramatist who lived in the 15th century. His plays are set among the English lower middle, and upper classes, and are notable for their comedies, tragedies, chronicled plays, social observation of that era. Under Elizabeth I's patronage he produced various plays. Hamlet without question, the most famous play in the English language probably written in 1602, the tragedy is a master piece of the famous English playwright William Shakespeare. Hamlet is his longest play, and among the most powerful and influential tragedies in the English language. Shakespeare's last plays, known as dramatic romances. His last four plays Pericles, Cymbeline, The winter's Tale, and The Tempest is commonly considered as the last play of Shakespeare. As a poet, Shakespeare dominated the stage with his words and language. His predecessors –Lyly, Greene, and Peele impressed his art of writing comedy. Shakespearean comedy is an integral part of comedy of love, which ends with the ringing of the marriage bells. Shakespeare included one hundred songs in his works. Music became necessary one in the Elizabethan life, as it is today. Heroines in Shakespearean comedies play a crucial role. In the words of Ruskin, "Shakespeare has only heroines and no heroes" proves it. They were wise, winning and charming. He used characters to reflect his time and they rely on music. In Hamlet play Ophelia sang "Tomorrow is saint Valentine's day" song in the 4th Act 5th scene, In Othello play our dramatist gave a chance to Desdemona to sing a song "Sing willow, willow, willow" in 4th Act scene 3. In The Tempest play Shakespeare provided a chance to airy spirit Ariel to express his feelings "Full fathom five thy father lies" (The Tempest Act 1, Scene 2). Shakespeare's genius spread across the nook and corner of the world. He was the prince of poets and the monarch of dramatists.

Key words: songs-music-comedy-Tempest.

Introduction

It is not an exaggeration to say that with the productions of his plays a new era had begun in Elizabethan Theatre. Shakespeare was one of the celebrated playwrights of the Elizabethan theatre gained popularity than other contemporaries like Greene, Christopher Marlowe. He used songs and music in his plays and entertained the audiences.

Song is a short piece of music with words that are sung. Its origin took place in middle English, from old English sang, akin to old English Singan to sing. It was used before 12th century. According to An Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary the definition runs thus, "A short musical composition with lyrics for voice or voices, performed by singing."¹

Shakespeare is a contemporary to Marlowe and senior to Milton. He used songs in his plays to entertain the audience. Songs portrayed the merriment of the characters. Especially in Shakespeare's late plays like Cymbeline, Pericles, The Tempest songs played a crucial role.

An eminent critic Dryden in his famous book "Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668) he mentioned his greatness, I put forth the statement here, " As for Johnson,...I think him the most learned and judicious which any theatre ever had...He was deeply conversant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latin, and he borrowed boldly from them...If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Johnson was the virgil , the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakepeare."2

The Tempest is one of the most famous Plays of Shakespeare. It pulsates with the romance of an adventurous age. An inner urge impelled Shakespeare to dwell on the joy that is in store for those who bear their wrongs in patience and forbearance, the joy that comes through forgiveness of the wrong doer, and on the moral redemption of the wicked through repentance. The last plays of Shakespeare, Pericles, Cymbeline, The winter's Tale and The Tempest are called dramatic romances. The main theme of these plays is reconciliation .The Tempest is a work of fantasy and courtly romance. This is the story of a wise old magician, his beautiful ,unworldly daughter, a gallant young prince, and a cruel scheming bro. It contains all the elements of a fairy tale in which ancient wrongs and righted and true lovers live happily ever after. The short drama is also one of poetic atmosphere and allegory. Beginning with a storm and peril at sea, it ends on a note of serenity and joy. No other of Shakespeare's play holds so much of the author's nature reflection on life itself.

The Tempest belongs to the last group of Shakespeare's plays which are called dramatic romances. The last plays of Shakespeare are neither pure comedies nor tragedies. They are of a new type, as Dr. Johnson calls them, a new experiment as it were. Hence they are called Dramatic Romances. The theme of all the dramatic romances including The Tempest is reconciliation at the end of the play. The old enemies Alonso, and prospero become friends at the end. Besides, stage equipment seems to have some improvised devices in the last plays because he depicts an actual ship wreck in the Tempest. The sea plays a very important part in the plays of the last phase of the dramatist. There are dances and masques in the last plays, the Dramatic Romances.

The play is classical in structure but romantic in treatment. The unities of time, place, and action are well observed in the Tempest. The time taken is only a few hours. The place is mostly in front of Prospero's cell. The action is dominantly that of prospero, even the subplots being directed and guided by him. The Epilogue at the end of the play is also a classical device. The device of retrospective narration is used by Shakespeare to tell the previous incidents of the play. At the same time, there is Romance in the play to such an extent that we may well say that Shakespeare is a child of the Renaissance and the Romantic movement of Europe. The atmosphere is magical and this is the main quality of the romance. The scene is located in an imaginary island, an island of enchantment which can not be identified any where on the world map.

There are spectacular scenes in The Tempest. For instance, there are the opening storm and ship wreck, the masque and the banquet scene. Romance implies love, adventure and friendship. There is plenty of it in this play. Comedy implies not only happy ending of the play but also reunion and reconciliation. The lost son of Alonso is restored to his father. The last duke dom of prospero is restored to him. There is forgiveness and reunion of the enemies at the end. The love of Ferdinand and Miranda is spontaneous and romantic. It culminates in their marriage. Ariel is restored liberty. Caliban is given his island again and

everything ends favourably. There is fun at the expense of the villains. The discomfiture and frustration of their conspiracies provide scope for merriment to the audience.

The *Tempest* is one of the most pleasing of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Songs and music are an integral part of romance and comedy. It is wrong to suppose that the *Tempest* is a mere frothy, airy, romance but it is full of significant and meaningful songs. They are played on appropriate occasions and have an important place in the fabric of the drama. Music is an essential factor for magic and therefore there is a combination of the supernatural element. The *Tempest* is a musical drama. The scene is laid on an enchanted island. The significance of the masque and the anti masque in the fourth and fifth acts of the play makes *The Tempest* almost like a modern opera. In fact, there is a German opera in the *Tempest*. The chief aim of the play is to amuse and entertain the audience. Therefore there is a picturesque characterization of secondary importance in musical drama. Prospero acts like a 'deu exmachina'. He weaves the various threads of the story together.

The peculiar charm of the play consists in its pictorial and spectacular quality. Ariel sings his gossamer songs and the fairies dance in ringlets. Banquets appear and disappear by a quaint device, nymphs and reapers dance with harvest songs. Tunes of a vanishing quality are sung by invisible spirits. All these contribute to the poetry of the play. Besides the special masque, which is played before the betrothed pair, there in the play. There is pantomime and pageantry which delight the audience.

Song is an integral part of the dramatic structure. Shakespeare used various songs in his plays "Desdemona's willow song in *Othello*, Ophelia's songs in *Hamlet*, Iago's drinking song in *Othello*, In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1594-5 'Who is Silvia? What is she?', 'When icicles hang by the wall' (*Love's Labour's Lost*, c1595), 'Over hill, over dale' and 'you spotted snakes, with double tongue' and several others (*A Mid summer Night's Dream*, 1595-6), 'Tell me where is fancy bred' (*The Merchant of Venice*, 1596); 'sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more' (*Much Ado About Nothing* 1598-9); 'Blow, blow thou winter wind' and 'It was a lover and his lass', (*As you Like It*, c1599), 'Full fathom five thy father lies' (*The Tempest*, 1611)."3

In 1620s and 1630s two English composers Henry Lewes (1596-1662) and his brother William understood the techniques of allying music and words. A renowned Poet and Novelist Thomas Hardy became aware of the importance of songs and used songs in his plays. In modern dramas and works the influence of songs fell on W.B. Yeats, Sean Casey, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden. These writers illustrated the point of songs in their works.

"He was the man", said Dryden, "who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul."4

His contribution to the drama is unique one. He has shown the tremendous impact on the film makers and persuaded them with his ideas. He is not only word magician as well as lyricist, he composed songs in his plays, he is still remembered for his yeoman service to the literature. His retrospective technique is similar to the present movies of flash back technique. Music, songs are all part of realistic world, the torch bearer of songs is none other than Shakespeare. Songs became an essential one in films, as well as realistic world like marriage ceremonies, birth day parties. Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, between 1599 and 1602. *Hamlet* was Shakespeare's most popular play during his life time. It is among his most performed plays. The play has invited critical and psychological studies. *Hamlet* is also the most filmed story after *Cinderella*. Writers of the calibre of Goethe, and Joyce have been inspired by *Hamlet*. Goethe expresses the common literary judgement when he says, "I do not remember that any book or person or event in my life ever made so great impression upon me as the plays of Shakespeare."5 Theatre represents truth. Play is a

suggestion. In 1796 in Germany Iffland was appointed as a director to the Bengal Royal Theatre. He received subsidy in a grand manner. He spent this huge amount to exhibit Shakespeare, Shiller plays. An art form can survive only with the support, patronage and love of masses. Song and music inculcates the virtue of dedication, discipline and hardwork. I would like to point out an important aspect here. As a son of butcher, he imbibed the knowledge of society and spread it among the people and shaped the future of English stage plays. He had set the stage for his successor eminent playwright Benjonson. He is still in the memories of the audience. His fame is an everlasting one.

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