

Shakespeare in the Dock: A Cross-Examination of His Works

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Abstract: The paper deals with the controversies concerning Shakespeare and his works. After the death of Shakespeare, unending debates over his authorship, person and the works create confusion among the readers of the world. First of all, the paper discusses the literature related to the textual problems; secondly, it discusses the problems concerning his authorship of the plays, and thirdly, it brings out an extensive analysis of the thematic and structural symmetry between Shakespeare's works and those of his predecessors and contemporaries.

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I. PROBLEMS OF SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS

Curiosity endless centers round Shakespeare and his works since his departure from the globe, but authentic sources are hardly found to explore the various horizons of the maestro of English Literature. The information we have about Shakespeare and his personal profile is now-a-days debated. Many scholars have come up with their detective methodologies to explore the real information about his life and works and at the same time they intend to break the riddle created among the readers through various confusing logics prevail in the society. During his lifetime, we did not have any play published. Seven years after his death, an anthology of his plays was published by one of his friends. This is known as The First Folio comprising thirty six plays. But the first Folio and Quartos are full of errors, obscurities and possible corruptions.(Johnson 1765).

The textual problems and confusions basically derive from the anomalies and discrepancies between the Quartos and the First Folio. Quartos are the small books published during staging the plays. The nineteen quartos are also commonly published with other plays in the First Folio comprising thirty six plays. But there are gulf of difference between the texts of the two versions. Heminge and Condell demand that texts of the First Folio are authentic, perfect and represent the original copies of Shakespeare. These two editors of the F1 also claimed that they are presenting to the readers the true copies "cured and perfect of their limbs andabsolute in their numbers as he perceived them". They also complained in the preface that people have been deceived with presumably piratical and surreptitious, stale and injurious texts of Shakespeare's plays. (Sinha, 1993, p186).

But the twentieth century researchers refuted the claims of F1 editors that they have printed their plays from Shakespeare's manuscripts with autograph is completely false and baseless. The F1 was not founded on Shakespeare's own manuscripts that disappeared by 1623 or much earlier. About seventeen or nineteen plays are based upon the Quartos. If they found the original manuscripts, they had not to depend on the Quartos. And the other eighteen or seventeen plays which had no Quartos are based on the play-house copies which had been undergoing all the vicissitudes of the green-room for a dozen of years since the author's retirement from the stage. Grierson says, "The stage version was no longer Shakespeare's plays as he wrote it, but as it had been revised by some enterprising dramatist in the service of the King's Players." Macbeth as it published in the Folio is not the exact play of Shakespeare. It was revised and refurbished to meet the demand of the stage and fashion. (Sinha1993, p186) This controversy regarding the texts makes the readers skeptical of valid authorship of Shakespeare.

II. ENIGMA CENTERS ROUND SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare is a mysterious playwright. There is no absolute parameter by which we can be sure that all these plays were written by Shakespeare himself. No letters or house hold commodities used by Shakespeare are found till now by which we can at least justify his writings. Even we do not know how he wrote his name or designation. The spelling of his name is found different in various files and documents. The spelling 'Shakespeare' is most familiar with us but there are many other spellings found such as 'Shakspere', 'Shake-Speare', 'Shakspere', 'Shakespeare', 'Shakespea', 'Shagsper', Shaxberd etc.(Christiansen 2003). All these names create confusion in the mind of readers that the man familiar as Shakespeare by name and Shakespeare was born in Stratford-Upon-Avon are not the same person. Freud, (75): "Incidentally, in this meantime, I stopped to believe that the author of Shakespeare's works was the man of Stratford."

For two hundred years interested scholars have been trying to fill up the loopholes of the stories of the great mysterious playwright. The detectives of Shakespeare encountered many questions such as:

- a) Why are his contemporaries reticent about his plays and personal life?
- b) Why are very few files and documents having the name of Shakespeare found?
- c) Why are there no hand-written manuscripts found?
- d) What is the reason behind his varied signatures? Why is his signature not uniform?
- e) Why did no one of Stratford-Upon-Avon know about Shakespeare as a great playwright?
- f) How does a boy studied at a local grammar school, not attending a university, not visiting a foreign country know so many things?
- g) What did he do in the last ten years after leaving school before being a playwright?
- h) Why are there his name not inscribed in the tomb? Is it really his grave or not?

All these questions lead us to another question that is: Who is the actual author of all these greatest works: Shakespeare or anyone else? If not Shakespeare, then who else wrote all these?

To answer the questions, the researchers of Shakespeare have chosen some names. They first consider F. Bacon as the writer of the plays of Shakespeare. He was basically a lawyer, politician, philosopher and writer. He was so brilliant that at the age of twelve he was sent to Cambridge. During his student life he used to direct drama. He was interested enough to be a playwright but his father insisted him to be a lawyer and politician. But he was severely haunted by his interest in play and so persuaded Shakespeare to use his name for writing plays.(Christiansen,2003). Bacon was skilled enough in making Cryptogram, a kind of symbolic language like shorthand used for detective purpose. Analyzing the various cryptograms, Shakespeare experts found some striking lines and words in a play that made them believe that Shakespeare's plays are written by Bacon: "Shakst spur never wrote a word of them." Another nonsense word found in the play "Love's Labour's Lost" 'honorificabilitudineinatus' the anagram of which, a detective observed is 'Franiiii Bacon'. Six 'I' signifies Fransix or Francis.

Next comes Marlow, the playwright who was born in the same year Shakespeare was born. Marlowe was not only a playwright but also a spy of the queen Elizabeth. He was engaged in detecting those who were plotting against the government of Elizabeth. In a stage of his life, he went to Europe on the sly and stayed there for a long time. Within the time he wrote many plays and all those plays were sent to Shakespeare for production in the Globe Theatre.(Christiansen, 2003). Recently a research reveals that Marlowe will share billing in the latest version of the *New Oxford Shakespeare*, being published this week as co-author of the three Henry VI plays, underscoring that the playwright collaborated with others on some of his most famous works. "A playwright, poet and spy, Marlowe will share billing in the latest version of the *New Oxford Shakespeare* being published this week. While scholars have long suspected that Shakespeare's plays included the work of others, new analytical methods helped researchers conclude that sections bore the hallmarks of Marlowe's hand." (Kirka, 2016)

Five of the world's most senior Shakespeare scholars – Taylor, Hugh Craig at the University of Newcastle, Australia, MacDonald P. Jackson at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, Gabriel Egan at De Montfort University, Leicester and John Jowett at the University of Birmingham's Shakespeare Institute – had to be convinced of the issues of authorship in the works.

The editors concluded that 17 of 44 works associated with Shakespeare had input from others. The scholars used computerized data sets to reveal patterns, trends and associations – analyzing not only Shakespeare's words, but also those of his contemporaries.

"Shakespeare has now entered the world of big data," Taylor said, adding that while the bard's work has been studied intensively, that's not always the case in the same measure for other writers of his generation.

III. SHAKESPEARE AND THE UNIVERSITY WITS

The University Wits are a group of scholarly playwrights who were graduated from the university of Oxford and Cambridge. The term "University Wits" was first used by George Saintsbury, a 19th-century renowned journalist and author.

"we have the group of university wits, the strenuous if not always wise band of professed men of letters, at the head of whom are Lyly, Marlowe, Greene, Peele, Lodge, Nash, and probably (for his connection with the universities is not certainly known) Kyd." (Saintsbury, 1887, pp 60-64)

The complete works of Shakespeare speaks for his imitation of the University Wits who were his immediate predecessors in the field of Elizabethan Drama;

"He imitated them all, and in each case seemed mainly concerned to turn out workmanlike product along the lines which had already been approved by the public taste." (Sinha 1993, pp 181)

It is also evident from the derogatory comment of Robert Green, "An upstart crow beautified with our feathers."(Encyclopaedia Britannica)

“Of all the University Wits Shakespeare is perhaps most indebted to Marlowe who gave him the idea of tragic hero and the masculinity of tragedy. Shakespeare’s chronicle plays like *Henry IV*, *Richard II* and *Richard III* are conceived along the lines of Marlowe. In *Richard III* Shakespeare definitely worked under the influence and in the manner of Marlowe. The entire play is the exhibition of one central character; all the subordinate characters are created that he may wreak his will upon them. This is quite in the manner of Marlowe. Shakespeare’s *Richard II* betrays a striking resemblance to Marlowe’s *Edward II*. Charles Lamb observes that the reluctant pangs of abdicating royalty in *Edward II* furnished hints which Shakespeare scarcely improved in his *Richard II*. Both the plays have pathos, and poetry, both have lyrical moments, both are conspicuous for the absence of comic relief. The resemblance of detail between *The Jew of Malta* and *Merchant of Venice* are such as to leave no doubt with regard to the debt owed by the latter to the former. The character of Shylock is broadly based on that of Barbaras. Both the characters are compounded of the same elements—avarice, cruelty, revengefulness, with no mitigating element but that of paternal love.” (Sinha 1993, pp 182) Shylock’s speech “My daughter!—O my ducats!—O my daughter!.....Justice! the law! My ducats and my daughter!”(Act-I, Scene VIII) is almost identical with Barbaras’s “My gold, my fortune, my felicity, Oh,girl, oh,gold, oh,beauty, oh, my bliss.

Many of Shakespeare’s plays are also found as replica of Kyd’s plays. In *Titus Andronicus* Shakespeare imitated the spirit and the form of *The Spanish Tragedy*. “Shakespeare seems to have written this play with the spirit of challenge to Kyd.”(Sinha, 1993, pp 182)

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is another instance of blind imitation. Here in *Hamlet* we see the plot, theme and characters and even the pattern of dialogues are identical with *The Spanish Tragedy*. Both tragedies have ghosts, bloodshed, play-within-play, lunacy, and the revenge motif. (Sinha 1993)In this regard T.S Eliot’s (1921) observation is worth quoting:

“We know that there was an older play by Thomas Kyd, that extraordinary dramatic (if not poetic) genius who was in all probability the author of two plays so dissimilar as the *Spanish Tragedy* and *Arden of Feversham*; and what this play was like we can guess from three clues: from the *Spanish Tragedy* itself, from the tale of *Belleforest* upon which *Kyd’s Hamlet* must have been based, and from a version acted in Germany in Shakespeare’s lifetime which bears strong evidence of having been adapted from the earlier, not from the later, play. From these three sources it is clear that in the earlier play the motive was a revenge-motive simply; that the action or delay is caused, as in the *Spanish Tragedy*, solely by the difficulty of assassinating a monarch surrounded by guards; and that the “madness” of *Hamlet* was feigned in order to escape suspicion, and successfully. In the final play of Shakespeare, on the other hand, there is a motive which is more important than that of revenge, and which explicitly “blunts” the latter; the delay in revenge is unexplained on grounds of necessity or expediency; and the effect of the “madness” is not to lull but to arouse the king’s suspicion. The alteration is not complete enough, however, to be convincing. Furthermore, there are verbal parallels so close to the *Spanish Tragedy* as to leave no doubt that in places Shakespeare was merely revising the text of *Kyd*.”

Shakespeare’s dramatic career is deeply influenced by Robert Greene. In the plays of Shakespeare readers feel the touch of Greene’s style. Shakespeare learnt the art of connecting scenes of genuine comedy with serious elements in the plays and of blending together different plots, as in *Friar Bacon* and *Friar Bungay* and *George-a Greene*. Greene’s *Magaret of Freshingfield* in *Friar Bacon* and *Friar Bungay* in whom there is the interplay of disparate, often conflicting impulses, provides the model for Shakespeare’s *Perdita* in *The Winter’s Tale*. Another aspect of Greene’s dramatic technique was also followed by Shakespeare. In most of his plays Greene interspersed blank verse with rhymed couplets. Shakespeare borrowed the tricks and technique and became successful in doing so.

All the Shakespearean plays are based on royal family. Society comprises the people of every clime and caste. But Shakespeare focuses the Kings and their activities. The recurrent theme of royal families creates monotony in the mind of readers. Tolstoy (1906) rightly said in *Tolstoy on Shakespeare*:

“I remember the astonishment I felt when I first read Shakespeare. I expected to receive a powerful esthetic pleasure, but having read, one after the other, works regarded as his best: “*King Lear*,” “*Romeo and Juliet*,” “*Hamlet*” and “*Macbeth*,” not only did I feel no delight, but I felt an irresistible repulsion and tedium... Several times I read the dramas and the comedies and historical plays, and I invariably underwent the same feelings: repulsion, weariness, and bewilderment. At the present time, before writing this preface, being desirous once more to test myself, I have, as an old man of seventy-five, again read the whole of Shakespeare, including the historical plays, the “*Henry’s*,” “*Troilus and Cressida*,” “*The Tempest*,” “*Cymbeline*,” and I have felt, with even greater force, the same feelings,—this time, however, not of bewilderment, but of firm, indubitable conviction that the unquestionable glory of a great genius which Shakespeare enjoys, and which compels writers of our time to imitate him and readers and spectators to discover in him non-existent merits,—thereby distorting their esthetic and ethical understanding,—is a great evil, as is every untruth.”

IV. CONCLUSION

All these criticism lead us to a question that is; was Shakespeare really a fundamental writer or a mere imitator? The answer may be varied. But it is doubtlessly commendable that whatever sources he imitated or borrowed, he surpassed all of them. He might have borrowed the chassis, but improved the body upon the chassis to a lofty and grand scale in such a way that it brings an eternal appeal to the mind of a reader who would hardly believe that it was borrowed or imitated. An example may be quoted here; Shylock is the figure like Barbars in *The Jew of Malta*. But here Shakespeare transcended the impact of Marlowe. Barbars in the malignity of revenge turns to a monster, on the other hand, in Shylock, revenge itself is dignified by its triumph over the baser sin of avarice, and for all his cunning ferocity he remains human to the last, cherishing the sweet memory of his dead wife Leah. (Sinha, 1993) As textual problems is an irresolvable problem, we should not be absorbed in finding problems in the texts rather we should be immersed in extracting the honey from the hive of his plays. "Perhaps it would not be easy to find any author, except Homer, who invented so much as Shakespeare, who so much advanced the studies which he cultivated, or effused so much novelty upon his age or country. The form, the characters, the language, and the shows of the English drama are his." (Johnson 1775)

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