

4: TDC B.A Part II

William Shakespeare

Shakespeare was born in April 1564, at Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. His father John Shakespeare was a prosperous tradesman and seems to have followed the occupations of a butcher, a Glover and a farmer. There is not much clarity about Shakespeare's education. His contemporary Ben Jonson, a competent scholar and playwright affirmed that he knew "small Latin and less Greek". Scholars regarded him as National poet and called him "Bard of Avon" or simply "The Bard". The way Shakespeare's glory had transcended geographical borders and read and performed in many countries across the globe bears testament to his overwhelming genius. The prophecy of his great contemporary, the poet and dramatist Ben Jonson that Shakespeare "was not of an age, but for all time," has been fulfilled.

He was a writer of great intellectual rapidity, perceptiveness and poetic power. How his career in the theatre began is unclear, but from roughly 1594 onward he was an important member of the Lord Chamberlain's company of Players (called the King's Men after the accession of James I in 1603). They had the best actor, Richard Burbage; they had the best theatre, the Globe (finished by the autumn of 1599); they had the best dramatist, Shakespeare. Unfortunately, written records give little indication of the way in which Shakespeare's professional life moulded his marvellous artistry. All that can be deduced is that for 20 years Shakespeare devoted himself assiduously to his art, writing more than a million words of the poetic drama of the highest quality.

His extant works, including collaborations, consist of some 39 plays, 154 Sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of the uncertain authorship.

Shakespeare's Tragedies:

His tragedies have no less a role in creating awe and disbelief among Shakespeare's readership in adulation for the master Bard, i.e. Shakespeare. He wrote 10 tragedies in his massive oeuvre displaying his beautiful blank verse interspersed with deep insights of life. Shakespeare had to a great extent followed literary conventions of a tragedy as outlined by Aristotle in his *Poetics*.

While he departed from conventions some times as per his demands and contrivances of the plot. In keeping up with Aristotelian diktat, all his tragic heroes are fundamentally flawed eventuating in their downfall. Shakespeare's tragedies often focus on the fall of a nobleman. By presenting the audience with a man with excessive wealth or power, his eventual downfall is all the more tragic. There are both internal and external struggles and often with the dash of supernatural thrown in for good measure. Another important aspect of Shakespeare's tragedies is the use of comic relief in a tragedy.

Shakespeare wrote the majority of his tragedies under the rule of James I, and their darker contents may reflect the general mood of the country following the death of Elizabeth I as well as James' theatrical preferences. Shakespeare, as was customary for other playwrights in his day, used history, other plays, and non-dramatic literature as sources for his plays. Some of his famous tragedies are Macbeth (1605), Hamlet (1600), King Lear (1605), Othello (1604), Julius Caesar (1599), Romeo and Juliet (1594) etc.

Important Concepts/Events/Terms

Comic relief: Comic relief is a literary device used in plays and novels to introduce light entertainment between tragic scenes. It is often used in the form of a humorous incident, a funny incident, a tricky remark or a laughing commentary. It is deliberately inserted to make the audiences feel relief. In this sense, it makes the tragedy seem less intense.