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**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE ON
SHAKESPEARE LIFE**

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of my paper is to show the Influence of Social, Political and Religious Perspective on Shakespeare Life . History plays especially from the point of their reliability. This has indicated that Shakespeare selected and reshaped his historical material with specific dramatic skill. He telescoped events to enhance their dramatic impact, and he did it with brilliance. I found also important to concern the question of what genre the history play was meant to be at the time when the Shakespearean histories were first printed and performed in front of the audience as well as how they are described nowadays. It has been mentioned the typical themes and reasons which lead to the characterization of these plays. My paper would not be complete without the drawing of the 'situation in Elizabethan England and describing social background connected with important historical events. The paper has focused an attention to the perception of history plays especially in the Renaissance; however, I have also outlined the reception in quite recent history in the introduction to my thesis. It is interesting to see the diverse understanding of the plays; although, in most cases they were performed primarily for political purposes.

Keywords: Universality, Inheritances Locality and Colonization

INTRODUCTION

This paper delineates the Influence of Social, Political and Religious Perspective on Shakespeare Life. William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in Stratford upon-Avon, a market town in a farming area of the Midlands. His father was a “glover” it meant a dealer in hides and leather goods, possibly a tanner and one who made these things into end products so a businessman of that prosperous merchant class in this market town where people came to trade, to buy and sell. He was a member of the Stratford city council, and served the city in various roles: a constable, one of the two town chamberlains; in 1565, when William was one year old, he was an alderman, and became high bailiff, sort of like a mayor, in 1568. But by 1577, when William was about 12, he drops out of the town records, most think because he must have suffered financial misfortunes. Some scholars have wondered whether the Arden families’ religious backgrounds the Ardens had been, at least in the past, Catholic may have had something to do with this. William attended the local Stratford grammar school. Stratford school was a good one, run by a well-respected Oxford grade teacher, and any grammar school at the time would have taught by our standards today enormous amounts of Latin and yes, some Greek as well. Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway in 1582. She’s from a well-to-do Stratford family. But she’s 27, and surely was, or was nearing; old maid status at the time, and Shakespeare was only 18. They marry in November, and a daughter, Susanna, is born in May 1583. William got Anne pregnant, and then hurried a wedding, or Anne was pregnant by someone else and William stepped in to save her honor, or they had an earlier “troth plight” that would have rendered this okay. We just don’t know. They later had twins, Judith and Hamnet, in 1585. For the next seven years there is a gap in official records we see nothing of Shakespeare, and believe me, scholars have looked. From early after his death, people have jumped in to fill in this gap with surmises and legends that he taught school, that he poached a deer on royal lands that he ran off with one of the theatre companies that regularly came through Stratford. He’s the member of a company called The Chamberlain’s Men, called this because their patron was the Lord Chamberlain. It was one of several such companies at the time, all competing for the entertainment dollar. Shakespeare’s company, during the 90s, became one of, if not the, top company, because of fine acting and his plays. By 1599 they moved their theatre from the north of London across the Thames River to the south banks, away from the Puritan city government’s jurisdiction, and Shakespeare was a part-owner in the company. In 1596 he had applied for a coat of arms not for himself but for his father a nice gift to assuage his dad’s feelings over the loss of his own fortune so he was becoming successful and known. In 1603, when James I come to the throne, the Chamberlain’s Men became the King’s Men that are; the King became their patron, anointing them with what by then was well-established, that they were the premier company putting on plays in London. He retired back to Stratford, it would seem, in 1615 buying the second-largest house in town ; clearly he had succeeded economically and managed his money well, and was ready to relax and enjoy it. He didn’t get to enjoy retirement long, however, for he died the next year.

DISCUSSION

This paper argues The Influence of Social, Political and Religious Perspective on Shakespeare Life. Several hypotheses have been put forth to account for his life during this time, and a number of accounts are given by his earliest biographers. According to Shakespeare's first biographer Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare fled Stratford after

he got in trouble for poaching deer from local squire Thomas Lucy, and that he then wrote a scurrilous ballad about Lucy. It is also reported, according to a note added by Samuel Johnson to the 1765 edition of Rowe's Life, that Shakespeare minded the horses for theatre patrons in London. Johnson adds that that story had been told to Alexander Pope by Rowe.^[17] In his *Brief Lives*, written 1669-1696, John Aubrey reported that Shakespeare had been a "schoolmaster in the country" on the authority of William Beeston, son of Christopher Beeston, who had acted with Shakespeare in *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) as a fellow member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men.^[18] In 1985 E. A. J. Honigmann proposed that Shakespeare acted as a schoolmaster in Lancashire,^[19] on the evidence found in the 1581 will of a member of the Hoghton family, referring to plays and play-clothes and asking his kinsman Thomas Hesketh to take care of "...William Shakeshaft, now dwelling with me...". Honigmann proposed that John Cottam, Shakespeare's reputed last schoolmaster, recommended the young man. "Shakeshaft" was, however, a common name in Lancashire at the time. A better documented, but still far from conclusive, link was established some 20 years later in Shakespeare's life: in the will of London goldsmith Thomas Savage, Shakespeare's trustee at the Globe Theatre, one of the beneficiaries was Hesketh's widow.^{[20][21]} Scope for further speculation is offered by records showing that Lord Strange's Men, a company of players linked with Shakespeare's early career in London, regularly performed in the area and would have been well known to the Hoghtons and the Heskeths.^[22] Another idea is that Shakespeare may have joined Queen Elizabeth's Men in 1587, after the sudden death of actor William Knell in a fight while on a tour which later took in Stratford. Samuel Schoenbaum speculates that, "Maybe Shakespeare took Knell's place and thus found his way to London and stage-land."^[23] Shakespeare's father John, as High Bailiff of Stratford, was responsible for the acceptance and welfare of visiting theatrical troupes.^[24] However there is no direct evidence of Shakespeare's membership of the Queen's Men, so it remains speculation. As a married man Shakespeare was ineligible to attend university and debarred from taking up a formal indentured apprenticeship in a trade with an established guild. But acting companies had so-called 'apprenticeships' which had much looser entry requirements.^[25] This is a possible clue to Shakespeare's route into the profession. Most scholars believe that by 1592 Shakespeare was a playwright in London, and that he had enough of a reputation for Robert Greene to denounce him in the posthumous *Greenes, Groats-worth of Witte, bought with a million of Repentance* as "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey." (The italicized line parodies the phrase, "Oh, tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" which Shakespeare wrote in *Henry VI, part 3*).^[26] By late 1594, Shakespeare was part-owner of a playing company, known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men—like others of the period, the company took its name from its aristocratic sponsor, in this case the Lord Chamberlain. The group became popular enough that after the death of Elizabeth I and the coronation of James I (1603), the new monarch adopted the company and it became known as the King's Men, after the death of their previous sponsor. The works are written within the frame of reference of the career actor, rather than a member of the learned professions or from scholarly book-learning.^[27] The Shakespeare family had long sought armorial bearings and the status of gentleman. William's father John, a bailiff of Stratford with a wife of good birth, was eligible for a coat of arms and applied to the College of Heralds, but evidently his worsening financial status prevented him from obtaining it. The application was successfully renewed in 1596, most probably at the instigation of William himself as he was the more prosperous at the time. The motto "Non sanz droict" ("Not without right") was attached to the application, but it was not used on any armorial displays that have survived. The theme of social status and restoration runs deep through the plots of many of his plays, and at times Shakespeare seems to mock his own longing.^[28] By 1596, Shakespeare had moved to the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, and by 1598 he appeared at the top of a list of actors in *Every Man in His Humour* written by Ben Jonson. He is also listed among the actors in Jonson's *Sejanus: His Fall*. Also by 1598, his name began to appear on the title pages of his plays, presumably as a selling point. There is a tradition that Shakespeare, in addition to writing many of the plays his company enacted and concerned with business and financial details as part-owner of the company, continued to act in various parts, such as the ghost of Hamlet's father, Adam in *You Like It*, and the Chorus in *Henry V*.^[29] He appears to have moved across the River Thames to Southwark sometime around 1599. In 1604, Shakespeare acted as a matchmaker for his landlord's daughter. Legal documents from 1612, when the case was brought to trial, show that Shakespeare was a tenant of Christopher Mountjoy, a Huguenot tire-maker (a maker of ornamental headdresses) in the northwest of London in 1604. Mountjoy's apprentice Stephen Bellott wanted to marry Mountjoy's daughter. Shakespeare was enlisted as a go-between, to help negotiate the details of the dowry. On Shakespeare's assurances, the couple married. Eight years later, Bellott sued his father-in-law for delivering only part of the dowry. During the 'Bellott v. Mountjoy' case, Shakespeare was called to testify, but said he remembered little of the circumstances. New Place, Shakespeare's home, sketched in 1737 by George Vertue from a description. By the early 17th century, Shakespeare had become very prosperous. Most of his money went to secure his family's position in Stratford. Shakespeare himself seems to have lived in rented accommodation while in London. According to John Aubrey, he travelled to Stratford to stay with his family for a period each year.^[30] Shakespeare grew rich enough to buy the second-largest house in Stratford, New Place, which he acquired in 1597 for £60 from William Underhill. The Stratford chamberlain's

accounts in 1598 record a sale of stone to the council from "Mr Shaxpere", which may have been related to remodelling work on the newly purchased house.^[31] The purchase was thrown into doubt when evidence emerged that Underhill, who died shortly after the sale, had been poisoned by his oldest son, but the sale was confirmed by the new heir Hercules Underhill when he came of age in 1602.^[32] In 1598 the local council ordered an investigation into the hoarding of grain, as there had been a run of bad harvests causing a steep increase in prices. Speculators were acquiring excess quantities in the hope of profiting from scarcity. The survey includes Shakespeare's household, recording that he possessed ten quarters of malt. This has often been interpreted as evidence that he was listed as a hoarder. Others argue that Shakespeare's holding was not unusual. According to Mark Eccles, "the schoolmaster, Mr. Aspinall, had eleven quarters, and the vicar, Mr. Byfield, had six of his own and four of his sister's".^[31] Samuel Schoenbaum and B.R. Lewis, however, suggest that he purchased the malt as an investment, since he later sued a neighbour, Philip Rogers, for an unpaid debt for twenty bushels of malt.^[31] Bruce Boehrer argues that the sale to Rogers, over six installments, was a kind of "wholesale to retail" arrangement, since Rogers was an apothecary who would have used the malt as raw material for his products.^[31] Boehrer comments that, Shakespeare had established himself in Stratford as the keeper of a great house, the owner of large gardens and granaries, a man with generous stores of barley which one could purchase, at need, for a price. In short, he had become an entrepreneur specialising in real estate and agricultural products, an aspect of his identity further enhanced by his investments in local farmland and farm produce.^[31] Shakespeare's biggest acquisitions were land holdings and a lease on tithes in Old Stratford, to the north of the town. He bought a share in the lease on tithes for £440 in 1605, giving him income from grain and hay, as well as from wool, lamb and other items in Stratford town. He purchased 107 acres of farmland for £320 in 1607, making two local farmers his tenants. Boehrer suggests he was pursuing an "overall investment strategy aimed at controlling as much as possible of the local grain market", a strategy that was highly successful.^[31] In 1614 Shakespeare's profits were potentially threatened by a dispute over enclosure, when local businessman William Combe attempted to take control of common land in Welcombe, part of the area over which Shakespeare had leased tithes. The town clerk Thomas Greene, who opposed the enclosure, recorded a conversation with Shakespeare about the issue. Shakespeare said he believed the enclosure would not go through, a prediction that turned out to be correct.^[33] Greene also recorded that Shakespeare had told Greene's brother that "I was not able to bear the enclosing of Welcombe". It is unclear from the context whether Shakespeare is speaking of his own feelings, or referring to Thomas's opposition.^[34] Shakespeare's last major purchase was in March 1613, when he bought an apartment in a gatehouse in the former Blackfriars priory;^[35] The Gatehouse was near Blackfriars theatre, which Shakespeare's company used as their winter playhouse from 1608. The purchase was probably an investment, as Shakespeare was living mainly in Stratford by this time, and the apartment was rented out to one John Robinson. Robinson may be the same man recorded as a labourer in Stratford, in which case it is possible he worked for Shakespeare. He may be the same John Robinson who was one of the witnesses to Shakespeare's will.^[36] Rowe was the first biographer to pass down the tradition that Shakespeare retired to Stratford some years before his death;^[37] but retirement from all work was uncommon at that time.^[38] and Shakespeare continued to visit London. In 1612 he was called as a witness in the Bellott v. Mountjoy case.^[39] A year later he was back in London to make the Gatehouse purchase. In June 1613 Shakespeare's daughter Susanna was slandered by John Lane, a local man who claimed she had caught gonorrhoea from a lover. Susanna and her husband Dr John Hall sued for slander. Lane failed to appear and was convicted. From November 1614 Shakespeare was in London for several weeks with his son-in-law Hall.^[40] In the last few weeks of Shakespeare's life, the man who was to marry his younger daughter Judith a tavern-keeper named Thomas Quiney was charged in the local church court with "fornication". A woman named Margaret Wheeler had given birth to a child and claimed it was Quiney's; she and the child both died soon after. Quiney was thereafter disgraced, and Shakespeare revised his will to ensure that Judith's interest in his estate was protected from possible malfeasance on Quiney's part. Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616, at the age of 52.^[41] He died within a month of signing his will, a document which he begins by describing himself as being in "perfect health". No extant contemporary source explains how or why he died. After half a century had passed, John Ward, the vicar of Stratford, wrote in his notebook: "Shakespeare, Drayton and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting and, it seems, drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted."^{[42][43]} It is certainly possible he caught a fever after such a meeting, for Shakespeare knew Jonson and Drayton. Of the tributes that started to come from fellow authors, one refers to his relatively early death: "We wondered, Shakespeare, that thou went'st so soon/From the world's stage to the grave's tiring room."^[44] Shakespeare was survived by his wife Anne Hathaway and by two daughters, Susanna and Judith. His son Hamnet had died in 1596. His last surviving descendant was his granddaughter Elizabeth Hall, daughter of Susanna and John Hall. There are no direct descendants of the poet and playwright alive today, but the diarist John Aubrey recalls in his *Brief Lives* that William Davenant, his godson, was "contented" to be believed Shakespeare's actual son. Davenant's mother was the wife of a vintner at the Crown Tavern in Oxford, on the road between London and Stratford, where Shakespeare would stay when travelling between his home and the capital.^[45] Shakespeare is buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was granted the honour of burial in the chancel not on account of his fame as a playwright but for purchasing a share of the tithe of the church for £440 (a considerable

sum of money at the time). A monument on the wall nearest his grave, probably placed by his family,^[46] features a bust showing Shakespeare posed in the act of writing. Each year on his claimed birthday, a new quill pen is placed in the writing hand of the bust. He is believed to have written the epitaph on his tombstone.^[47]

CONCLUSION

Little is actually known for sure about the man we call William Shakespeare, although this is a name familiar to nearly every English speaking person. His birthday is a guess, and just what he looked like is a mystery. Even his identity itself is sometimes disputed. But most people today consider Shakespeare the greatest of all dramatists. His plays demonstrate a profound understanding of the nature of humanity. His skill with language and his ability to construct a story through dramatic and poetic means is unequalled. Shakespeare became a charter member of a theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, in 1594. He first worked in theatres owned by James Burbage northeast of London, the Theatre and the Curtain. In 1598 Burbage moved to Bankside, along the Thames River, and built the Globe Theatre. As a partner in the Globe, (and later the Blackfriars Theatre, acquired in 1608), Shakespeare profited from its success. His plays were performed at the courts of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I, who became sponsor of his theatrical troupe in 1603. Its name was changed to the King's Men.

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