

Shakespeare As a Dramatist

Shakespeare is one of the greatest dramatist of the world. His plays can be divided into three main headings—

- (a) The tragedies
- (b) Histories which include his Roman plays.
- (c) The Comedies.

A tragedy is a play which ends in the death of the hero or the main character. According to Prof. A.C. Bradley, "A Shakespearean tragedy is a story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man in high estate. It is pre-eminently the story of one person, the hero, or at the most two, the hero and the heroine." Tragedy is always concerned with persons of high degree like kings and princes, noblemen, statesmen, generals, men of high social standing and character. The hero is over-come by the forces which have been gathering round him and in the end, meets his death and destruction because of a tragic flaw in his character. The important tragedies are Othello, Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth.

A historical play concerns with the life and reign of a British King such as Henry IV, Henry V, Richard II and Henry VIII. There are some plays that are set in ancient Rome such as Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus. These are also famous as his Roman plays which are set in England and have an English king as the hero slightly differ from the plays which are set in ancient Rome.

A Comedy has a happy ending. It is not merely amusing. Sometimes it has the capacity to make people think and might have a serious purpose behind it. His famous Comedies are Twelfth Night, As You Like It, the Tempest and Merchant of Venice. In As You Like It and Twelfth Night, humour and romance blend in perfect proportion. Some scholars say that Merchant of Venice is not a true Comedy but a tragic Comedy.

Shakespeare was only interested in the audience in the play house. The play house was everything to Shakespeare. So many heroines in his plays willingly change into boys' clothes. This is because the heroines were boys and felt more comfortable in men's clothes.

Secondly, words were very important in Shakespearean plays. He cast his spell on the audience with the magic of words, long speeches and poetic images play with words and sound. He wrote his plays in the form of verse which is famous as a 'blank verse'. The verse is called blank because it is unrhymed. It is used when characters speak about issues which involve deep thoughts and feelings.

Sometimes prose is also used, it is generally used for Comic Character, Characters of lower social position, letters, proclamations etc. In Julius Caesar the warning of Artemidorus to Caesar is in prose. "Caesar, beware of Brutus, take heed of Cassius, come not near Casca, have an eye to Cinna, trust not Trebonius, mark well Metellus Cimber, Decius Brutus loves thee not; thou hast wronged Cassius Ligarius."

Brutus delivers his famous speech in prose in Act III, Scene II. Probably Shakespeare wanted it as a contrast to Mark Antony's speech. In the opening scene of Julius Caesar, the cobbler also talks in prose.

