

# Heroine's Importance by Shakespeare

<sup>1</sup>Karimella Vikram, <sup>2</sup>U.Pavan Kumar

<sup>1</sup>Prof. & Principal, Narayanadri Institute of Science & Technology Rajampet, Kadapa (D), AP, India

<sup>2</sup>Asst.Prof. Narayanadri Institute of Science & Technology Rajampet, Kadapa (D), AP, India

## Abstract

William Shakespeare was baptized on April 26, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. From roughly 1594 onward he was an important member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men company of theatrical players. Written records give little indication of the way in which Shakespeare's professional life molded his artistry. All that can be deduced is that over the course of 20 years, Shakespeare wrote plays that capture the complete range of human emotion and conflict.

## Early Life

Though no birth records exist, church records indicate that a William Shakespeare was baptized at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 26, 1564. From this, it is believed he was born on or near April 23, 1564, and this is the date scholars acknowledge as William Shakespeare's birthday.

Located 103 miles west of London, during Shakespeare's time Stratford-upon-Avon was a market town bisected with a country road and the River Avon. William was the third child of John Shakespeare, a leather merchant, and Mary Arden, a local landed heiress. William had two older sisters, Joan and Judith, and three younger brothers, Gilbert, Richard and Edmund. Before William's birth, his father became a successful merchant and held official positions as alderman and bailiff, an office resembling a mayor. However, records indicate John's fortunes declined sometime in the late 1570s.

Scant records exist of William's childhood, and virtually none regarding his education. Scholars have surmised that he most likely attended the King's New School, in Stratford, which taught reading, writing and the classics. Being a public official's child, William would have undoubtedly qualified for free tuition. But this uncertainty regarding his education has led some to raise questions about the authorship of his work and even about whether or not William Shakespeare ever existed.

## The Evolution of Shakespeare's Heroine

There is something most interesting and peculiar in the way Shakespeare seems to have regarded his heroine as an increasingly important factor in carrying forward the action of the play, and more and more as the center of dramatic interest and appeal, first in the series of his comedies and then, in a different way, in the tragedies. It is strange, too, that though the two kinds overlap, the development of the heroine of Shakespeare's comedies and the evolution of his tragic heroine form two such separate and distinct series. To arrange the plays in their more or less accepted order, setting aside the history plays (where of course the part played by the women had to be more nearly that assigned to them in the sources), and keeping the comedies and tragedies separate, this progress in Shakespeare's dramatic method becomes so evident as to claim a greater significance than has ever been given to it. One is tempted to say that at least no metrical tests could be more definitive in marking out the order of the plays, and in assigning to their right places some of the doubtful ones, than would be indicated by a conformity to a sequence so clearly established and so consistently held. I shall consider briefly the plays in the

two series, first of the comedies and then of the tragedies, and after that I shall try a bit of a struggle with some of those same much disputed over dramas. It is only a seeming upsetting of my theory at the start that the shadowy ladies of Love's Labour's Lost are at least as real and vital as their shadowy lovers, and do, rather more than is the case in the comedies immediately following, control and direct the action of the piece; for we must remember not only that this play was much changed in its later revision but also that the gallantry and policy of the young poet probably entered very largely into his earliest experiment in the writing of comedy. It is fair, I think, to set it aside from our present consideration and consider the sequence of comedies which is to show the evolution of Shakespeare's heroine as beginning with The Comedy of Errors.

Here at least we have the comedy in which the part played by the women is the most slight and subsidiary. The whole dramatic interest of the piece lies in the confusion of the Dromios and of their masters. There is little real characterization of any sort; and such of it as Adriana or her sister receives is purely conventional. The Two Gentlemen of Verona was a more determined study in characterization, and both Silvia and Julia are real; but still the action is wholly controlled by the men, and the interest is chiefly in their loves and their adventures. Neither men nor women control the action of A Midsummer Night's Dream, though if we were to regard Oberon and Titania as man and woman as well as king and queen of fairies, it is notable that Oberon controls and that Titania is made ridiculous without in the least arousing our sympathetic protests, even though she was in fact quite right as to that matter of the "little changeling boy" that the fairy king had stolen. It is noticeable also, in this dramatic fantasy, that while the clowns are the only characters having a flesh and blood reality, yet Helena stands out as gaining the only bit of dramatic sympathy that goes out to any of the characters. With The Merchant of Venice we have in Portia as fully developed and as fine a woman as could be asked for in any comedy. I am not contending that there is any growth in the final excellence of portraiture, though of course this does somewhat keep pace with the developing genius of the dramatist, or any specific progress in the nobility of character of Shakespeare's women; I am at present merely noting the increasingly important part that they take in the action of the comedies, and the growing interest and sympathy which is given to them relatively to that given to the heroes. Now it is clearly in The Merchant of Venice that Shakespeare's heroine first emerges as a doer of things. Without Portia the happy outcome of the play was wholly impossible, but it still remains the character of Shylock that has chiefly fascinated us and the escape of Antonio that has most thrilled us. Even in the casket story, we care more that the easy going Bassanio shall win Portia than that her aversion to her other suitors and her preference for Bassanio shall be triumphant. Of course the happiness for Bassanio in this marriage was greater than the happiness of Portia could be; but this does not at all negate the fact I am recording. The Taming of the Shrew is the story of how Petruchio overcame Katherine, though here we have at least a respectable struggle for supremacy on the part of the heroine. Portia was chiefly a means

to the solution of the conflict between Antonio and Shylock, who are the central opposing forces of the play; whereas Katherine is at least one of the principals in the main action, although the defeated one. I omit any reference to the Bianca story as not the work of Shakespeare, though to include it would not interfere with the point in hand.

The case is somewhat reversed in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, for here we are at least on the side of the buxom heroines, and it is they who undertake and most vigorously accomplish the humiliation of the fat and sensual knight. But Falstaff remains the central character, the hero of his many misfortunes, and he is the occasion and the only justification of the farce. We can scarcely remember Mistress Page and Mistress Ford apart; and for "sweet Anne Page" and her love story we care still less.

*Much Ado About Nothing* gives us two heroines; and while our interest in Beatrice is at least even with our interest in Benedick, the sad fortunes of Hero move us to the exclusion of any care for her credulous and worthless lover. The heroine has now become the central figure in the sub-plot, and the honors in the main plot are evenly divided.

With *As You Like It* the balance is completely shifted. It is Rosalind's love; it is Rosalind's plot and her adventures in the Forest of Arden; it is Rosalind's happiness in the end. Orlando is a woman's man; we see him through Rosalind's eyes, and regard him with her favoring sentiments. It is no answer to say that Lodge's story determines this; it is Shakespeare's choice of the story and his treatment of it that is important.

Viola is the whole of *Twelfth Night*. Except for the "comic relief", her love, her attitude, her success is all. We may be glad for Orlando; we are not even pleased for Duke Orsino. The play has no hero. Again the point is not that we do not chance to care for Orsino's success since he is sentimental and in love with Olivia till the last moment of the play; the point is that Shakespeare made him such a man to begin with, and Viola the most radiant and delightful of his women.

This brings us to the time when Shakespeare turned from comedy to tragedy, and it thus completes the sequence I have sketched of the plays in which the heroine comes more and more into the center of the action, and our interest in the hero becomes relatively less and less. There is no further development possible along this line. It would be as easy to play *Hamlet* with *Hamlet* left out as to have *Twelfth Night* with out Viola.

In the comedies which Shakespeare wrote after 1601, when the series of great tragedies began, we have, however, a new development. Our concern for the fortunes of the heroine deepens through *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* by the intensifying of the suffering through which she passes and the increasing emphasis upon her purity and the deeper qualities of womanhood. This is of necessity accomplished by adding the positiveness of actual villainy to the opposing hero. For Duke Orsino we had a tolerant contempt; for Bertram we have an impatient anger; for Angelo we have hatred and loathing. The only possible advance upon the experiences of Isabella in *Measure for Measure* in the direction of rousing in us all our rage and pity is to be found in the ghastly brothel scenes of *Pericles*. "We some times try to clear Shakespeare's name from all association with these

scenes; but it would be (to me) an inconceivable assumption to credit him with the Marina story unless these scenes were in it.

The only comedy, if it be comedy at all, that I have omitted up to this point is *Troilus and Cressida*. To this play I shall return for more detailed consideration. It is evident that it does not fit anywhere in the sequence I have been following.

Leaving aside also for the present the three romance-comedies written near the close of Shakespeare's life, and turning at once to the tragedies, we find in them a curious parallelism to the comedies in this matter of the evolving heroine. Of course I omit from this sequence of tragedies the early tragedy-of-blood, *Titus Andronicus*, and the early tragic poem of *Borneo and Juliet*, in which Juliet is the finer character, though it was (as always in this period of his work) the man's fortunes which were more carefully followed.

Of course there is relatively more need of a heroine in a comedy than in a tragedy, and the relative importance of the heroine also must be greater; for aside from the brightness and pleasantness which comedy demands, the fact that marriage is the normal business of a comedy is determinative. In the series of comedies ending with *Twelfth Night* the average is two and three-tenths marriages to the play! But when Shakespeare turned from *Twelfth Night* to *Julius Caesar* he turned from a type of play in which the heroine and her good fortune had come to be all in all to a drama in which there was no room for a heroine and scarcely any for the introduction of women at all. *Julius Caesar* stands in the list of tragedies where the *Comedy of Errors* stands in the comedy sequence. We have again a man's world, with a couple of women hardly sketched in in a play complete without them.

A slight and ineffective girl is the heroine of *Hamlet*. We never see the action through Ophelia's eyes; her impotence to be anything to *Hamlet* in his time of great need is her main contribution to the tragedy. Her pretty and pathetic madness and death is her reward and solution. She is but little more needed to the story than *Calpurnia* or *Brutus's Portia* to *Julius Caesar*.

*Desdemona* is of course the essential cause of the tragedy of *Othello*, but it is Iago's work and *Othello's* passion which chiefly concern us. *Desdemona* is of course a wonderful advance upon *Ophelia* both as a woman and as a participator in the action; and her lack of certain qualities is what makes the story possible.

*Desdemona* falls to a minor part, and the lead is taken by a pair of evil women who introduce a new element into the heroine of tragedy. *Cordelia* is absent after the opening scene till toward the close of the play. She has 112 lines to speak out of the 3332 which this drama contains. That Shakespeare himself regarded her only as a minor character is perhaps the explanation of her needless and uncaused death. But *Goneril*, backed and shadowed by *Regan*, produces by her evil determination and desires the tragedy of *Lear*.

In *Macbeth* we find the evil-willed heroine fully developed, her personality much clearer to us, and her part in the action much more conspicuous. The play remains the tragedy of *Macbeth*; but whereas *Goneril* merely thwarted and tortured her father, *Lady Macbeth* takes the whole action into her own hands. She drives *Macbeth* to the murder of *Duncan*, and she holds him fast to his

purpose till the deed is done. But Macbeth once fully started on his downward course, his wife is left behind inactive and unconsulted.

It remained for Antony and Cleopatra to give us the tragic heroine unsurpassed in all literature. The play is not of Antony, in the sense that Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth have been men's plays. Indeed for all his importance in the world of action and for all the profound and subtle delineation of his character Antony remains the lesser of the two, and the tragic denouement is Cleopatra's work.

One cannot but observe two things as to the position of the heroine through this series of tragedies: (a) she is increasingly important in the part she takes in the action with each new play, and is therefore more and more the center of interest; and (b) she is of two kinds, — the first good and the victim of an action which rises outside of her, and the second of evil will and destroyed by the action which she herself brings about. The first series contains Brutus's Portia, Ophelia, Desdemona, Cordelia; the second, Goneril and Regan, Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra. King Lear here represents the shift in the treatment of the heroine, just as *As You Like It* marks the change to the center of interest and appeal in the comedies.

In considering this series of tragedies I have not taken account of *Timon of Athens* and *Coriolanus*. The reason is the very obvious one that these plays do not fit into the general scheme I have been following with that easy appropriateness that each of the previous tragedies has had in taking its proper place in the sequence. Thus far I have not had to do any proving; I have merely called attention to a curiously neglected bit of observation which everyone will realize to be true the moment it is pointed out. But with these new tragedies I must take account of a seeming departure from my thesis. It would be easy to pass over *Timon* as an imperfect play and only partially the work of Shakespeare; but I prefer to reserve it for a more extended consideration later. *Coriolanus* I wish now to add to the sequence in the light of certain special modifications. Though this last in date of Shakespeare's tragedies is the rightful successor to Antony and Cleopatra, yet there is much reason for grouping it rather with the three so-called "romances" which followed it than with the tragedies that went before. There is nothing particularly painful in this play in the sense that *Othello* and *Lear* are painful tragedies. In deed the pivotal point of *Coriolanus*'s futile attempts to cringe to the plebs is little short of intentional comedy. After his reluctant concession of "Kindly! Sir, I pray, let me ha't. I have wounds to show you, which shall be yours in private. Your good voice, sir; what say you?" witness his delightful outburst of "You common cry of curs; whose breath I hate As reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize As the dead carcasses of unburied men That do corrupt my air, I banish you!" [III, iii, 120]; and compare with this *Othello*'s tortured cries or the anguish of the outcast *Lear*. It is not that the tragedy is of lesser make (which of course it were folly to deny), but that Shakespeare is feeling his way toward the grave and serene outcome of the later plays. The atmosphere of this play is not "surcharged with gloom" as was that of all the tragedies before. The necessary and carefully justified death of *Coriolanus* does not give us that solemn pause that we have even with the death of *Brutus*. There is in the whole piece but this one death, whereas the six tragedies before have averaged over six deaths to the play, and none had less than five. Of still greater consequence is the positive side of the matter, — that except for the death of *Coriolanus* himself the play

ends happily. The main catastrophe of the piece, the destruction of Rome, is completely averted.

We may therefore justly expect to find in this transition tragedy a new departure in the treatment of the tragic heroine. *Volumnia*, the mother of *Coriolanus*, carries on the tradition in her tragic greatness and majesty, and is, more than any of her predecessors, the originator and producer of the action. But the new and important thing is this: it is she who brings about the one great good which is accomplished; it is she who saves Rome and redeems her son from the eternal shame of his treason, even though it is at the cost of his life. Except for the final attempt of *Cordelia* to set things right, an attempt which results in her failure and death, this is a new role for Shakespeare's tragic heroine. Throughout the series of *Goneril*, *Lady Macbeth* and *Cleopatra*, there has been a constant advance in the direction of virtue, but these all remain evil women. But *Volumnia* has made her son the soldier and hero that he is when the play opens, she is his good genius in the action of the piece itself, and in the end she controls and triumphs over him through the force of her mother's love, in that magnificent scene — one of the sublimest in all Shakespeare's work — when she turns him back from his terrible revenge. Two things more are notable as to *Volumnia*'s place in the sequence of tragic heroines: her complexity and her maturity. Though we have little more than our personal impressions to determine this matter, still there is small room for a difference of opinion in the assertion I now make: namely, that from *Hamlet* to *Coriolanus* the heroines of the great tragedies have been increasingly complex and each somewhat older than the heroine of the play before. *Ophelia* is little more than a simple child in her teens. She is unmarried, naive to a degree which is almost tragic in itself, and scarcely capable even of the deception to which her father drives her.

*Desdemona* is a bride, a bit more mature, and capable only of a little more independence of action. Her naivete is pitiful but at least no longer absurd. *Cordelia* is sweeter, saner, wiser, but again unable to realize what her position really calls for until the end of the piece, while her older sisters are obviously both more mature and more complex. Though the action of *Macbeth* covers (by implication) so many years, we have only some twenty lines of *Lady Macbeth* (in the sleep walking scene) after the banquet of the third act, which is presumably very shortly after the action of the play begins; and hence we are justified in thinking of her as distinctly on the near side of middle age. We must not confuse her with the stalking majesty of the older actresses who have portrayed her. *Cleopatra* is as much more mature than *Lady Macbeth* as the latter is than *Goneril*; and the complexity of the Egyptian queen is also greater than that of her predecessors. *Volumnia* is beyond middle life — a grandmother and though perhaps not so baffling in her actions as *Cleopatra*, yet her character is surely the most complex of them all.

A point of lesser moment that might be made in passing is that with the increasing maturity of these tragic heroines there has come an increased greatness in their social or world importance. *Ophelia*, the chamberlain's daughter, could not properly be the wife of the Prince of Denmark. *Desdemona*, the daughter of a Venetian senator, is the wife of a general and ruler of an island. The daughters of *Lear* divide the legendary kingdom of Britain; *Lady Macbeth* is full queen of Scotland; *Cleopatra* is the queen of Egypt. But *Volumnia*'s world importance was greater still, in that she was the mother of *Coriolanus* and the savior of Rome.

With Volumnia we have also in this tragedy Virgilia, the wife of Coriolanus, and the lady Valeria. The part in the action of these younger women is small. Virgilia, as sufferer from the acts of others, might be regarded as continuing the tradition of Ophelia, Desdemona and Cordelia; but it is more to the purpose to regard her as the predecessor of a new series of heroines, Imogen, Hermione, and Miranda. Let us therefore turn now to this series of "romances" with which Shakespeare's independent work came to an end.

In *Cymbeline* the older, evil, plot-producing woman falls to the minor part of the unnamed Queen, the wife of *Cymbeline*, — just as *Cordelia*, the virtuous and youthful successor of *Ophelia* and *Desdemona*, falls to a minor part in *Lear*; but *Imogen*, who is *Cymbeline*'s daughter, and wife of the much abused *Leonatus*, rises far above *Virgilia*, the weepy wife of *Coriolanus*.

The curious lapse of sixteen years after the third act of *The Winter's Tale* gives us in *Hermione* first the youthful wife of the jealous *Leontes*, *Imogen*'s successor in being wrongly suspected, innocent and much suffering, and then, in the end, as the triumphant mother of the young and happy *Perdita*, she becomes (in a way) the all-virtuous successor of *Volumnia*.

This works out to a complete annihilation the older heroine who began so inauspiciously with *Goneril*; and consequently (shall we say?) there remains in the final play of *The Tempest*, only the eternally young and wonderfully charming *Miranda*, found at last, like *Perdita*, and given happily to her fortune and her love. Superficially, this treatment of the heroine seems to hark back to the earlier comedies; but in the richness and tenderness of his treatment now Shakespeare introduces in his heroines many elements which are far removed from the romping *Rosalind* and the saucy *Viola*. *Miranda* is the last and fairest flower to blossom from the genius of Shakespeare, the complete feminist!

And now I have taken some account of all the comedies and tragedies except *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*. Though these plays do not give us the finished and independent work of Shakespeare, still the treatment of the heroine in *Troilus and Cressida*, and the utter absence of women from *Timon of Athens* except for the brief appearance of two courtesans with only eight lines between them, are matters in which Shakespeare is involved, and are in themselves so interesting and so curious that I wish particularly to discuss them.

What I shall say about *Timon of Athens* will not involve the problem of the authorship. The scene in which *Phrynia* and *Timandra* appear is always recognized to be Shakespeare's work; and there seems to be neither reason nor room for any other women in the tragedy. But before we can see how this curious omission interrupts the otherwise unbroken sequence of tragic heroines, we must try to determine between which of the greater plays Shakespeare wrote his portion of *Timon*. That it came between *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra* I do not believe.

As is always noted, *Timon* is closely akin to *Lear*; so suggestive of it in many ways that it becomes harder and harder to believe that the writing of *Macbeth* could possibly have come between the two. Return to a previous attitude of mind is of course possible, but it does not seem to be characteristic of Shakespeare. Now setting aside the metrical tests, since they are never precisely determinative at their best and especially do not apply in the

same way to an unfinished play (particularly the test of speeches ending in broken lines, which are most common here), let me submit my firm belief that *Timon* was written or sketched in some haste immediately before *King Lear* and abandoned in favor of the greater play. That it was finished somewhat perfunctorily for stage presentation later, by some inferior poet, would be a natural corollary of this view.

My reasons are very simple ones. (1) The ideas, or philosophy of life, contained in the drama which are akin to those in *Lear* are less completely thought out. They show no faintest advance upon the thought of *Lear*. They are more imperfect, more new to the thinker, less firmly grasped. (2) The emotions which it is presumable the poet had regarding such matters as ingratitude and the like are apparently much more raw and crude in *Timon*, not because it is a poorer play but because they are too new, — not lived over or recalled, as Wordsworth insists the poet's emotions must be. There is somewhat the same difference between *Timon* and *Lear* that there is between an evening paper's first raw story of a day's event and the "write-up" of it in the next morning's papers. The telling of the story of ingratitude is not worked up in the ease of *Timon* as it is in *Lear*, (3) The treatment of certain special features characteristic of both plays shows the same difference, as, for example, the calling of men by the epithets of animals. Compare the long series in *Timon*'s speech a Shakespearian passage with the corresponding instances in *King Lear*, and the proof becomes almost self-apparent. For if all that may be noted as positive in these various differences of treatment is the superior perfection and greatness in *Lear*, does it not seem wholly credible that Shakespeare at the height of his power might abandon so unpromising a subject as he had to deal with in *Timon*, and find a more possible motif in *Lear*, where the giving of money foolishly becomes the giving of a kingdom, the mere lavishness of *Timon* mellows into the father's love of *Lear*, the cave and desolate retreat of *Timon* becomes the hovel of *Edgar* and the storm swept heath with its several shadowy characters adding largeness, completeness, and fulness of misery to the scene, where the rant of *Timon*'s curses gives place to the nobler but no less terrible imprecations of the aged king? At least, if the treatment of these themes in *King Lear* does not seem like the expansion, the heroic amplification of the *Timon* themes, does it seem possible or likely that after the all-sufficient treatment which they did receive in *Lear*, Shakespeare should rehandle these old matters with a shortened vision, with a more uncontrolled virulence, and on a subject contemptible by the side of *Lear*, and then pass on to *Macbeth* or to *Antony and Cleopatra*? To me, that is frankly unbelievable.

Though the individual instances are by necessity wholly different, I find analogies of this same sort in Ibsen's first drafts of his plays (now published in translation) as compared with his finished dramas. The importance and value of *Timon* becomes wonderfully greater if we regard it — the genuine parts of it — as a play in the making. It would then somewhat take the place of what Mr. Shaw lamented that Shakespeare had not left us, — an explanatory preface of his purpose and dramatic method. Unless Shakespeare were the rehandler of the lesser poet's material, it would indicate a most interesting fact: that he wrote an opening scene, briefly indicated suggestions of later development, and then plunged wildly here and there into his final acts. That he ever expected his fragmentary scenes of *Timon* with *Alcibiades*, with *Apemantus*, with the banditti, with the steward, and with the poet and painter to

be given as the consecutive portions of a finished drama is beyond all credence. Shakespeare was always a dramatist.

If, then, Timon was sketched just after Measure for Measure and Othello, we can see here the beginnings of the change from the pity-provoking heroine of the later comedies and the helpless suffering heroine of the tragedies. There seemed to be no room in Timon of Athens for the gentle, loving successor of Desdemona, and the idea of bringing about the tragic action through the evil force of a Goneril and Regan did not at first occur to him. It was this lack of the feminine element of either sort that chiefly foredoomed the play to failure; and I, in my simplicity, cannot but believe that this chiefly turned the mind of the dramatist to consider how such a situation as Timon's might be brought about by such flattering receivers of great benefits as should have even in nature itself a bond against ingratitude, — by (for example) the falsely flattering daughters of a too lavish and impulsive king.

Troilus and Cressida offers a more difficult problem. In spite of the death of Hector, the much fighting, and the most unhappy ending, this play is usually placed among the comedies. It is one of Shakespeare's poorest, and gives, like Timon of Athens, unmistakable evidence of being finished for stage production either hastily and without conviction by Shakespeare himself or somewhat blindly and laboriously by a clever imitator; but that it is almost wholly the genuine work of Shakespeare is beyond all doubt. This gives us a very peculiar problem. Cressida is, at the start, as tender and reserved and yet as outspoken and true-seeming in her love as Juliet herself; and her yielding to the importunities of Troilus hardly prepares us for her equally ready yielding to the more masterful demands of Diomed.

The subject of sex morality had hardly concerned Shakespeare in his earlier comedies. For all his broadness of speech, there is among the earlier plays a wholesome indecency in him to the entire theme, except in such plays as Titus Andronicus and Henry VI, where Shakespeare was simply revising the work of other men. In 1599 (if our dating is correct) when Shakespeare was thirty-five years old, we find him first approaching this vital subject, and then it is to have the sensual Falstaff roundly punished by those merry wives of Windsor, and, in the sub-plot of Much Ado, to have Hero unjustly suspected through the cruel scheming of the cowardly Don John. Again we have the freer and purer atmosphere of As You Like It, Twelfth Night, and Julius Caesar; and then a sudden and complete absorption with this gloomy subject. Though morality is triumphant in the comedies of All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure, and in Pericles, yet the theme is so much in the poet's mind, and in so insistent and disagreeable a way, that we cannot read these plays without shuddering. And each of these three comedies grows more coarse and somber than the one before it. The tragedies of this period show the same thing. The faithlessness of Hamlet's mother fills the melancholy prince with unspeakable horror and casts over him a deadlier spell than does the murder of his father. The young and innocent Ophelia is driven to her madness and death by the harping on this subject of her father and brother at least as much as by her father's death. "Witness the insistence upon this theme in her distracted ravings and songs.

From being a subsidiary motif in Hamlet, woman's purity becomes the whole subject of Othello, as it formed at this same time the whole plot of Measure for Measure. "With these two

plays Shakespeare so frankly faced this theme and so fully gave expression to his attitude toward it that he seems somewhat to have recovered thereafter from the intensity of his feeling regarding it. He had his complete say. In King Lear, therefore, he makes little of the infidelity of his evil-minded heroine, Goneril, adding this, as an almost necessary touch, to show the completeness of her villainess. Regan, as the lesser accomplice, shares somewhat in this shame. "With Antony and Cleopatra the subject (in spite of the special aptness of the situation) seems almost to have passed out of Shakespeare's mind again. The mere fact of Antony's unfaithfulness to his wife in loving Cleopatra hardly occurs to us. In no way is the sin of either made morally accountable for the tragic outcome. With Coriolanus the atmosphere is completely cleared. The wrongful suspicions to which Imogen and Hermione are subjected are considered as dramatic material merely. The theme has become as objective as it was in Much Ado About Nothing. (I do not feel prepared to consider the implications of the later sonnets in this connection.)

And now, in the light of this hasty review, what shall we say of Cressida? The two other instances of actual falseness, the Queen in Hamlet and Goneril in King Lear, are treated with loathing and contempt; but Cressida's rank immorality is made almost a subject for humor. The rage of the youthful Troilus is perfunctory, and the shameful part of Pandarus is made light and laughable. His offense is grosser than that of Iachimo in the comedy of Cymbeline; but notice how widely different is the treatment of Pandarus from that of Iachimo, or of Angelo, or even of Don John! The only instance at all approaching this flippant treatment of the subject of sexual morality is found in Henry IV and The Merry Wives of Windsor, where Falstaff's grossness is added to his cowardice and his fat as a thing for men to laugh at. Psychologically, therefore, it seems to me all but impossible that Troilus and Cressida could have been composed at any other time than 1598 or 1599; but all that one may do in a matter of this sort is to submit his conviction with modesty and sincerity, and trust that what has appealed to him as true may seem so to others.

There would be, however, no fatal objection to placing Troilus and Cressida thus early. It was in 1598 that Chapman published the books of the Iliad that Shakespeare drew upon for much of his material. A probable reference in the Prologue to Jonson's Poetaster, of 1601, tells us nothing, since the Prologue was quite obviously not Shakespeare's. The metrical tests, as in the case of Timon of Athens, are indicative rather of the play's unfinished state than of later composition. If we carry Troilus over to the neighborhood of Othello and Lear, as some have done, it becomes a gross anachronism and an insult to the plays about it. Moliere

### Conclusion

wrote a series of comedies in which the jealous lover is made ridiculous as his suspicions prove each new time to be unfounded; and then, without warning, came Le Misanthrope, where the suspicions of Alceste prove suddenly to be true. The revelation casts a ghastly light upon the plays before. But did Shakespeare jest coarsely with the theme of woman's purity in the time of Hamlet and Measure for Measure and Othello? Perhaps we cannot do better than follow the conclusion of Pleay, that the piece was partly written at an early period in Shakespeare's life and completed for stage production at a later time. If this is the case, the evolution of Shakespeare's heroine was almost too ideally regular. It "keys" as prettily as if it had been discovered by a Baconian

## References

- [1] William Shakespeare. (2014), "The Biography.com website. Retrieved 12:10, Dec 20, 2014.
- [2] [Online] Available: [http://www4.nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/shakespeare\\_an\\_overview](http://www4.nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/shakespeare_an_overview)
- [3] [Online] Available: <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/PDF/Rom>.
- [4] [Online] Available: <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/shake.htm>
- [5] [Online] Available: <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/shake.htm>



Prof. K. Vikram is working as a Principal at Narayanadri Institute of Science & Technology, Rajampet, Kadapa (D.T). He has received ME.(Computer Science and Engineering) from Anna University. Presently, he is a Research Scholar. He has published and presented good number of technical papers in National and International Conferences. His main research interests are Software Engineering, Data Mining, and Network Security.



Mr. U. Pavan Kumar is Working as Asst. Professor at Narayanadri Institute of Science & Technology, Rajampet, Kadapa. He has Received M.A(English) from S.V. University, Tirupathi. He attended so many conferences and published various journals.