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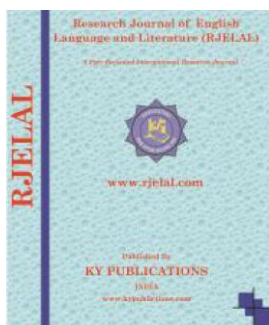
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SONGS AND MUSIC IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare is well-known as a dramatist than a poet. His poetic gift is displayed not merely in his poems and sonnets but also in songs and the verses scattered in all his plays. His greatness lies in his command of rhythm and imagery.

Music and songs in a drama may not be directly relevant to the content but wants them as part of entertainment. In his dramas *The Tempest*, *As you like it*, *The Hamlet*, etc. the songs are so deeply embedded in the text as dialogues that it is Unnecessary to stop the action to permit them to be performed. Shakespeare's use of instrumental music serves the demand of certain dramatic situations like rejoicing, mourning or supernatural interventions.

The soliloquies of his tragic heroes are best examples of greatest poetry. They are the spontaneous overflow of depressed souls. These poetic expressions win more than the desired effect. There was general enthusiasm for music in Elizabethan England. Thus Shakespeare's great combination of these skills gives his plays extraordinary power and richness.

Keywords: Shakespeare sonnets – songs – instrumental – music – stage music – magic music – called for songs – rejoicing – super natural inventions – love of music – casual musicians – musically train boys – songster.

The common reader of Shakespeare knows him as a dramatist and not as a poet because he is not aware of his sonnets and well-known poems, "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece". Shakespeare's poetic gift is displayed not merely in his poems and sonnets but also in songs and the verses scattered in all his plays. Some of the blank verses he uses in his tragedies can be compared with the blank verses of any of the greatest poet in the world. Shakespeare's greatness as a poet lies in his command of rhythm and imagery, use of the art of rhetoric, magic of words and above all his brilliant imagination.

Sometimes Shakespeare is highly metaphorical and that is why he is not always intelligible to the common reader, but in most of his

plays, he uses a language which goes straight into the heart of the reader. His poetry is a superb means of dramatic expression. In his poem, "single nature's double name", the dramatist is like the phoenix and turtle, when he was writing plays he found instances for composing poems.

Music and songs in a drama may not be directly relevant to the realistic element or content of presentation, but the average play –goer wants them as part of entertainment. The dramatic conventions of the Elizabethan stage permitted the introduction of songs and instrumental music. Though the primary object was to please the public, Shakespeare's plays were so conceived that the songs and music could well serve as essential

elements in the structure of the play and convey ideas which cannot be effectively done by speeches.,

Helen Moeris observes-

“The oddest thing about Shakespeare is that people sometimes forget that he wrote plays. There is so much poetry, philosophy and psychology in his writings that it is easy to forget that he wrote for the stage.”

In Richard two we will be fascinated by the psychology of Shakespeare’s king and enchanted by the poetry of his speeches.

David Daiches observes -

“We all know that he was a great poet as well as a great dramatist and it is his combination of these two skills that gives his plays their extraordinary power and richness”.

Though the primary object is to please the public, the song and music well serve as essential elements in the structure of the play. W.H Auden lists out some of those purposes that his poetry serves in his plays, viz

- (a) Dramatic relevance
- (b) Tone of the drama
- (c) Insight into the character
- (d) Instruction
- (e) State of mind of a character

As for dramatic relevance, some scenes of action are to be presented with a musical background. A banquet or a call to battle demands what is known as “stage music”

E.g.:- In the Tempest, Ariel sings to himself about his joy after he gets freedom.....”

When the bee sucks, there suck I
In a cow slip’s bill I lie;
Merrily, Merrily shall I live now”.

Other songs of Ariel are also dramatically significant. They set the course of events in the play. These set of songs are so deeply embedded in the text as dialogues that it is unnecessary to stop the

action to permit them to be performed ,for they are essentially a part of The Tempest , when Ariel sings,

“Come unto these yellow sands

And then take hands -----

Ferdinand feels that the song is intended for him only and follows it.

Again Ariel sings.

“Full fathom five they father lies
of his bones are coral made”

The song entices Ferdinand to Prospero’s cave.

Such “magic music “is employed to make someone fall asleep or fall in love or culminates in the marriage of lovers etc. It is brought about by a trap door device blow or behind the stage .In the Tempest the musical intervention is supernatural.

The tone of drama is impressively suggested by music. In films instrumental music sets off the mood and atmosphere of the scenes. It shows the heroine descent from the pedestal [as Hermione in the hunter’s tale] the wedding masque in The Tempest besides serving a pure musical entertainment, prefigures a very happy return of voyage for the royal families.

“calm seas, auspicious gales,
And sail so expeditious that shall catch,
Your royal fleet far off”
Juno[Queen of Heaven] sings -----
“Hourly joys be still upon you !
Juno sings her blessings on you.”

Thus in The Tempest half dozen songs that are present serve important functions and a necessary dramatic device.

Musically trained boys and professional musicians done the roles especially in the last romances, thus enriching the musical content of the plays.

The songs rendered by Amiens, feste and Balthazar can be called “called-foe” songs, for they are sung at the request of another who wishes to hear some music. So, the characters become performers and so the emphasis is on the quality and

content of the musical numbers. Balthazar is asked by Duke Pedro to entertain the group with a song, He sings-

“O good my Lord, tax not so bad a voice!!

To slander music any more than once “

Likewise Amiens in “As you like it” sings at the request of Jaques

“under the greenwood tree

Who loves to lie with me“

Celebrates the simple, free life in the forest of Arden. The song brings us a picture of pastoral beauty exalted by the spirit of freedom that every creature enjoys.

The song -

“Blow Blow, thou winter wind

Thou art not so unkind

As man’s ingratitude

Thy tooth is not so keen

Because thou art not seen”

Tells us of man’s cruelty to man and his selfishness which is more harmful than writer’s harshness. Nature [the forest] beyond man’s domain is indeed a blissful heaven for those who shun ambition and power over man.

A forester also sings when the countries hunt a deer -

“The horn, the horn, the lusty horn,

Is not a thing to laugh to scorn.” The horns of the deer with their familiar association with unfaithful wives provide a subject for some fun. The last song of hymn is a conventional marriage hymn.

“Wedding is great Juno’s crown

O blessed bond of board and bed”!

Hyman invokes the presiding goddess of marriage to solemnize the wedding of the lovers.

Shakespeare’s use of instrumental music serves the demand of certain dramatic situations like social rejoicing or mourning or supernatural interventions, while casting magic spell etc as you

,see Cohen played to wake up Alonso and Gonzalo [The Tempest] from magic spell, when a message is conveyed to Jupiter [in Cymbeline]. In Antony and Cleopatra the doom of Antony is foretold by playing melancholy note.

Songs are also used for character – revelation. The Melancholy of Mariana [Measure for Measure], who bids a boy-singer to “please her woe” with Music, Mariana’s feelings of sadness and frustration due to rejected love are reflected in the song –

“Take, O Take those lips away
Those so sweetly were forsworn
And those eyes, the break of day,
Lights that do mislead the morn” etc.

This song to which she is listening is a poignant expression of her own battalion disappointment in love.

For a touchingly striking study of character, the song of Ophelia offers a fine example. In her madness wrought by grief, she sings songs before the king, queen and Horatio,

She sings,

“He is dead gone lady,
He is dead and gone,
At his head a grass green turf
At his heels a stone “

In the words of the king Claudius, Ophelia is struck by a battalion of sorrows, she foresees her death, she sings –

“He is gone, He is gone
And we cast away moon

Her profound grief over her father’s death, and the absence of a decent burial for him, and her love for Hamlet and his rejection all went an expression in these songs.

The lines

“To the grave did not go “ and
“Tomorrow is saint –valentine’s day “

reveal her chaste passion. In Othello, Desdemona's willow song provides a picture of an innocent soul waiting her doom with sublime helplessness. The sad songs of Ophelia strike a pathetic note indicating premonition of tragedy.

In Henry 4 part 1 the boy who played Glendower's daughter Kate sings a song in Welsh. In as you like it two boys sing besides Amiens.

These songs are not "called for" songs, but a spontaneous overflow of a depressed soul. These songs reveal the true mind and the sub-conscious feelings beneath the layers of the minds of Mariana, Ophelia and Desdemona.

Songs are hardly seen in the historical plays (exception Antony and Cleopatra – a Roman play). In tragedies the effect is profound. The songs in tragedies help the audience to identify themselves with characters. For example for the boy Lucius, Brutus sings in the tent wins our sympathy for him.

"This is a sleepy tune: o murderous slumber

Lays't thou thy leaden mace upon my boy

That plays thee music?....."

A Shakespearean tragedy in never depressing" says A.C Bradley.

Along with other excellences his poetry is very enjoyable.

The soliloquies of his tragic heroes are best examples of greatest poetry. These poetic expressions emphatically convey the melancholy, and win more than the desired effect.

For example:-The agony of Othello after killing his wife

'My wife! My wife! What wife? I have no wife

O, insupportable, !O heavy now!

Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse".

'Othello has just done the deed and is undecided as to what he should do next .On

mentioning the word wife" he breaks down in a paroxysm of grief over the fact that now he has no wife.

And again Hamlet when he comes to know that his love Ophelia is no more and when he sees Laertes making an extravagant display of grief he bust out-----

"I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
Could not, will all their quantity of love
Make up my sum".

And his other famous soliloquies such as---

"To be or not to be ; that is the question "

"O, that this too solid flesh would smell'---
a beautiful poetic utterances.

Elizabethan audience regarded plays as instructive .The acting of rebellion or abdication put dangerous ideas into the heads of the people. Censor was quick to crack down as such scenes. A play of Thomas More bore the instructions of censor on the script of play . Shakespeare knew the pulse of his audience The day before the "Earl of Essex" rebelled against queen Elizabeth , his friends bribed the players to act Richard 2 ,so that Londoners might actually see that it was possible to replace a weak and vacillating ruler by a strong and capable noble man . Shakespeare uses songs in his plays to instruct and instill great nationalism and patriotic feelings. Here is one song when England faced open war with Spain in 1580.

"This England never did , not never shall ,
lie at the proud foot of a conqueror"

Shakespeare's plays are so familiar that they had an entry in to the Elizabethan song books. They are so written as to give plenty of freedom to the composer and at the same time to be relevant to their contexts and to contribute to the dramatic effect. These songs are more thoughtful poems which can also stand alone.

For example : It was a lover and his lass (As you like it) was later set to music by Mocely .

There was general enthusiasm for music in Elizabethan England. The love of music was certainly

not confined to the educated classes, casual musicians, wandering about the streets waiting for casual engagements to play at wedding or to entertain customers in taverns and in the houses of noble, were plenty. They played the flute, feste in The Twelfth night plays the pipe and taboo. Ariel in The Tempest is directed to play a tune on the taboo and pipe. Ophelia (in the first quarto) enters playing on a lute. And in Julius Caesar, the instrument over which Lucius playing a 'sleepy tune' and falls asleep is a lute.

Brother takes it from his lap, saying

"If thou dost nod, thou break'st thy instrument'.

A dreamer would be needed for the marches of soldiers.

For example: - As in Hamlet, a Danish March.

In the Theatres the normal places for music was a curtained box. Shakespeare himself had a very considerable knowledge of music. His poems and plays are full of allusions to the art. Instrumental music greatly contributed to the atmosphere the playwright wished to evoke.

The music employed in Shakespeare plays may be classed in three groups. 1) Fanfares 2) dancers and 3) songs. Fanfares include all the trumpet calls, alarms, retreats, tuckets as well as marches for drums. Music of this type is played in connection with battles, princes and kings. When Claudius drinks in Hamlet drums were played to indicate the sounds.

The songs

"It was a lover and his lass (As you like it) set by Morely

"6 mistress mine" (Twelfth Night) set by Morcely

"lawn as white as driven snow" (The winter's Tale)

Set by Dr. John Wilson,

"Full fathom five" set by Robert Johnson are famous.

It has been suggested that many of Shakespeare's songs were written to tunes already in existence, although those tunes may not be known to us now.

Musically trained boys (choristers of royal chapel and St. Paul's cathedral) and professional musicians donned these roles, thus enriching the musical context of the plays.

Shakespeare is not only a great poet, but also a great dramatist and a musician. He is one of the greatest songsters and it is his combination of all these skills that gives his plays their extraordinary power and richness.

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