

Shakespeare and Cicero: The Roman Plays

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Abstract:

Shakespeare's greatness lies in his "comprehensive soul". That is the most poetic summation of a dramatic genius that has been equalled. If Shakespeare's writings are the monuments of remarkable genius, they are also the monuments of a remarkable age. His six dramas of English history and three Roman tragedies form such a whole as is found nowhere else, and constitute solid framework of Shakespearean drama. Arguing about Shakespeare's Roman works: The Rape of Lucrece, Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra and Titus Andronicus follow a general Ciceroic philosophy. Lucrece, Titus and Caesar share a concern with the Elizabethan succession and its divisiveness and insecurity. His theme in these plays is country instead of anything else. Coriolanus and Antony speak to issue of Stuart absolutism and excess. In Julius Caesar Shakespeare describes the Roman Republic and killing Caesar is the only way to save Roman Republic. When Shakespeare wrote Caesar, it was pretty oblivious that the sixty six year old Queen Elizabeth [1533-1603] was not going to produce an heir to the throne. Her subjects were stressed out about what would happen upon the monarch's death. Would chaos ensue when Elizabeth died? Who would take the Queen's place? Would the next monarch be a fit ruler or a tyrant? In other words Shakespeare wants to convey that welfare of people or Republic is the big issue than anything else. His plays depicts the yearning for a good relationship between ruler and ruled and human philosophy in its more myriad and intense form. All his Roman works however share Cicero's views of the Republic that sliding into division within ruling class and so into factionalism, rebellion mob rule and tyranny.

Key words: Shakespeare, Cicero, Roman plays, the Republic

Cicero's Influence on Shakespeare's Roman Works:

“If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need”, the mighty lines describes the mighty personality of Roman philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero, born on 3rd January 106 B.C. at Arpinum Roman Republic. He was a politician, lawyer, orator and philosopher. He engaged with a literary movement called ‘Golden Age Latin’. His works ranks among most influential in European culture today still constitute one of the most important bodies primary material for the writing and revision of Roman history , especially the last days of Roman Republic .During the chaotic later half 1st century B.C. marked by civil wars and of Julius Caesar, Cicero championed a return to the traditional Republican government. Following Julius Caesar's death Cicero became an enemy of Mark Antony in the ensuing power struggle attacking him in a series of speeches; he was proscribed as an enemy of state by the second triumvirate and subsequently murdered on 7th December 43 B.C.

Shakespeare gave Cicero an everlasting image in *Julius Caesar* (1599), which is essentially formed on the basis of Plutarch. He is presented in the play as an authoritative man with grey hair. With his influential power he could have helped but the conspirators did not let him in because they thought his vanity would never permit him to be in a position of a mere follower without taking the initiative himself. He is made aware of the critical importance of the moment by both Casca's talk and the unusual phenomenon of the burning heaven. When the people see Caesar to reject the offer of crown without hesitation they are impressed by him, while Cicero speaks in Greek. Cicero admired as a writer and philosopher. He draws a great effect on the views of Shakespeare about Republic. According to Cicero, Republic means commonwealth, served by an ideal government in the welfare of its people.

Place of Cicero in Shakespeare's Works:

Shakespeare first drew attention to contradictory nature of Cicero in Julius Caesar and describe about Roman Republic. Brutus has decided to go ahead and kill his friend Caesar because the man (Caesar) might become a complete tyrant if he gains more power. Even though he and Caesar are best friends, killing Caesar is the only way to save Roman Republic. Is he right? I don't know for sure, but Shakespeare definitely wants us to think about this. Shakespeare portrays Caesar's assassination on the Ides of March 15, by a group of conspirators who feared that the ambitious leader would turn the Roman Republic into a tyrannical monarchy. Shakespeare's presentation of a great orator is such as to indicate that Cicero is a subtle man who knows how to mask his sentiments. He was he who knows rhetoric, knows the people, and the people are the body of the state. He was closer to an understanding of the extremities of politics. His philosophical works blended with flavoured version of Roman ethical thoughts with traditional Roman values to produce a distinctly Roman stoicism—moderate, public-spirited, placing all its emphasis on the renaissance, was incalculable.

DE REPUBLICA (On the Republic):

Most popular of all was Cicero's *De Republica* and *De Officiis* which places great effect on Shakespeare about his views on Republic. Shakespeare's conception of his noble Romans as actors derived ultimately from Cicero's works. He is fascinated by the questions seems to Ciceronian decorum. Shakespeare seems to be affected in views by Cicero's on Republic. He was presented the changing conception of Roman city, its people and its ideals. Cicero's interest in philosophy figured heavily in his later career and led to him introducing Greek philosophy to Roman culture creating a philosophical vocabulary in Latin. Cicero "inspired by an extraordinary zeal for philosophy "sat

enthusiastically at his feet and absorbed Plato's philosophy. He admired especially Plato's moral and political seriousness, but he also respected his breadth of imagination. However, his career as a statesman was marked by inconsistencies and a tendency to shift his position in response to changes in the political climate. His indecision may be attributed to his sensitive and impressionable personality; he was prone to overreaction in the face of political and private change. His commitment to the values of the Republic accommodated a hatred of the poor and persistent opposition to the advocates and mechanisms of popular representation.

Conclusion:

This study has sought to show that Shakespeare's Roman works under discussion, attest a sequence of constitutional decline replication that posited by Cicero in his work *De Republica*. As Cicero discusses the meaning of Republic and its function in welfare of society or people in his work, we find its direct effect on Shakespeare's Roman works. According to the study of Shakespeare's Roman works we can say that Republic means the government working in welfare of people with a prescribed constitution. In the political lessons it afforded, England's history was rivalled only by Rome's particularly that of the late Republic and early Empire, which significantly paralleled England's own history. England's dynastic war, still fresh in national consciousness, recalled the broils that had toppled the Republic, and the attendant democratic impulses culminating in potential or actual popular rule. All the Roman plays, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Titus Andronicus*- concern the disastrous consequences of a failed or destabilised monarchy, and descent of the state into anarchy, civil war and barbarism.

In case of Roman plays Shakespeare never cared for little details and may have been twisted them to give them a distinct Elizabethan colouring. He wanted to please his

audience as well as to create a picture of reality. The public theory is accompanied in Cicero by the more personal one in which the welfare of people is more important than any other idea.