

Shakespeare



Introduction:

As we know there are a lot of men in the world who lived with a lot of questions and question marks.

One of them was William Shakespeare, a great man and unforgotten person. One of questions about him is:

Was Shakespeare a playwright , a poet or an actor? or all of them?

I will discuss this with some articles about him and what did critics said about him.

I. Chapter 1:

English literature is very rich and varied with a lot of great writers and poets. One of them is a man called William Shakespeare, a man had shined in the sky of literature, a man had written his name by golden characters in the world's memory.

Who doesn't know "to be or not to be" or " not all that glitters is gold". Who doesn't know "**Hamlet**" , "**The Merchant of Venice**" or "**Othello**"?

Shakespeare was born in 1564 in Warwickshire. He died in 23 April 1616. John Shakespeare -his father- was a glover by trade, was a well-known man who held important positions in the government of the town .

Shakespeare did not go to the university, and instead tried his hand at life with only the education he received at the local grammar school.

When he was eighteen he married to Anne Hathaway .After three years he became a father of three children.

(Shakespeare, William, *As You Like It*, York Press, Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 2003, page 7)

II. Chapter2:

1- Was William Shakespeare a poet?

Shakespeare was famous for his sonnets .He wrote about 154 sonnets.

Shakespeare's sonnets were first published in 1609 .

The sonnets have been divided into two groupings:

Sonnets 1-126 are addressed to or concern and unnamed "fair youth", probably Shakespeare's friend and patron the Earl of Southampton.

Sonnets 127-154 are about a woman who is conventionally referred to as the "dark lady". The poet speaks about his complicated relationship with this person.

The series of emotions explored in the sonnets is extraordinary: confident declarations of unselfish love, sad words when leaving, expressions of joy at reunion and bitter disappointment.

The series of styles is greatly varied. In many sonnets the style is complex and rich while in others the vocabulary, syntax, and form are disarmingly simple. The best of the sonnets are widely considered to be some of the finest poems in English literature.

(Students book, Committee of Authors, English for starters, literary Section, Eleventh Grade, Maktabat El Nashr El Tarbwi El Souri ,Syrian Educational Publishers,page.34).

The 154 sonnets prove that Shakespeare was a poet, a professional poet.

2- Was William Shakespeare a playwright?

As we know, Shakespeare wrote a lot of plays . According to many he was labeled as one of the greatest dramatists the world has ever known and the finest poet.

Shakespeare's plays are usually divided into four periods. In the first period (1590-1595), he wrote very different types of plays, he wrote chronicle plays dealing with the history of England, such as **Henry VI** and **Richard III**. Also he wrote comedies which include **A Midsummer's Night Dream** and **The Taming of the Shrew** also he wrote tragedies like **Titus Andronicus** and **Romeo and Juliet**.

In the second period, from 1596 to the turn of the century. He focused on chronicle and he wrote his best comedies such as **The Merchant of Venice**, **As You Like It** and **Twelfth Night** .

During the third period, from 1600 to 1608, Shakespeare wrote his great tragedies. These plays given world theatre unforgettable characters such as **Hamlet**, **King Lear**, **Othello** and **MacBeth**. He also wrote some comedies in that period but they weren't as successful as comedies in the second period.

He continued writing plays at the fourth period between 1609 to 1612, he wrote **The Tempest** for example.

(Students book, Committee of Authors, English for starters, literary Section, Eleventh Grade, Maktabat El Nashr El Tarbwi El Sourî(Syrian Educational Publishers. Page.32)

So Shakespeare wrote a lot of plays which concerned among the world's most famous literary works. He used all the literary kinds like, comedies, tragedies,etc. So he was a great playwright.

3- Was Shakespeare an actor?

Shakespeare was involved with a company of actors as actor and playwright. In 1594 he was not only an actor but in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which meant that he was a part-owner of that company of actors (which was formed in 1594), receiving a share of its profits. The patron was the Lord Chamberlain, one of the Royal Household's main officials. They performed together a lot of plays.

Shakespeare seems to have acted such roles as Adams in ***As You Like It***, the ghost in ***Hamlet***, the Duke in ***The Merchant of Venice*** and the Duck in ***Othello***.

His main work, however, was the writing of plays and he was an actor, too.

(Shakespeare, William, *As You Like It*, York Press, Librairie du Liban, pages. 7 and 9)

III- Chapter 3:

1. The critics of Shakespeare.

There has been a great variety of critical approach to Shakespeare's works since his death. They claimed that he had corrupted the language.

Shakespeare was an original writer in many ways. He was unusual among the playwrights of his day because he trained as

an actor before he started writing. He was also different from other playwrights because he did not go to the university.

Most playwrights came from wealthy families and received a very good education. Some contemporary writers were envious of Shakespeare talent. In 1592, the playwright Robert Greene, called Shakespeare an "upstart crow, beautified in our feathers". This insult compares Shakespeare to an ugly common bird that enjoys things he does not deserve.

Other critics were more generous. Ben Jonson, a rival playwright, recognized that Shakespeare was very talented. He said that 'Shakespeare's work was timeless; his use of the English language was so original that he was not of an age, but for all time'.

In 1642, thirty-six years after Shakespeare's death, the theatres of London were closed. Theatres were thought to be a bad influence on society and they did not reopen for eighteen years.

When the theatres reopened in 1660, Shakespeare's plays were not performed, and it was only a century later that his plays finally returned to the London stage. As a result, many people read the plays of Shakespeare as literature and did not see them performed on a stage. It was during this time that Shakespeare became known as a poet rather than a playwright.

John Dryden is one of the most famous critics of Shakespeare. In 1668, he said that Shakespeare was 'naturally learned' and that he did not need a university education to be a great writer.

John Addison, writing in 1712, agreed with Dryden, saying that Shakespeare had 'nothing to support him besides the strength of his own genius'.

Samuel Johnson was the first critic to compare Shakespeare to the writers of ancient Greece and Rome, and suggested that Shakespeare was the greatest poet of all time. He argued that Shakespeare was 'above all writers... a poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirrour [mirror] of manners and of life'.

Alexander Pope recognized that depth and originality of Shakespeare's work. He said that Shakespeare developed characters himself when other playwrights reflected the work of others. Shakespeare was not widely admired in the 18th century; people thought he was an uneducated man from a violent period of English history.

In the 19th century, the romantic poets were inspired by Shakespeare's plays and used the same themes in their poems. At this time, Shakespeare was still considered more as a poet than a playwright.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the most famous Romantics poets, noticed that some expressions in Shakespeare's works were about philosophy and psychology. Before Coleridge, these expressions were sometimes considered mistakes.

By the 1920s, Shakespeare was thought as a playwright rather than a poet. Harley Granville-Barker argued that 'the works of Shakespeare were best when they were performed in a theatre, rather than read in a book'.

Shakespeare's plays were performed during his lifetime. In 1997, the theatre was rebuilt and many new critics were able to watch and enjoy the plays.

Today, there are many critics who considered Shakespeare as both playwright and poet.

(Committee of Authors, English for Starters book, literary Section, Twelfth Grade. Maktabat El Nashr El Tarbwi El Sour, Syrian Educational publishers, 2012, Pages. 16 and 17).

As a conclusion, Shakespeare was a genius in many ways. He proved to the world that education is not the only reason to be successful; talent is the most important thing. He mixed between writing plays, writing poems and acting. He was and still be a symbol in literature and a great flame in Art sky.

References:

- 1- Shakespeare, William, *As You Like It*, York press, Librerie du Liban, Beirut, 2003.
- 2- Committee of Authors, English for Starters book, Literary Section, Eleventh Grade, Maktabat El Nashr El Tarbwi El Souri, Syrian Educational Publishers.
- 3- Committee of Authors, English for starters book, literary Section, Twelfth Grade, Maktabat El Nashr El tarbwi El Souri, Syrian Educational Publishers.