

THE STUDY OF HISTORICISMS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

In this article discusses about the study of historicisms in Shakespeare`s plays and given some important information about the great Shakespeare`s plays

Keywords: *Historicism, play, categories, tetralogies, chronicles, playwright*

АННОТАЦИЯ

В этой статье обсуждается изучение историзмов в пьесах Шекспира и дается важная информация о великих пьесах Шекспира.

Ключевые слова: *историзм, пьеса, категории, тетралогии, хроники, драматург.*

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's plays have been traditionally divided by researchers into four categories: comedy, history, tragedy and romance. He has written ten histories (actually 11 if *Edward III* included) which can present the whole picture of the great history of England. The total ten histories are composed of two tetralogies and the other two histories, *King John* and *Henry VIII*. The first tetralogy includes *Henry VI* trilogy and *Richard III*, while *Richard II*, the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V* constitute the second tetralogy. These histories traverse England's medieval history from the coronation of King John in 1199 to the death of Henry VIII in 1547.

They broadly and profoundly reflect the war, society and life of the English period from King John to Henry VIII. Hence, they are also called chronicles. Shakespeare is one of the most prominent historical playwrights in English history. Not only does he depict many great historic events vividly in his history plays, but also shows the readers and the audience the prevailing political thoughts of that time. In a certain sense, Shakespeare's history plays exert an influence on the British history by means of direct or indirect participation in social and political life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The New Historic school emphasizes that literary criticism should "return to history" and make great efforts in studying the connection between literature and history, and examining the status of ideology and politics in literary works. In the eyes of new historicists, all texts are "political tools" that are used to regulate social, political, and cultural relationships. In this sense, New Historicism has taken a further step compared with Historicism. Historicism holds that history is a set of facts that exist outside the text, providing a strong background for any given text, and the text

is only the reflection of history. New Historicists oppose the simple division between text and history. They believe that literature is actively involved in a particular historical moment, not just passively reflecting history. It can be seen that the purpose of New Historicism's reading is not to interpret the meaning and intention of literary texts, but to describe and test the language, culture, society and political structure of the past in details.

New historicism claims that history is a text, a story, and a narrative. This indicates that historical events exist only in the form of textual imprint. We can understand history in both textual form and in a textualized form. What we learn is not real historical events, but descriptive construction of historical events. In fact, in the course of historical revision, due to the different backgrounds and personal preferences, historians need to revise the disorderly events by means of exclusion, emphasis, and subordination. In this way, the same historical events may have completely different or even opposite meanings through different treatments. They carry the personal imprint of the historical creators.

Shakespeare's first tetralogy ends with the defeat of the evil Richard III in the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. The winner, Earl of Richmond, belongs to the House of Lancaster. He marries the Princess Elizabeth of the House of York, thus uniting the two nobles and ending the Rose War. Richmond is crowned King Henry VII and opens the Tudor dynasty.

DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Today, historians are still arguing about how the evil Richard III in the mouth of people really was, especially whether he personally ordered to kill the princes who were imprisoned in the Tower of London. But what is certain is that it was good for the Tudors to portray him as a tyrannical monarch. It was convenient to highlight his opponent, the future Henry VII, is a hero and a saint.

Richard's stage image as a humpback villain is mainly from *History of King Richard III* (c.1513) written by Sir Thomas More. Because More was in charge of the literary work at the court of King Henry VIII, son of Henry VII, who defeated Richard in the Bosworth Field, he was vilifying Richard as much as possible in *History of King Richard III*.

Richard, the third son, of whom we now treat, was in wit and courage equal with either of them, in body and prowess far under them both: little of stature, ill featured of limbs, crooked-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard-favored in appearance, and such as is in the case of lords called warlike, in other men called otherwise. He was malicious, wrathful, envious, and from before his birth, ever perverse. It is for truth reported that the Duchess his mother had so much ado in her

travail to birth him that she could not be delivered of him uncut, and he came into the world with the feet forward, as men be borne outward, and (as the story runs) also not untoothed.

In fact, the true image of Richard III may not be the case. Leonard F. Dean pointed out that the image of Richard III in More's book is consistent, but the actual personality of Richard III is very complicated. The historians of later generations also gave an objective evaluation of Richard III's performance as the monarch. Winston Churchill objectively affirmed Richard III's political achievements in *A History of the English Speaking Peoples*, pointing out that Richard III's life was frugal, the luxurious scene was restricted, the defeated political opponents were forgiven, and the poor petitions were taken care of.

In 2012, archaeologists at the University of Leicester finally confirmed a municipal parking lot as the Franciscan Church where Richard III was buried. In August of that year, they unearthed a skeleton of an adult male who apparently died in the war. Then, they passed scientific tests such as radiocarbon dating and determined that the deceased died between 1455 and 1540 and was about 20-30 years old. Finally, combined with historical data and by pairing with the DNA of Richard III's descendants, they determined that they discovered the remains of Richard III. According to further research on the epiphysis, Richard III is very likely to die from a fatal blow to the head. His body is thin and his spine vertebrae do have a certain degree of curvature, which is consistent with the hunchback of Richard III in the historical description. However, no evidence of a shrinking arm or lameness has been found.

We can see that the narrative of history in More's *History of King Richard III* is not neutral or objective. The strong points of Richard III are omitted and the physical defects are highlighted by Thomas More intentionally. Standing on his own position, More has made selection of historical materials, thus constructing a set of historical discourses that describe Richard III. The core of the discourses is deformity and evil. And more importantly, More's history has received a lot of attention in the 16th century, and it has been one of the standards for compiling the history of England throughout the century. Therefore, the discourse of Richard III, constructed by More, is widely circulated and recurring in the historical texts of Hall and Holinshed.

Thomas More obtained a lot of information about Richard from Bishop Morton of Ely, a mortal enemy of Richard. More's writings were incorporated into the main chronicles of the Tudor dynasty; Shakespeare may have read it through Edward Hall's *Union of the Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and York* (1548). He may also

have referenced *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* of Holinshed or many other such chronicles.

In the creation of *Richard III*, Shakespeare absorbed and referenced the historical discourse constructed by Thomas More and grasped the characteristics of deformity and evil in the discourse. Richard is not only physically deformed, but also mentally distorted in the play.

At the very beginning of *Richard III*, Richard goes into a soliloquy.

I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty

To strut before a wanton ambling nymph:

I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,

Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,

Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time

Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,

And that so lamely and unfashionable

That dogs bark at me as I halt by them —

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,

Have no delight to pass away the time,

Unless to see my shadow in the sun

And descant on mine own deformity.

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,

To entertain these fair well-spoken days,

I am determinèd to prove a villain

And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

(Richard III.1.1.16-31)

In fact, the literary discourse of Richard's deformity and evil has been established in the third part of his previous work *Henry VI*.

To shrink mine arm up like a withered shrub,

To make an envious mountain on my back,

Where sits deformity to mock my body;

To shape my legs of an unequal size,

To disproportion me in every part,

Like to a chaos or an unlicked bear-whelp,

That carries no impression like the dam.

(Henry V, Part III.3.2.57-163)

Then, since the heavens have shaped my body so,

Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.

(Henry VI, Part III.5.6.78-79)

It can be seen that the "literary discourse" about Richard in the literary texts created by Shakespeare is consistent with the "historical discourse" written by Thomas More and others. Both of their cores are deformity and evil.

CONCLUSION

Studying Shakespeare's history plays from the perspective of New Historicist mainly refers to examining the relationship between text and history, which means to put literary texts in the same position as non-literary texts and combine them together. By studying the mutual construction of literature and history, the new historicists, represented by Greenblatt and Montrose, have proposed new research methods for Renaissance literature and Shakespeare's history plays. By analyzing Shakespeare's history plays from a New Historicist perspective, it can be concluded that the playwright himself is inevitably influenced by the era, social and political environment in which he lives when constructing literary texts. At the same time, the playwright also participates in the writing of history through the construction of literary texts.

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