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CLASSICAL INHERITANCE AND HUMANIST INNOVATION IN SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES ZULFIQAR MUGHAL

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Abstract

This paper examines Shakespeare's engagement with the fundamental elements of classical tragic drama and the influence of Renaissance humanism on his plays. Although Shakespeare draws heavily on traditional Senecan tragic conventions–particularly the concept of scelus, denoting crime and moral corruption–his originality lies in his departure from the rigid structures of classical tragedy. The study analyzes key tragic elements such as the nature of the tragic hero, the role of the supernatural, humanist thought, the treatment of fate, and the cosmic order, with specific reference to Hamlet, King Lear, Julius Caesar, Othello, and Macbeth. The findings identify four major transformative features that define Shakespearean tragedy. First, Shakespeare reshapes the nature of the protagonist, shifting from the fate-driven, mythical hero of classical tragedy to a psychologically complex, humanist figure whose actions emerge from internal conflicts and emotional turmoil. Second, the downfall of the tragic hero is depicted as the result of an interaction between personal moral choices and external circumstances rather than destiny alone. Third, supernatural elements are presented not merely as external forces but as reflections of the characters' unstable mental states, unresolved guilt, and accumulated trauma. Finally, Shakespeare departs from the Senecan tradition of the triumph of evil by ultimately portraying the downfall of immoral forces, thereby reinforcing a moral framework within his tragedies.

INTRODUCTION

Charles and Michelle Martindale in their book Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity write "Seneca was the closest Shakespeare ever got to Greek tragedy but, to a man who could always make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, that was quite close enough" (Martindale 44). That is to say that though Shakespeare may not have been directly influenced by Greek tragedy, with his boundless creativity and unparalleled genius he was able to write and dramatize his plays in a manner that was uncannily like Greek tragedy despite having drawn from secondary sources like Seneca. His plays are full of allusions to the Classics including references to Greek mythology, Grecian and Roman history, literature, and philosophy in a way that suggests more than just a passing acquaintance (Baumbach 77). Even without directly having witnessed the works of Greek dramatists, there is an undeniable affinity between Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, which makes the reader and the critic wonder if he was following an Attic template for his plays. However, Shakespeare is known to have experimented with a wide variety of literary and dramatic forms, including the thematic ideals of ancient Classical tragedy. This paper explores how Shakespeare while drawing greatly from earlier Classical drama, especially Senecan tragedy, experimented greatly

ISSN: 2709-7919 [e] 2709-7900 [p] Volume 6 Issue 4, 2025

with his resources to create plays fitting the Elizabethan sensibility. The paper focuses on how he dealt with themes of humanism, fate, destiny, history, supernaturalism, evil, and optimism in his dramas while experimenting with the Classical mode of the tragic hero and the cosmic structure of the universe. Special references *to Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth, and Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear* have been made.

Discussion

In Elizabethan England, Shakespeare and his contemporaries didn't have direct access to Greek drama because there weren't any English versions available for plays by eminent Greek tragedians like Sophocles, Euripides, or Aeschylus by then. What they did have at their disposal was the Senecan revenge tragedy (Silk 241). Lucius Annaeus Seneca, the ancient Roman stoic philosopher and dramatist was known for borrowing material from Greek drama to criticize the outrageous reign of Nero Caesar and to describe a radically evil world (Arkins 1). This inevitably makes his plays much more pessimistic than Greek tragedies. The Elizabethans held Roman tragedy in high esteem, though modernist critics like T.S Eliot find it difficult to understand why exactly (Wells 73). A possible explanation for this might be found in the fact that long before Senecan tragedy became popular with the Elizabethans, Mystery and Morality plays had their fair share of violence and horror like flagellation and crucifixion in the York Mystery plays (Wells 73). This might have aided Roman tragedy to incorporate itself much more easily into Elizabethan sensibility and eventually act as a kind of template for Shakespearean tragedy.

Seneca's revenge tragedy taught Shakespeare 'scelus', which refers to the concepts of crime, sin, evil, and wickedness. Arkins notes that one of the most obvious messages derived from Thyestes is "Great crimes you don't avenge unless you outdo them" (5). We see that in the end of *Othello*, where after killing Desdemona Othello implores the devils to "whip him" (289) before proceeding to kill himself, Shakespeare has indeed outdone avenging Desdemona. Without Seneca's 'scelus', Shakespeare could not have been expected to create such a climactic scene (Silk 241-2). Thus, it is easy to see how deeply influenced Shakespeare was by the Senecan tragedy and that he was certainly inclined to follow it as an over-arching model. However, Shakespeare was not one to follow the rules, rather it is for his uniqueness that he is remembered today.

Samuel Johnson in his Preface to Shakespeare has commented that Shakespeare's dramas have no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men who act and speak like the reader. His drama is the mirror of life (3-4). Dr. Johnson also observes that Shakespeare's Romans are critiqued not to be sufficiently Roman, while Voltaire deems his kings not to be sufficiently royal (4). By choosing to write about principal characters who are more human than the divine and noble heroes of Greek and Roman drama, Shakespeare transgresses the boundaries of attributes laid out for protagonists by ancient classical critics. In Poetics, Aristotle prescribes the hero and suffering character of a play to be above ordinary men, that is, from noble or royal lineage. Moreover, the suffering characters in ancient classical tragedy are often from the realm of heroic mythology (Silk 244). That is these characters, though flesh and blood, are directly in connection to the divine. Heroes like Agamemnon and Ajax are the progeny of gods, and even Oedipus who doesn't have any divine ancestors becomes something of a prophet after blinding himself and is worshiped by some Greek religious cults (Silk 244). On the other hand, Shakespeare's protagonists are strictly human. Their suffering is not merely for acting like a cog in the wheel of cosmic justice, but instead bares the inner torments of the human psyche.

A probable explanation of why Shakespeare chose to do so might be that he was writing amid the golden age of Renaissance Humanism, which demanded him to create characters who were individuals and not just extraordinary, unrelatable heroes. For this reason, some critics have commented that Shakespeare's Romans are Elizabethans in togas (Baumbach 79). In Dr Johnson's words, Shakespearean protagonists are influenced by passions and principles that agitate

ISSN: 2709-7919 [e] 2709-7900 [p] Volume 6 Issue 4, 2025

all minds (2). Moreover, by deviating from the ideal Senecan hero, Shakespeare was able to create universal characters. Classical scholar Lydia Baumbach is an adherent of this idea; she observes that Shakespeare not only infused the spirit of his own age in the sources he derived from but also instilled in them the spirit of universality, for his plays needed to appease the Elizabethan and Jacobean sensibility as well as audiences from future generations (80). Thus his Roman tragedies like *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Anthony and Cleopatra* can still be seen from Marxist, capitalist, and democratic lenses (Baumbach 80). Referring back to the notion of strictly human Shakespearean heroes, his revenge tragedy *Hamlet* presents us with a fitting example. Arkins refers to it as one of Shakespeare's most Senecan plays; the tone, the atmosphere, the emotional charge, the general theme of revenge for a great wrong done, and the meditative soliloquies are all borrowed from Seneca (4-8). However, it is the treatment of the hero, Prince Hamlet, where Shakespeare deviates from the Senecan model of the avenger. Hamlet doesn't ruthlessly pursue his victims but rather incessantly wavers before committing revenge (Arkins 8). Over the centuries critics from different schools of thought have proposed theories to explain Hamlet's character. One of the most popular of these is Dr. Ernest Jones' theory which takes a psychoanalytical approach, arguing that Hamlet procrastinates because he suffers from an Oedipal complex (Reed 177-179). Though we cannot completely rule out the possibility of Shakespeare's knowledge of Seneca's Oedipus considering it was staged in Cambridge between 1551 and 1563 (Arkins 1), there is little possibility for him to have borrowed the concept of Oedipal complex from there as it was not well-understood before Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic theory in 1899. However, suppose we are still tempted to believe in the likelihood that the Oedipal echoes in *Hamlet* were deliberate. In that case, Professor Oscar J.Campbell proposes a theory that only reinforces Shakespeare's deviation from the Oedipal template. Campbell's theory to explain Hamlet's choices has received the least objection; it recognizes Hamlet as a manic-depressive youth who fails in his motive of revenge due to psychotic shortcomings (Reed 178). This theory suggests Shakespeare's portrayal of Hamlet as a young person suffering from nothing more than a human mental disorder, indifferent to his regal background. On the other hand, Oedipus' suffering is largely dependent on his fall from a king to a blind beggar, which makes his royal status much more consequential than his humanity.

Hamlet's self-accusations are the outgrowth of a conscience and his obsession with his past actions, or rather inaction, and are therefore unwarranted (Reed 181). Another example of when Shakespeare puts a character through extreme psychological torment is found in *Macbeth*, Here Lady Macbeth is portrayed initially as a formidable female lead deviating greatly from any feminine archetypes but ends up dying as a frail human being. Here one notices a much obvious parallel between her and Seneca's Medea. As Shakespearean Professor Jonathan Bate suggests in his book How the Classics Made Shakespeare, we may say with some confidence that the murderous Medea is a paradigm for Lady Macbeth (45-47). He further observes that one of Shakespeare's most frequently used rhetorical devices was the paradigm, and this one may be a formidable example of it (47). Some of Lady Macbeth's most gruesome dialogues are found in Act 1, Scene 7 that liken her uncannily to Medea;

"I have given suck, and know,
How tender 't is to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out" (lines 54-58).

This dialogue suggests that Lady Macbeth has experienced motherhood before. We are not told how it ended, but it puts Lady Macbeth's tendency for infanticide out in the open, making her analogous to Medea. Furthermore, both heroines desire to be "unsexed", that is, they want to desert traditional female values (Bate 46). Another similarity between them is their association with witchcraft. While Medea is indisputably an enchantress, speculations that Lady Macbeth too is a witch have often been made. Nyusztay calls her a "domesticated witch" who plays the role of

ISSN: 2709-7919 [e] 2709-7900 [p] Volume 6 Issue 4, 2025

Macbeth's proximate instigator (83). But what's interesting is how Shakespeare doesn't let go of the human trait in even his most unearthly heroines. Unlike Medea who after killing her children flies away to start a new life with apparently little guilt, Lady Macbeth's conscience utterl destroys her sanity to the point of committing suicide. Duncan's murder brings out the most human response from her; extreme guilt. She too, much like Hamlet, is morbidly occupied with past sins but doesn't have Medea's superhuman strength to move past them.

Shakespeare's psychologization of his main characters creates tragic heroes that are very different from the kind of tragic heroes portrayed in Greek or Roman drama. In ancient Classical drama, the hero's demise was due to events that were largely out of his control, whereas in Shakespearean drama the hero's violated conscience brings his fall. However, such deviations were bound to arise when both of these drama types served different purposes. The ancient Greek plays were to honor the Olympian gods and put human characters entirely on their mercy. In contrast, Shakespearean plays had to appease, if anything at all, the Elizabethan tenets and ambitions of Renaissance Humanism. It was required of him to create characters who depicted man as being at the center of the universe; characters who were individuals, and what Harold Bloom refers to as "so many separate selves" (1).

A very interesting result of Shakespeare's humanistic ambitions is his treatment of fate and destiny. Unlike the Classics, Shakespearean heroes always have some control over their fate no matter how much they appear to disassociate from this power. As for destiny, it is nothing but the sum of their external circumstances or influences (Morozov 57). On the contrary, Greek tragedy usually has a hero predestined to delusion (Nyusztay 82). His life is subjected to the gods' whims who ransack it right before his eyes. He's nothing but a pawn in the game of fate. Sophoclean heroes like Oedipus are typical examples. However, for Shakespeare, there is no concept of fate as a mystical abstraction. Though all Shakespearean plays depict this idea, we will specifically mention *Othello* and *Macbeth.* After killing Desdemona in Act 5, Scene 2, and before committing suicide, Othello laments "Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now" (line 277). His saying so implies that he had no control over the events that occurred, which is untrue. Instead, killing Desdemona and then himself was always a choice he compelled himself to make. It is none other than Othello who passes the verdict for Desdemona's murder in line 58; "Thou art to die". The reason behind his actions is a feeling of necessity and compulsion which is nonetheless a product of Othello's own mind. For *Macbeth,* which seems to be Shakespeare's most fatalistic play, it's a common misconception that the witches forced Macbeth into killing Duncan. In truth, he had been occupied by such thoughts for quite some time before the weird sisters entered the play (Nyusztay 82). Lady Macbeth's dialogues in Act 1, Scene 7 are evidence for this:

"What beast wasn't then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?"

and

"Nor time nor place, Did then adhere: and yet you would make both" (lines 47-52).

Here Lady Macbeth is referring to the time Macbeth had the idea of killing Duncan, which was long before the weird sisters. This indicates that the witches had no role in pre-destining Macbeth, which leads us back to what Morozov says; that in Shakespeare's plays the external circumstances or influence sum up to create destiny (57). The supernatural or divine doesn't have the upper hand here despite appearing to be so.

Additionally, the portrayal of supernatural elements in Shakespeare's tragedies is also infiltrated by his psychological approach, intricately intertwined with the characters' mental state. Aeschylus' tragedies serve as the origin of the dramatic ghost. It was Aeschylus among Greek tragedians, who first introduced the vengeful ghosts of Clytemnestra and Darius into the *Eumenides* and *Persae*, respectively (Moorman 6). Yet again, Shakespeare borrows the concept of the existence of a supernatural world from Seneca, but

ISSN: 2709-7919 [e] 2709-7900 [p] Volume 6 Issue 4, 2025

he puts it to a completely different use. Greek and Roman dramas had a distinctly supernatural environment because in spirit they were religious. The images of dragons, oracles, witches, ghosts, and prophets are recurrent in them. In their context, the supernatural was indeed "a realm the human mind could not conceive" (Bown et al. 1-19). For the ancients, the tragic spirit of a play was wrapped around the idea that human beings have no jurisdiction in the realm of gods; where human beings cannot question the gods' decisions. For Shakespearean plays too no accepted laws of natural science or physical laws can explain the supernatural. This is because the Elizabethans too were superstitious people; they too feared the unknown as well as the forces of nature and the supernatural (Agarwalla 43). However, in Shakespearean plays, the relationship between man's world and the supernatural realm is quite different from what we understand in Greek or Roman drama. While supernatural elements in Greek plays represented the divine intervention; gods appearing ex machina to serve divine justice, Shakespeare molded this theme around human agency or mental stability. Evidence for this can be found in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar*. According to the Elizabethan or Protestant belief, contrary to the Roman Catholic creed, there is no concept of Purgatory (Reed 179). After death, one can either enter Heaven or Hell. So, how does King Hamlet's Ghost return to the living world if there is no Purgatory? Reed while Quoting from King James I's *Daemonologie* (1597), a dialogue on the study of demonology, shares the same Protestant view; "neither can the spirit of the defunct return to his friends or yet an Angel use such forms" (179). Though apart from Hamlet the Ghost is witnessed by Marcellus and Bernardo, the above question still suggests that the Ghost can be a product of Hamlet's imagination. Robert Burton in *Anatomy of Melancholy* speaks about the effects of a spirit over the mind of an individual as a subject of supernaturalism; "many think he can work upon the body but not upon the mind. But experience pronounce the otherwise, that he can work both upon body and mind." (49). *Macbeth* provides better evidence of this probability. Banquo's ghost visits Macbeth when he is wishing Banquo good health at a dinner party after killing him. Here, no one except Macbeth sees the ghost, not even Lady Macbeth. In this scenario, it is more than possible that Macbeth's guilt is driving him to insanity and making him hallucinate.

Caesar's ghost in *Julius Caesar* plays a similar role. Caesar's Ghost, much like Banquo's ghost, brings out Brutus' guilt. Macbeth recognizes the ghost as "unreal mockery" (line 82), the very painting of his fear; and Brutus claims "it is weakness of mine eyes" (line 281) that "shapes this monstrous apparition" (line 283). Shakespeare in both *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* addresses the assassination of the head of the state and is more interested in the consequences of regicide for the murderer. In illustrating the deranging outcomes of murder, Shakespeare's use of the supernatural gives his plays the highest dramatic value. No doubt, alive Caesar demands great respect but dead Caesar enhances the tragic spirit of the play, as Brutus is constantly haunted by the power of Caesar's ghost. The appearance of ghosts also creates ambiguity in the play which gives rise to a dramatic mood. In the opening of Act 1, Scene 1 of *Hamlet*, Bernardo and Francisco ask startled questions; "Who's there?" (1), and "Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself" (2). And then Horatio's question, "What, has this thing, appeared again tonight?" (21), set the tone of ambiguity and duplicity that create a dramatic mood in the play. The audience wonders if the appearance of the ghost acts as a catalyst for Hamlet's madness. Or did he already have his suspicions about Claudius? Seneca's ghosts, like the spirit of Megaera in Thyestes, also contribute a dramatic value to the play. This hyperbole in early Elizabethan tragedy is a direct heirloom of Senecan tragedy (Moorman 87).

Julius Caesar is also a play where the supernatural creates organic connections between different themes of the play as a whole. It is also noteworthy that almost every aspect of occult phenomena is mentioned in this play including prophecies, omens, strange dream narratives, and ghosts inspiring people to claim revenge or forecast their downfall and demise. By demonstrating the

ISSN: 2709-7919 [e] 2709-7900 [p] Volume 6 Issue 4, 2025

prevalent superstitions in ancient Rome, Shakespeare provides us with a true picture of Roman tradition and history. While quoting Nahum Tate, Baumbach writes: "I am sure he never touches on a Roman story, but the Persons, the Passages, the Manners, the Circumstances, the Ceremonies, are all Roman'' (79). A good example is Caesar's superstitions regarding his wife's ability to bear children, which not only tells us more about the importance of superstitions in ancient Rome but in Caesar's own life as well. In Act 1, Scene 2, at the beginning of the play; "Calpurnia! Stand you directly in Antonio's way, When he doth run his course. Antonio!" (1-4). Then, he talks to Antonio; "Forget not in your speed, Antonio, To touch Calpurnia; for our elderly say, The barren, touched in this hold chase, Shake off their sterile curse" (6-9). In this scene, Antonio is a participant of a race in the Annual Roman festival Lupercalia, held on 15th February to honor Faunus, the god of fertility and forests. Caesar is referring to a common myth around this festival that if a runner touches a barren woman, who in this case is Caesar's wife Calpurnia, she will be able to conceive a child. This demonstrates how Shakespeare weaves different themes together into a single supernaturalist core framework. Portraying Caesar as a believer of this myth sheds light on his superstitious personality. gives his protagonists a greater nuance by giving the audience an insight into the hero's beliefs and moral principles.

Shakespeare's deliberate use of supernatural themes is to reflect the conscience and psychotic flaws of his characters, delving deeper into the human condition. The subject of supernaturalism is directly linked to the concept of the cosmos in Shakespearean tragedy. William J. Grace points out that Shakespeare is unique in English literature for possessing a cosmic sense with an organic supernaturalism to an extraordinary degree (437). He is near the Greek concept of the cosmos but his supernatural referent is left mysterious; it is not categorized. Moreover, as mentioned before, unlike the Greeks he does not look upon a spiteful destiny that would ironically invert the course of events in the protagonist's life (439). Nor does he believe in the Hegelian sense of resolution of the opposites in which the conflict results in a great truth (Grace 439). Shakespeare's tragedy follows a logical series of events that cries out for a solution (443). He, like the ancient tragedians, does tie the cosmic sense with a sense of justice; but the way justice is served in his idea of the cosmos is not Grecian. He places foremost emphasis on moral human choices and deeds, and eventually retribution. In fact, this is how he achieves most of the tragic irony in his plays: by placing the action purely on a natural plane set against the question mark of man's destiny (439). In Act 5 Scene 2 of *Othello*, he says; "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul. Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars, It is the cause'' (lines 1-3). Shakespeare creates characters functioning as parts within a cosmic structure and formulates relationships between the particular and the universal, ultimate good and evil, and the microcosm and the macrocosm, but according to contemporary conceptions (Grace 434). This is where he moves away from the earlier Greek and Roman concepts of the cosmos, which inevitably leads to a different treatment of justice and punishment. Shakespeare draws the concept of transcendent good from Renaissance Platonism. This transcendent good is what Castiglione calls "heavenly bountifulnesse", the inexhaustible goodness that is constantly diffusing into the universe. This goodness, according to Renaissance Platonism, connects one to his fellow men, with the angels and the entire universe. However, evil cuts one off this bounty of goodness and stops the transcendence. Therefore, who commits evil is severed from the "heavenly bountifulnesse" and is utterly alone in the universe (Grace 434-435). This concept of transcendence is found in *Macbeth*. Act 1 Scene 3 of *Macbeth* states;

"The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray' in deepest consequence.'' (126-128).

Here, the idea that personal sin carries a transcendent guilt is important. It is an act that can cut off the protagonist from the transcendent "bountifulness''. Thus, Shakespeare through this version of the cosmos, emphasizes the idea of

ISSN: 2709-7919 [e] 2709-7900 [p] Volume 6 Issue 4, 2025

choice and links the cosmic sense with its deep knowledge of good. In Hamlet, he reiterates this concept in Act 2 Scene 2; "What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty." (301-302). But unlike classic tragedians, Shakespeare creates the inter-relationship of transcendence and immanence through his characters. For instance, Hamlet's thought is also explicitly taken up with the Platonic conception of eternal perfection and eternal beauty that is imperfectly reflected in the world. He doesn't merely see-saw between what G. Wilson Knight would call "grace and hell of cynicism" (Grace 438). In a nutshell, Shakespeare's employment of supernatural themes and techniques not only portrays contemporary notions of human agency and conscience but also shows the complexity of the human mind. Moreover, Shakespeare's cosmology also has a sense of retribution. This is because his cosmic structure also draws on the medieval notions of punishment for unrepented sin. Shakespeare's values also comprise mercy (Grace 441).

An interesting aspect of Shakespeare's cosmic sense is the deliberate artistic irony of it. He would purposefully black out the supernatural element of the scene, to allow the unfortunate victims to receive tragic sympathy. In this way, pathos arises from a question awaiting an answer, an answer that in the world of time, of contingent particulars, is concealed from the audience. For example, Lear would incessantly question the supernatural, he would project his suffering on the heavens, and he would make the heavens subordinate to his passions.

"O heavens, If you do love old men, if your sweet sway Show obedience, if you yourselves are old,
Make it your cause. Send down, and take my part" (Act 2, Scene 4, lines 217-220)

But the tragic fact remains; it is himself who has brought this calamity and not the supernatural.

Lastly, it is intriguing how Shakespeare manages to make these plays tragic but not particularly pessimistic by eventually showing the defeat of evil. Pessimism, as we call it today, is prevalent in Senecan tragedy, possibly because he was an orthodox Stoic. In his essay De Providentia his general attitude towards evil and suffering is that they are "teleologically necessary" (Spring 51). Arkins notes that it is typical for Senecan tragedy to start with a Cloud of Evil, then Reason's defeat, and the ultimate triumph of Evil (1-2). Even when he tries to justify the necessity of evil, for instance by reasoning that war is necessary to control the world's population and that moral evil is a test of character, he is not optimistic (Spring 51). For Seneca, evil is necessary and it is here to stay. Shakespeare doesn't treat evil in the same way. For him, evil is transitory, and it is so because his plays reflect his worldview; the struggle eventually lessens, enlightenment follows (Morozov 55). For example, in Romeo and Juliet, the young lovers die but their families reconcile. The Montagues and Capulets raise golden statues for Romeo and Juliet that symbolize their union in death, thus concluding the play on a bittersweet note, if not an entirely hopeful one. Either way, this is not a pessimistic ending. In *King Lear* too the play concludes on an optimistic note with the noble Kent and Edgar's ascent to power. The same goes for h, with the tyrant's defeat at the hands of Duncan's son Malcolm. These tragedies were written when there was a struggle between the Humanists and the Machiavellians in Elizabethan England (Morozov 54). This dualism is evident in Shakespearean plays; man's greatness as well as his disillusionment. But he certainly does not consider this strife to remain permanent and this belief produces optimism in even his most horrific plays.

In conclusion, Shakespeare's imagination went well beyond the tenets of Elizabethan psychology. The historical context in which he was writing fostered a deeply introspective tragic spirit in his plays, a quality for which Harold Bloom in his book Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human relates him more to Chaucer and Dostoevsky than to his contemporaries (1). Bloom notices that Shakespeare's original invention is Personality, which accounts for his perpetual pervasiveness (4). For this very reason, it might be argued that the epitome of tragedy is not Greek or Roman but Shakespearean tragedy as Ben Johnson indicates in his poem "To the Memory of My Beloved, the

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Author Mr. William Shakespeare" says: "He was not of an age, but for all time!". From this discussion, it is obvious that all of Shakespeare's experimentation with the Senecan, and hence Greek, models of tragedy can be wrapped around the spirit of Renaissance Humanism. Wherever he deviates from the earlier templates it is because the vigor of his era demanded it. He was a man of the Golden Age of England; where the language, education, political structures, theatre, and the dawning British Empire all made it the most propitious moment in English history. His plays are imbibed in this dynamism, while also benefiting from his grammar school education which must be where he first encountered Latin, eventually leading him to Seneca's tragic model.

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