

Tribute to *The Bard*

by Earl P. Holt III

I consider William Shakespeare to be the greatest author who ever put ink to paper. In my opinion, with the exception of *The Bible*, all other authors combined are not worthy of one Shakespeare. He is the most quoted author in history and not without reason: The timeless moral insights gained from his tragedies have resonance even 400 years later, and are applicable to almost any circumstances.

The genius of Shakespeare was to resurrect the formula of the greatest of the ancient Greek Tragedians -- such as Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles -- and combined them with the elements of **Free Will** and **Reason** that defined *The Enlightenment*. The result of his labors were the timeless tragedies of *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and several others, that will be cherished as long as men are free.

Aristotle described this formula of the Ancient Greek Tragedians in his "*Poetics*." It usually involved a main character (or "**PROTAGONIST**") of "*high estate*," who suffers an unanticipated and profound **REVERSAL OF FORTUNE** that is attributable to some **INNATE CHARACTER FLAW** that he possessed. The protagonist's fatal flaw was usually "*hubris*" -- Greek for pride or arrogance -- which so **DISPLEASED THE GODS** that they set in motion the events leading to his demise.

The genius of Shakespeare was to adopt the elements of Greek tragedy and merge them with the prevailing philosophy of *The Enlightenment*, the revolutionary idea that man is given *free will* by God -- for good or evil -- and that his fate is not merely predestined. In doing so, Shakespeare **DISCARDED THE INTERFERENCE OF THE GODS** in bringing about the demise of his own tragic figures.

That Shakespeare's tragic figures are destroyed by mistakes and errors they, themselves make -- rather than merely become the victims of angry and capricious Gods -- is clearly and unmistakably reflected in Caesar's famous remark to Brutus in Act I, Scene 2 of *Julius Caesar*: "*The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are underlings.*"

Shakespeare's Tragic "Quartet"

Macbeth, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Othello* are generally recognized as the "Quartet" of Shakespearean Tragedies, although there are many others that fit the formula equally well. Each of these tragic figures is considered to be a great and powerful man, but each is undone by his one *tragic flaw* that inevitably manifests in his own destruction.

The fatal flaw of *Macbeth* is *blind ambition*, which prompts him to murder his King and the head of his Clan in order to usurp the throne of Scotland. He in turn is destroyed by those loyal to the murdered King Duncan.

Interestingly, *King Lear* is the only one of the four in whom the inherent *tragic flaw* is *hubris*, the fatal flaw preferred by the ancient Greek Tragedians. Wishing to retire his crown, Lear decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters, based on their declarations of love for him. The two older daughters pander to him and engage in excessive and insincere declarations of devotion, while the youngest (Cordelia) is more reserved, and merely states that she "*loves him as a daughter should.*"

Based on these declarations, Lear divides his kingdom between the two oldest daughters, while excluding the youngest. His rash and prideful decision eventually leads to the loss of his kingdom, as well as the destruction of himself and all three daughters.

Hamlet's fatal flaw is **indecision**, which is captured in his famous soliloquy: "**To be or not to be: That is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles...**"

While Hamlet is a sympathetic and noble character in many regards, few men would experience indecision over what course of action to take if their father had been murdered, and their mother taken as a bride by their father's murderer. The proper course of action would be even more apparent if the ghost of one's murdered father were to appear to him, demanding revenge for his own "*murder most foul.*"

The fourth of the traditional Shakespearean Tragedies is the Venetian Army General **Othello**, who is consumed by **jealousy**, his own tragic flaw. Foolishly listening to Iago, his disloyal subordinate, Othello believes Iago's lies about his wife's infidelity, causing Othello to slay her in a fit of rage. When Othello eventually learns that his wife's fidelity has actually been exemplary, he kills himself out of grief.

Other Shakespearean Tragedies

Many other works of Shakespeare demonstrate his *Enlightenment* adaptation to this formula of the Ancient Greek Tragedians, including **Richard III**, **Romeo and Juliet**, and **Julius Caesar**.

Richard III betrays England and the House of York multiple times in pursuit of the Throne of England, but such **disloyalty** generates contempt and disdain within his own army, which abandons him at the Battle of Bosworth. There he is killed for want of a means of escape after losing his horse. ("**A horse, a horse, my KINGDOM for a horse...!**")

The central character in **Julius Caesar** is not Caesar, himself, but Brutus, who helped others assassinate his dearest friend, Caesar, ostensibly out

of fear that Caesar aspired to become king and thereby threatened the future of the Roman Republic.

Brutus' fatal flaw is also *hubris*, a character flaw that made him vulnerable to the flattery of peers with dishonorable motives. His pride permitted them to successfully recruit him to participate in Caesar's assassination, all the while knowing in his heart that the deed was both wrong and evil and for which there was little justification.

Even *Romeo and Juliet* fits this formula: The families of these two star-crossed lovers are so embroiled in their age-old vendetta against each other, that their *vengefulness* ultimately leads to the tragic deaths of both Romeo and Juliet, the very flowers and futures of their respective families.

Conclusion

Most English Literature courses requiring Shakespeare focus on the endless details of his varied and intricate plots: Often, there is little consideration given to understanding the deeper and more profound historical context in which Shakespeare's genius united the classical elements of Greek and Medieval Tragedy.

This is unfortunate, and helps fuel the conspiracy promoted by many Cultural Marxists -- among other truly ignorant and hopelessly stupid individuals -- who conspire and contrive to remove Shakespeare from high school and college curricula.

Not only are these ignoramuses oblivious to most of the above, but many are also motivated by a seemingly endless desire to "*water down*" the curriculum, so that even dolts might successfully matriculate. Their brilliant "*solution*" is to exclude the works of Shakespeare, aside from the Bible, the greatest literature in the history of the written word.