

## Thomas Dekkar's the Shoe-Maker's Holiday-A Reflection of Middle-Class Life

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**Abstract:** *Thomas Dekkar was a professional Elizabethan playwright. He understands the middle-class life with its ups and downs, aspirations and its compromises. The shoe makers's Holiday is his supreme contribution to this class of literature, and of its type it remains an unique example.*

*The play consists of two stories, the romantic story with the characters from high class like Row land, Lacy and the story that concerns its ordinary citizens. The shoe makers, like Eyre, Thodge etc. The two stories are closely interwoven in the structure of the play.*

**Keywords:** *Elizabethan comedy – faithful picture of Citizens – Realistic comedy – comedy of London life citizen drama – middleclass life – Elizabethan crafts man – reflects the trading class – aristocratic.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Thomas Dekker was a professional Elizabethan play **wright**. He was not a supreme artist. He is often slip shod, often careless and his eyes are always fixed on the east. The poet in him is irrepressible, but there is no **sunnier writer** than Dekker, nor who understands middle class life with its ups and downs, is aspirations and its compromises better than he. The shoe-makers holiday is his supreme contribution to this of literature, and of its type it remains an unique example.

It is hard to form a final judgement of Dekker as a Dramatist. There is so much in his work to delight us that it is easy to dwell upon his charm and overlook his weakness. On the other hand if one observes his plays closely, one can easily point out his failures. The great fault of his plays is a lack of unity and incoherence of plot. He has written in great haste because of the need for money. Though he is not perfect many of his characters drawn from daily life-like the London shop keeper, the long suffering wife etc., creatures of less of poetic imagination than of sympathetic observation. He is not a great dramatist, but certainly a delightful poet – play wright.

### 2. ESSAY

“The **shoe-makers's Holiday**” or “**the gentle craft**” is about Simon Eyre, shoe maker and Lord mayor of London. It was acted before the **Queens** of England, The idea of this character he got from the Novel on Simon Eyre by Deloney

The play consists of two stories. The romantic story with the characters from high class and the story that concerns ordinary citizens. The shoe makers. The two **stories are closely interwoven in the structure of the play and there** is a blending or **romance and realism**.

Rowland Lacy, nephew of Sir Hugh Lacy, Earl of Lincoln is a high spirited young man. He falls in love with Rose daughter of Sir Roger Oteley a merchant who is Lord Mayor of London as the play begins. The noble man looks down upon the merchant class and does not like his nephew to marry beneath his rank. Sir Roger Oteley also has his prejudice against the aristocracy their extravagance and so opposes the young lovers. The earl wants to pack off his nephew to the war in France and Oteley proposes to send his daughter to his country seat. Both of them fail to realize that, “**love brooks nor barriers**”

Lacy Manages to stay behind in England. He disguises himself as a dutch shoe maker on a new name – Hans. He joins Simon Eyre the master – shoe maker as an apprentice. It is Simon Eyre who supplies shoes and leather goods to the mayor's family. Thus Lacy gets several opportunities to meet Rose. Simon and his wife are happy to help the young lovers. They got married. The parents report the matter to the King and request him, to cancel the marriage. But Simon Eyre takes up the case and pleads with the king to forgive them. The king obliges and rewards him with knight hood. Thus the romantic story ends happily.

The other story is about the household of Simon Eyre – the merry master shoemaker, his assistant and his young wife Jane. Ralph joins army most reluctantly. He does not return from the army. Jane does not want to be a burden to the Simons. So she sets up a seamstress shop and earns her living independently. Master Hammon makes love to Jane. But Jane turns a deaf ear to his courting as she wants to be true to Ralph. After many days he brings her the news of Ralph's death. So she reluctantly agrees to marry him. On the wedding day Ralph returns, seeing the developments he becomes stricken. On the advice of his fellow shoe makers when the party is going to church, he appears on the scene and Jane is restored to Ralph. Thus the second story ends well.

The structure of the play is of real interest. Dekkar exhibits his mastery in construction. The two stories are very **skillfully and harmoniously inter woven**. Neither the romantic young man, Rowland Lacy, nor the young shoemaker Ralph is the hero of the play. The real hero is Simon Eyre, the merry shoe maker. It is quite obvious that he knits the two stories into a composite whole.

He has his part to play in both the stories and thus serves as the connecting link between the two stories. – S. Banumoorthy.

The shoemaker's holiday is often referred to as a **citizen play** and as a romance of the working class, because of the way in which Dekker portrayed the shoemakers. His attitude to the common man is very much different from that of the other contemporary writers. Most of the dramatists of his age looked down upon the common folk and treated them as the birth of ridicule

The trade's men who carry tools of their trade "had sweaty night cops and emitted their foul and stinking breath.

They are **fickle minded; irrational, incapable of any judgement and often ludicrous and contemptible**. This is the picture of common folk we get in many of the Elizabethan plays. On the other hand, Dekkar attempted to give a faithful and objective picture of the **artisans** the shoemakers. He does not cover their ludicrous aspects, at the same time he is aware of their **sterling qualities** and highlightens them.

In the play Dekkar makes fun of their boastful and pretentious life saying that they are gentlemen pursuing a gentle craft under the protection of **St. Hugh**. He has a good laugh at their affectations and whims Dekkar at the same time projects their enduring qualities. They are a very hard working people. They do not want to live on charity but want to earn their bread by honest work. They have a sense of professional dignity. They are honest and truthful and there is no craft in them. They are friendly lot and they have a sense of oneness. They stand together and help one another. They are perfectly natural, cheerful and gay. They love fun, frolic and a holiday. They have their own simple philosophy of life. Thus Dekkar presents them in a kindly, sympathetic light.

Simon Eyre the chief of the shoemakers is an unforgettable character. He is a very Loud Character fond of swearing. He is never tired of repeating his tall claim "**prince am I none, yet am I princely born**" he is what he is and cannot pretend to be different. He is a jolly type of person given to blunt speaking. He is not refined in his talk. He has real love for his wife which he shows in his own rough unconventional way. He has great concern for the welfare of his workers. But he is not lenient towards them. In the shop he is their stern employer. He is kind hearted towards them. That is why he helps Hans (Lacy in disguise) in his love affair.

As a mayor also he does his duties to the approval of all seasons of society. He wins the admiration of the court in the way he conducts himself as a mayor. The king is very eager to meet "**The mad merry mayor**" The noble men describe him to the king as

"One of the merriest mad caps in your land, your grace will think when you behold the man."

He is rather a wild ruffian than a mayor"

Commenting on the character of Eyre **D.J.Palmer** says that he has allusions to "Mephostophilus", "Sultan Soliman", and "Tamburlaine" "**Eyre is something of a play goer himself**"

The other characters also represent their classes with great detail. Sir Hugh Lincoln is a typical aristocrat Sir Rogeroteley bears the stamp of merchant class. Rowland Lacy is a romantic young man in whom love triumphs over his sense of duty. Rose is a young girl of Grace and beauty Doger is a conventional spy and informer. Margery is a fitting wife to Simon. The king who makes his appearance in a **couple** of scenes is noble and fun loving.

Shoemaker's holiday mirrors the feelings of the trading class of the Elizabethan age. They were supposed to be hopelessly materialistic, men deficient in self respect and ready to do anything for money. The women bent on pleasure and ready to be reduced by any gallant who would look at them.

Dekkar sits out to describe the class, the one to which he himself perhaps belonged. They enjoy material prosperity, this natural enjoyment creates an atmosphere of good will and activity. It is not the story, however as it is, that gives this play its perennial charm, it is rather the abounding joy of life in general, of Elizabethan London life in particular that flows from Dekker's pen that attracts us. Simon as lord mayor declares that upon every Shrove Tuesday, at the sound of the pen cake bell shoemakers shall shut up their shops for a holiday. The play taught in a mirthful manner the very much needed lesson of the dignity of Labanto and gave assurance of the highest rise in life even to the lowest of citizen.

The most important feature of Elizabethan comedy is the homely character of its people and scenes. Its theme and its atmosphere, Thomas Dekkar is also a realist like Ben Jonson. Shoemakers holiday is also a realistic comedy. It gives a true and faithful picture of the citizen life of London in those days. In the words of F.S. Schelling "Shoe Makers Holiday" is a typical contribution to domestic comedy and here we have the daily life of the small trades folk of London done to perfection; **their humour, their pleasure, ambitions and hearty good fellowship**" Dekkar also exposes the follies of the age and the play is a comedy of London life. He aims at giving us an accurate picture of the people of his age, particularly those of the gentle craft.

The "**Shoe Maker's Holiday**" is a citizen drama. The citizen element is found in Shakespeare also. But in him it never took deep root, Dekkar and Fletcher concentrated on this line, The citizen drama depend for its effect more on characterization and humour than on situation and plot.

The citizen's drama is a true mirror of contemporary life and no other writer has displayed it with as much faithfulness as Dekkar.

Dekker like **Dickens** with whom he has so much in common, was at his best when writing a homely joys, London life is accurately picturised. The places mentioned in the play are known to every Londoner and the life, character and behavior of the shoemakers is beautifully and accurately portrayed some of the scenes which best represent the true life of London are the following-early morning in Tower street, Eyres election Jane in the seamesters shops and the pan cake beast at the Leaden hall etc.

The best picture of the life of the shoe makers of London in those days come through the characters of Eyre, Hodge, Firk etc. He represents all the glamour and romance of the gentle craft without exaggeration. His character speaks an intelligible language of the tower street workshop. Hodge is the foreman and firk the journeyman, Simon Eyre is their hero and their king.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

In the "**Shoe Maker's Holiday**" a great deal of information is given about the life of Elizabethan Craftsman, their way of living, their feasts, merry making, their drinking breakfasts and jolly chit chats.. From early morning when the Journey man breaks his fast with three post of double ale to deny eve, there is cutting and stitching waxing and paring. In short their life history is given in this play. They are Frank and open-hearted. The "**Shoe Maker's Holiday**" also tell us about the courtiers and middle class people. The courtiers lived an artificial life. They are hypocritical and showy.

The "**Shoe Maker's Holiday**" is a hilarious play. It is a perfect comedy. It is full fun and gaiety. The spirit of the pure comedy is preserved from the beginning to the end of this play. This shows **Dekker's** greatness as a dramatist.

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**Velpula Beulah Rani**, have been in service as a Lecturer in English in this August body since 2000. I have enriched my teaching and language skills by participating in various National and International seminars and workshops. Eight of my research articles have been published in different souvenirs. Three of my research articles have been published in international souvenirs.



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