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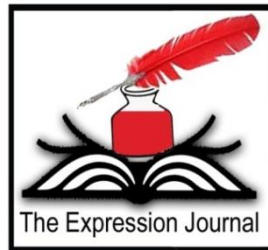


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Correlation of Religion and Poetry in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe

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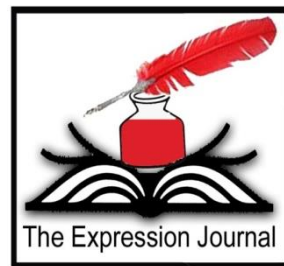
Abstract

It is to be admitted that poetry and religion are both concerned with being the inner basis of existence. Experiences in both the fields reveal inner drama. In inner drama, nothing moves in the crude fashion, but they treat of universal aspects of life which actually do not change. If we understand by poetry a kind of madness, religion is not different from poetry. Whenever inner drama is required to be shown, poetry and religion form a kind of togetherness to serve the cause of the drama. In a stage-play pleasure emerges from mimesis or imitation which covers entire human emotion. The theatre and the rite merge in this imitation. In the ancient primitive culture one is indistinguishable from the other. Drama requires Apollonian orderliness when the action is dramatized. Anyhow the illusion is to be created and maintained. The elements such as music, dance, poetry and impersonation go into the making of the dramatic form. In the Greek drama we notice the transformation of the old rites into the art form. To the tragic poet the universe is not fully rational and so it is inexplicable. To Aristotle the hamartia in hero is often drawn from the universe. So what is inevitableness in a tragic drama is part of religion in drama. In England Renaissance was not allied with plastic art as in France and Italy. When the Renaissance occurred in England, there had been no pictures or statues in that country. Again, most of the reformers disliked images.

Keywords

Poetry, Religion, Plays, Relation, Dramatic Literature.

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Correlation of Religion and Poetry in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe

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Many literary critics in the past and present perceive some link between poetry, religion and drama. They argue that the plane of poetry is the birthplace of great drama which creates an impression having relation to religious experience, and so in dramatic literature drama, poetry and religion are analogous with one another and the experiences in each field will be found parallel. The proper investigation will be held in this field to understand the dramatic writings better and to improve the readers' response to dramas. Maurice Maeterlinck in his *The Treasure of the Humble* wrote of many laws which are mightier than passion but at the same time those laws are silent and can be heard only in the meditation during the tranquil moments of life.

Maeterlinck's critical analysis reveals that some act of life, if its source is known, is full of mystery which bears upon religion. It can be said that the act of life as presented dramatically creates the impression of mystery in a drama where life is governed by laws of passion. When our life is in a tranquil state and meditation the laws become visible. Once again this mysterious power takes us to the domain of religion. Thus presented life forms the staple drama made up of such components as poetry and religion is. Now there will be a critical investigation into the relation between poetry and drama, between religion and drama and religion and poetry in the context of Medievalism, the Renaissance and the Reformation. Now let's turn to the study of poetry in drama. In the early stages of dramatic writings, verse was used in drama, and it was natural and conventional as men loved poetry in dramatic writings. With the development of prose, the drama began to be written in prose and thus verse was replaced in drama. With the arising of prose fiction out of narrative poetry, the novelists emerged and Geoffrey Chaucer receded into the background. Again in modern times taste of people has changed and they play a significant role in re-introducing poetic drama.

The well-known prose dramatist Somerset Maugham in his *The Summing Up* wrote how drama took a horrible turn via his demand for realism and abandonment of poetry. Lascelles also writes about the limitation of prose drama in *The Function of Poetry in Drama* describing it as ordinary appearance. The ordinary man's mind cannot follow the flight of poetry ever concerned with the essence of life- the natural and religion. Thus presenting life poetry offers religious experience in the real sense. This essence exceeds all empirical experiences constituting appearances. What is found here is life in dilation which constitutes the stuff of prose drama. The modern common man accepts this prose drama sans life's essence. Prose is not befitted; it has its advantages of which Raymond Williams in his *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* says: "In the present situation naturalist prose drama, although discredited among a minority remains the dominant theatrical form" (Williams 152). About poetic drama T.S. Eliot's comment is quoted here to clarify the relationship of poetry and drama: "A verse play is not a play into verse but a different kind of play: in a way more realistic than naturalistic drama" (Eliot 38). T.S. Eliot's poetic drama is different from the mere verse play. The poetic drama is more realistic in that it delves into the essence of life that lies inside the natural appearance. In this type of drama, the different kind of verse serves as the formation of drama. Transported into the wonderland lying beyond the world of appearances only empirically perceived by the sense, the audience or the readers get absorbed in religious experience in the true sense of the term.

Naturally the effect of the English Renaissance was inward and moral. It was only after the Reformation when the Anglican religion had spread itself all over England, tinted with Calvinism that the Renaissance had reached the climactic point in England. The Puritan atmosphere in England facilitated the aspiration of the Renaissance to every form of beauty and all sorts of energy. Eventually we find the free spirits in England, indulging in notorious activities of rebels. But the majority of Englishmen had natural morality and so others, on pain of public shame, had to assume morality.

The poetic drama stands as the antithesis to what we call today the naturalistic or realistic drama. The poetic drama as practised by the Elizabethan playwrights particularly by Shakespeare has for its subject imaginative interpretation and presentation of life. The poetic drama had revival in the early years of the twentieth century and some of the dramatists connected with this revival are Stephen Philips, Gordon Bottomley, and G.E. Flecker, W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, T.S. Eliot and others. A. Nicoll opines Synge's plays as the true poetic drama; though written in prose, they possess all the poetic spirit of a poetic drama. *Riders to the Sea* is a powerful specimen of the modern poetic drama, though written in prose and not in verse. It is a masterpiece of realistic tragedy and in its poetry it approximates closely to Shakespeare's great tragedies. In this poetic drama Synge's vision of life is perfectly metaphorical. He sees and felt deeply the tragedy of life of the peasants among whom he lived for a time to

prepare himself for the work of a dramatist whose imagination touched their lives with high poetry.

The poetic drama provided a great experience of joy by bringing poetry into the world of living and by making its audience return to the world of poetry when it leaves the theatre. Here the dramatist tries to show life in living. Thus the movement of drama is controlled partly and religion in true forms. Poetry and religion are related to each other. Their significance is perceived when the poets and the prophets are under inspiration. It is a profound kind of art. In both the spheres of poetry and religion the inspired artists have the direct knowledge of things without the help of any intermediary. So it is often said that Art stands still while History develops. Here art includes both poetry and religion. As a matter of fact, the human mind does not alter from generation to generation. To illustrate the point, Thomas Delony in the Elizabethan age does not differ from his modern counterpart, though he differed as an individual. In the area of fundamental unity, poetry and religion operate and intensify greater and greater unity. In both and poetry and religion chronology has no place.

T.S. Eliot in his *The Sacred Wood* described the function of critics is to see literature as a whole and the work should not be bounded by any time. The principles and system of poetry and religion have been clearly indicated here. Poetry and religion are mainly concerned with the purification of humanity; when it is achieved, there is nothing left. Next, it is our turn to focus Marlowe and scrutinize more a bit closely how he has used the system of signs in his plays to bring forth dramatic pleasure to the audience present, where the readers of his plays are meant. All the heroes in the plays of Christopher Marlowe are often found to act as slaves of passion as described by Harry Levin. The heroes of Marlowe are all conventional people, who are perpetuating the social slavery and conditioned existence in society. The protagonists of these plays of Marlowe show their proneness to do precisely the reverse of what is actually done in society are also dubbed as social misfits. For better understanding of Marlowe's treatment in the field of religion, poetry and drama, we have to take into account the conflicts in the play which will invariably lead to our identification of the larger scale of ideas that integrate the play by binding all parts together.

The very contribution of Marlowe mainly is concerned with the conflict between dramatic and empirical reality, and between content and form of the work of art. It is supposed that we are members of the audience while reading Marlowe's play and we can perceive that the aesthetic effect of a work of art does not reside in its content. It is to be noted here that the form of the work of art is the aesthetically active factor while content appears to be aesthetically different. Thus notably, by 'content' the thoughts and feelings are meant while by 'form' all the linguistic elements are meant which are involved to ventilate contents. But remarkably to note that this conventional distinction will be undefended when we find in close examination that content has some elements of 'form'. Obviously, it is said that if events are taken together as parts of the 'content',

the way they are arranged into a 'plot' is part of the 'form'. No ramification of artistic taste is gained if this arrangement is not maintained. However, words are also aesthetically indifferent like a crude material and crude content. This is why all crude contents and words used to express them are materials. But the manner in which the materials are taken on aesthetic efficacy is the structure. All formal parts and contents are treated as materials and structure conceptually includes 'content' and 'form' so far as they can combine to secure aesthetic purpose. This mentioned namely, 'structure' indicates a system of signs used in a work of art to secure aesthetic delight through poetry, drama and religion.

Christopher Marlowe is highly appreciated for his mingling of poetry and religion in his plays in beautiful verses, notably in *Doctor Faustus*. When Faustus proceeds to sign the bond, his blood coagulates and he is not in a position to write. It is another warning to him coming from his soul. He is concluding that he should not fly. Thus the bond is signed where Faustus begins to question Mephistopheles about Hell. What has been described about Hell by Mephistopheles is to be followed by Faustus as he would willingly be damned. This is expressed in beautiful poetic lines at the opening of Act II, Scene II. Here Faustus is seen regretting his loss of the joys of Heaven. Speaking to Mephistopheles, he says: "When I behold the heavens, then I repent/ and curse thee, wicked Mephistopheles" (Marlowe 89).

It is worth noting that for the first time Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* dramatically shows symbolic representation of Marlowe's own struggles in his mind. In the Morality plays, the universal human conflict is found between Good and Evil, as cut off from the playwright's individual viewpoint. Contrastively, Marlowe treats Faustus' personal problems and at the same time dramatically presents his conflicting ideas about the core issue of life, despite the fact that to some extent he uses the techniques of the Moralities. Marlowe has successfully turned *Doctor Faustus* into a spiritual tragedy in beautiful poetic and religious tones in that all the external circumstances and events, instead of expressing their internal values, help the readers understand what is in progress inside the mind of Faustus. He is not seen fighting against any human antagonist; his battle is all against supernatural powers that forge a link with his mental forces -- all embedded in his soul.

Thus, it can be said in conclusion that, in *Doctor Faustus* there are characters representing good and evil forces as in a Morality play. Here religion gained with poetry shows the action of good and evil and their struggle for the soul of man. Thus we see the meeting of poetry with religion on the plane of drama. Poetry and religion becomes indistinguishable in the utterance of the everlasting death. So in *Doctor Faustus* such elements as doubt, despair, damned soul, agony etc. are all religious. These experiences are expressed through poetry. Action can be shown through the integration of poetry and religion which again provide the deeper level of the drama under reference. The *Faustus* theme is search for truth which is more valuable than the passion of truth. This

is the loftiest idea of religion expressed in Doctor Faustus in terms of poetry which is also equally lofty in dramatic literature.

There is a lack of evidence about secular entertainments in the semblance of drama in the Roman Britain or in Anglo-Saxon England. But the fragments of primitive farces in the literature of medieval Germany and France have survived the onslaughts of time. In England there existed the Interludium de Clerico et Puella which was a very elementary dramatization of the tale as contained in Dame Siriz. The Interludium is interlude. The word is ambiguous in that it is understood variously. It may be something played between the parts of something else like a light musical and dramatic performance between the acts of a play called musical intermezzo. It may also mean distributed dialogue between performances; it is not solo recitation. Such description applied to that composition that had secular characters giving secular instruction and diversion. In the absence of strict definition of Interludium people spoke of the miracles as interludes. So interlude is the name of any kind of play. Thus the tragedy of "Pyramus and Thisbe" as contained in Midsummer Night's Dream was presented by Peter Quince and his Athenian amateurs were an interlude.

In England the minstrels had been the successors of the Northern bards or scopos. They acted as common medieval entertainers. In France people distinguished between the Norman trouveres who sang of war, and the provincial troubadours who sang in the softer south their songs of love. The Norman Conquest brought in England not only reputable minstrels like Taillefer and Rahere but entertainers of many kinds. In this period the English singers had less reputation and so they appealed to the despised countrymen. Thus a higher and lower class of entertainers existed side by side the Norman trouvère and the English minstrel. In some obscure way the minstrels helped to keep alive the elementary notion of dramatic entertainment. By the fifteenth century the religious drama had passed from the church to the amateur performers of town or guild and the minstrels stood apart as professional actors. Then they formed a guild of their own for self preservation. Then they became interlude players. The wealthy patrons hired the professionals but towns encouraged the amateurs. Then by a natural process the tropes of interlude players developed 'into the regular dramatic companies, such as "my lord chamberlayne's menne" in the reign of Elizabeth.

The folk-play had also an obscure influence on drama. Symbolical performances developed from primitive rites of spring and winter, celebrating fertility in land and beast. The maypole still recalls the dance round the sacred tree. Sword dances are another remnant of old rites. Another instance of folk-festivals turned into play is the development of the May game into the Robin Hood play. The Whitsun pastorals in The Winter's Tale was the May game already denounced by the clergy as early as the thirteenth century. According to Sir E.K. Chambers Robin Hood became a popular national hero of ballad and elementary drama. The foregoing discussion leads to what Allardyce Nicoll observes in British Drama: "The indigenous dramatic activity took its rise, as did the drama of the Greeks, from the religion of the time" (105). He goes on to state that the drama remained for long "distinctively a creation of the church" (105).

Despite corruption among the priests, the church was a place of rest for the variant people, and it gave solace to the suffering, bread to the hungry. At that time the church was many institutions combined. It was at once a place of meeting and amusements.

By disgrace the English drama becomes connected with the lives of the people. About the stages of dramatic development E.K. Chambers writes:

First, the dialogue and the action gradually developed with little Latin play lets... in the second step the vernacular were introduced. Now drama moves slowly towards people. In the third steps we notice purely vernacular plays written and acted in the church precincts by the monks, the priests and choir boys in church service. The next movement of drama was towards secularization. (70)

The introduction of the vernacular and the change of locality were the main causes of the drama breaking away from the service of the Mass. Eventually, the town guilds took over the representation of the plays and carried on the tradition to the 16th century.

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