



SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM; DR JOHNSON CONTRIBUTION TO SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM

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ABSTRACT

Dr Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare is an important contribution to English literature and criticism. Dr Johnson is a neo-classical writer, his comments of Shakespeare is unbiased and worthy on the whole. Johnson not only praises but also points out his defects. For Shakespeare he believes audience as great judges. Johnson's duty was to show Shakespeare under the sunshine of neo-classical taste. Johnson does this satisfactorily though in some instances he's not fully justified. Preface to Shakespeare opens with a tribute to Shakespeare's writing, which Johnson consider it long lasting value. Further he also made comments to the defects of Shakespeare. In this paper we will going to see how Dr Johnson criticises Shakespeare.

KEYWORDS – Shakespeare, drama, puns, characterisation, nature

INTRODUCTION

Samuel Johnson's criticism on preface to William Shakespeare has been looked at masterpiece to the English literary criticism. In this criticism Johnson sets out his important principles and appreciate Shakespeare for his "excellences" and "as well as defects of the works of Shakespeare. Johnsons many points treated as fundamental aspects of modern criticism; others give greater insight into Johnson's prejudices than into Shakespeare's genius. Johnson may be a true classicist in his concern with the universal instead of with the particular; the very best praise he bestows upon Shakespeare is to mention that his plays are "just representations of general nature." The dramatist has relied upon his knowledge of attribute, instead of on bizarre effects, for his success. Johnson concludes. It is for this reason that Shakespeare has outlived his century and reached the purpose at which his works are often judged solely on their own merits.

JUST REPRESENTATION OF GENERAL NATURE

As per Johnson the essential requirement beauty and truthfulness found in the nature. He finds this plentiful in Shakespeare. Johnson says, "Shakespeare is especially writers a minimum of especially modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to this

readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters aren't modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the remainder of the world; y t e peculiarities of studies or professions, which may operate but upon small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they're the real progeny of common humanity, like the planet will always supply, and observation will always find." In other words, dr Johnson, heavily admired the universal quality in Shakespeare's plays.

UNIVERSALITY OF SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS

Dr Johnson continue on to praise the Shakespeare of characterisation. He says that his characters are on the base of general principles and thus the entire system of life is continued in motion.' The implication of the neo-classical creed—'Just representation f general nature'—is that attribute, nature, a minimum of the refined attribute, is perennial. It is due to this universality that the work of an excellent artist has an inventive appeal which continues through the ages. That is why Pope asserts that the Greek and Roman writers expressed the foremost exceptional way of emulating nature which therefore to repeat Homer or Virgil was to imitate nature realistically. Pope feels that the lads of ancient period weren't much different from the lads of his own



age, especially in terms of their poetic interest or aesthetic faculty. A poet's universality depends upon his being general or particular with regard to his treatment of characters, he focuses his attention on the common nature of men, their general traits, emotions, passions and manners of life which are to be found in men in the least times altogether countries.³ This indispensable 'generality' of a poet is further stressed on by Johnson in his novel *Rasselas* he doesn't number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the various shades within the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the primary to every mind, and must neglect the minute discriminations.

THE THEME

The knowledge of general attribute enable Shakespeare to unveil the truths of life and enrich his plays "with practical axioms and domestic wisdom". Shakespeare was none of those who attached an excessive amount of of importance to the themes of affection with regard to their theme. Other dramatists who consider the subject of affection in their works become unjust, and violate the probability. Life is misrepresented by them and thus the language deprived. Love is simply one of the varied human emotions and to assign overlarge a significance thereto is unjustifiable. it's no considerable impact upon the totality of life. Consequently it's little operation within the dramas of Shakespeare who "caught his ideas from the living world and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew that the opposite because it had been regular or exorbitant was a explanation for happiness of calamity." this is often often a shrewd observation. Johnson goes on to say that Shakespeare's plays are rendered in such how that even a private has enough material and knowledge to draw from them. Johnson was bold enough to differ from his characters. as an example , Dennis and Rymer didn't approve of Shakespeare's depiction of Menenius, a senator of Rome, as a buffoon, and Voltaire didn't approve of the Danish usurper (Claudius in Hamlet) being shown as a drunkard. t. Shakespeare's story may require a Roman senator or a king but he thinks only in terms of men and not particular individuals belonging to a selected time or place. And undoubtedly, there is no reason to suppose an individual cannot be a buffoon because he's a Roman senator.

JOHNSON ON MINGLED DRAMA

Mingling was objected to by the neo-classicists who were, more or less, obstinate about the purity of genres. The critical trend at the time was to believe tragedy as an unadulterated genre by itself and comedy

as a completely separate genre by itself. However, Johnson justifies the mingling of the two on the thought of the neo-classical theory itself. Art meant to the neo-classicists a truthful depiction of human life; on this basis, one can justify Shakespeare's practice of blending comedy and tragedy, for such a mingling displays real attribute which "partakes of fantastic and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless kind of proportion and in numerable modes of combination". Shakespeare's plays depict a world where all human actions have equal importance, where all types of citizenry are equally represented and where we see with none objection, the reveller hastening to his wine and thus the mourner burying his friend. during this way Johnson meets the objections of the neo-classical critics on their own ground.

JOHNSON ON RULES AND DIDACTICISM

Johnson isn't bound by the neo-classical rules of criticism in his approach to varied other details of Shakespearean drama. Dr Johnson, perhaps unwittingly, points out a possible contradiction within the critical theory of his time. If literary criticism is based on adequate principles with regard to the connection between art and nature, an appeal from criticism to nature is nonsensical. Any rules concerning the apt mode of representation should flow that basic requirement and can not contradict it. But Johnson was particular about the didactic function in conjunction with the imitative one. The aim of a bit is to please and instruct its reader., Johnson admits that Shakespeare has not only shown attribute because it acts in real exigencies but because it would be found in trials to which it can't be said to be exposed. But, according to him, what Shakespeare lacks is that the moral purpose which he should have abided by in his plays. rather than keeping track of morality, Shakespeare "sacrifices virtue to convenience" and is "much more careful to please than to instruct." Johnson feels that Shakespeare is careless about awarding his vicious characters with sorrow and thus the great characters with happiness; instead, he dismisses them to chance. He carries all of them through wrong and right leaving them to figure by accidents. it's with regard to this aspect that Johnson is dissatisfied with Shakespeare's drama

THE JOHNSON DILEMMA

Johnson insists that a poet should 'imitate' attribute as closely and accurately as possible. At an equivalent time he also insists that the poet need to draw the story in such how that it brings some moral instruction and delight to the reader. This is possible,



we know, as long as attribute were fundamentally noble and refined. Even Philip Sidney, who argued that poetry should be morally instructive, couldn't deny the very fact that attribute, being what it essentially is, doesn't convey an ethical lesson to the observer; therefore he averred that the poet should plan to make the planet better and new. Johnson must be conscious of the very fact that the important world is way from always rewarding good or being basically moralistic. It is very interesting to ascertain Johnson grappling together with his dilemma during a long note on Lear. There he says that a play during which the wicked prosper and therefore the virtuous are miserable may be a just representation of the common incidents and occurrences of life but since all folks love justice, a play won't go to pot by showing the ultimate victory of persecuted virtue; and if the pleasure we derive from 'poetic justice' may be a wholly separate quite pleasure from that of being instructed about attribute. Johnson only repeats the old theory that literature should be both pleasing and instructive if it's to be everlasting; he fails to explore all its implications.

PUNS AND QUIBBLES.

Another weakness that Johnson points out at Shakespeare's plays is that Shakespeare is madly interested in word-play and equivocations. Johnson says during this connection: "A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra that he lost the planet and was content to lose it". This approach towards poetic diction is vital in both the idea and therefore the practice of poetry from Dryden to Johnson; its critical implications are most clearly visible in Johnson's Lives of the poets. However, we'd not be quite as vehement as Johnson is our condemnation of the penchant for puns in Shakespeare. We are more willing to ascertain it as an aberration of his times.

JOHNSON AND THE UNITES

Dr Johnson admired Shakespeare unities of time and place. The neo classic period was not in the favour of accepting Shakespeare. Thus the drama had to be curtailed and brought under the prescribed framework and therefore the actual experience is nearly nullified. The proponent (those who introduced it) of this law held that any depiction differing from these rules isn't acceptable. But Shakespeare wasn't a slave to the normal etiquettes. Justifying him Johnson says that the action of those plays is predicated on certain conventions which the audience accepts readily. For example if the spectators can take it without any consideration that a specific actor on the stage is Caesar or Antony, the audience also can accept the convention of shifting scenes from one place to a different or the

passage of long periods of your time. But the truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know from the primary act to the last that the stage is merely a stage, which the players are only players (then) where is that the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first Athens, then Sicily, which was always known to be neither Sicily nor Athens, but a contemporary theatre?" True, this doesn't seem to be an absolutely original remark.

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