

The Integrated Relation of Poetry and Religion 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. Here in lies the integration of poetry with religion which my writing will examine.

Keywords: Poetry, religion, plays, relation, dramatic literature.

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.

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 no 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.

Works Cited

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