

Illuminationist Features of Shakespearean Dram

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Summary

Whenever Shakespeare is compared to the great poets of the East or the West, one fundamental difference between him and the rest is commonly ignored. The rest of the poets used sequences of metaphors to capture universal states while Shakespeare presented the states as set of behavior. Shakespearean drama does not depend on quotable quotes, outstanding story outline or psychologically remarkable characterization; it depends on infinite variety of sets of human behavior and relates all he possible mathematical sequences of human nature with all the possible equations. Shakespeare appears to be the only poet fulfilling the Quranic requirements of the model poet. At his stage in the article the nature of the poetic experience is redefined. The present article in this way also deals with the perennial nature of true poetic experience and its essential relevance to the world. It attempts to elaborate the process through which a poet is uplifted in a creative moment beyond terrestrial boundaries and is aligned with the 'state of Perfection'.

Key words: Being and Non-Being, Al-Shu'ara (24-27), the Quranic discipline, Northrop Frye's concept of a poet, the Human event 'Perfection'-poet alliance, progression from periphery to center, beatific vision, audience (as) mode of inspiration, symbolic set of values of diverse nature, reciprocal agent, poetic hieroglyph, irreversible phenomenon, ultra human, 'secular Bible'

Being and Non-Being (*wajood* and *adem*) are interrelated states. There is no *wajood* without *adem* but the One, and there is no *adem* without *wajood* but the One. There is no *Dajla* (the Tigris) without the drop and there is no drop that does not contain *Dajla* within (from a letter of Urdu poet, Mirza Ghalib, d. 1869).

The Being and the Non-Being, the river and the drop, the One and the all-these and many others are the commonly found metaphors throughout the western and the oriental tradition of the last millennium. However as states, these appear as concrete set of behavior in Shakespearean drama alone. This makes Shakespeare quite unlike any other author of either the western or the oriental tradition. Shakespearean art does not work with the bounds of stories (*Hikayaat*), maxims (*malfuzaat*) or wise morals at the end of the play. All the great stories, glorious maxims, golden quotable quotes can lead an audience to get inspired of a lie, might be the works of liars themselves (as Shakespeare says in Hamlet, ‘doubt all truth to be liar’). These can be impressive and powerful but devoid of that essential essence that the Quran describes in three phrases in Al Shu’ara:

- I. Righteousness,
- I. remembrance of the One Creator of all,
- I. supporting the weak when they are wronged.

In the Quranic discipline, without these three simultaneous elements (Al-Shu’ara: 227) no one deserves to hold the title of a poet because otherwise the breach between the written word and the truth behind it remains an unassailable gulf. But before we go further with our analysis of the true essence of poet and poetry and Shakespeare stature among the writers of the world, let’ have a look at Northrop Frye’s concept of a poet:

“We have two words, imaginary, meaning unreal, and imaginative, meaning that the writer produces, and they mean entirely different things.

We can understand though how the poet got his reputation as a kind of licensed liar. The word poet itself means liar in some languages

and the words we use in literary criticism-fable, fiction, myth-have all come to mean something we can't believe. Some parents in Victorian times wouldn't let their children read novels because they were not 'true'. But not many reasonable people today would deny that the poet is entitled to change whatever he likes when he uses a theme from history or real life. The reason why was explained long ago by Aristotle. The historian makes specific and particular statements, such as, 'the battle of Hastings was fought in 1066. 'Consequently he is judged by the truth or false of what he says-either there was such a battle or there wasn't, and if there was he's got the date right or wrong. But the poet, Aristotle says, never makes any real statements at all, certainly no particular or specific ones. The poet's job is not tell you what happened, but what happens: not what did take place, but the kind of thing that always does take place. He gives you the universal event. You wouldn't go to Macbeth to learn about the history of Scotland-you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul. When you meet such a character as Micawber in Dickens, you don't feel that there must have been a man Dickens knew who was exactly like this: you feel that there is a bit of Micawber in almost everybody you know, including yourself. Our impressions of human life are picked up on by one, and remain for most of us loose and disorganized. But we constantly find things in literature that suddenly coordinate and bring into focus a great many such impressions, and this is part of what Aristotle means by the universal Human event." (*The Educated Imagination*, Indiana University press, 1964, pp, 63-64)

What is the meaning of Universal Human event, I will return to this point in a while to deal with it in details but one thing is for sure that this event cannot be recorded by those who:

يُلْقُونَ السَّمْعَ وَأَكْثُرُهُمْ كَاذِبُونَ ط
وَالشُّعْرَاءُ يَتَّبِعُهُمُ الْغَاوُونَ ط

الْمُتَرَانَهُمْ فِي كُلِّ وَادٍ يَهيمُونَ ﴿٢٢٦﴾

وَأَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ مَا لَا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢٢٧﴾

*They pass on what is heard, and most of them are liars.
And the poets – [only] the deviators follow them;
Do you not see that in every valley they roam,
And that they say what they do not do? (Al-Shu'ara 224–227)*

A poet, the one who records the Human event, lives beyond the skeptical current of the time. He is not startled by the world nor wishes to startle it. He is neither a lover nor an enemy of metaphysics. He does not search for unfathomable seas, shores or lighthouses. The poet, the one that the Quran speaks of, is the child of Nature and speaks the language of Nature. He does so knowingly that no geography and no barrier of time can interrupt his Natural tongue revealing the Truth to those who follow the Path (*tareeqat*).

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!
(Julius Ceaser, III: I)

Elsewhere, I have described in details the nature of the poetic experience that the model poet of the Quran goes through. Hereby a gist is presented for the interested reader:

Poetic experience involves a nexus of esoteric and exoteric happenings. Total recognition of these happenings makes a true poet to surrender voluntarily his conscious being to those senses that are particular modes of non-duality; this eventually leads to a 'discovery'. This experience is that unique moment of awareness in which poet discovers and rediscovers a perennial existence of cosmic nature ---- the state of 'absolute perfection'.

Thoughts, then, uninterrupted by a terrestrial barrier flow, to and fro, from the center of poet's being to the center of the cosmic being. This 'Perfection'-poet alliance, as the result of the poetic impulse, forces the later to feel, understand and trace out all the possible dimensions of the first. This establishes an objective correlative between the two. The poet identifies his own self as one with the existence. If this progression from periphery to center, from finite to infinite, from form to meaning continues the poet would enter the realm of 'beatific vision', the promised land of the mystics and Sufis who remain to this day the selfless, contemplative element of any society. Poet's impulse to recreate, as compared to a Sufi's selfless surrender to and timeless glaring at this vision, forces him to withdraw from this loftiest state of human mind and soul. He decides not to break through the terrestrial crust, deprives himself of all the possibilities of becoming one with the beatific vision and returns to begin sharing his experience with his audience. As a matter of fact, all great poetry is a scrambled record of the experience of this moment. That is what Longynus, the wisest of the Thebans and in our days Joan Elya (renowned Pakistani Urdu poet of late 20th century) meant when they suggested 'sole purpose of composing poetry should be the transference of experience (*Kefiyat* in Urdu/Arabic, *Ekstasis* in Greek) from the poet to the audience'.¹

Audience, at this stage, becomes formulating factor for the 'mode of inspiration', distinguishable thoroughly from the 'mode of thinking-with-purpose'. This mode of inspiration is never a result of a plan; it results into a plan. This unintended plan is actually a symbolic set of values of diverse nature, at times vague but always impressive and suggestive. In this way every great poet goes beyond the boundaries he originally sets for himself. Audience is the reciprocal agent to these sets of values. Successive generations of this 'reciprocal agent' give versatile meaning to these values and in the process detach the original poetic experience from its end product. The meaning of the true poetic experience, thus, becomes subject to further deciphering of the poetic hieroglyph ----- the poetic image. De-codification of poetic image is the life principle of poetry. C.D. Lewis believes that not only image is the constant in all poetry; every poem itself is an image. Discussing the nature of poetic imagination he says:

¹ Joan Eliya, *Shayed*, Alhamd Publications, Lahore, 1996, p. 14.

“When we speak of imagination, then we speak on the one hand of a sympathy common to all men, though in the poet specialized, cultivated and intensified, and on the other hand, a perpetual reaching out of this sympathy towards objects otherwise unattainable --- towards the past, the future, the absent, all that lies beyond the compass of present experience, without which the meaning of this experience must be so much the less distinct and complete. The nature of poetic sympathy is revealed in images, and I do not know any better way of defining it than by selection of images in which poets have embodied this sympathy, or attested to it. We remember Shakespeare’s lines:

Love’s feeling is more sensible
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails.

Then there is Keats:

The setting sun will always set me to rights --- or if a sparrow comes before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel.

And Blake:

Arise your little glancing wings and sing your infant joy!
Arise and drink your bliss, for everything that lives is holy.
And Mr. MacNeice speaking of his days in Birmingham:
The short square fingers stuffing pipes were not poetic romantic objects abstracted in a picture of Picasso, but were living fingers attached to concrete people --- were in a sense my fingers.
We look as such images as those, and we live in them,
‘..... that sustaining love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By men and beast and earth and air and sea
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst’. (Shelley)”²

This kind of study of a certain text makes Shakespeare’s writings unprecedented in inspiring successive generations of mankind. Over

² C.D. Lewis, *The Poetic Image*, Cox and Wyman Ltd, 1965, p. 66.

the centuries, the textual and inter-textual history of his plays has been written down time and time again. Not only the otherwise fossilized Elizabethan world finds a life giving force in Shakespearean drama but also the literary criticism in general, considered as 'barren landscape' by ordinary readers, receives fresh air from his art. He as a cliché is 'for all ages' but his popularity as an ever-growing, irreversible phenomenon has never been the fate of someone merely human, up to this day this is ultra-human.

Language barriers and time scales cannot restrict the voice that sounds His notes. Thinking words can confuse thinking but no one can confuse the inhaling of fresh air, rising of the sun, shower of the rain, blooming of a flower. These are the states through which He speaks to us. These are the signs as well which He urges us to see so often in the Quran to relate our lost selves to His-Self. Once this relation is established, the human situations and conflicts of history stop being the thematic patterns of literature. History then is no more the key to understand poetry. When poetry gives birth to history and human situations instead, the model poet of the Quran is born. Beside the scriptures, The Biblical or the Quranic, I see only Shakespearean drama coming close to the model of the poet. In part III of this series, I will give evidences to prove that it was not 16th-17th century history that designed Shakespearean drama but it is Shakespeare's works that 're-fashioned' the course of history-the history in which we live four centuries after his death.

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Iluminacionističke osobine Šekspirovske drame

Sažetak

Kad god Šekspira poredimo sa velikim pjesnicima istoka ili zapada, redovno se ignoriše jedna ključna razlika među njima. Dok su ostali pjesnici koristili slijedove metafora da bi uhvatili univerzalna stanja stvari, Šekspir je predstavljao stanja kao skup ponašanja. Šekspirovska drama ne ovisi o upotrebljivim citatima, fenomenalnim fabulama ili zavidnim psihološkim obradama likova; ona ovisi o beskonačnoj različitosti vrsta ljudskog ponašanja i povezuje sve moguće matematičke nizove ljudske

prirode sa svim mogućim jednačinama. Izgleda da je Šekspir jedini pjesnik koji ispunjava kur'anske uslove za uzornog pjesnika. U ovom radu, na njegovoj pozornici, priroda pjesničkog iskustva se ponovo definiše. U radu se takođe govori o perenijalnoj prirodi pravog pjesničkog iskustva i njegove ključne povezanosti sa svijetom. On pokušava da objasni proces kroz koji se pjesnik uzdiže u kreativni momenat iznad zemaljskih okova i kako se nađe u istoj ravni sa „stanjem Savršenstva“.

Ključne riječi: postojanje i nepostojanje, sura Pjesnici (24–27), kur'anska disciplina, Northrop Fryev koncept pjesnika, savez između „Savršenstva i pjesnika“ kao ljudski događaj, napredovanje od krajeva ka sredini, blažena vizija, publika (kao) modus inspiracije, simbolički skup vrijednosti raznovrsne prirode, recipročno sredstvo, poetski hieroglif, jednosmjernan fenomen, ultra ljudski, „sekularna Biblija“