

## Shakespearean Versus Post Shakespearean Tragedy

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Jacobean drama, unlike its Elizabethan maturity, does not obey the normal Aristotelian pattern where there is only one action and everything conduces to that action. In order to simplify dramatic symbols, commentators ignore various areas of symbolic effect. Deconstruction chooses not to ignore those because its goal is not clear prosaic statements of the author's apparent intention but an understanding of how we project our desires for coherence onto their literary texts. Literary texts have symbolic existence rather than an actual or prosaic existence. Therefore, deconstructionists are always on the look out for irony where the manifest meaning of one scene or one speech is always undermined by the total effect of the whole document.

Thus, a moment of "aporia" becomes an impasse for the commentator who wishes to simplify; it is also an opportunity to grant the dramatic text its own unprosaic power. For there to be clear distinctions between Good and Evil, there must be a simplification of the human condition. The revenger, however, in carrying out his purpose seeks his own demise in a deep sense, not consciously but as part of a mechanism over which he/she has no control.

The current critical assessments on Jacobean play argue that the inconsistencies, fragmentations, the decentring of man and the ambivalent theatrical responses not only constituted a flaw but ultimately reflected the instability and the social upheavals of that period. I believe that the conflicting and contradictory aspect of that drama might be conceived as vital and dramatically positive features. To put it differently, my attempt to bring together Derridean "aporia" and Bakhtinian dialogics in relation to Jacobean drama could spark a totally different conclusion. In the same way as Shakespeare's Jacobean phase-Hamlet, King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra reveals a greater complexity in characterization, and thereby his maturity and ripeness, I would argue that the more mature the drama is, the less resolved it would be in terms of moral and dramatic impact. Consequently, the irresolution and the clash which constitute the hallmarks of Jacobean drama, such as *-The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Atheist's Tragedy*, *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Malcontent* might be examined as staging and inscribing a

developmental and positive trait rather than a disrupting and detracting component.

One of the distracting assumptions behind theatrical criticism is that dramatic works are most powerful when they are cohesive and simple. The cohesion of a work of art does not always ensure its direct display of emotion. It is when our expectations are disappointed that we see a wider world than that suggested by Aristotle. Secondly, there is a reliance on the notion of artistic autonomy when referring to the works of playwrights. As Stephen Orgel states in his article, "What is a Text?" "all theatrical literature, must be seen as basically collaborative in nature" (*Staging The Renaissance*, 87). This means not only that a text was staged by many hands and that the distance traveled from text to drama could be a long one, but also that authors often censor themselves on the one hand or simply find the term to express themselves, on the other, by reference to inevitably abstract notions of audience. This is largely what Bakhtin implies when he favors dialogic texts rather than monologic ones. For Derrida, one finds an excess which can not be construed within the rules of logic, for the excess can only be conceived as neither this nor that, or both at the same time - a departure from all rules of logic.

Difference often functions as an "aporia": it is difference in neither time nor space and makes both possible" (*Writing And Difference*, xvi-xvii).

What we are addressing are difficulties of understanding contradictions, and in Derride's term, difference which is a structure and a movement that cannot be achieved on the basis of the opposition presence / absence. Difference is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing [espacement] by which elements relate to one another. This spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive ( the a of difference indicates this indecision as regards activity and passivity, that which cannot yet be governed and organized by that opposition) , of intervals without which the "full" terms could not signify, could not function (*On Deconstruction*, 97), Instead of high and low or moral / immoral there is only distinction of items in a dialectical relationship.

In Paul De Man's *Allegories of Reading*, these "hidden articulations and fragmentations within assumedly monadic totalities" (247) pit the unofficial images our society provides, seemingly subjective and accidental, against the

apparently communal and accepted official images which in the last analysis have actually little to do with dramatic power. As David Underdown amongst other explore, excess was not just an aesthetic liberty; it was also an effect of social comment (44-72). A newly acceptable artistic form such as the drama was particularly well- suited to such representations, dynamic rather than definitive and monumental.

The inability of the tragic protagonists to grasp fully the impact of the action in which they are a part is strangely similar to the difficulties that surround critical interpretation of the plays. Individuals have to simplify in order to achieve motivation and direction. For the Jacobean plays, a deterministic universe supplied the hope of a cultural core of meaning that was often absent. The irony lies in the lack of a manifest Divinity that would explain why and how such determinism is part of human existence.

The lack of full narrative resolution in the plays mirrors a pervasive sense of inexorable difficulty that many Jacobean sensed about their culture. Seneca supplied the tragic genre with heroes capable of immense courage and tolerance but was absorbed into predominantly Christian ambience on the Elizabethan stage.

It is quite clear that far from the wishes of the king and the court, Jacobean England was riddled by cultural conflicts. What was becoming evident but had yet to achieve full political expression, as well as be examined in more detail later, was a split between traditional reliance on a vertical hierarchy and a more democratic emphasis on moral reformation, personal responsibility and individualism. This split is part of both provincial and London life and helps explain the growing distinction between private playhouses (not always needing regal license) and public arenas where the vitality of this debate had to be carefully coded to avoid legal censure.

The Jacobean age and its culture were fascinated by the clash of public and private identities. The difficulty of ascribing all of the many areas of figurative excess and varied action to some unified and carefully calculated individual intention is simply what those who have read their Derrida and Bakhtin would have expected. Far from identifying the plays under critical consideration as ambiguous, we ought to consider them as polemical, far from reading them as royalist or conformist, we should find their theatre radical and interventionist, stating multiple truths in multiple voices. This

does not mean that these plays are to be regarded as sharing the same political and philosophical platform. The glory of Vindice is his revenge; the saving grace of Charlemont is his refusal to revenge. *The Revenger's Tragedy* stages a multiplicity of diverse voices - whereas Vindice's claim for the reinstatement of justice might be seen as a moral one, yet his hysteric quest for revenge and his poisoning of the duke is horrifying and immoral. However, what these plays do share is the same problematic, the same nexus of anxieties and preoccupations that produce figural vitality in the face of death and the constant reminders of its proximity .

No king or guardian angel can intervene to help the individuals in their predicament.

Consequently, my contention is that a similar distinction should be made between the Shakespearean stage and the non-Shakespearean Jacobean drama. Whereas the Shakespearean stage especially in its Elizabethan period could be seen as essentially centripetal - upholding a sense of moral order and the official conception of monarchy, the non-Shakespearean Jacobean drama which aimed at a more diverse audience, can be seen as closer to the novel in its mingling of centrifugal and centripetal tendencies. Viewed from a Bakhtinian critical perspective, Jacobean drama , as will be demonstrated later, stages a multiplicity of diverse heteroglot voices and world views which in turn state multiple truths for a diverse audience, and , as such, should not be dismissed as flawed by its moral ambiguity .

#### Bibliography

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## المأساة الشكسبيرية مقابل المأساة ما بعد المرحلة الشكسبيرية

اعتراف النظرية النقدية ما بعد العصرانية بكثرة وجود التناقض والمحاكاة الهزلية الداخلية وتصادم القيم التي لم تلق حلاً في الأدب الكبير يتيح لنا الفرصة أن نقيم من جديد مسرحيات المرحلة الجاكوبية مثل "مأساة المنتقم"، "مأساة الكافر"، "مأساة العذراء" و "الناقم".  
يدعي المقال أيضاً أن تمييزاً مماثلاً يجب عمله ما بين المسرح الشكسبيرى والمسرح الجاكوبي، في حين أن المسرح الشكسبيرى - خاصة الأزابيثي - يمكن رؤيته على أنه يدعو إلى نظام أخلاقي مركزي ومفهوم ملكي رسمي، فإن المسرح الجاكوبي الذي هدف الوصول إلى جمهور أكثر تنوعاً يبدو أقرب إلى الرواية التي تميل إلى دمج المركزي واللامركزي.  
من وجهة النظر التقليدية البختينية "Bakhtinian" فإن المسرح الجاكوبي يعرض مجموعة متنوعة من الأصوات المتناقضة ووجهات النظر العالمية المتعددة التي تعكس حقائق عديدة لجمهور غير متجانس. مثل هذه الضبابية الأخلاقية يجب ألا تقودنا إلى الحكم على المسرح الجاكوبي على أنه مصاب بالخلل.

## تקציר

הכרתה של התיאוריה הביקורתית הפוסט-מודרנית, בשכחותן של האפוריה (Derridian Aporia) הפארודיה הפנימית (Parody) ושל התנגשות ערכים שלא באה על פתרונה בספרות הגדולה, נותנת לנו הזדמנות לשיקול ולהערכה מחודשים של מחזות התקופה היעקובינית - The Atheist's Tragedy, The Maid's Revenger's, Tragedy, The Malcontent, Tragedy בערכם של הנושאים העיקריים המשקפים את מורכבותם המוחלטת של מצבי האדם. לפיכך, אני גורס כי קיים הבדל חד בין השלב השייקספירי לבין הדרמה היעקובינית הלא-שייקספירית. בעוד שאת הדרמה השייקספירית יש לראות כשואפת ביסודה למרכז (Centripetal) - תוך חיוב הכרת הסדר המוסרי והתפיסה היסודית של המונארכיה - את הדרמה היעקובינית הלא-שייקספירית, המכוונת לקהל יעד מגוון יותר, יש לראותה כקרובה יותר לרומן-בעירוב מגמותיו הצנטריפוגליות הצנטריפטליות. מנקודת מבט באכטינית בקורתית Bakhtinian , Perspective הדרמה היעקובינית מציגה מגוון של קולות רבים ושונים והשקפות עולם המבטאות אמיתות רבות לקהל יעד מגוון. בתור כזאת, אין לדחות כפגומה בשל ערפולה המוסרי.