

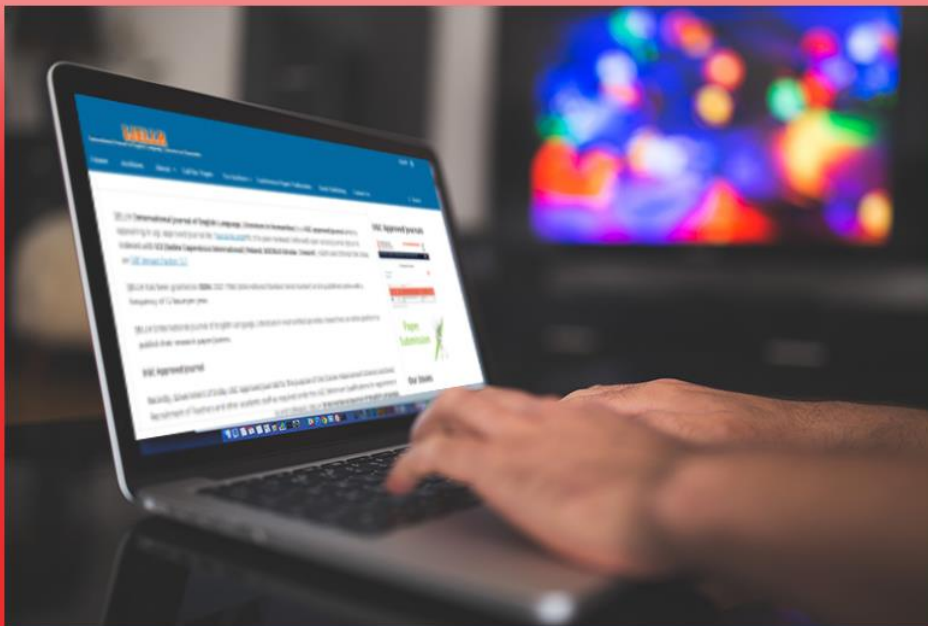
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Poetry, Religion and Drama during Renaissance and Reformation: Impact on the Modern

Age

Abstract: In the days of Renaissance and Reformation the original dramatists such as Christopher Marlowe regarded pride as a virtue, to them pride is not a vice. It creates hope and faith in the minds of man. This hope and faith form the main substance of religion- a very significant cause, promoted by the movement of the Reformation. So emotional exuberance and imaginative extravagant have been balanced by some order of structure provided by the Reformation. This concept is exemplified in the dramas written in Tudor times. Here the dramas signify not only the poetic dramas but also dramas written in verse. In the dramatic presentation of the theatre of the mind, where being is everything, poetry plays the key role but in order to show the dramatic action in the external world the dramatist has taken recourse to verse drama which really presents the theme of the drama and its action in a very succinct manner. This paper will be a study of the impact of poetry, religion and drama of the Renaissance period upon the Modern age.

Keywords: Poetry, religion, drama, Renaissance, Reformation, impact, Modern Age.

Any discussion of Elizabethan drama will have reference to Renaissance and Reformation and their impact on dramatic literature. Prior to any discussion of poetry, religion and drama it will be necessary to know about classical Renaissance and also Reformation in the later period. The classical Renaissance was understood as the rediscovery of classical thought and literature as written by classical writers in Greek and Latin. Italy gave birth to Renaissance which in the course of years, got disseminated widely in Germany, France and England and thus created a sort of cosmopolitan republic in Europe where wild, war-like and illiterate people had lived. As it spread silently over large areas, well- educated person of either sex acquired their ability to read Greek and to speak and write in Latin. But the seamy aspect of the-then picture was that the devotees of Greek and Latin had been disdainful of their mother tongue and tended to believe that cultured thoughts could be expressed suitably in the language of Cicero. Latin was then the common speech of literary republic and so it gave the users of Latin an audience in all parts of educated Europe. Eventually, this very tendency enriched the vernaculars in new vocabulary and introduced new graces of style and expression. The pioneers of classical learning in England were Thomas Linacre, Thomas More and John Colet who made the Renaissance the instrument of Reformation. These Latinists affected spiritual Reform in England and understood the value of classical writing. Reformation had also a great impact upon the national literature. It gave the English people the English Bible and The Book of Common Prayer. Of no less importance were a numbers of treats, treatises, sermons and devotional publications produced by the Reformation. Many regard this Reformation literature as the descendants of Lollard tracts and versions, but it is really the successor. The marked characteristic of this period was the tendency towards critical and creative revolt in religion. It was at Cambridge that the English Reformation started. The movement here was launched by Erasmus who gave impulse to religious thought and learning in Cambridge. In the course of years Colet at Oxford and Erasmus in

Cambridge were found to have proclaimed the supremacy of the Bible over the preaching of the church as the rule of Christian life. The Bible became the permitted possession. What was more and more demanded throughout Christendom was the use of the vernacular in the service of the church. In England the first step towards uniformity of liturgical use was the re-issue of The Sermon Breviary for authorised use throughout the province of Canterbury. A chapter of the Bible was ordered to be read in English on Sundays and holydays, and in 1544 the litany came to be available in English. Crammer translated certain prayers into English; he also gave the majestic rhythm to litany. Many preachers like William Langland, Latimer then tried for the enlightenment of the general public with the Biblical message. William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale did a lot of translations of the Biblical literature. The Bishop's Bible was issued in 1568 under Elizabeth and upon the initiative of Archbishop Parker, but it was replaced by the Authorised version in 1611, written after the Hampton Court Conference. The Reformation that started with medieval theses, upon medieval controversies, ended in England with the English Bible and the English Prayer Book – popular and modern like any other literature of elevated kind. Elizabeth restored Protestantism amid great public regaining. Elizabeth was political, not really devout. She played to the gallery when it was the public desire to be independent of Rome in religious matters. Not inclined to deep religious conviction or to proselytise, Elizabeth was the well-suited person to rule men of her time. The tepid religious feeling in the age of Elizabeth allowed literature to grow vigorously and the Renaissance to flower. England owes the glory of her drama to the slow movement of the Reformation in closing its grip in England under Elizabeth and James I.

With drama the poetry returned and the poet was regarded as what Legouis and Cazamian described as the first of men. Sir Philip Sidney says that the Romans regarded the poet as the Vates – the diviner or prophet. To him the poet is superior to the historian and the philosopher. He writes: “Of all Sciences is our poet the monarch” (Sidney 37). Spenser also

thinks that the heroes and the great poets are born together. He announces that civilization and poetry always advance together. He sees poetry as “a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to be gotten by labour and learning” (Gilbert 462). This concept penetrated English poetry. This is Platonic as much as Renaissance ideal in poetry; here mind and imagination are suddenly awakened as in the religious experience. The experience of poetry is analogous to that of religion. Originating from poetry, the Elizabethan drama provides religious experience at its end when the awakening of mind and imagination occurs suddenly. Poetic imagination is not different from the religious enthusiasm. Shakespeare calls it a fine frenzy which is not different from Michael Drayton’s fine madness. Poetry and religion provide not only religious experience but demoniac experience also.

To sum up, poetry, religion and drama attempt to explore mysteries of life and seek truth which may not be something stable. Drama, as it deals with life, cannot be cut off from religion and poetry which jointly give primeval laws that control the mundane aspect of man’s quotidian life in every age throughout the world. The exploration of life thus conducted, will lead to better sense among humans and better inter-personal and inter-community relationship needed very much for peace and harmony. According to Aristotle, poetry springs from two causes, lying deep in human nature. The first cause is imitation implanted in man, and the second cause is the pleasure in things imitated. These are the two universal causes wherefrom poetry springs. Oscar Wilde in his *Intentions* says: “Life imitates art as much as art imitates life” (Wilde 377). Furthermore, he says that the glory of life and art lives in the widening and deepening spheres of relations between art and life. These mutual relations in their operative aspect have great impact in drama- particularly religious drama.

Religious drama, as defined by Kitto as a form of drama in which the real focus is not the Tragic Hero but the divine background. A drama is religious because of its religious spirit,

religious impassion and its ritual giving an analogy of the experience of religion. Now we shall cite two examples of religious drama such as *Samson Agonistes* and *Murder in the Cathedral* where the readers feel the impact of awe and some understanding of life approximately to religious experience. The artistic detachment leads us to understand in the play what may be called life's experiences. The understanding given in a religious drama is always incomplete as the ideal is unreachable and it is a sort of arguing process. In this understanding of life begins the meditation. To a philosopher as a tragic poet the universe is not fully rational, as Dixon finds. The inevitableness as often detected in tragedy is nothing but religious in spirit.

In the religious drama the controlling element is divine activity. Here we find the framework of inexorable law. Kitto says the divine background holds up to us the system of co-ordinates against which we are to read the significance of what human actors do and suffer. General public come to see religious drama to develop faith in them. Many also long for religious experience as embodied by art forms. The religious drama becomes successful when art combines with religion and interacts with it. The modern age is not religious and there is absence of faith in every sphere of life. But if passionate faith and a lively imagination are combined, it will prepare the ground for modern religious drama. If poetry and religion combine in a play, it becomes a religious play which dramatically shows the external in action. The external sense can be conveyed if a certain rhythm of sacrifice is produced. It is suffering- a subtle form of sacrifice that has been dramatised in *Dr Faustus*, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* etc. Faith is thus renewed through the ritual of suffering or sacrifice. The church becomes stronger when men are prepared to die for it.

To conclude religious drama must have essentially poetic character. Here drama is presented as ritual in the plane of poetry. In the images of human experience the dramatists try to achieve the religious design poetically. Here the poetic purpose is palpable to us-not the

purpose pertaining to religion. In the poetic drama of T.S. Eliot the readers will nearly always get poetry in passivity. Here Eliot has indicated the design of God under which Becket and the woman are passive sufferers. Poetry and religion are indistinguishable when the tempters, the inner enemies focus the stages of Becket's development towards martyrdom. Becket's loneliness is that of a saint as a martyr. Here we are provided with the combined picture of poetry and religion, forming the cultural part of a drama. G.B. Shaw has brought out loneliness dramatically in St Joan. It is believed that poetic drama is the theatre of words. Here poetry is the action, the action of listening, it is not, meant for seeing.

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