

The Text as Socially Contributed and Determined Phenomenon: A General Paper on Inevitable Historicity in Select Shakespearian Plays

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ABSTRACT

The literary texts have been put into rigorous investigation over the years. The critical enquiries have themselves undergone tremendous change. Thanks to the amalgamation of divergent disciplines and owing to the massive expansion of intellectual spectrum in the recent past, the reader/audience has been enabled to understand the text from multiple perspectives, which was not sanctified in the liberal humanist phase. 21st century, despite having grown considerably, and still being driven by the earlier 20th century investigative ideologies, does and has to remain in its cradle position. Therefore it would be essential to understand Shakespearean text in the light of much enriched critical/theoretical conception of the bygone past. Moreover, the calculative selection from pluralistic discursive formations has to be done to extract the essence which might otherwise be submerged within the text itself. Having hypothesized like that, A few plays of Shakespeare would be chosen to be explicating historical elements by juxtaposing literary text with that of historical document. A sufficient justification would be supplied to establish the reason for opting new historicist approach besides being observed several theoretical ideas. Such comparative method must be invigorated up against the text to demarcate the territory between literary production and historical record, which would prove to highlight the enormous contribution of society at large in making literary production as such. A strenuous effort is to be taken up in showing the circulation of “social energy” inside the artistic work.

KEYWORDS

Liberal humanist; pluralistic; social energy.

The western intellectual enquiry has undergone tremendous attitudinal as well as perceptual change over the years. The modifications are necessitated by the socio-political predicament of the ages gone into the repository of the past. Innumerable movements and isms have proficiently supplied ideas and ideologies to interpret the literary text from divergent perspective. “If there is such a thing as

literary theory, then it would seem obvious that there is something called literature which it is the theory of.” (1) To put it precisely, much earlier critical writings aimed at explicating the nuances which must have involved in literary production. Whereas, the modern critical contributions rest largely on elucidating the technicalities that have intricately stood as

inevitable features to consecrate literary status to an imaginative ridden work.

Compartmentalizing literary production into distinct group would be fruitless. The multiplicity with which the creative rendering being done, has complicated the task of identifying which is literature and which are not. "English literature usually includes Lamb (though not Bentham), Macaulay (but not Marx), Mill (but not Darwin or Herbert Spencer.)" (1) However, the disassociating task is further intensified, owing to the enigmatic fusion corroborated at various disciplines, which have comparatively less to do with imagination/creation. The circulatory expectation demands the sensuous integration of facts, which is paradoxically accommodated, on the pretext of scientifically or logically produced work. But the actual confusion arises when the literary text bears the traceability of historicity.

Even before touching upon that idea, it is crucial to examine the appropriateness of specific theoretical application out of many provocative formulations, not for mere piling up, but for establishing the conviction, that has undergone in the process of selection. First and foremost premise to be considered is whether the reading act would be done without preconceived notions. If at all it could be achieved, would it be possible to denote such naive effort as comprehensive one? "If we begin to ask ourselves questions about the construction of meaning in fiction, the presence of ideology in poetry, or greatness of either." (4) The answer is pretty obvious. The text cannot be digested in isolated passion. At the same time, artistic output cannot emanate out of a directionless vacuum. The connective operation must be required in between those laps. For such demand, there has to be certain discourse, which has come to be validated as theory of literature.

If the theoretical conceptions would supposedly be perceived from linguistic perspective, that too within twentieth century alone, there comes two broader paradigms, which are structuralism and post structuralism. Both phases have tremendously contributed, shaped, determined and impacted the subsequent branches of knowledge's, which have periodically been substituted to dismantle literary texts. As for as new criticism and formalism are concerned, the self-referential interpretation to text is paramount. 'Defamiliarization' and 'literariness' are excessively emphasized in Russian formalism to analyze document that falls under imagination. "It was made of words, not of objects or feelings, and it was a mistake to see it as the expression of an author's mind." (3) The referential/denotative denomination of a literary language is kept high above emotive/affective outpouring that of an author. The same method of investigation lends itself to comprise and then to figure out the connotative/suggestive presence of compelling words on the pages.

The philosophical ridden post structuralism has radically revisioned many institutional establishments. The previous thoughts and ideas have strenuously been reconceptualized in order to identify not only the marginalized voices, but also the politically perpetuated ideologies. The dynamism attached to the cultural practices and societal norms are proportionately fixed and elaborated to show the effective functionality of discourse. In this phase, all most all the concepts in different theories are basically interconnected. "First, single and capitalized 'theory' has dissolved rapidly into 'theories' - often overlapping and mutually generative, but also in productive contestation." (8) In this connection, the vociferous debate has persisted on the concept of authorship, which has opened up many possibilities; especially the emphasis has hitherto been laid on

explicating the actuality, pertaining to context to the literary text. The powerful manipulation of political agencies on the production of artistic rendering has also been shown with adequate substantiation. Such contribution has further deepened the appropriate theory to despoil the lucrative potion of the earlier systems of thoughts.

Roland Barthes' polemical proclamation 'death of the author' has given birth to many voices, which are being crushed in the name of dominating authorial narration: "The principle of a certain unity in writing." (13) He has made us aware of the fact that the text itself is the witness to multiple perspective of a given idea. The author being grown and taught in a particular society, would have to inscribe all that have been registered in his 'unconscious'. It is that unconscious, being constituted well ahead the individual formation of the author, inescapably fails to refute the prevailing ideologies and systems, but effortlessly accentuates own cultural codes and faiths. The author along with his text trades on similar process of appropriating the compelling elements, for the sake of providing an ultimate power to his or her society/culture/race. ON such speculative process, evidently, through negation and contradiction, many concepts are constructed, and innumerable ideologies have discursively been imposed and gradually assimilated as natural.

The unconscious has significantly been determined by the web of language. In other words, without the system of language, one cannot have unconscious as such. The discriminatory language has several inherent issues. When it comes to artistic production, the author as a personality functions just as a medium, being assisted contiguously by the paradigmatic availability of language. "It is language which speaks not the author." (13) Such condition again leads to other aggravating disputes pertaining to the dissociable existence of 'literatures' being

written down in infinite languages. The 'intertextuality' of disproportionate cultural context has surprisingly been brought together with the generous acceptance of the inevitability of prototypical humanity across the cultures.

So therefore text produced in various languages and cultures have supplied plots to other alien literary texts. "A text is no more than a tissue of . . . citations from other texts." (14) After the advancement of postmodernism, the gap between the original and that of the model has been distorted. Instead, both the real and the copy have begun to be viewed as relational entities, or secondary version of the natural phenomenon, or even as the products of socio-political agencies. The above mentioned explanation has drawn attention to the potential danger of locating the original, which of course should not be minimized, because such passivity would result in committing injustice to countless disquieted voices. The creative text can never climb to have produced in a holistic passion. "Writing involves the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin." (17) In preservation of such destruction, there is an effective requirement for juxtaposing the imaginative with that of the raw material by which the imaginative rendering is actualized.

The unconscious turns out to be an essential embodiment to the subject of an individual. The contradictory exercise of many dominant forces, competing with each other for holding on to the ultimate power, do fabricates the subjects of the individuals in particular society. So the individuals are compelled to resist whichever ideological and political perceptions being imposed on them. "The subject's possible resistance to discursive formation which transmits ideological positions." (185) there would be distinct subjects with their 'collective unconscious', standing up against the monopolizing oppressor. It is paramount

to identify the methods and approaches of performing the act of resistance. It can best be done by involving all sought of manifestations of the subject's accounted reflections. As mentioned earlier, juxtaposing the text with that of the historical source would alone not serve the convincing purpose, because both history as well as the literary document do pass through human mind, which of course adhere to social formation, and retain 'ideological state apparatuses'.

The reason for not going by either is that the fictionality being employed. Neither historical writing nor the literary text can be brought out without being drenched within creative flavour. The so-called history would not be exempted from such accusation. Both the historian and his factual record cannot be uprooted from readership circulation. So therefore his or her historical writing must have the bearings of personal opinions, imaginative construction, effective handling of bombastic language, availability of cultural codes, subtle presence of political intentions and so forth. "Historians can no longer claim that their study of the past is detached and objective." (184) at the same time, the chronological dissemination is artistically carried out like that of a story, which is pretty obvious by looking at the split up of the word history, 'his story'. Owing to the precarious predicament, the impartiality of facts turns out to be dubious, unreliable, disconnected and unbiased. "There is no single 'history', only discontinuous and contradictory 'histories'." The herculean task is realised to meant and arrive at a decision in resolving the obvious defects.

Literature on the other hand, has heavily drawn from the historical resources, which is crucial and indispensable. Primarily for two major reasons. First, the sources might be resituated in a different mode, by invigorating with rhetorical devices to ensure the sustainability. Secondly, what is

not vested, or deprived from historical segment of writing, can very well be transcended and given to pursue as inclusive one. What historian is found to be constraining, may appear to be advantageous to the imaginative writer. But the author of literary writings is also a chosen identification of the society to which he or she owes so much for their upbringing. Either the historian or the literary creator can do away with their respective historicity. Then the only option sounds meaningful is identifying "the historicity of text and the textuality of history." Denoting the parallel study of 'text' and 'co-texts'.

The past has been narrated to us. One cannot depend upon the canonized historical writing. There are other modes of representation, which are to be used in explicating the historicity out of literary texts, because history itself is the combination of other important documents. "'non-literary' texts produced by lawyers, popular writers, theologians, scientist and historian should not be treated as belonging to a different order." The past is not the concretized tangible object. In such enigmatic position, the literature should either be prioritized. Post structuralism has attributed narrative status to history; thereby it has begun to be viewed as text rather than archival document by the new historicists. They have shown with adequate textual traces that history is not a unified single entity. It can only be grasped and seen in bits and pieces, which can enhance our task fruitful to an extent. With all the above hypotheses, the analytical journey is expected to be made strenuously towards locating the decentred cultures and marginalized voices.

Shakespearian plays have been recapitulated within different era according to its requirement and peculiarity. But the interest on understanding Shakespeare has not been diminished, even after many years being

gone. Our perspective of Shakespearian plays may not be identical with that of the previous 19th century. The succeeding approaches after 1616, after the demise of the bard, would not even be match together with Elizabethan conception.

Shakespeare with that of his contemporaries; it is rather different historical periods have constructed a different Homer and Shakespeare for their own purposes. (11)

The old historicism has attributed divinely status to Shakespeare, and therefore his works have been looked up with the perspectives of universality, aestheticism, nationalism, moralistic, and so forth. But such Hegelian historical attitude towards Shakespeare would be insufficient; if at all the plays are to be contrasted with the social condition of the period.

Shakespeare has borrowed sources from Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Plutarch's *Lives* for his plays. The former, he has made used for his historical works, and the later has significantly been used as the sources for Roman plays. Besides these major contributes, He is set to have referred to more than 200 works for the successful outcome of his works. Other than the obvious facts, our task is to see whether the imbedded historicity can be extracted from his texts. From the play *Othello*, the character Othello's eventual death can be related to the perception of white dominance. "Cohen Describes Othello's suicide as the complete triumph of the white world's ethos of Individualism." (242) Shakespearian tragedies are the embodiment of the attitude of the people of the age. Especially, the potential and powerful presence of elite section can be explicated from the tragical representation of major characters. "The tragic worlds of the plays are driven by the lonely and relentless hunger for self-definition." (243)

Stephen Greenblatt, the critic behind the emergence of new historicism as a distinct theory, has called it as 'cultural

poetics', emphatically alluding to the culturality within the literary texts. For example, He has fixed the King Lear within the prevailing Jesuit exercise. That can be found in his chapter on *King Lear* in the influential book *Renaissance Self-fashioning*:

From Moor to Shakespeare, 1980. It would be impossible to dissociate Shakespeare's plays from that of political power. AS England being administered by a female authority, which must have been irresistible to the literary consciousness of the author, Shakespeare seems to have responded to that as well. "Explored through the association of Lavinia's body with Roman Polis in *Titus Andronicus*, through the meaning and disposition of Gertrude Body." (243)

Shakespeare has registered his unconscious reservation for the actors and other contemporary theatrical personages through the depiction of play within the play in *Hamlet*. As we are concerned so much about 'social energy' as a predominant contributive phenomenon, it can also be interesting to see the presence of common humanity in Shakespearian plays, as he has often been contested for having dramatised the superhuman personalities, or in substitution the powerful elite individual. "*A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Tempest* and *Henry V* are also historicized to reveal a Shakespeare in closer in sympathy with Caliban, Trinculo, Stephano than to Prospero." But there would be alarming results, if the plays of Shakespeare are observed closely from renaissance construction of gentility. The gentlemen have encountered no trouble what so ever in finding their way out both on stage and in the space of spectatorship. The process of selection and omission has been envisaged consistently at the time of play production, which has later been textualized.

New historicists have established with the support of anecdotes and other

local narratives, the fact that Shakespearian theatricality has been class-ridden. The audience have been allowed to watch the play in proximity in keeping with their social status. Those who have contributed materials to the plays, those who are rich and powerful, have been permitted with special consensus. The performative phase would have been more problematic, and it can evidently be demonstrated for having imposed the dictations of the one, who has entirely controlled and permitted the theatrical activity to exist. Shakespearian writings can only be understood, if they are seen as

reciprocally with the socio-historical documents and evidences. Every word of Shakespeare's plays can be extracted out and related to the social energies of that particular age.

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