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DIALOGIC STUDY OF SHAKESPEAREAN TEXTS

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Abstract : The growing variety and complexity of literature owe greatly the spirit of ceaseless experimentation and innovation on the part of writers as well as critics. Preoccupied by the desire for the adequacy of language for the communication of the amorphousness of the human existence, the creative souls could not help realizing the problem of communication through the traditionalist, the Naturalist, Mimetic expressions. There are good reasons for the Modern writers to question the aptness of the conservative mode of expression which turned out too monological and fixed to give vent to the invisible layers of human psyche set against the complex world of Nature and universe.

Keywords: Monological, Prescriptive, Un-Aristotelian, Epic Theatre, Polyphony, Dionysian, Apollonian, Dialogic

Introduction Hence, it is in the fitness of things that Aristotle's 'Poetics', the first prescriptive and authoritative work on drama has not been immune from the substantial body of literary criticism trying to revitalize and redefine the dramatic communication, the role of characters vis-à-vis the audience towards establishing theatre as the essential and most powerful medium of conveying the experience of life in all its dept and intensity. It is not for nothing that Aristotle's 'Poetics' has remained a target of many a representative critic of our times, as they have laughed at Aristotle's preoccupation with plot, unities and 'therapeutic' end of tragedy. Quite naturally, these critics have turned out un-Aristotelian in their perspective decrying proto-structuralist aspects of Aristotelian criticism because of its inadequacy to justify the potential complexities of dramatic literature. These un-Aristotelian critics have pronounced the irrelevance and inability of Aristotelian principles to fully vindicate the work of a dramatist, let alone of Shakespeare about whom Ben Jonson writes:

> He was not of an age, but for all time!
> And all the Muses still were in their prime;
> When like Apollo he came forth to warm
> Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm!
> Nature herself was proud of his designs,
> And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines,
> Which were so richly spun, and woven to fit,
> As, since, she will vouchsafe no other wit. (Jonson, 373)

The present paper is a critical endeavour to explore Shakespeare's dramas in the light of dialogic imagination which talks about plurality and multiplicity.

The spectrum of un-Aristotelian criticism is wide and it can be an absorbing critical pursuit to appreciate the potential Shakespearean texts, its multidimensionality, its multiplicity, its universality and, above all, its complexity in this light. Piscator proposed a drama which would use the stage as a platform for public discussion of social issues. This new dramatic form was called "Epic Theatre". According to Piscator:

> It is not his (man's) relationship to himself, nor his relationship to God, but his relationship to society which is central…… it is no longer the private, personal fate of the individual, but the times and the fate of the masses that are the heroic factors in the new drama.
> (Piscator, 187)

Brecht had categorically declared: "The modern theatre is epic theatre" and he held that the 'epic' form alone was felt to adequately depict man as a social process, man as changeable, and by opening out into a future horizon alter the consciousness of the spectator (Brecht, 5). Structurally, 'epic theatre' meant a narrative sequence without the artificial imposition of the Aristotelian unities of time, place and action directed towards a climax. Thus, the traditional preoccupations with closed, tightly-knit, 'well-made' play were discarded in favour of a loose-linked, episodic and open structure.

One of the earliest un-Aristotelian approaches may be attributed to the critical formulations of the Russian critic, Bakhtin who propounded his theory in which he contrasts the monologic novels of Tolstoy – which

undertake to subordinate the voices of all the characters to the authoritative discourse and controlling purposes of the author – to the dialogic form of "polyphonic form" of Dostoevsky's novels in which the characters are liberated to speak "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin, 263). Bakhtin develops his view that the novel is a literary form that is constituted by a multiplicity of divergent and contending social voices that achieve their full significance only in the sustained process of their dialogic interaction, both with each other and with the voice of the narrator. Bakhtin sets his critique against Aristotle's 'Poetic' and its preoccupation with 'plot', its fixed beginning, middle and end. Bakhtin elevated discourse into the primary component of a narrative work, and he describes discourse as a medley of voices, social attitudes, and values that are not opposed, but irreconcilable, with the result that the work remains unresolved and open-ended.

The desire to break away from the rigours of the Aristotelianism is well marked in Nietzsche who at loggerheads with the therapeutic effect of response to tragedy I 'Catharsis', conceives of a vitalizing power born of its Dionysian origins. The "ecstatic reality" which Nietzsche calls "Dionysian Urge" is a basic urge for power, vitality and sexual gratification "the highest gratification of Primordial Unity". (Nietzsche, According to Nietzsche, the "Dionysian urge" is the ecstatic reality and has its origin in the deeper layers of human psyche and emobodies the dark forces of life. The Apollonian state of dream is an illusion which man experiences with the "joyful necessity of the dream experience". Nietzsche regards Apollo as "the glorious divine image of the principium individuation is whose gestures and expressions tell us of all the joy and wisdom of 'appearance together with its beauty." Recognizing the shaping power of illusion Nietzsche holds that it regulates and sharpens the urge for vitality and illusion itself is saved from degenerating into pathological. Nietzsche asserts:

> .. We must also include in our picture of Apollo
> that dedicate boundary which the dream-picture
> must not overstep – lest it act pathologically
> (in which case appearance would impose upon
> us pure reality. We must keep in mind that
> measured restraint, that freedom from the
> wilder emotions, that philosophical calm of
> the sculptor-God. (Nietzsche, xx)

The Shakespearean texts, more often that not, bear testimony to the breaking down of the illusions of the protagonists and their realisation of the unique reality of self which leads to their progress to the ultimate and this is where the essence of the Shakespearean plays lies.

We come across some un-Aristotelian strains in Pirandello's "Theatre of the Looking-glass" (Pirandello, 20) wherein the delicate boundary of the 'actor' and 'acting' is maintained by the actors standing outside their characters thereby challenging the monological aspect of the Naturalistic-Mimetic techniques. In 'Six Characters in search of an Author' Pirandello depicts the struggle of characters to make for the limitations of their roles and their revolt against the stereotypical treatment given to them by the dramatic conventions. The Pirandellian concept, like the Bergsonian concept, seeks to represent the fluid and indeterminate nature of reality which can be effectively shown on the stage, its characters and situations.

A perceptive reading of the Shakespearean texts immediately suggests that they are conceived in 'dialogic imagination' of the dramatist and their verbal and thematic aspects can be justified only in their orientation towards the wider contexts at once, amorphous and heterogeneous. The protagonist of Shakespeare's play Hamlet is placed in intriguingly callous circumstances which have made him some sort of misfit who is too broken to settle the unsettled affairs around him. The incestuous relationship of his mother and uncle, murder of his noble father and consequent usurpation of the Danish throne turns out for the wise Hamlet a microcosm of the great moral turns out for the wise Hamlet a microcosm of the great moral and spiritual crisis of the age and his essential conscience cries out:

> The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right. (I, V)

This is the profound reaction of a sensible soul whose anxiety to reform and restore the 'rotten' state of Denmark is frustrated partly because of his frail mother and inconstant beloved, partly due to his philosophical understanding of the crisis in its universal context. As a result, the monological aspect of the socio-political crisis assumes dialogic dimensions and even a good soul like Hamlet feels like a sceptic doubting the goodness and glory of mankind. He says:

…… And indeed it goes so heavily with my
disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems
to me a sterile promontory, this most
excellent canopy the air, look you, this
brave o'erhanding firmament, this majestical
roof fretted with Golden fire-why, it
appeareth nothing to me but a foul and
pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece
of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite
in faculties! In form and moving how express
and admirable! In action how like an angle!
in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of
the world, the paragon of animals – and yet, to
me, what is this quintessence of dust? (II, II)

It would seem that Hamlet's thoughtfulness and meditativeness mars his spirit of action. The more he looks into the core of the crisis, the less he acts to overcome it. His dilemma is spiritual and this dilemma dissuades him from considering the devilish act of his uncle Claudius as the ultimate evil and his consequent failure to kill his uncle in the Prayer – scene. Though Hamlet's friend Horatio prevents him from fighting the match, yet Hamlet shows his unprecedented "readiness" in action and says that even sparrow's fall is in the hands of God. Shakespeare seems to have alluded to the Bible where in Mathew 10:29 it is said "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? Are not one of them shall fall on the ground without your father? (II, II)

Hamlet's decision to fight the fencing match does not show his practical and wise sense as a delicately sensible soul could not counter the dragonian designs of the opposite forces. Dr. Johnson rightly says, "I wish Hamlet had made some other defence; it is unsuitable to the character of a brave or a good man to shelter himself in a falsehood." While dying Hamlet expresses his wish:

O, I die, Horatio
The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit.
I cannot live to hear the news from England,
But I do prophesy th'election lights
On Fortinbras! He has my dying voice.
So tell him, with th'occurrents more and less
Which have solicited – the rest is silence. (V, II)

Hence, the protagonist's crisis continues and remains 'unfinalised', and 'unfinalisable'. *Hamlet* becomes a dialogic discourse, a verbal combat of warring forces defying resolution and reconciliation. The final utterance of the protagonist – "the rest is silence" is open-ending suggesting his eternal helplessness to settle the chaotic world around him. In the end begins new dimensions of the crisis.

A dialogic character emerges as ambivalent often existing on the border between art and life. the mask used by them shows contradictions and they curiously ask – "I am me and the mask, and I the mask? Or is the mask someone else? Does it make me someone else?" Shakespeare's clowns often show such engrossing awareness of their own 'Selves' in relation to their action on the stage thereby striking the sense of the audience, the critics and the readers.

Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* who is assigned the role of Pyramus shows conscious reactions to his self and mask/character. He says:

… I have a device to make as well. Write me
a prologue; and let the prologue seem to say
we will do no harm with our swords, and that
Pyramus isn't kill'd indeed; and for the more
better assurance, tell them that I Pyramus
am not Pyramus but Bottom the weaver.
This will put them out of fear. (III, I)

As Snug is to put on the mask of a lion to enact. Thisby's mother, Bottom first thinks if his mask makes any difference in him and later he expresses his desire to introduce the audience his real self thereby creating before the audience a wonderful aura of dramatic re-presentation. Herein, we come across a self-

conscious, meta-theatre where the special relation between the illusion of theatre and the illusion of real like takes on complex meaning. Bottom says:

> Nay, you must name his name, and half his
> face must be seen through the lion's neck;
> and he himself must speak through, saying
> thus, or to the same defect: 'Ladies' or 'Fair
> Ladies, I would wish you' or 'I would request
> you' or 'I would entreat you not to fear, not
> to tremble. My life for yours! If you think
> I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life.
> No, I am no such thing; I am a man as other
> men are'. And there, indeed, let him name his
> name, and tell them plainly he is Snug,
> the Joiner. (III, I)

The character of Falstaff in Shakespeare's Henry IV Parts I and //emerges as dialogic in his being a medley of contradictory traits lending his character amazing variety and complexity. Superficially, his life is given to carefree merry-making, eating and drinking and he is unmindful of the normal goings- on of life which makes Prince Hal call him "fat-witted with drinking of old sack….". And as he shirks and avoids practical responsibilities Prince Hal goes to the extent of calling him, "….sanguine coward, this bed-presser, this horse-back-breaker, this huge hill of flesh." But then, fearless and witty as Falstaff is, he ridicules the prince's lankiness so powerfully:

> Sblood, you starveling, you eel-skin, you
> Dried neat's-tongue, you bull's-pizzle, you
> Stock-fish-O for breath to utter what is like
> Thee! – you tailor's-yard, you sheath, you
> Bow-case, you vile standing tuck! (II, IV)

Moreover, Falstaff's histrionic instinct and resourcefulness are well displayed in his bold remark, "Shall we have a play extempore?" When Prince Hal asks him to enact the King's role, Falstaff shows the natural genius of an actor who reacts metaphorically:

> Shall I? Content! This chair shall be my state,
> this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my
> crown. (II, IV)

A witty and pleasure-loving soul as Falstaff is, he does not hesitate to show his harmless presence to the Prince saying, "there is virtue in that Falstaff: him keep with, the rest banish." When Prince charges him with being "villainous, abominable misleaders of youth" and calls him "old white-bearded Satan", Falstaff's report is again witty showing his gift for allusions and comparison:

> If to be sold and merry be a sin, then many an
> old host that I know is damned: if to be fat be
> to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are
> to be loved.. (II, IV)

Falstaff is a hedonist, a lover of carpe diem philosophy believing in "eat, drink and be merry" kind of life who wishes:

> ….Brave world! Hostess, my breakfast, come!
> O, I could wish this tavern were my drum.

But when Prince regards his bulkiness and fleshiness as the root cause of his dullness, Falstaff reacts as a sensible soul well-aware of his mortal limitations which is due to his physicality:

> Thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam
> Fell, and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in
> the days of villainy? Thou seest I hae more
> flesh than another man, and therefore
> more frailty… (III, III)

Falstaff bears the soul of a philosopher who observes in the body, the flesh and physical attachment the real cause of weaknesses and failings and, therefore, shows potential hope for liberation.

That Falstaff is a curious clash of opposite traits, pretension and perfection is well shown in his dramatic escape from the battlefield. Prince Henry after killing Hotspur, turns round to seek Falstaff lying on the ground. He takes him for dead and bids farewell to him and leaves. Falstaff rises up again and laughs at the Prince's folly in taking him for the dead. Falstaff believes in life and living, not in dying. He says that he pretended death to save his life and so he is really "the true and prefect image of life indeed". So, Falstaff is carefully wise and a real brave who believes in life and vitality, rather than waste them in killing others and getting killed. He rightly remarks:

> The better part of valour is discretion,
> in the which better part I have saved my life… (III, II)

Hence, Falstaff remains a dialogic figure in his interplay of the numerous voices and sounds, none of which is repressed. He turns out a complex, unfinalisable character defying a monological interpretation.
The characters of a dialogic text are liberated to speak, "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices." King Lear may be critically examined to observe the polyphonic, multi-voiced, meanings. One cannot but being touched by the grief of a King-Father maddened by the thanklessness, the ingratitude of his daughters. We come across the height of a broken father's brief in these lines:

> Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
> You cataracts and hurricanes, spout
> Tell you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd
> the cocks
> You sulphurous and though-executing fires,
> Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
> Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder;
> Strike flat the thick rotundity o'th' world!
> Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
> That makes ingrateful man! (III, II)

Due to the impulsive decision of the indiscreet king, untold loss is caused to the men and materials of the empire. Those critics who read in the play a simple, monosemantic domestic meaning freel shocked at Lear and Cordelia's touching end. But then, the play emerges as a complex, polyphonic piece when studied along the dialogic and impersonal lines. To a discerning reader, the play seems to be conceived in Shakespeare's dialogic imagination embodying contemporary realities regarding political consciousness among women. It is here that we can justify the actions and reactions of Goneril and Regan. The Eliabethan Age had already ushered in a strong political commitment which could e seen in the bold decision of the Queen who preferred to maintain her throne to get her cousin Mary executed. The same motive seems to dominate the actions of Goneril and Regan who do not hesitate een to violate their filial obligations to perpetuate their political power. Hence, those who notice quasi-religious meaning of reconciliation in the end of the play consciously deny the powerful femiistic traits of Goneril and Regan marked by tremendous passion for independence, power and sexuality.
Furthermore, the exponents of 'Epic Theatre' make play a narrative sequence and episodic structure rather than a fixed monological plot which is consciously directed towards a climax and then resolution and reconciliation. Besides, through interpolatory, commentaries, self-conscious acting and the technique of "play-within-the Play" these dramatists introduce what is called 'alienation' or 'estrangement' effect in the play. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare introduces such dramatic elements to produce intellectual, besides emotional impact on the audience. In 'the-play-within-play' scene, Hamlet seeks to confirm the words of the ghost regarding Claudius's sin, his mother's frailty and usurpation of the Danish throne. Hamlet informs the audience of his purpose behind the performance of this play:

> I'll have grounds
> More relative than this. The play's the thing where
> I'll catch the conscience of the King. (II, II)

Hamlet tells the players about his concrete idea and plans for the staging of the play called "The Murder of Gonzago". To make the play a great success, he advises the players to "suit the action to the word, the world to the action" so that they may not "overstep the modesty of nature". Shakespeare introduces dumb-show making it an integral par tof the episode. The dumb-show itself very closely represents the crime of

Claudius. The dumb-show being the prelude of the play brings Hamlet closer to the Greek tragedies of Aeschylus and Sohocles where the entire setting is designed to strike the audience, rather than enthral them emotionally. The dumb-show leads to the actual play. The –play-within-the-play with its self-conscious style, repetitions and circumlocutions invites us to look at the real drama which is being enacted, with Hamlet's eyes riveted on his uncle's face with the king trying hard to conceal his actual feelings. The words of the Player queen bring out horrible truth compelling the audience to think over the crisis:

In second husband left me be accurst!
None wed the second but who killed the first
……
……
A second time I kill my husband dead
When second husband kisses me in bed. (III, II)

Hamlet's sudden interjection and interpolation makes the point more clear:

That's wormwood, wormwood"… "If she
should break it now!" ….. "O, but she'll keep
her word. (III, II)

That Claudius rises "frighted with false fire" confirms the ghost's story and the spectators are taught the truth of the crisis and thus they are made to think feeling wide awake. We come across episodic structure in some other plays of Shakespeare, too, which helps the dramatist to objectivise the serious complication of the play on the stage. "I do not like plays to contain pathetic overtones," Brecht said, "they must be convincing, like court pleas. The main thing is to teach the spectator to reach a verdict. This trains the mind." Really Shakespeare's characters emerge as actors 'standing outside their characters', as recommended by Pirandello. In the-Play-within-the-Play scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* we find the actors conscious and analytical of their real and counterfeited roles. When the actors are asked by Quince to enact the mythical play 'The most Lamentable Comedy and most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisby', the characters appeal to the presenter (Quince) to introduce apt prologues intermittently to compel the audience to look at the actual performance on the stage. Bottom says:

Tell them that I Pyramus am not Pyramus
but Bottom the weaver. This will put them
out of fear. (III, I)

In fact, such concrete re-presentations on the stage enable the audience to watch the events on the stage in a detached and impersonal way thereby adding to the objectivity and universality of the play.

A remarkable aspect of the "Epic Theatre" is the presentation of a broad historical sweep in the plays. As against the Aristotelian principles of play-writing conceived in monosemantic and fixed observance of unites of time, place and action, the writes of "epic theatre" introduced into drama episodic narrative, spread over a long period of time. Shakespeare, too, was given to historicizing in his plays. *Henry IV, Part I* deals with such a vast incidents of the eventful reign of Henry IV, Prince Hal and the tremendous comedian like Falstaff. As far as the unity of action is concerned, Shakespeare takes up the central crisis and is settled. But then, in sharp reaction against Aristotle's deliberate monological plot of a well-defined Beginning, Middle and End, Shakespeare reverts it. The climax comes in the last, instead of in the middle act, which makes the general structure somewhat different from the mechanical balance stipulated by Aristotle and the Greeks. The climax of Macbeth comes at a correspondingly early stage in the drama, and yet it least lowers and dramatic effect of the play. Dr. Johnson rightly says that the spectators are always in their senses, and know from the beginning of the play to the end, that the stage is only a stage and the players only players. In spite of the fact that the actions in Shakespeare's plays are taking place at different places simultaneously, Shakespeare's successful incorporation of consistency, intense action and profound characterization made the plays convincing and universally appealing.

Reacting sharply against Aristotle's monosemantic view of the cathartic effect of tragedy, contemporary critical sensibility has shown a radically powerful departure towards explicating the very end of tragedy as regards the revelation of human spirit cutting across the trammels of time and space. There seems to be a convergence among most of the modern critics that the end of tragedy is tonic and sublime, not merely therapeutic. Appreciated in these open-ending, polyphonic and metaphysical strains, a Shakespearean tragedy may emerge as odyssey of powerful human souls asserting their invincible spirit. Tragic wisdom is joyful in transcending the self-assertive Appollonian dreaming through enjoying the ecstasy of profound

intergration of conscious self with the dark, the vital self. The audience of a tragedy do not merely return home with "calm of mind, all passions spent" by having been affected by the protagonist's mood of resignation and their touching suffering. Though the tragic protagonists, are his hard by "the Persistence of …. Spirit" which behove their essential glory. It would seem that the Shakespearean tragedies, like the tragedies of Sophocles, bring out the best and the bravest in the elemental man whose defiant breaking through the vicissitudes, the trials and tribulations of life make them victorious souls neither to be discomfited by vagaries of nature, nor to be subdued by the designs of darkness. Shakespeare's Hamlet seems to undergo such a sublime and ecstatic experience. Horatio prays to God for the perennial peace of this departed soul:

And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. (V, II)

Fortinbras, the would-be King of Denmark, shows the same feel of Hamlet's having transcended the illusory and the mundane world towards merging with a world of beatitude when he says:

….. O proud Death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell. (V, II)

Such a heroic vision of man's victory in defeat is glorious and recalls Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus.

One does not simply feel 'pity' and 'fear' in the end of a Shakespearean tragedy but a sort of uplifting wonder at spiritual progress. For example, Lear shows the freedom to enjoy the "soul of bliss" which his daughter (Cordelia), living or dead, becomes for him. He ecstatically utters.:

I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;
If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
Why, then she lives.
……
……
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, Look there! …… (V, III)

Hence, Shakespearean tragedies end with the beginning of new experiences amongst us of endless possibilities, gaiety, loftiness, and immortality of the tragic protagonists. W.B. Yeats aptly describes the spirit of triumph of the tragic heroes:

All perform their tragic play,
There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,
That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
Yet they, should the last scene be there,
The great stage curtain about to drop,
If worthy their prominent part in the play,
Do not break up their lines to weep,
They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
Gaiety transfiguring all that dread… (Yeats, 101)

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