

Didacticism in Elizabethan drama

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Abstract

This paper explores the prevalence of didacticism in the drama of the Elizabethan age: originating from traditional liturgical practices and culminating in a dramatization of contemporary sociocultural events. Throughout history, people have turned to literature for guidance and have, in turn, inherited generational wisdom. It is only through literature that man uttered *ubi sunt* and reached out to his ancestors for respite from the cruelties of life. The early dramas of the Medieval age were primarily of three types: mystery, miracle, and morality play. Miracle plays were strictly based on the lives of the saints from Biblical stories and greatly used allegories. Morality plays also discussed the teachings of the Bible and the Church but they were more pragmatic in nature and tested these teachings by putting characters in situations of temptations where the choice had to be made between virtue and vice. Despite a departure from these theological methods of instruction, didacticism is maintained in the Elizabethan age in three forms of plays: tragedies, comedies, and histories. Tragedies dealt with characters of noble birth or inspiring virtue who face struggles and despair because of their singular tragic flaw. Comedies dealt with human follies, errors, and vanity. History plays were stories that were based on real events that occurred in history and usually derived from the biography of a great person's life. They were very similar to miracle plays based on the lives of saints. In this paper, the didactic nature of Elizabethan drama, the dispatch of its instructive function, and its evolution are studied beside an observation of resultant social changes that precipitated.

Keywords: Morality, didacticism, drama, elizabethan age, and society

Introduction

1. Prevalent Scholastic Opinion

For some time now, there has been a common supposition amongst literary analysts and critics that the Elizabethan age had its roots of morality in the preceding age from which it was born. The morality springs from the beliefs and ideology of Medieval English literature and society. Scholars have not limited themselves to finding these moral traces in the Elizabethan tragedy but in its comedy as well. David Bevington writes: "Shakespeare's acting company, too, was a direct descendant of those troupes that had acted morality plays all across Tudor England. The morality plays thus became the chief dramatic link between the Medieval stage and the Shakespearean" (qtd. in Wasson 84). The unanimous nature of the acceptance of the moral ancestry of the Elizabethan age becomes very difficult to challenge for a scholar having a different view on the matter. Another reason behind the difficulty in challenging this view is the nobility that supports it. This tracing of the moral ancestry began to establish an English source for the didactic in the Renaissance drama instead of a Greco-Roman classical source. These laudable thoughts, however, have to be challenged or, at least, reanalyzed because of two reasons. Firstly, there can be found more appropriate ancestors to Renaissance drama in the Medieval plays than the ones that have been accorded. Secondly, the easily recognizable information that morality plays were not part of the popular plays of the Medieval age.

2. History, Tragedy, Comedy and School Plays

The Renaissance histories were the first plays to be connected to Medieval morality plays. There were no discernible classical analogues or inter-textualities in these plays and they, therefore, must have been produced

indigenously. Other than the transitional plays of the time, the two important types of plays were court drama and school drama. Court drama primarily concerned itself with the political discussion and the method of allegory employed by the morality plays was perfect for this cause in stark contrast to the historical examples cited by later history playwrights. School drama mainly dealt with the instruction of the youth at school and therefore was able to make use of a didactic method that made clear the intention and the message conveyed. Renaissance history plays, in contrast, do not have any characteristics of morality plays. They do not have any figure that has the semblance of a man who is following a path of downfall to only be saved by his repentance and the intervention of the Church. Many, otherwise great, historical dramas have been rejected by critics and scholars because of this evident lack of the didactic because they do not culminate in a teaching lesson.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that the clearest influence of morality plays is to be seen in one type of comedy, that characteristic of school drama. Because most schoolmasters were required to have their boys perform at least one play a year, presumably before the parents, they understandably selected either Terence or plays in the morality tradition. If the boys did not learn to be diligent scholars from acting in *The Nice Wanton*, at least their parents could be satisfied that proper moral instruction was being given at school. Schoolmasters themselves seem to have been the chief writers of these plays, and certainly, schoolchildren were the chief actors of them. (Wasson 212)

Elizabethan tragedy yet has lesser evidence of the influence of morality plays than history plays because there is a

certain inherent opposition between the two genres. In the history plays the actions of the protagonist are always redeemable in the sense that he backslides but then soon enough regains solid ground. The hero in the tragedy has an inherent tragic flaw or "hamartia" that may be recognized but cannot be rectified and for that reason, the hero must fall. All morality plays end on a happy note as the hero has learned his lesson and repented, therefore, leading life further with good intentions and deeds and the blessings of the church, but this case of salvation is hardly ever achieved by a tragic hero.

It becomes evident that the strongest influence of morality plays is found in certain comedies that were written for performance at school in front of parents and by the wards. The school and its masters needed to display the ethics and morals that the boys were being taught at school and, therefore, school drama primarily consisted of comedy with a generous dose of didactic morality. The students who later became professional playwrights and dramatists carried this impression into their works as well, at least in the plays written for the children's companies. Even then, the impression was second hand not exactly a descendant of the morality plays. None of the three types of Elizabethan plays carried any ideal resemblance to morality plays.

3. Morality versus Miracle Plays

The understanding of the history of English drama is primarily based on the plays that survived and it is understandably so but then at the same time, it also creates the problem of partial understanding of the genre. It is a viable thought that the extant dramas are not the normal but the abnormal, that were preserved for reading or for prescription into the books of schoolboys for learning and performing at school. Based on this, our entire understanding of the development of the English drama might be flawed beyond repair. For example, most of the extant mystery plays are from larger and older mythical cycles but they would not have been popular at the time and would have found a place only in the private manuscripts of the clergy.

Statistical scholarship in the past has revealed that the most frequent dramatizations were of a folk nature, followed by an approximately equal amount of miracle and mystery plays and the least number of religious plays. The total absence of morality plays does not necessarily mean that they never existed rather it just indicates that their portrayal on stage was very infrequent. Thus, it follows that morality plays could not have been the roots which Renaissance and Elizabethan didacticism draw from. The research must concentrate on the types of plays that were most acted for example folk plays and miracle plays. The extant quantity is very limited but enough is known about the two types of plays to find their impressions and influence in tragedy, comedy, and history plays.

From the fourteenth-century comedy, plays must have been performed professionally. They do not share many similarities with classical comedy. It shares similarities with the thematic choices of Medieval folk drama. Robert Potter has recently found a strong connection between the mummers' plays and morality plays. He has also found the influence of morality plays in the works of Ben Jonson. There is an apparent influence of mummers' plays and morality plays on Elizabethan comedy. The pattern followed

is that of disaster followed by salvation and new birth in most of the comedies. The resurrection is most often caused by a magical cure or intervention.

4. Evolution of Miracle to History Plays

Another type of drama of the Renaissance where the influence of Medieval plays can be clearly seen is the history play. There is an abundance of evidence to show the influence of the lives of the saints on the history plays. Miracle plays were the most revered, celebrated, and popular out of all types of Medieval plays. They also had the oldest standing tradition of performance and were still being performed at the beginning of Queen Elizabeth. Amongst the extant plays, we do not find any plays on the lives of the English saints but scholarship reveals that they were very similar to Elizabethan history plays in their structure. There are dual plots in such plays wherein the lives of two saints are generally discussed. While one is the major plot, the other is a subplot and is only connected to the main plot in the message delivered. The playwright follows the conclusions of history while taking liberty in the arrangement of the chronology of the events.

History plays from the Elizabethan age would have derived a lot more from miracle plays than the development of character, structure, and theme, just as they did from the morality plays. The two kinds of extant influences, namely the lives of the saints and the mummers, appear to be a unified source. One of the reasons behind the popularity of the lives of the saints must be the reason that they gave the mummers the sanction to perform with religious authority. The common theme of both these plays other than the overtly religious theme was the theme of resurrection after the sacrifice. Such plays continued well into the Renaissance age.

Finding a Medieval source of influence for the Renaissance tragedy is comparatively harder. There is no evidence of the performance of a tragedy in England before the mid-sixteenth century at Oxford. Although the extant plays have no evidence pertaining to this field, there is proof of the performance of plays on the life of Saint Thomas Becket.

Although the records of Medieval drama are disappointingly meagre ... it is becoming clear that more plays on Thomas a Becket were performed than on any other subject except the traditional Christmas and Easter plays. There was a play on St. Thomas in London as early as 1182, shortly after his death. The earliest recorded drama in East Anglia was a Thomas Becket play at Bishop's Lynn in 1385. The earliest play with a known title in Kent was on St. Thomas, at Ham in 1453; Canterbury, as one might expect, presented St. Thomas plays yearly over a long period. And there were others, as at Norwich, Bungay, and Mildenhall, at least as late as 1539. (Wasson 218)

The plays about the life of St. Thomas differ from other miracle plays in the matter that they are accurate and particular in their description rather than being fantastic. These plays are highly biographical and depict the history of the Saint's life with calculated praise and exactness. They depict his promising childhood, his eminent youth, the choice between the state and the church, and his ultimate demise at the hands of the sympathizers of Henry II. His life provides tailored material for the depiction of tragedy.

Therefore, it was in the story of the life of Saint Thomas Becket that history plays and tragedy found its culmination. It is safe to assume that the development of English tragedy was continuous from the twelfth century until the age of the Renaissance.

It is easier to advocate for the extant plays than for those that do not survive and which are only known via secondary evidence therefore morality plays seem to be the primary influencer of the didactic nature of the Renaissance and the Elizabethan plays but it must be noted that miracle plays had a tradition older than any morality play and were performed for a longer period as well. Their popularity also surpassed that of morality plays to a greater extent. The latter have evolved as generally accepted sources of all didactic themes of their larger existence and have no similarity in chronological, structural, or thematic merit.

Morality in the Elizabethan Age

1. The Idea of Inclusiveness

The drama produced in the Elizabethan age can be seen as being different from the general tradition of the English drama in several ways. But the most charming and differentiating thing about the Elizabethan drama is the comprehensiveness with which it understood life, society, and people and reflected them in the works. A thing of uniqueness can only be fully understood when it is given a backdrop that is contrasting but also the general order of the day. The Elizabethan stage can be understood well when compared to its contemporary counterparts in Greece, France, and modern Europe.

2. Inclusiveness on Stage

In such a discussion the matter that is hidden in plain sight is often ignored as not being fertile for a comparative study but it often is a mistake as appearances are intended and the physical appearance of a stage can reveal much about the plays that were enacted on it. The stage derives its theme from several elements of daily life. Elements from the peasantry and nobility are included alike. Thematic inspiration is taken from the wagons of the peasants, the trestle stages of the moving fairs, a yard of inns, the architecture of the city like city gates and monuments, and descriptions in paintings, etc. The result of the mixed usage of all these themes is a stage that is complex in nature but versatile in its function. This stage has multiple play areas with different themes, therefore, it can accommodate the enactment of different plays all together at the same time. This allowed for the portrayal of several scenes of life simultaneously in a single moment, enforcing the idea that no man is an island. In contrast, the Greek fixed stage, often called *skaiena* holds the attention of the audience at a single place and is only able to show an unafected view of life.

Even when plays like *The Tempest* restrict the stage to one place they're still remains a fluidity of movement and scene and the audience is allowed to freely explore the several shores and caves of the island. Plays like *The Alchemist* restrict movement for the particular purpose of creating high tension at a restricted place where there are more people than feasible and things are chaotic beyond understanding and control. This restriction of movement is a retort to the absurdity of the Aristotelian unity of place. In a similar vein, the squeezing of decades into a few minutes and kingdoms into a pile of wooden boxes is a testament to the Elizabethan

arrogance of the stage which felt nothing to be above and beyond its reach.

Once, the unities of time and place have been made absurd and ridiculed there is now no mandate binding characters to one place or a day to a few hours. This translated into a love for the magical and the supernatural unleashing a flood of dream sequences, teleportation, and instances of witchcraft and wizardry; sometimes in excess.

It must be partly this voracious appetite for space and time that gives it such a striking affinity for magic, as in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, or *Doctor Faustus*, or *Old Fortunatus*, or *Macbeth*. With the literalizing of dreams of flight, of fantasies of transformation, of clairvoyance and clairaudience, and of invisibility, with the annulment of time through the conjuring up of past and future, the whole spatial and temporal universe is brought within the compass of the playhouse. (Barish 105)

3. Dramatic Changes for Inclusion

This justifiability of everything on the stage instilled optimism in the audience, a certain level of magic in their lives. There was the loosening of the orthodox principles in all spheres of life. The Elizabethan stage could no longer do with just a few actors on stage and while the Greek stage did all efforts at compressing several characters into one actor to ensure the least number of players on stage the Elizabethans needed more and more players for their ensemble. This voracity led to some welcome changes as well. While the Greeks implemented their taboos to restrict appearance on stage the Elizabethans slowly lifted and loosened it. Thus, we have crowds as off-stage voices in the plays of Racine, Ibsen, Sophocles, and Seneca whereas Mark Antony incites and brings on stage an entire mob.

This affection for comprehensiveness and completeness inspired Elizabethan drama to encourage people from all classes to come and participate on stage. Shakespearean tragedy ended in the social performance of a grieving rite while his comedy ended with people from all sections of society coming on stage in a climatic unification or a mood of festivity. Jonsonian comedy saw everyone coming on stage to receive their reward or punishment according to their actions doled out by a higher power. This formulaic union at the end created a discourse of inclusiveness and sharedness in times of plenty and dearth. Quite in contrast to this, Greek and European drama ends with either the victim staring at the deed of the evil or the protagonist staring at the bleak future, thus creating a discourse of suffering in solitude.

This inclusiveness was well received and after the onset of the seventeenth century, any plays that did not sport a multi-linear plot became anomalous. The plays that survived with a linear plot had moments pregnant with multiple episodes that ran simultaneously or tension that was bi-directional. Classical and French drama preferred a unidirectional and linear plot that did not have many episodes that did not arise out of the main plot. The multifocal nature of Elizabethan drama was reflected in its usage of language as well. Greek drama, especially tragedy, is written with heavy usage of hexameters, and the dialogues are punctuated at a varied distance with an ode that is sung in chorus. The French drama stuck fast to the Alexandrine couplet but the Elizabethan drama utilized all possible mediums of verbal expression. Prose and Verse are used together without any

discrimination. The prose utilizes the colloquial as the ceremonial with the same rigor and the verse combines along with blank verse pentameter, octosyllabic, and doggerel couplets.

...all combined and recombined in endless permutation—as, for example, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with the blank verse of Theseus and Hippolyta, the pentameter couplets of the lovers, the octosyllabic couplets of Robin Goodfellow, the songs and lullabies of the attendant faeries, the clownish prose of Bottom and his associates, and the even more clownish stanzaic verses they recite in their playlet of Pyramus and Thisbe. (Barish 108)

This language also makes heavy use of puns and other wordplays. Puns require a sophisticated understanding of the multiplicities of the meanings trapped in a single word and then making its immaculate use to free them at the same time. The other dramas, in this case, make use of language that is clear and precise with enough force to make its impact. The former gives up this clinical clarity to make a language that is more accepting of its speakers.

Another difference that creeps up in the comparison of Elizabethan drama with other dramatic forms is its open-mindedness. It does not mean that these plays do not offer a moral at their end but just the opposite, they offer multiple moral teachings throughout that remain suspended simultaneously long after the play has ended. They suspend together while exerting their own individual forces on our conscience. Elizabethan drama uses its stage to show us life in suspension for our observation and introspection with all things happening together, at the same time; too much to grasp sometimes but too ethereal miss to deny it its greatness.

4. Nomenclature of Morality Plays

Few, if any, of the plays of the sixteenth century, have found a place in modern textbooks, discussions, and renditions although some of the morality plays from the fifteenth century still find devotion. This might be because of the many discussions on the morality of the Elizabethan stage and age that new discussions and research are avoided but still, there are many anomalies and abnormalities in our assumptions regarding the moral history of the Elizabethan play that have not been addressed.

One of the many such abnormalities is the abnormality of nomenclature. "Morality" and "morality play" are terms that do not have Elizabethan origin and were prevalent long before the dawn of the reign of Queen Elizabeth but have, nonetheless, been used synonymously to describe several plays of this age. It is possible that at several instances the term "moralite" was confused between its French origin and English usage. In France, it referred to a form of drama but in England, it was used to refer to plays that had similarity to the Medieval morality plays. Another common use instead of the word "moralite" has been the use of the words "comedies" or "interludes." Another term was "morall" that was later used to refer to similar plays of a didactic nature. Later, the terms "morall" and "morality play" were used interchangeably. But the former appears to be a belated term that was, in certain cases, used to refer to the latter. By the end of the sixteenth century, there was no interest left in the people for any play primarily preaching morality.

The effect of the morality of the previous ages was not always overt in the Elizabethan plays and was most often covert. Plays were not primarily intended for preaching morality but did carry didactic interest in a subtle manner, in the actions and punishments of a character and such. This transition of the losing of the interest in the overt preaching of morals was not immediate. It increased over time and by the end of the century, it was well accepted. There are several instances of literary documentation where there is no mention of morality plays.

Some attention should be paid, however, to the many places where this term is not used, for the documents and treatises that touch upon the drama in this period are notable for their curious failure to mention the morall. The same Revels Accounts...consistently offer lists of different kinds of dramatic entertainment, lists that do not include the morall. E.K. Chambers provides eighty-five pages in the small print of 'documents of control' ranging from 1531 to 1616, including many lists of the dramatic kinds, but no morals are to be found here either. Again, under 'documents of criticism' Chambers brings together many passages where morals might be expected to appear but do not. (Dessen 142)

Contemporary drama and literature do not explicitly discuss morality or morality in plays because they are now regarded under the classical division of plays and morality is not taken into account because of the perishing of morality plays. Plays are now either studied under comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, pastoral, and satirical, etc. There can be another reason ascribed to the lack of mention of morality in plays now. Much of the documentation on morality plays come from religious authorities who were against them or from critics who were trying to establish their direct ancestry in the Classics, therefore the mention we have of them is not reliable to the highest degree.

5. Elizabethan Collaborations and Their Need

The meaning of the word "anonymous" has changed over time but its use remains the same; to assign authorship to an unknown entity of an unclaimed work. The modern definition of the word is "bearing no author's name; of unknown or unavowed authorship" but this was not always the definition. In the seventeenth century, the word signified "a person whose name is not given, or is unknown." The older definition attaches the text with an author and hence authorship but the newer definition removes the possibility of authorship. But knowing the authorship of text helps in establishing with confidence the scholarship and historiography of a particular author's canon in order to not only gauge their greatness but also to be able to fully understand their work.

Collaborative dramatic texts from this period thus strikingly denaturalize the author-text-reader continuum assumed in later methodologies of interpretation. Located both at a historical moment prior to the emergence of the author in its modern form and as a mode of textual production that distances the writer(s) from the interpreting audience, dramatic collaboration disperses the authorial voice (or rather, our historically subsequent notion of the authorial voice); it instead exhibits the different configuration of authorities controlling texts and constraining their interpretation. (Masten 338)

In the Elizabethan age, there was a sudden increase in the voracity of the appetite of the audience for the production and enactment of drama and to tend to this demand many playwrights started creating plays together without regard to their individual fame and credit. Inaccurate and incomplete literary bibliography owing to incompetent historiography, witnesses, signatures, and knowledge of the peculiarities of age has led to the creation and accumulation of books that lack the names of the authors. Multitudes of great works remain in libraries and in English literary history whose profundity is enjoyed by the masses and scholars alike without the deserved appreciation being accorded to the rightful author. These books serve the primary function of any work of literature of instructing humanity with delight. The extending of appreciation is not the only concern that plagues literary historians or the student of English literary history studying the Elizabethan age; books remain unclaimed and unadorned and the genealogy of literary traditions and genres remains untraced. Our knowledge of the Elizabethan dramatic literary traditions remains incomplete. It still remains unknown which age or canon first witnessed the birth or uprising of a particular nuance of writing. Authorial oeuvres remain incomplete and their true greatness remains hidden from curious readers who read their books with admiration and appreciation but do not know the names of the creators. Scholars hypothesize the greatness a particular author of a certain age would have reached if not for his/her premature and untimely death, yet authors who wrote works that form the touchstone for today's literary criticism remain unapplauded for these quintessential works that form the pillars of our literary ages. This problem increases in magnitude owing to duplicity arising from improper maintenance of records, loss of manuscripts, or ambiguities in the identification of authorial contributions.

The last reason is a reversible issue that is possible to be made right by efforts in the proper direction with measured motivation. Literary criticism of the most accurate diligence holds the potential to undo the damages to authorial oeuvres done by selfless and unsuspecting co-authoring practices of the Elizabethan age. Co-authorship or collaborative writing was not specific to a certain age although it saw a rise during the ages that witnessed sustainable patronage for Arts. Authors made joint literary efforts with their contemporaries who shared similar views, followed the same literary tradition, or harbored mutual respect. Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, Philip Massinger, John Ford, and George Chapman etc. were the contributors who frequently engaged in collaborative writing to ensure a steady flow of quality drama to the Elizabethan stage. It was majorly started as a noble venture by literary giants who cared little about posthumous fame or immortality through literature.

Collaborative writing of fiction gained popularity amongst authors, poets, and playwrights owing to the shared popularity of the sentiments of the Elizabethan age that the masses appreciated and the authors recognized. Collaborated writings have such a compounded effect that the individual peculiarities of an author's writing remain non-apparent even to the keen eye if a painstaking study is not undergone. Authors who engaged in the collaboration culture viewing to satiate the demands of the public often did not concern themselves with retaining unshared and undisputed fame and claim to greatness. Their personal emotions, motifs, symbols, and ideas remain amalgamated

amongst the labors of their fellow authors and remain unrecognized owing to the commonality of allegories, analogies, images, and fables borrowed from a shared culture. The ordeal of separating the individual contributions of these authors from their collaborated works is such that the unsuspecting scholar of literary history in the nascence of his/her study remains blissfully unaware that Beaumont-Fletcher are two great playwrights with their own oeuvres, lives, ideas, and philosophies who are different from one other in their experience and in their writing. Their sensibility is communicated to be common from their collaboration and to date they remain named as a team and not identified and appreciated for their individual worth. Despite the problems of authorship attribution and bibliography the instances of collaboration and their popularity during the Elizabethan age, unlike any other age, suggest the earlier mentioned notion and the idea of inclusiveness, where playwrights instead of being competitors were collaborators for a shared cause.

Morality at the End of the Elizabethan Age

1. Defining the End

It is never clear when one age stops and the other begins but the ambiguity was more so with the Elizabethan age. The case cannot be made whether the age and all its characteristic nuances stopped reflecting in literature with the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth nor can the case be made that the age continued, unhindered, even after her reign was over. There are several arguments that are made in this regard. While some make the case that Elizabethan literature had ceased before her reign stating her ruling to be the root cause others argue for its survival even after the end of her reign, calling drama and literature a secular entity untouched by the fickleness of reign and religion.

Father Harold Gardiner, in *Mysteries' End*, argues for an earlier discontinuity, blaming Elizabeth for the suppression of the religious cycles. David Bevington, in *From Mankind to Marlowe*, has retraced a gradual train of secularization through the moralities and the troops of players. (Levin 275)

2. From Inclusiveness to Exclusiveness

All the cases and advocacies are warranted on their own merit. While it is true that reign and religion control and influence literature to a great extent it is also true that not all literature is liturgical. For understanding the decay and end of age the process of its growth has to be understood as well. The growth of age can be divided into three parts, namely germination, efflorescence, and decay. In the first leg of its growth, not much was witnessed until the year 1588 from which the plays of the University Wits started to be enacted and ultimately led to the work of Shakespeare and its enactment that lasted actively for around twenty-five years and was the golden time of this era. In the year 1613, *Henry VIII* was enacted and the theatre burnt down as a supernatural epilogue. John Webster and Ben Jonson had by this time given their contribution to England and Francis Beaumont soon passed away and John Fletcher was the undisputed dramatic authority in the last twelve years of the reign of King James.

In 1603 Queen Elizabeth died and the orphaned throne was crowned by James I but there were no significant changes in the literary trends partly owing to the plague that had

beleaguered the country. By this time most of the University Wits had also vanished from the scenes and Marlowe was long dead. Shakespeare, by this time, had fully established himself through his drama and sonnets. Not long after this, before the end of the century, several new dramatists appeared on the Elizabethan stage, Jonson, Chapman, Marston, Dekker, and Heywood to name a few. By this time the idea of inclusiveness, that was the hallmark of the early Elizabethan drama, had died out and there was an outbreak of professional rivalry in all literary spheres and mainly drama and this is what is known as the “War of the Theatres.”

3. Thematic and Linguistic Changes

At this time the official patron of the Shakespeare company was King James. Shakespeare's only opponent at this time was the legacy of John Fletcher. He died the same year as the king and his legacy set the tone for the upcoming drama. It set the ground for the heroic play and for the comedy of the Restoration age. One of the aspects of Fletcher's writing that set him apart from the rest of the Elizabethans was his portrayal of women in his drama. Reading through Fletcher's canon one would notice that some fifteen of his plays have the mention of femininity in one way or the other in their titles. All this together make apparent the gallantry and the chivalry with which he wrote and that set the ground for his works. Another aspect of his patronage that might have helped him in his proto-feminism was the fact that most of his patrons were from the upper class who paid for private screenings and had a comparatively refined taste and were not yet affected by the puritan dogmatism, until it closed this as well as it did all other theatrical productions. The Elizabethans had reflected all of life in their works in various brush strokes and the possibilities for their successors were fewer as they were standing in the great shadow of the giants that strolled in that era. These new playwrights were not as resourceful and they were writing for an audience that was limited and had very particular demands that had to be met because of the limited patronage. Some tried their hands at titillating tales and novels to create works that would rekindle the public passion. This, after the atrocities of the Puritan regime, was the next step in the erosion of Elizabethan morals.

Among the Carolinians, John Ford kept the tragic flame alive by such desperate measures...His heroine in *The Broken Heart* dances while dying; the hero is enthroned and entrapped in a sinister chair...*'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is a latter-day *Romeo and Juliet*, wherein the star-crossed lovers are brother and sister. They accept their incest as their fate, whereas Fletcher—in *A King and No King*—had characteristically teased the theme and dropped it in favour of mistaken identity. After *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, according to Stuart Sherman, it was “time for the theatres to close.” (Levin 279)

Another manner in which the decomposition and deterioration were happening was via language. The language itself was undergoing an erosion from what the Elizabethans had known. The lyrical and ceremonial nature of the Elizabethan dramatic language was gone and it was not replaced by a colloquial counterpart to ease access to the masses. The change in language was primarily because of the growth of dramatists in the shadow of the great

playwrights of the Elizabethan age that had discussed everything life had to offer and left little for anyone else to discuss. The language was no bolder and lacked lustre and moral integrity. In a desperate attempt to survive and appease the few patrons that were left, the language adopted was scandalising and dripping with sensuality. T.S. Eliot finds that Massinger like many other Elizabethans that came at the end of the era should be considered transitional poets of lesser merit as they were but mere symbols Elizabethan decadence and end. Their eye and vocabulary were no more in cooperation.

Conclusion

The Catholic and Puritan roots of English ensured that the literature it produced would always be didactic in nature. The balance of pleasure and instruction may tilt one way or the other, according to the times, but the need for either cannot ever be totally eradicated. Didacticism in the Elizabethan drama finds its roots in the Medieval Drama. The Medieval ages saw the inception of English drama at the hands of the Church and drama for a long time performed as solely a state apparatus and through miracle and mystery plays the message of the Church was taught to the masses in an enticing manner. Songs and interludes were used to engage and captivate the audience. Chorus was designed to include the audience in unified worship of God. While miracle plays concentrated on the lives of holy men who had dedicated their lives to the Church and had not attained great positions in the clerical order but had also been converted into legends through deification with the passage of time. There was also detailed mention of the hardships faced by such men in their childhood, their rising in life through their devotion to the Church, their sacrifice for God and spreading the enlightened word and their resurrection by the will of God were primary themes of miracle plays. Mystery plays dealt with a certain episode of the life of great men and primarily discussed matters of encounters with barbaric creatures and salvation through the will of God. Morality plays, on the other hand, were evolved forms of these Medieval plays and showed the other side of life as well. They contrasted light with darkness and virtue with vice. They shocked the audience with the portrayal of the Devil but stopped before committing blasphemy and ended with the moral winning of virtue over vice and light over darkness.

Queen Elizabeth was a great patron of the Arts and drama flourished under her reign. Elizabethan drama became popular in three subtypes, tragedy, comedy and history play. All these subtypes dealt with different themes but they were all inspired by the didactic nature of the Medieval plays. Tragedy dealt with the life of a nobleman or a person of great virtue who struggles a lot in life because of fate and ultimately falls prey to worse fate because of their one tragic flaw or *hamartia* leading to the purgation of the pitiful feelings of the audience. Tragedy, overtly, seems very similar to the miracle plays that dealt with the life of holy men and saints but differs in the manner that there isn't any explicit religiousness nor is there any salvation and resurrection. Comedy, on the other hand, deals with human follies and the simpler vices inherent in human nature and in a light-hearted manner shows the losses incurred by an individual because of greed, gluttony and avarice. History plays seem the most similar to miracle plays in the sense that they are based on episodic excerpts from the pages of

history and usually document the life of a great person and the fate that befell them. School plays were also very popular during the Elizabethan age. Boys' schools used to enact plays written by headmasters and acted by students of the school for the benefit of the audience that primarily comprised of the parents of the students and therefore these plays were overtly didactic in nature to assure the parents of good schooling.

One general notion that defined and differentiated Elizabethan drama were the ideas of inclusiveness and comprehensiveness. The stage, at this time, welcomed actors who were from all walks of life and saw the use of multiple choruses and 'mobilised mob' scenes. The portrayal on stage was no more only of the nobility but also the everyday Elizabethan life of the commoners. To accommodate the masses there was a great shift in the language from the ceremonial to the colloquial. The change was also seen in the theatrics of the stage. The stage no more only depicted a courtroom of a King or the great doors of a palace, it consisted of several fragmentary but comprehensive symbols borrowed from daily life. Several scenes were brought together; the carts and tapestry of the peasants, the doors and houses of the commoners, architectures from the city and the balconies of palaces were depicted together to show a display of harmonious living. This change towards a more inclusive theatre was also visible in the last scenes before curtain-fall. While the Greek and French plays ended with a solitary suffering or a fallen hero or scared victim, Elizabethan plays ended with chorus, communal festivity and social gatherings. This feeling of inclusiveness had also penetrated the lives of the authors and playwrights who were writing these plays and they came together to write plays in collaboration without regard to their personal fame and posthumous canon. Playwrights like Beaumont, Fletcher, Massinger, Ford, and Chapman etc. created collaborated plays to meet the voracious demands of the audience of the age.

The end of the Elizabethan age, like the beginning or end of any period of time, was a gradual process. It doesn't exactly coincide with the death of Queen Elizabeth and the crowning of King James but was certainly affected to a great extent by this. At this time the plague also claimed many lives of the commoners, the primary audience of the Elizabethan theatre and Shakespeare's Globe also burnt down as an unprecedented epilogue to his career. The audience now primarily consisted of the nobility who demanded private screenings and the playwrights succumbed to the decadence of the age and their writing created plays that were filled with titillating sexual innuendo. The sole motive was securing patronage and surviving without any regards towards the projected morals. The playwrights who were born after the retirement and death of the great Elizabethan minds were reared in the shadows of these giants and could hardly hope to imitate, let alone replace their greatness. Sensitive playwrights like Webster wished to be read with same eyes that read the ancestors but in vain. The birth, flourish and death of Elizabethan morality and didacticism can be the story of any other literary but with less lustre.

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