

Tate's Happy Ending To Shakespeare's King Lear

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ABSTRACT

What is tragicomedy? It may be answered that a serious action with happy ending is termed as 'tragicomedy'. Shakespeare's King Lear is considered timeless and universal because the characters and their sufferings presented in this novel are vivid and lifelike. Almost after one and half century, a restoration dramatist Nahum Tate presented its radical adaptation under the title '*The History of King Lear*'. Originally King Lear is a heart touching tragedy which can leave even a hard hearted person moved. But in Tate's adaptation it has a happy ending. What can be the possible reason for this change of form? Critics believed that Tate wrote a happy ending in order to cater the contemporary public's aesthetic taste in drama. Apart from the attainment of aesthetic pleasure it has a veiled political context also. The restoration of Lear to his throne is clearly related to the stability of the monarchy since the restoration of Charles II. Many of alteration were made in the light of political as well as aesthetic importance.

Keywords: Adaptation, Tragedy, Happy Ending, Attainment, Political.

Usually a play with a tragic end is considered the ideal tragedy. To understand the nature of tragedy one might study the definitions of tragedy proposed by different writers. One famous definition of great philosopher Aristotle can serve the purpose best. According to Aristotle, "A tragedy, then is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having certain magnitude, complete in itself, in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions" (The Poetics by Aristotle). Shakespearean tragedies have some specific features which make them different from other type of tragedies. These tragedies usually, have a tragic hero who suffers either by his own weakness or is cursed by fate. For example King Lear suffered a lot because of his

own faults but Romeo suffered because of some misfortunes occurred in his life. Often we see these characters having internal conflicts also.

King Lear is known as the universal and timeless tragedy written by Shakespeare who provided it a tragic end in order to accomplish the functionality of a tragedy. Famous critic and writer Samuel Jonson in spite of being known as the admirer of Shakespeare asserted that “Lear’s final scene haunts me.” He said in addition that “a play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry might be a good play but the audience will be better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue”.

The most important function of tragedy should be teaching morality as stated by restoration critics. These critics criticized Shakespeare for violating the laws of poetic justice. King Lear is the major example of the play which violates the law of poetic justice. Banishment of King Lear and death of Cordelia have no bearing with poetic justice there is not any element of divine judgment also. So Nahum Tate in 1681 gave a happy ending to this play and alteration done by him fulfilled the condition of poetic justice but we never should forget that Shakespeare's King Lear was written in the Renaissance era, and it was comfortably accepted by the audiences of the time. In order to sip the whole essence of play it is necessary to understand the historical context of Shakespearean age.

Characters in King Lear are the embodiments of evil and goodness, truth and falsehood, honesty and dishonesty which are the aspects of real life. Goneril, Regan, Edmund and Cornwall present the evil in the world while Cordelia, Kent, Gloucester, Edgar, the Fool, and the servant of Cornwall are the symbols of loyalty, and humanity.

Shakespeare’s King Lear presents a mini world before its readers which shows how a rash less father divides his all property between his two greedy daughters and banishes his youngest and honest daughter Cordelia. Here, with the help of Lear’s character Shakespeare successfully shows us the role of flattery in our lives, how one gets deceived due to his own weakness in the hands of his loved ones is also the prominent theme of the play. In the end of Shakespeare’s play, King Lear and Cordelia are presented as the victim of death instead of showering any kind of justice upon them. But Nahum Tate altered this ending with a happy one. In this adapted version in 1681, Cordelia is rewarded for her virtue and the death of King Lear is removed. Thus Nahum Tate’s alteration serves the law of poetic judgement and fulfils the didactic function of the play.

Tate’s version with a happy ending fulfilled neoclassical aesthetic taste and political need both simultaneously. In this altered version of King Lear. Survival of Lear and his daughter

Cordelia as well as marriage of Edgar and Cordelia are the dominant source of relief to its readers and audience. It also paved a way to didactic and moral ending of a tragedy where virtue is finally rewarded.

Nahum Tate's insertion of love theme in the play can be understood in the light of aesthetic importance of a play in his time. Shakespeare used poetic imagination while portraying the character of Cordelia, describing her 'smile and tears' and 'sunshine and rain' at once. No doubt, Cordelia is the heroine of Shakespeare's play King Lear but Shakespeare did not portrayed her as a charming and passionate lover; instead she is presented as a truthful daughter. Shakespeare did it deliberately because Lear is the prime focus of his narrative not Cordelia. But it does not mean that love theme was completely absent from the original play. Some romantic events are described in it such as Cordelia's admiration by the king of France. Nahum Tate said that, when he read the play he found the lack of wholeness in it and included the element of love theme in order to unify the thematic loose ends of the play.

Hence this altered version deals with two plots side by side: first dealing with the filial theme and second with romance. In order to explain both the themes in a comprehensive way Tate added some relevant passages to the play. For example nine lines are added before the episode of division of Lear's kingdom. Another example of addition by Tate is: firstly Edgar is shown glad on the thought of possibility of his marriage with Cordelia when he came to know about the rejection of marriage by her. Second instance of addition made by Nahum can be noted while reading Act iii, scene ii where Cordelia begs Gloucester for aid in finding her father. Secondly, they reveal that Cordelia, with her maid Arante, disguises herself to search for Lear. At the same time, Edmund is tempted by Cordelia's virtue and draws up an evil plan to rape her (Act III. Scene ii.). Another marking addition is when Edgar rescues Cordelia from ruffians sent by Edmund in this scene Cordelia and Edgar confess their love to each other. Tate in altered addition made Lear announce his own retirement and elevation Cordelia and Edgar to the throne. In this way a tragic end was transformed in a happy ending. Nahum Tate used some words such as 'virtue', 'injured', 'piety', which were not used in Shakespeare's edition. The words Virtue and Piety are used by Tate to show Cordelia and Edgar's filial attachment to their fathers. Injured word is used four times in play and three times in act five, scene three to illustrate injured monarchy. Following are the lines which show the repeated use of word 'injured' to make the royal condition visible:

***Take off their chains. Thou injured majesty,
The wheel of fortune now has made her circle,*** (Act 5 Scene3)

It seems that Tate used the word 'injured' to remind people of the painful recent past of the nation. Tate omitted the words 'treason' and 'treachery' from his text keeping the contemporary political conditions in his mind. Tate removed Shakespeare's lines 'there's son against father' and 'there's father against child because of political sensitivity. 'Nothing will come of nothing' is a sentence used in Shakespeare's version which shows Lear's ego and pride. But Tate has completely removed the word 'nothing'. Hence the language and words chosen by both the writers visualize the political stability and instability of their age.

COMPARISON OF BOTH VERSIONS

King Lear by Shakespeare is a remarkable tragedy with a serious beginning, middle and a serious end. To make the audience relaxed from the tragic atmosphere and their suffocated spirits clowns play their witty but comical roles which makes the tense atmosphere relaxing for a while. But the main plot which is related to King Lear remains much serious and tragic in tone and action. Audience in the period of renaissance was able to accept such type of tragic end of a story quite comfortably. On the other hand, 'The History of King Lear' by Nahum Tate presents a happy end where the survival and reconciliation of Lear and Cordelia is shown. Shakespeare's play 'King Lear' deals with filial theme, hence character of Cordelia is drawn loyal to her father but Nahum Tate added the love and romance theme also to the play. The language used by both the writers also differs from each other; Tate excluded many lines and words from the original version of the play. He not only excluded some of the words and lines but also added some new words, lines and even the theme of romance to the original version in order to satisfy the contemporary audience.

CONCLUSION

Tragedy is defined by many writers in many ways. According to classical writers tragedy must be enough tragic to arouse the pent up emotions of readers. Aristotle says, "Catharsis (purgation of emotions) should be the final goal of tragedy". Purgation of emotion is possible if the audience feel quenched at the heart while seeing the hero punished. In this way, Shakespeare has achieved the final goal of tragedy by punishing the virtuous in the form of Lear and Cordelia. Later some writers like Samuel Johnson and Nahum Tate did not approve this tragic end of the play, they wanted to modify the final closing scene of the play and make them less tragic.

In addition they wanted some reward for the virtuous characters so that play may fulfill some moral and didactic purpose. It is often considered that literature has the power to change the society, so virtue shall be rewarded. Hence Tate found an alternate for the tragedy of King

Lear in tragicomedy. “Tragicomedy as the name of a once consequential and recognized dramatic species is a fact known to everyone familiar with the history of modern drama; and while the initial difficulties attending an approach to the subject in hand may not be totally effaced by an introductory discussion, they may be limited and in some degree minimized (Humphrey Ristine). It was quite clear that Tate’s adapted version of Shakespeare’s King Lear had both aesthetic as well as political purpose. Tate’s happy ending was approved by most eighteenth century critics. Perhaps Tate wanted the triumph of goodness so he altered the ending of the famous Shakespearean play King Lear.

This revised version known as ‘The History of King Lear’ is regarded as a tragicomedy in which many scenes are different from Shakespeare’s King Lear. Many new lines and words are added while many words existed in the earlier versions were omitted to achieve political and aesthetic purpose. Tate’s modified play is about eight hundred lines shorter than Shakespeare’s. Samuel Johnson was shocked by the ending of Shakespeare’s play King Lear’s tragic end in which Cordelia is rewarded with death ironically. He was so much shocked by her death that he avoided to read the end of Shakespeare’s play for several years. Johnson approved Tate’s happy ending. Most of the critics approved the happy ending of play except some like Joseph Addison who believed that altered version had marred half of its beauty.

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