

The Essay of Dramatic Poesy

Handwritten
N.M.G.

Neander's well-known judgement on Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher

Dryden shows his strength as a judicial critic in his brilliant and penetrating appreciations of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher and Ben Jonson. On the beginning of the Essay of the Dramatic Poesy he takes up theoretical problems and then defends the variety of English Drama. After that he ~~by~~ through the mouth of Neander takes up the cases of the individual English playwrights and analyses their merits and demerits. By doing this he gives a comparative study on them, especially on Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

After illustrating the best qualities of English from the works of outstanding English dramatists Neander, symbolising Dryden himself expresses his views on Shakespeare. On the words of Atkins, "Neander's well-known judgement on Shakespeare, to begin with, has since attained classic rank, and this by reason of its keen insight, its suggestive and happy expression." According to Neander Shakespeare was the man of all modern and perhaps ancient poets. He had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily. When Shakespeare describes anything, one more than sees it, one feels too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned. He needed not the spectacles of books to read nature. He looked inward and found her there. With born-gifted wisdom and above all philosophy make

him, most correct part of intellectual power
and imagination, picturesque images, greatest
wit. Actually Shakespeare was the Homer,
or father of our dramatic poets. But
Neander did not say he was everywhere
alike. He is many a time flat, insipid;
his comic wit degenerates into clutches,
his serious things swell into bombast, but
he is always great when some great
occasion is presented to him. One should
do him injury to compare him with the
greatest of mankind. No man can say
she ever had a fit subject for his wit,
and did not then raise himself as high
above the rest of poets. The consideration
of this made Mr. Hales of Aton say that
there was no subject of which any poet ever
wrote, but he could produce it much
better done in Shakespeare.

On Ben Jonson Dryden has
more to say. Through Neander Dryden at
some length discusses the merits of Ben
Jonson as a dramatist. He regards
him as "the most learned and judicious
writer which any theatre ever had." He
had wit in abundance and was rather
frugal of it. He made the drama more
artistic. Humour was his proper sphere.
By writing Everyman in His
Humour and Everyman out of His Humour
he delighted most to represent mechanic
people. He was deeply conversant in the
ancients, both Greek and Latin and he
borrowed boldly from them. In invading
what would theft in other poets, is only victory
in him. Of Shakespeare was the Homer
of elaborate writing, the pattern of
finish than that of Shakespeare. But there
is an absence of love scenes in Jonson's
plays. One seldom finds him making love in
any of his scenes or endeavouring to move
the passions. Beside this Dryden finds fault
with Jonson's style; of these finds fault
in his language; it was that he was too
too closely and laboriously in his comedies

especially. Though he learnedly showed the
the language of the classical authors,
he did not enough comply with the idiom of
English native.

Thus we order the mouthpiece of Jonson
makes a comparison between Jonson and
Shakespeare. Of Jonson was acknowledged as
the more correct poet, Shakespeare the
greater with Shakespeare was the more
while Jonson was the virgin. Of his comment
is most significant of all, however, is
Neander's last words on their respective
merits, 'Jonson', he declares, 'I admire,
but I love Shakespeare; and here judg-
ment is pronounced, not in accord and
with rules of technical excellence, but in
the light of the general impression and
of the emotional appeal to the whole man.'

Appreciation of Beaumont & Fletcher:

Beaumont and Fletcher, Neander feels,
had the advantage of Shakespeare's wit
and their natural gifts were improved by
study. They created generally more polished
dramas than Shakespeare's especially those
which were made before Beaumont's death.
They understood and imitated the conversa-
-tion of gentlemen much better. No poet
before them could point wild debaucheries
and quickness in repartees (or wit) of the
then gentlemen as they have done.
Humour which Ben Jonson derived from
particular persons, was not made as their
business to describe. They represented
all the passions very lively and above all
with love. The English language in them
arrived to its highest perfection. What words
have since been taken in, were rather
superfluous than ornamental. Beaumont
and Fletcher used most of the words orna-
-mentally. Their plays are not the most
pleasant and frequent entertainments of