

# Dryden on Shakespeare: A Choleric-Sanguine Dramatic Poet

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Shakespeare's Temperament is a hot topic in Shakespearean criticism history when Dryden established a humor-temperament-oriented literary history through the perspective of Greek-Roman traditional medicine theory and Renaissance attitudes towards giants and genius. From Dryden's analogical inference, Shakespeare, the father of England dramatic poesy, is supposed to be Choleric-sanguine like vigorous and pioneering Homer who is versed in the design of the fable and thought, instead of being a correct poet like phlegmatic-melancholic Virgil improving the structure and language with his comprehensive mind and metaphorical thinking.

**Keywords:** Dryden, Shakespeare, Choleric-Sanguine Temperament

## Introduction

There are two influential attitudes concerning Shakespeare's temperament in literary criticism history. One is shaped from *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth* written by A. C. Bradley, who takes melancholy as the key factor to understand *Hamlet* through exploring Shakespeare's life in Elizabethan England (Bradley, 1904, p. 127). However, this melancholic image of the poet with sensibility could not cover all Shakespeare's life span compared with his fellow poets such as John Donne, Robert Burton, and John Milton when Melancholia seems to disturb everyone's life described in the encyclopedia works *The Anatomy of Melancholy* based on the traditional ancient Greek-Roman Medicine, especially Hippocrates' medical theory of Four-Humour to explore the reason of social problems (Burton, 2001, p. 15).

The other is based on Shakespeare's sharp reaction to revise his testament and will without clear evidence to do his second daughter Judith good or bad in February with the help of his attorney Collins (Chambers, 1988, Vol.2, p. 174), which builds the exact image of Choleric Lear when he learned the message his second daughter got married in January. Moreover, Shakespeare's attitude towards his wife concerning the item that he would "leave her the second best bed" used to be regarded as "an oddly unfeeling and unsympathetic document, and often interpreted as proof of the unsatisfactory nature of Shakespeare's character, his last years and family life" ("Shakespeare's will: a new interpretation").

Indeed, these radical controversial attitudes about Shakespeare's melancholic or choleric temperament could only provide an enlightening view about the factors related to his documentary career, which could not attain a comprehensive insight about his creative achievements within the framework of literary criticism by John

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Dryden from the humor-temperament perspective established by Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales* in the British literature tradition.

To some extent, the Elizabethan poets are particularly skilled in characterization of personalities' behaviors and manners with some medical terms. Compared with Ben Jonson who entitled two of his play directly as *Every One in His Humour* and *Every One Out of His Humour*, Shakespeare used to causally draw the vivid picture of human nature in brief medical words. The typical melancholic images include Jacques in *As You Like It*, the depressed and desperate queen in *Richard II*, the traitor Hotspur in *Henry IV* and so on.

The temperament-oriented human personality was still prevailing in Restoration period that Dryden drew a rough stretch of literary history in his Preface to *Fables: Ancient and Modern* translated into verse from Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio, & Chaucer (Dryden, Preface to Fables, 1700). Combined with Dryden's analogical inference "Shakespeare is Homer in England, the father of Dramatic Poesy" (Dryden, 1879, p. 71), it is obvious that Choleric-Sanguine Temperament is of critical significance to explore the connection between Shakespeare's comprehensive mind and metaphorical thinking.

### Shakespeare's Choleric-Sanguine Temperament

Before Dryden lauded a tentative perspective to establish a family tree of literary history based on the correlation between the poets' temperament and their influence, he has put forth the fundamental principle of literary criticism when singing highly about Shakespeare's status during the development of England stage from Elizabethan times. Under the condition of French aesthetic rules like Three Unities, Decorum and Rationality prevailing and denominating in the Restoration stage, Dryden definitely asserted "Shakespeare is above all the dramatic poets no matter who are in ancient or modern period" (Dryden, 1879, p. 69), who is not only outstanding in tragedy and comedy, as well as influential in improving potentiality and possibility of English to express philosophical idea gracefully.

Twenty years since then, Dryden explicitly classified poets from ancient Greek, Roman to Renaissance period as followings. The pioneers used to be Choleric-Sanguine, who are courageous in making a breakthrough to establish the framework structure, subject or language of certain genre, while the followers are supposed to be Phlegmatic-Melancholic, namely prudent in achieving a correct and elegant style to improve certain genre and his native language. Under such presumptions, Homer is labeled as a Choleric-Sanguine pioneer inventing the design of epic poetry with vigor and vitality characterized by eloquent and rough speech, while Virgil, a phlegmatic-melancholic poet, follows Homer's steps and makes the epic elegant with language and exact details.

According to Dryden's framework that the poet's achievement in literary history is mainly determined by their temperament to enrich human thoughts and the development of their native language in barbarous times, which has nothing to do with formal education and knowledge from books. Correspondently, it is true for the development of British poetry. Geoffrey Chaucer, the father of English Poetry, is versed in drawing the pictures of human nature through exploration of the inner mind and feeling that is radically different from Italian poets' method employing the physiological narration in their poems. The story of *Duchess* pays much attention to the psychological aspects in England literature followed by Edmund Spenser and his followers. John Milton had ever claimed himself to be "just the poetical son of Spenser", whose allegorical *Lost Paradise* is not completely new

to *The Farie Queen* when he builds up the image of Satan in the religious world (Dryden, Preface to Fables, 1700).

As for dramatic poesy, Dryden, Pope and Johnson came to the same conclusion that Shakespeare is the father of England dramatic poesy with profound invention and originality. Dryden, a Choleric-Sanguine temperament according to his own judgement, admires Shakespeare and takes him as the father of Dramatic Poesy, defending for him in any aspects (Thomas, 1975, p. 356). Then, Pope, a little choleric and melancholic poet and critic, intended to set a series of norms to judge the excellences and faults of Shakespeare's works. According to objective facts, he made a great tentative reform to collate and revise the supposed textual problems of the First Folio (1623) when he thought it corrupted by Shakespeare's fellowmen. However, Pope's revisions aroused life-long debating with Lewis Theobald more than twenty years (Jones, 1966; Lansbury, 1906), and changing and accelerating the progress of textual criticism and publication of Shakespeare's works. Among three of them, Johnson, a melancholic genius disturbed by serious illness (Boswell, 1970, p. 251), who spent about twenty years on editing Shakespeare's works with great patience and prudence to fulfill his wish to make an authorized version with historical explanations to help the reader have a thorough understanding.

Johnson follows Dryden's instruction that Elizabethan period is a barbarian period while dramatic poetry is in a golden time, insisting that Shakespeare is the father of English dramatic poesy and his mixture of tragic and comic scenes could meet the taste of English audience and the end of instruct by delight of poetry at the same time. He sticks to Dryden's conception that the nature of the plays shifting from imitating one action to the vivid image of human nature, then comes to the conclusion that Shakespeare is the poet above all the modern poets, whose plays can withdraw the race, time and space, moving people all the times. However, Johnson thought "subplots in Shakespeare's plays should be tightened if Shakespeare could examine them carefully". In consequence, Johnson compared the irregular structure with the well-arranged French plays following the rule of three unities and drew a metaphorical image. French plays are like a well arranged beautiful garden, while Shakespeare's plays look like a natural forests with woods and grand trees.

Besides the above mentioned relations between poets' achievements and temperaments, Dryden also presumes that a poet's personality can be judged according to the character of major hero because great minds thinks alike. For instance, Aeneas seems to resemble considerate Virgil, while Ulysses and Ajax are just like vigorous Homer with momentum.

Theoretically, Shakespeare's melancholic image that comes into shape from Romantic period is also based on this same presumption as A. C. Bradly's opinion about Shakespeare's loss of his beloved son and his life experience in Elizabethan times. According to the above mentioned image of the poet based on their works, it is clear that the character of the hero in Shakespeare's play is not definitely the representative of the poet's temperament as those in the epic poetry. Because in the long and prolific span of Shakespeare's writing career, his plays are kaleidoscope that you cannot figure out which one could reflect his comprehensive aspects but only link them with one short episode with the poet's life. When Shakespeare began his career at the early era of the development of England public theater, he is just a grass green hand, while from his middle stage of writing, he was the most influential one to undertake three roles together as a player, playwright and shareholder of the Globe Theater. It is clear that Shakespeare, like the Greek tragic poets Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides who could create, act and attend the contest to earn money and respect, has been confronted with the ups and downs of the

development of the group and theater. Therefore, it is not proper to conceive the melancholy image that Shakespeare used to be isolated in a room like a philosopher to ponder about the universal matters. Finally, he withdrew from London stage to his hometown Straford.

In addition, Shakespeare's temperament would not shift from Choleric-sanguine to Phlegmatic-melancholic even under the influence with aging. Dryden takes himself as a typical example and reveals that the Greek Poet Homer is more appealing to his genius and makes him satisfied even when aging he could not tolerate the torment of violent emotion when growing old and fragile, he had to shift the translation task from Homer to Virgil and Ovid (Barnard, 1999, p. 198). This is also true for Shakespeare's tragic hero King Lear, whom in his two elder daughters' eyes has never changed constant rashness according to their judgement.

In a word, Shakespeare's temperament should be Choleric-Sanguine given into account Dryden's analogical inference that Shakespeare's influence in England dramatic poetry history is equal to Homer's epic poetry.

### **Shakespeare's Masculine Love, Honor and Friendship**

When examining the development of literary history in the golden period, the poet's Choleric-Sanguine temperament is often essential to cultivate the masculine style, whether in Homer's heroic epic or Shakespeare's plays. In Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* or *the Truth Found Too Late*, Dryden makes further explanation of masculine style that means the moral instruction revealing the general principle of the national spirits achieved by the poets such as Homer and Shakespeare (Dryden, Preface to *Troilus and Cressida, or Truth Found Too Late*, 1679).

In particular, the masculine style which makes Shakespeare have higher social status in literary history is of similar significance with love, honor and friendship in Restoration heroic plays. The subject of love and honor in Shakespeare's plays gradually attract poets' attention since William Davenant, a poet witnessing ups and downs of the theatrical development in Elizabethan age, establish the subject of heroic play *The Siege of Rhodes Made a Representation by the of Prospective in Scenes, And the Story sung in Recitative Musick* (produced in 1656) on the stage. The love through hardship mixed with personal matter while the love of male friendship is closely related to the steadiness of the country and universe (Campbell, 1898, p. 180; Dryden, Preface to *All for Love, or the World Well Lost*).

Dryden was so deeply impressed by Shakespeare's works after cooperation with Davenant to adapt *The Tempest* (1667) with more musical elements to meet the social expectation and made a rough definition of play to distinguish the feature stages in different countries. For Dryden, Shakespeare is a distinguished poet even compared with the ancient Greek or Roman poets for his love-scenes that resemble the tender feeling in *Andromache* which is the most frequent of all the passions, "being the private concernment of every person, is sooth'd by viewing its own image in a publick entertainment" (Dryden, 1879, p. 68). On the contrary, the violent passions such as lust, cruelty, revenge, ambition, and those bloody actions are not the daily passion in human life, which could not move the audience into action, and only arouse pity and horror in his life.

In general, Shakespeare's influence on Dryden and his followers can be roughly classified into two aspects about the development of heroic plays: the subject and the language. Dryden took Shakespeare's plays as the most appropriate materials to create new subjects in his last period of writing heroic plays, and adapted two tragedies of Shakespeare and earned great success. After Dryden, Several playwrights who could make

adaptation of Shakespeare's plays according to the conventional rules of the simplification of structure, including characters and plots to make it adjust to the new requirements. Although Dryden's heroic play is about love, while that is not the love in Fletcher's style, he would link love with state and country development just like *Antony and Cleopatra*. While Thomas Rhymer opposed Othello as the typical example of tragic hero from the perspective of poetic justice because the hero is not the moral model of life.

Dryden's adaptation of Shakespeare's works not only earned fame and chance for him, but also promoted the publication of Shakespeare's works in the last quarter of 17th century, establishing the foundation of Jacob Tonson's publishing kingdom in vernacular literary works (Bernard, 2016, p. 159). Taking the chance of the Heroic play *Troilus and Cressida* and the copyright of the Forth Folio of *Mr. Shakespeare's Plays of Comedy, Histories and Tragedies*, Tonson not only established his published Kingdom. Nicholas Rowe, the first modern Shakespearean editor to finish his first Octave version, is a promising dramatic poet who helps Jacob Tonson edit the works of Dryden, forming the image of Shakespeare as a master of sweet language in "Some Account of Life William Shakespeare", which is the first brief introduction with field study in Stratford to interview the people who have some impression about the poet.

Shakespeare is not a correct poet like Ben Johnson following the rules strictly, who would stick to his pioneering ways to exemplify his understanding of the rules of time, place and action in *Henry V*, *As You Like It* and *The Winter's Tale* based on his observation about life experience and the magic of audience's imagination. In Dryden's opinion, Shakespeare has some philosophical conception about the sorrow concerning the whole country that everybody would ponder on. Meanwhile his efforts in establishing the masculine love, honor and friendship with comprehensive mind and metaphorical thinking make him to be the brightest star in the literary history.

### **Shakespeare's Comprehensive mind and Metaphorical Thinking**

From Dryden's analogical inference, Choleric-Sanguine temperament might be the foundation of comprehensive mind that Shakespeare needn't read books to get the secondary knowledge of human nature. As for how Shakespeare draws the vivid picture of human nature from inner mind, Dryden has never made further explanation about it.

There is no doubt that Shakespeare's writing process is completely different from his fellowmen Ben Jonson, a Phlegmatic-Melancholic poet like Virgil, who has read widely and borrowed so much from classical works that makes English language Latinized and the purity of his native tongue to some degree. Shakespeare's writing is a typical example to illustrate the philosophical understanding of human mind from Thomas Hobbes' "On man" in *Leviathan* to David Hume's anatomy of Human Nature that the foundation of imagination and understanding should be established on ambiguous and fading personal experience stored in his memory with clear judgement about the profound meaning of life and death.

Therefore, the university education is not essential for a poet if he could acquire profound knowledge through life experience and broad reading as Alexzander Pope illustrated in his Preface to the second version of Shakespeare's plays published in 1723. Pope takes *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* as the evidence of Shakespeare's knowledge about the distinction of Roman spirits and manners, as well as their minor historical distinction to prove that it doesn't matter "if a man has knowledge, whether he has it from one language or from

another” (Pope, 1993, p. 187). He strongly believed that the opinion of Shakespeare want of leaning was resulting from confusing learning with languages that was taken for granted prevailing in Elizabethan period.

Most of people would agree with Samuel Johnson that Shakespeare had never taught the lesson directly but at random, which is not from his way of reasoning but from his metaphorical thinking. For example, Jacques talks about the death of hunted animal with the cruelty of human invasion into other world, which was criticized by the followers of the Lords in the forest for they thought it is ridiculous.

Dryden compared Shakespeare’s ability to make full use of metaphor with Horace to make the English harmonious, which was taken for granted by Pope and Johnson as the best way he values for a poet to improve vernacular language. In Roman, Lucretius and Horace are two poets taken as the language masters by Dryden, who praised Lucretius him as the best poet who can help him in the world to know the true with verse. At the same time, in the preface to *All for Love*, Horace is regarded as the master of language because his use metaphor to makes the Roman Words graceful, which is also the best way for a poet to enrich the language for a world in his *Art of Poetics* to make the daily words got the graceful meaning.

Eventually, Dryden’s opinion of Shakespeare’s comprehensive mind transformed into Pope’s idea that Shakespeare originality is superior to Homer for his borrowing from Egyptian culture. However, even “all his metaphors appropriated, and remarkably drawn from the true nature and inherent qualities of each subject”, Shakespeare is still an amateur with common sense in some area being lack of essential and concrete description and reasoning, the philosophical ideas loosely connected. For example, there are lots of scenes concerning the prevailing melancholy providing an insightful and vivid England pictures, which are much earlier than Robert Burton’ books but cannot be used as the handbook to cure spiritual diseases. At the same time, the well-known debating about one pound of flesh in *The Merchant of Venice* is also a scene to improve the dramatic effect that could not be taken for granted as the social and legal customs in Elizabethan time. In fact, he is an encyclopedic man with broad horizon about life and nature and find common sense among them.

In a word, Shakespeare’s comprehensive mind is closely related to his profound talents in metaphorical thinking. Metaphorical thinking is taken as the first rate talent for a poet that cannot learn from others in Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Ficino, 1998; Jones, Thomas O., 2013). Although a poet can borrow story from ancient family or other books, while he could not borrow metaphorical thinking, which is the first rate poet in the world, which is the first way to make the language clear while not common and full of vividness. Aristotle put forward metaphor is to link different things together to make the world with similar quality and in the *Art of Poesy*. Moreover, metaphorical thinking is also critical to improve the gracefulness and vitality of language through new meanings of the old words, or and find the internal connection of the universal world.

Metaphorical thinking is not closely related to the inherited imagination but just through observation of the world. Sometimes, metaphorical thinking is confused with melancholic feature being taken as the mark of genius, especially the giants and complete men in the Renaissance period. For the image and scene in the play is only some hints of the thing as the famous philosophical debating “A White horse is not a horse” by GongsunLongzi. Consequently, it is impossible for us to behave according to the means in his plays, while we can get the common sense to deal with the problems aroused by measure for measure.

Metaphorical thinking is different from the logical reasoning in metaphysics but only link show the metaphorical thinking when Dryden and Sydney insist that abstract conception to share the true way of thinking

is share the thoughts. As for Shakespeare, he has suggested his spectators to have imagination that they can have thought the one person the whole troupe and army that in the world and could think the stage as the real world to see the feature to cross the sea and climb the mountain. In this aspect, imagination is the way to fill the gap between real world and theater world.

## Conclusion

What makes a poet rank first is not the correctness and accuracy of language and obedience to the strict rules, but his profound thought that could give instruction by delight in harmonious and pure language like Shakespeare. In consequence, it is easy to admit that character, especially the born-ability, will influence a man's behaviors and judgement, and making a haste conclusion that Shakespeare owes most of his achievement to his temperament.

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