

Poetic imagery and use of symbolism in John Drinkwater's play 'Abraham Lincoln.'

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Introduction

The play 'Abraham Lincoln' is from the year of 1918 is a masterpiece, as regarded by many and the John Drinkwater's play reflected on the life event and sequences of one of the most celebrated presidents of United States of America, Abraham Lincoln. Mostly, it is to be noted that political career of Abraham Lincoln was focused upon in this 1918 play and there was as much as the one hundred and ninety-three performances that has been covered in the whole play's theatrical adaptation. The latter was released in the year of 1919 that is vital to understand. And the theatrical production of the 1918 play was done by William Harris Jr. In the year of 1924, the first film adaptation of Drinkwater's play was made and as later as in the year of 1952, an anthology serious that was broadcasted on the television was also made. Such was the impact of the great play by John Drinkwater. The presidential period of Lincoln has been encompassed completely with much creativity and analytic point of views in this 1918 play that is also be noted particularly. Set in the times of the first world war, when England was going through crisis and various types of complex warfare and societal exploitation issues, the drama about the great American Hero 'Abraham Lincoln' was written by John Drinkwater. The play was chiefly written to find an alignment in terms of human struggle during times of extreme world crisis when not a mere person but a society, a country, a world falls into (Venugopala, 2014). But as the struggle is always at the human level, therefore, the defenses and the ways to fight these crises are also present at the human level. And by analyzing and writing about the heroic career of Lincoln, the hard experiences of the man and the rising up to the great events – the play has been a trial to motivate all who are going through crisis during the world war,

especially the people of England that is important to note. The book is known for the usage of two specific literary styles, and this is one of the rarest features that is come across in a play. While the lines of the characters come in the form of prose, it is the lines of the second and the first chronicler that comes between the scenes in the form of poetry verses. And such of such dual techniques in the drama or play writing is what made the feat even more interesting and also very exciting for the readers and the audiences of the theatrical production (Grice, 2015). Not only the play was a roaring triumph in the home country but also in the country of United States which is critical to understand because the protagonist of the play was the American Hero himself. The deeds and the professional works of the American president has been symbolized and held high by the playwright John Playwright in order to depict them as highest orders of societal actions plus rightful citizenship behavior. There is a lot of psychological analysis of the American president that helps the audiences, and the readers gain insight about the probable personality traits of the great leader who became a political legend as well. And it is also to noted that the play has selected after a long procedure for the theatrical productions, and it was based on the truth and the relevance of the life and persona of Abraham to the first world war times that is critical to note (Current, 2014). But as for a matter of fact, the John Drinkwater play met all the necessary criteria for the educational theatre designed chiefly for the high school students and it was an immediate success when released. In this study, the scholarly evidence present in the scientific literature has been reviewed at first to gain more insights regarding the play. The strengths and the weaknesses of the drama has

been determined through the analyses of the scholarly literary articles that is focused on the play and the playwright. Following that, the critical analysis of the poetic drama has been undergone and then the essential techniques and tools used in the development of the 1918 play has been discussed too.

Literature review

According to Rogal (2016), the 1918 play about the American president visited important elements and events from the life of the man that is exemplary of greatness, valor, and truth. The martyrdom, traumas as well as the trials received by the great man was found to be affecting the lives of others around and not only himself and he was a true leader in many good ways that marks the dramatic work of John Drinkwater. However, the British hit drama was strongly criticized and charged for inaccuracy by the Harriet Munroe who is herself a Lincoln specialist. According to Harriet, spirit of the American President is perceived and respected differently by his own people and a British foreign author cannot understand the sentiments and the underpinnings of it which is important to understand. According to her, the main basis of her criticism has risen from the fact that the spiritual connection which exists between the memories of Abraham Lincoln cannot be understood by the British people and that is why, the credibility of such works is not accurate, to her. The artistic acuity of the John Drinkwater drama was not accurate either according to her because in the scenes of the play, British landscapes has been more imagined other the America where the protagonist of the drama belonged. That is why, in terms of poetic imagery – phrases and the point of index is axiomatically wrong, according to the Lincoln specialist, Harriet Munroe. Also, according to her, as mentioned by the researchers of this study, Lincoln was a great poet himself and his artistic levels were not matched or even justified properly in the British drama that was based on him. The aspects of the ‘eye’ poetry that are often used by the prairie poets while describing Lincoln such as the inward reflections, emotions and passionate expressions was missing from the British Drama, although it seemed appealing to American audiences and British audiences.

Edwards (2013) focused on the events of the drama that reflected on the Christian life of the great legendary American president. There was lot of emphasis in the 1918 drama about the English connections of the American President that is important to understand. As for matter of fact, his lifestyle was reported to influenced by east Anglia and from the lives of his English ancestors. And there has been symbolisms used in the drama by John Drinkwater that pertains to the various implications of such possible life and family history of Abraham Lincoln. In fact, the research, and the symbolism to such connection in the works of the twentieth century has been found to be impacting upon the Anglo-Saxon communities as well as on the American-Anglo relationships. Hence, the poetic imagery and verse techniques used in the play other than being a great it also actually influenced a lot of relationship building amongst the people of two different countries. In other words, the researchers of this study mentioned that the drama ‘Abraham Lincoln’ had a strong impact on the lives and the socio-cultural attitudes of the angelical communities. Moreover, it can be said that the British perception about the Great American hero’s anglicization has been one of the hallmarks of the 20th century and dramas as well as poetries about Lincoln that had great effects on society. Thus, this drama about the American president is of immense importance, that helped in building of international relations between England and United States of America that is to be noted critically. It has also been impacting on the Churchill political practices during the second world war.

Burlingame (2013) focused on the development of the figure of ‘global Lincoln’ that is critical and cardinal to understand as well. According to this research, the laws in pertinence to democracy were first realized and bought to practice by Abraham Lincoln that laid the foundations for democracy to be followed by the administrative all across the world. And the work of John Drinkwater was so influential and such a great theatrical hit that it shaped the ideas of national unity and the nationalism in a broader sense where people and their opinions are respected. According to the research, the leader has been imagined and imaged in the shades of nation builder and as a natural leader that opened up

democracy and American spirit of equality and sovereignty in the nation. The human rights and the compassion for fellow men was the main crux of Lincoln's philosophy of democracy that formed the main symbolism used in the John Drinkwater's play in a massive manner. The exercising of human rights that is equal to all and that nobody is above nobody is what shaped the era of Abraham Lincoln's presidential rule that is to be noted. And this helped in the giving freedom to the people from the shackles of the practice of slavery that was a major sociocultural problem at his time.

According to Poplavskiy, Rybinska & Ponochohna-Rysak, (2020), there was great elements of what is synesthesia in the twentieth century poetries and John Drinkwater's poetic imagery is one of the prime examples of the same. The psychological – linguistic phenomenon is one of the most critical when it comes to the synesthesia application in poetry and in the various scenes of the John Drinkwater's play, this style has been used in order to appeal to audiences. In the rhythms and the melodies of the poetry whether it is British or it is American, it has a very strong use that leaves the readers and the audiences to its recitation mesmerized. And this is surely due to the psychological aspects of this poetical imagery method. There is use of one sense for explaining the position, effect or rather the condition of the other and mix and matches in word patterning is done in order to appeal to the people's senses, choices and personality attributes. Such high forms of artistic tools were used in the John Drinkwater's 1917 play that is very important to understand. In the poetical areas of the 1918 play, such technique was used in order to express the inner turbulences, natural beauty as well as the personal growth and war experiences of Lincoln, the great. Through this, the life events of the great American leaders were rendered brightly in the perceptions of both the British and the American audiences that is important to comprehend here. Moreover, the Britishers had a bad perception about the Lincoln ruled America primarily and it was through Drinkwater's works and that of other contemporary writers and poets, the perceptions about the brave American President were made clear to the audiences.

Thus, there are many aspects of the 1918 drama that appeals to the people with different personas and sensory appeals and that is how, at a very technical level, the drama was conceived.

Maxwell(2017) focused to study the absorption into the poetic works and the depiction of the atmosphere that allows the absorption to take place. This research is done both at the abstract and at the conceptual level, thereby, describing the critical areas where John Drinkwater, Charles Swinburne, and the world-renowned poet T.S Elliot are similar and different. As mentioned in this article, the ideas pertaining to impersonation of emotions in the world of poetry is very much significant in John Drinkwater's work such as the Abraham Lincoln, the ideas of freedom and free world is more pronounced in the Swinburne's poetical works. This difference is vital for the poet and literary critics to understand as because the psychological, philosophical and the artistic perceptual structures are different in each and this will help in better understanding of the poet himself. As for a matter of fact, synesthesia is very pronounced in the Drinkwater's plays as compared to the other two poets in discussion here.

Critical Analysis of poetic Drama

The drama by John Drinkwater has many aspects and layers that can be seen and understood in a literary and also in a very artistic manner. The drama, that analyses and idolizes the life events of the great American president is a work of imagination to many critics and a work of reality, harsh reality, and inspirational leadership to others (McCrary, 2015). Although, the drama by playwright Drinkwater has been said to be flawed by Harriet Munroe, many has implicated the possible reasons for her criticism of Drinkwater's great play 'Abraham Lincoln' that is critical to note and understand as well. According to her, the spiritual connection of the American president Abraham Lincoln was not realized or lived by the playwright who was focused on finding the British connections of the president rather than his individual flair and talents in different fields (Pohlad, 2016). According to her, the fact that Lincoln was a champion of law, politics, and humanity and also a very greatly pronounced poet at the

same time but these factors that actually made him a great man with an inspired personality – was not at all described by the playwright. While this caused a gap in the semantic reflection on the president's life, this also resulted in detachment from the true reality – the American reality of the events in Lincoln's life that is cardinal to understand. This was the main critical statement made by the Harriet Munroe who herself is a known Lincoln specialist and a great advocate of the group of poets known as the prairie poets. These group of poets that includes herself too, specializes in eye poetry and that is why, she had a strong knowledge of poetic imagination and emotive symbolism (Almasalmeh, 2015). But according to other critics, her non-acceptance of the John Drinkwater's work is biased. It was biased because the nationalistic as well as the very chauvinistic attitudes was very pronounced in her criticism of the highly successful 'Abraham Lincoln' play, according to many and that is why, she felt alienated from the 1918 work of John Drinkwater. Yes, it is that true that Drinkwater's excessive use of poetic imagery with respect to Lincoln's British context has been criticized by many as a deviation from the truth, from the array of actual facts but the one given by Harriet remains one of the harshest criticisms of the Drinkwater's poetic drama in a very major way.

It has also been reported by scrutiny done by many critics that the play by John Drinkwater actually brings out the characters and not only Abraham Lincoln, back to life, using the stylistic literary and persuasive tools. And it is one of the major factors behind the massive success of the 'Abraham Lincoln' play in both the countries – United States of America and also in the home country of Great Britain (Tal, 2015). The use of synesthesia and poetic imagery tools are so excelled in this drama that people perceive and senses the characters of the play as a real person. In fact, the choice of the actors decided upon by the productions made a great realistic performance that led to general acceptance of the people in a serious way. But again, going back to the core of it, was the use of poetic imagery tools as in visual imagery, tactile imagery, organic, olfactory, kinesthetic as well as gustatory and auditory senses in the drama. And again, it is through the use of these synesthesia

techniques – the past world and history of Abraham Lincoln was reconstructed and remade in front of the audiences – thus leading to its natural acceptance (Burlingame, 2013). In the scenes of the 'Abraham Lincoln' play, there has been major elements of what is known as the personification of the nature that rendered the emotional picturing of the Abraham Lincoln in a great manner. And this is to be seen as one of the major achievements of the drama in the artistic sense that won the applauds of the audiences.

According to many, there are lack of what is known as the super-sophistication or the various types of the vulgarity that superficially included to appeal to youth and certain sections of the people but in this, there was no such problems. It was a pure appeal to the people sheer senses and innate drives for freedom and treatment of equality for which they could relate to every prose, every verse in the John Drinkwater's play that is important to understand here (Cochrane, 2015). There accompanied a feeling of sophistication as well as feeling of harsh barriers of world reality that Lincoln had to face during his lifetime but only coming out victorious in the end. Although the death of the great leader came under tragic circumstances, the impact of his activist, humanitarian as well as leadership works became very much embedded only in the American history but also in the world history.

Use of literary tools and techniques

The tools and the techniques used in this play by John Drinkwater mainly focused on developing the feeling of empathy by constructing the three-dimensional images of the beloved American president's life in the people's minds. The use of synesthesia in various forms as mentioned above was actually the main technique used in the developed of the three-dimensional poetic imagery in the mind of the audiences and that of the readers as well. And the keeping out of vulgarity or stigma sensitive areas from the play, the playwright made very sure that the drama appeals to all human beings alike, in form senses and perception ("The courses of his soul, And give his hand, Courage and continence"). This reason can also attribute the great fact that the show was not just a success in United Kingdom but also in United States.

And this is purely due to the human touch and emotive personification of nature, landscapes that gave the drama – that extra mile to recreate the memories of brave and evolved Abraham Lincoln in a very profound manner (“From the furrows of corn and the brown loads of hay To the mountain-side”). In other words, the use of synesthesia, symbolism as well as the poetical imagery techniques in the drama ensured that a sensation will be left in the mind and lives of the people who have read or seen the drama in the theaters (“I’ve a queer, anxious heart. And, God bless America!”). As for more critical evaluation, it can be said that the characters in the very drama’s plot went through many conflicts and struggles that defines the actions, reactions, responses and the romance, life philosophies of all – under the leadership influence of the great Lincoln (“But man’s desire and valiance that range”). Thus, in a way, the three-dimensional reality of the drama was not bought into picture by the application of the synesthesia technique but also through carefully research that made the realistic storyline and lifestyle of characters – possible. The use of such poetic conception tools became so successful that many high schools in Great Britain actually isolated thirty-five subjects to be taught based on the same which is important to understand (Latham, 2020). The character development in the drama was done through the use and depiction of external and internal forces and this is what the audiences could emphasize with and the various situational crisis and struggles of the events in Lincoln’s life added the extra layers to its artistic creativity and comprehensions (“The spirit of man immortally to live”). There was coherence as well as a logical flow between the verses and the proeses and that is why, the character development as well as the plot development was realistically comprehended by the audiences and the readers (Hibberd, 2013). And these factors actually added to the intensity and the success of the plot, using the poetic imagery tools as described. It is also to be noted that the various

aspects of the dynamics of the Lincoln’s personality was shown beautifully through the use of poetic imagery that actually helped the empathic connection building with the viewers and the readers.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be concluded saying that use of poetical imagery as well as synesthesia were the main tools and techniques that made the empathic and three-dimensional thinking possible. But the actors’ dedications to the theatrical performances also bought characters in the play – to life. According to Harriet, there was issues with the symbolic thinking and factual data in the play by John Drinkwater but according to other critics, it was her nationalistic bias that led to delivery of such biased critical comments. The work by John Drinkwater strictly depicted the political and leadership career of the American president showing the obstacles and the hard decisions that had to be made by him – in many situations, that taught the world the value of democracy and freedom. And these are the main points beautifully and synchronously depicted by the usage of symbolism and synesthesia techniques in the drama by John Drinkwater. The use of the different types of the poetical imagery techniques has been exemplary in this drama and the character developments has been shown quite realistically too that has been liked by the audiences and the readers. The various elements of the nature have been impersonated effectively to match the tone of the feelings and the emotions of the human characters in the drama and this has fondly accepted by the audiences. There has been Anglian connections of Abraham Lincoln that has been symbolized in the drama by John Drinkwater and this has been found to affect the acceptance of the work by many. But it has also created positive perceptions about the connection of the two cultures – that is the American and the British that has helped the relationships between the countries over the years. In fact, various works in literature is symbolic of Anglican Lincoln that has merged thoughts and cultures in times of global crisis and warfare and in fact, the great leader has taught everybody the true meanings of freedom, as depicted in the drama

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