

This opposition between Shakspeare's methods and those of Jonson grew, of course, out of the Art and Nature labels which had already been attached to each.

But the first actual fragment of our story is found only so late as 1668, when Dryden wrote that,

The consideration of this made Mr. *Hales* of *Eton* say, That there was no subject of which any Poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better treated of in *Shakespeare*; and however others are now generally prefer'd before him, yet the Age wherein he liv'd, which had contemporaries with him, *Fletcher* and *Johnson* never equall'd them to him, in their esteem: And in the last Kings Court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir *John Suckling*, and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set our *Shakespeare* far above him.³

Here, then, is Dryden's story, with the alleged opinion of Hales, and with Suckling preferring Shakspeare to Jonson.

Two later writers give this opinion of Hales a circumstantial setting. The first and in many ways the most elaborate of these versions is that of Gildon in 1694. But in the meantime Nahum Tate in 1680 had written to Edw. Taylor,

I cannot forget the strong desire I have heard you express to see the Common Places of our *Shakespear* compar'd with the most famous of the Ancients . . . Our Learned *Hales* was wont to assert "That since the time of *Orpheus* and the Oldest Poets, no Common Place has been touch'd upon, where our Authour has not perform'd as well."⁴

This is merely Dryden in fancy dress, and needs no other source. Also in his reference work, which with its successive revisions was destined to be the standard for many a year, Langbaine in 1691 says, Sr. *John Sucklin* had so great a value for our Author, that (as Mr. *Dryden* observes in his *Dramatick Essay*) he preferred him to *Johnson*.⁵

Tate and Langbaine together make up Dryden.

Then in 1694 Charles Gildon,¹ addressing Dryden and quoting Dryden, "if my Memory fail me not," gives the story the setting of a formal trial at Eton, and mentions specifically only Falkland and Suckling as participants with Hales and Persons of Quality. A progressive growth in change of phraseology is significant here. Dryden's statement was general, "no subject." In Tate, this becomes specific and technical, "no Common Place." So Gildon continues the evolution with, "all the Topics, and common places made use of in

³ Munro, *Sh. All. Bk.*, Vol. II, p. 141.

⁴ Munro, *Sh. All. Bk.*, Vol. I, p. 374.

⁵ Munro, *Sh. All. Bk.*, Vol. II, p. 372.