



A Nation's Heart - An analysis of 18th century american drama with special regard to Royall Tyler's 'The Contrast'

Sebastian Zilles

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Seminar paper from the year 2008 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 2,0, University of Mannheim, course: Literatures of the Early National Period, 8 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: Walter J. Meserve concludes in his work *An Outline History of American Drama* that many eighteenth century American plays "indicate little dramatic talent and were written more to criticize and to propagandize than to create a work of art, but the passion of some exhibited in these plays often strikes a spark of real life" (38). Given this, Meserve portrays early American drama as a weapon with the ambition to educate its readers in a specific (American) way. In the same breath, this also means that the play's form and its dramatic elements are less important than its implicit (political) message, which leads to the conclusion that early American drama is merely a political mouthpiece.

Contrariwise, this paper will show that besides educating its readers, early American plays should also be read as a work of art. This will be illustrated by Royall Tyler's play *The Contrast* which is an outstanding example of the eighteenth century literature, combining political issues with formidable art. In summary, the overall question that will be answered in this study is: Which political issues of his time does Tyler portray in his comedy and which other readings of the play are possible? I assume that the political tendency is only one aspect. Above all, the paper will point out that the play is also construction of art and shows a special concept of utopia.



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