

17/4/20

English (Hons)

DII / Paper III (Drama)

Dr. Hempati Thakur / Lecture No - 8

(1)

Topic: Christopher Marlowe's "Edward II"

C. Marlowe (1564 - 1593)

Marlowe was the second child of his parents, John and Catherine by name, and was nine brothers and sisters altogether. Though he is considered as the precursor of Shakespeare, he was born only two months before him, his father being a well to do shoe-maker and his mother the daughter of the rector of St. Peter's, at Canterbury in February, 1564. It is recorded in the register of the Parish Church of St. George the Martyr; ~~at~~ "the sonnet of John Marlowe, a shoe-maker, was christened as Christopher." Before joining Bennet College, Cambridge he received his early education at King's School, Canterbury. Though he was able to obtain B.A. Degree from the University, it refused to admit him to the M.A. Degree on account of his irregularity in attendance and his atheistic views. Later, on the intervention by the then government as reward for his secret services like espionage, the University was forced to grant him the M.A. Degree.

While a student at Cambridge, Marlowe translated Ovid's "Amores" into English as his earliest literary attempt. It is seen

in the critical circles as 'a proof of his intention to join the Church which, in reality, never materialized. We see him settled in London by 1587 as one of the band of writers for the stage.

While staying for a period of nearly six years in London, his creative genius churned out besides "Hero and Leander" (an anthology of poems) and the plays "Timberlake the Great", in two parts (1587), "Dr Faustus" (1588), "The Jew of Malta" (1590), "Edward II" (1591), "The Massacre of Paris" (1593), and the unfinished "Dido, Queen of Carthage" (1593). To his credit is also, in collaboration with Robert Greene and George Peele, "The Contention" and "The True Tragedie", and in collaboration with Shakespeare, "The Andronicus" and "Henry VI".

Marlowe did not restrict himself to the activities in literary field only though he found himself climbing the ladder of fame here. He was also getting involved at the same period in political and religious controversies and quarrels. He hob-nobbed with all sorts of unscrupulous people, and indulged in corrupt practices. There were allegations against his activities, and he was ordered to be arrested; but before he could be tried and sentenced, he got involved in a private ^{drunken} brawl in which he was stabbed to death. Marlowe's comment on the death of the protagonist Dr. Faustus which

occurs as the last lines of his famous drama of the same title "Dr. Faustus", can well be very well taken as describing his own sad demise :-

"Cut is the branch that might have grown
full straight,
And burred is Apollo's bough,
That sometime grew within this learned man."

His place as Dramatist :-

Marlowe's literary career stretches over a short period of only ~~nine~~ ²⁹ ~~years~~ ^{years}; yet even this short span was enough to bestow upon him the reputation as a dramatist which stands next only to that of Shakespeare and he has deservedly been called the greatest dramatist before the Great Bard, Shakespeare. He is credited with giving a new look to the English drama through the reforms he effected in its theme and its language - a double reform, announcing which, in his 'Prologue to "Tamburlaine"', he ridiculed the 'jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits' and 'such conceits as clownage keeps in pay'. His choice of themes presented him with opportunities to create titanic characters infused with the Machiavellian ideal of individualism and confrontation with an inexorable Fate. These themes he was quite

able to present in grand style with truly poetic fervour and charming beauty. The critics have rightly pointed out about his caliber of poetry when they opine that his place as a poet will live for ever even if the dramatist in Marlowe is forgotten. Posterity will always remember him as the person who pioneered and associated the Blank Verse with drama elevating it to a level where it developed to be the medium best suited for dramatic expression. The qualities of his poetry and his contribution to the Blank verse far outweigh his defects as a dramatist such as weak plot-construction, over emphasis^{on} and dominance of the protagonist at the expense of other characters, the paucity of women characters and almost absence of any real humour as opposed to a low type of buffoonery.

Marlowe's other glaring contribution was his rebellion against established conventions making him pioneer of the transition of the English Drama from medievalism to romanticism as regards both plot and characterisation. He also brought about a basic change in the very concept of tragedy. Instead of Kings and Lords of earlier plays, he presented ordinary men, endowed with prodigious desires almost impossible to achieve, thus paving the way for their tragic failure. He was always successful in his tragedies to delineate the tug of war going on in the hearts

remembers because he loves his own home and that the singer will return to the nest; but Shelley sees and hears the bird who ~~is~~ in its hour of inspired singing will not recollect that it has home. Wordsworth humanises the whole spirit of the pilgrim of the sky. Shelley never brings the bird into contact with us at all. It is left in the sky singing; it will never leave the sky. It is the archetype of the lark we seem to listen to, and yet we cannot conceive it. We have no power. "What art thou we know not."

Metre: -

In the short lines there are three and two accents alternatively, but in the long ones there are five accents, the feet being 'trochaic'. Leigh Hunt, speaking of this Metre says: "Shelley chose the measure of this poem with great felicity. The earliest hurry of the four short lines, followed by the long effusiveness of the Alexandrine, expresses the eagerness and continuity of the lark."

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