



Importance of Marlowe's in English literature

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ABSTRACT

In the brief prologue to Tamburlaine, Marlowe not only clearly announced the character of that play, but hinted at the programme which he proposed to carry out in the future. Here is that prologue: From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits

And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay. We'll lead you to the stately tents of war Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine Threatening the world with high astounding terms And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

"The place and the value of Christopher Marlowe as a leader among English poets would be almost impossible for historical criticism to over- estimate. To none of them all, perhaps, have so many of the greatest among them been so deeply and so directly indebted. Nor was ever any great writer's influence upon his fellows more utterly and unmixedly an influence for good. He first, and he alone, guided Shakespeare into the right way of work; his music. in which there is no echo of any man's before him, found its own echo in the more prolonged but hardly more exalted harmony of Milton's. He is the greatest discoverer, the most daring and inspired pioneer, in all our poetic literature. Before him there was neither genuine blank verse nor a genuine tragedy in our language.

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INTRODUCTION

Marlowe's merit is that in his short career he set the stage on fire with flame of his passion. He was less versatile than the other prominent playwrights of his day. He was less able than they to conceive of multitudinous feelings distinct from his own emotions. He was less quick than some of them to catch the scenic side of things. He did not have the same capacity as several others had for dramatic construction and for writing supple and nimble dialogue. He had little aptitude for delineating women. In spite of these shortcomings, Marlowe possessed a

supreme quality which enabled him to lift drama into the sphere of high literature. He was a great The element of horse-play is, however, very much in evidence in Dr. Faustus even though it has been said that this part of the play is not the work of Marlowe himself, but of some other author. poet, a lyrical, personal, violently egoistical poet, who carried with him his own unique conception of man and life. His exclusiveness produced intensity, and the English stage was in great need of intensity. There had been an abundance of grace, wit, and fancy, mingled with faults of every kind in the English plays, but never hitherto had English drama known the dash and the vehemence which Marlowe infused into it. Above all, Marlowe established the supremacy of blank verse as the appropriate metre for dramatic work.

Marlowe was able to give his audiences an impression of greatness; he made them tremble with enthusiasm. His success was immediate; but even when his plays had come to seem extravagant, they remained popular. They first made the English people feel the pride of strength. For all their lack of patriotism, Marlowe's plays made the hearts of people swell with a new national pride. His characters are too large to be realistic or convincing; and yet they have the breath of life in them. "Their passionate declaiming cooperated with the triumph over the Armada, one year after Marlowe's first play and the pride in distant conquests, to make English hearts drunk and giddy with triumphant strength. Together with the discoveries of the great sea-farers, these figures on the stage enlarged, in men's minds, the bounds of the possible. These plays were a paean to the infinity of military power, of knowledge, and of wealth. The subjects Marlowe borrowed, the heroes he moulded, were no more than his mouthpiece, voicing his exorbitant dreams. Like him they sought the infinite and like him were never sated."

A literary historian thus describes Marlowe's achievement: Marlowe raised the subject-matter of English drama to a higher level. He dealt with heroic subjects that had a stirring effect on the imagination. His heroes were Tamburlaine, a world conqueror; Faustus, a scholar seeking supreme knowledge; Barabas, dreaming of fabulous wealth; Edward II, with his mingling of nobility and ignobility, reaching the heights and touching the depths of human nature. Thus Marlowe's subjects were the boundless spirit of adventure, the towering passions of love and hate, the ideal of beauty, the nobility and pettiness of human life.

Besides, Marlowe showed an admirable capacity for character- portrayal. The characters in his plays were not puppets manipulated by strings, but living and breathing realities. Marlowe made his audiences feel the fierce exaltation of the conqueror, Tamburlaine; the vibrant passion and rapturous longing of Faustus; and the fierce selfishness and cruelty of Barabas.

Marlowe also discovered the immense possibilities of blank verse. He discarded the rhyming lines which had been employed by his predecessors, and he established blank verse as the

most appropriate medium for writing of plays. Blank verse had certainly been used before him, but he improved upon it and enriched it. Blank verse prior to him consisted of lines, each ending with an accented monosyllable; each line standing by itself. There was a monotony in this kind of blank verse. Marlowe varied the rhythmic pauses, altered the accents, made the metre suit the subject, instead of fitting the subject to the metre. In the words of his prologue to Tamburlaine, he bade farewell! to the "jigging veins of rhyming mother wits, and such conceits as clownage keeps in pay". It was because of what he did with the blank verse that his successors, especially Shakespeare, were able to discover the infinite variety of this metre. He taught his successors to play upon its hundred stops, if he himself could not play upon them.

The same historian points out the following three characteristics of Marlowe's work as the most striking ones-its pictorial quality, its ecstatic quality, and its vitalising energy. Marlowe has been called the father of English dramatic poetry, just as Chaucer is regarded as the father of English narrative poetry, and Defoe as the father of English prose fiction. Preceding poets had certainly produced pictorial effects, but those effects were feeble as compared to what Marlowe achieved. Marlowe had an instinct for selecting those scenes that could best impress the imagination. He employed similes that went home most effectively. With Keats and Morris, Marlowe shares an intense appreciation of colour effects: there is the glitter of gold and scarlet about his verse. He also makes use of the magic of old-world names. Such names give warmth and colour to his verse. Marlowe's pictorial quality is no mere visualising of a dreamer's fancy: it shows the inspiration of that spirit of adventure which characterised the Renaissance. Tamburlaine's passion for conquest is similar to the passion of the explorers and adventurers like Drake and Hawkins.

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