

The University write or

The Predecessors of Shakespeare

During the 16th Century the drama gained definite foothold in England's cultural life. The world of letters was, no doubt, dominated by Latin culture and literature, but the burgeoning ~~street~~ national feeling of the Elizabethan age was largely reflected in the plays. The plays of the period are roughly divided into two heads: The Courtly and The Popular. The Courtly plays were, generally, staged in the halls and noble houses by the choir children and by young gallants. They usually derided the popular playwrights as vulgar persons who strove to outshine their better sort by their 'swelling bombast & a bragging blank verse'. The Oxford and Cambridge universities that had admitted plays as part of their academic life accepted for themselves the tradition of The Courtly plays. Although Shakespeare, at a later stage, showed a fine fusion between the two tradition of The Courtly and The Popular, until then, the two trends were distinctly separate.

The initial stages of the glorification of the drama are due

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to a new school, that had arisen, called 'University with'. It was a group of young men associated with Oxford and Cambridge Universities and did much to form the Elizabethan School of Drama.

The stalwarts of this band of 'University with' were John Lyly, George Peele, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Nashe, Robert Greene and the most formidable, and Christopher Marlowe. Each of them emphasised some essential elements in the drama which appeared in a chiselled form late in the works of Shakespeare.

John Lyly, who is known chiefly for his Euphuistic style (the term having been derived from Euphuus, the great prose work of Lyly). He is one of the most influential of the early dramatists. He gives to the English prose a refinement and shape. Before him, plays of poor quality used to be written in doggers, and English drama betrayed a tendency towards melodrama. Lyly introduced refined dialogue and, virtually, invented the comedy based on social complications. His famous work, 'Euphuus' introduced into English a style noted for its refinement, wit and circumlocution. It is the first English

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The chief characters are 'Gulian', 'Alexander' and 'Campbell', 'John' and 'Cathy and Mary'.

George Peck, the author of this play, was a talented playwright and he has written some plays in some plays of Shakespeare. But Peck had a short career, although, his work exhibit a versatile talent trying his hands on various forms. His 'The Arrangement of Paris' is a pastoral romance of Edward I - a historical play with a ground of romance. His notable work is, perhaps, 'David and Bethsabe' examined with the beauty of blank verse. He has dramatic force, truth of characterization and masterly delineation of secondary characters.

Lyly and Peck were more conformers of language than true-born dramatists. Their works lack dramatic power and conflict. In fact, there is true sense, not seen with Lyly's 'The Spanish Tragedy', Marston's 'The Malcontent' and 'Arden of Feversham' by some unknown author. 'Arden of Feversham' enacted through competent stage-craft, the intricacies of love and treachery which more compare with modern plays. The author paints his characters with a surety of touch not experienced before him in drama. Not in spite of these merits, the play can't be

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Credited with Renaissance virtue of gentleness, ambition and revenge

It was Kyd who imposed these elements that lent Renaissance touch to the plays. He borrowed from Seneca, the great Italian dramatist, the idea of horror, the soliloquy and evinced the greatest dramatic sense among all Shakespeare's predecessors in his disposition of events, sense of dramatic movement and characterization. Kyd's 'Spanish Tragedy' is highly acclaimed. Greene played important role in the development of Romantic comedy. He gives us some excellent scenes of the English life in his plays like 'Fulius Brutus' and 'Faint Braggart'.

Marlowe is, however, one of the most suggestive figures of the English Renaissance, and the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors. 'Tamburlaine' struck a new note in celebrating the triumphal march of a Turkish hero. Marlowe made it the occasion to ventilate the aspirations and glories of Elizabethan England. The glory of the Elizabethan drama date from 'Tamburlaine' in which the restless temper of the Elizabethan age finds characteristic expression. Its mighty lines soon became the instrumental of all dramatic outbursts. Marlowe made blank verse the most suitable

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medium for playwrights. The blank verse that we see in Shakespeare's plays is usually a decorated and enriched form of the one that similes with simple the poetry however, to be concise and one-linered, with metaphors to serve the needs drama perfectly. "Dr Faustus" is one of the best of Marlowe's works. This play has a large number of passages of rare poetic beauty. It reveals a mature medium and a free grasp of material. His third play, "The Jew of Malta" might have been said to Shakespeare the theme of "The Merchant of Venice". His last play is "Edward II", which is again an excellent piece of dramatic art. In the matter of style and dramatic construction, it is the best of Marlowe's plays, and is worthy of preference to Shakespeare's historical dramas. Thomas Lodge and Marlowe are of a much lower calibre to merit equal attention.

These great playwrights created great influence on Shakespeare. They prepared a fertile ground for him on which he worked and excelled. By his taste for sonnet and his knowledge of French and Greek freed Shakespeare in 1564 by W. L. Lyly anticipates Shakespeare. The Shakespeare of "Love's Labour's Lost", "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "Much Ado about Nothing", and, especially, "As You Like It".

THE END

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