

Christopher Marlowe: An Introduction

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Christopher Marlowe, the great predecessor of Shakespeare, was one of the greatest dramatists of Elizabethan period. He was a shoemaker's son and was born at Canterbury and baptized on 26th Feb, 1564. He was educated at the King's School, Canterbury, which he entered in 1578. His contribution to drama was that he raised the subject matter of drama to a higher level. He provided big heroic subjects that appealed to the imagination of the audience. His major plays were *The Tamburlaine*, *Dr. Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta* and *Edward II*.

Marlowe, more than Shakespeare, was the representative dramatist of the Renaissance period. The Renaissance was the age of adventure and material wealth. It was an age when the minds of the people were lured by the new visions of distant lands rich in gold and jewels. The Renaissance artists were swayed by the captivating charm of beauty and loveliness. Music, dance and mirth played a significant part in the general life of the men and women of this age. Marlowe, in all his four plays, have a fair expression of the entire age with all its new aspirations, hopes and dashing adventure. Marlowe is the dramatist of the Renaissance which people felt and lived. He touches almost all aspects of the Renaissance in his works.

Marlowe's ideal of a man of the Renaissance is pictured by him in the figure of *Tamburlaine*, the Scythian conqueror. In Marlowe's vision, the men of Renaissance was expected to be -

"Of stature tall, and a sprightly fashioned
 His lofty brows in folds.

The pleasure of the earth and material values of life, which the men of the Renaissance held dear, are given full

scope in Tamburlaine where the dramatist says -

"A god is not so glorious as a King
I think the pleasure they enjoy in Heaven
Can not compare with kingly joys in earth -
To wear a crown encased with pearl and gold,
Those virtues carry with it life and death;
To ask and have command and be obeyed."

In "The Jew of Malta" we have another expression of the love of wealth and precious stones which fired the imagination and vision of the Renaissance men and women. Barabas, the Jew, is a typical Renaissance figure in his love for wealth. He employs all his energy to accumulate "infinite riches in a little room".

In Dr. Faustus Marlowe represents a man of learning and a man running mad after the pursuit of worldly power. Dr. Faustus is the master of varied knowledge ranging from philosophy to economics but he is dissatisfied with all his knowledge and practices necromancy to acquire worldly power. So great is Dr. Faustus' love for power and pleasure that he sells his soul to the Devil for twenty-four years' enjoyment of worldly power and pleasure.

This love for the world finds a different expression in different form in Edward II. Here, it takes the shape of sensual pleasures. The defiant tone of the Renaissance adventure is heard in the speeches of young Mortimer when he is cummed to the Tower.

"What Mortimer, can ragged stony walls
Immure thy virtue that aspires to heaven!
No Edward, England's carriage, it may not be
Mortimer's hope surmounts his fortune far."

The introduction of the character of Lightborn in Edward II and his pride in his art of murdering people is also typically Renaissance. He says —

"I learned in Naples how to poison flowers
To strangle with a lawn thrust through the throat."

Marlowe, was in fact, the mouthpiece of the new age of the Renaissance. He was himself a lover of all those values which were held dear by the people of the Renaissance. He was "a new kind state", is a new kind English poet, a mind striving after power, wealth and beauty, exulting in material splendour, full of rapture at the glories of this world, contemptuous of traditional religion, yet aspiring to an ideal existence beyond the fleeting glories of our blood and state."

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