

Edward II: The best of the Historical or Chronical Plays:-

It reveals Marlowe's Dramatic Art:-

P. 4. EY. LL. 17

Edward II is the finest of the Historical or Chronicle Plays in English literature. Its dramatic qualities speak of Marlowe's genius and skill as an artist. Its tragic unity, its force, its clarity and beauty of style are superb and striking. In the words of Havellock Ellis "Marlowe reached the summit of his art here only. Let us see the play in a brief.

Edward II, undoubtedly, surpasses all other Historical Plays written upto its publication. Usually, a Historical Play creates varied problems for the dramatist, for it is not easy to satisfy dramatic requirements with historical facts and truth. The dramatist requires events in a certain sequence that may not happen in real life. He has to select material from history, that is, he omits certain facts and add something from his imagination. Marlowe impressively stands to such tests and has marvellously practised omission, addition and condensation to make the actions more dramatic and continuous. As an artist, he is quite successful in converting the history of Edward II into a tragedy. His craftsmanship is revealed in the presentation of events of twenty seven years of reign within the short compass of the play.

Historically, Edward II is accepted as a weak king of England. Marlowe takes some important events of his reign, gives them a little dramatic modification and presents him as a tragic hero. The king's undue love for Gaveston is treated as the principal cause of conflict between the Barons and the king. When Edward II recalls banished Gaveston, the strong Barons unitedly stand in opposition and compel him to sign the decree of Gaveston's rebanishment. Though queen

2

Isabell persuades the Barons for Gaveston's return, they do not reconcile with him. An open battle is fought, many are killed, but younger Mortimer escapes to France. He conspires with Isabell and returns to England with support of the French Nobles. Gaveston is killed, Edward II is imprisoned and humiliated. Mortimer develops illicit relation with the queen, becomes protector of the young king and rules over England. He gets Edward II killed. But, Edward III comes to know Mortimer. Finally, Mortimer is put to death and the queen is imprisoned.

The dramatic presentation of this simple history reveals Marlowe's dramatic art as well as his contribution to the development of drama. It is here that Marlowe achieves dramatic unity, lacking in Tamburlain or Dr. Faustus. It is also here only that he introduces dramatic conflict. The conflict erupts between the king and his Nobles. It deepens gradually and finally leads the involved characters to their unnatural end. For the first time, Marlowe gives human interest to his characters. Besides Marlowe breaks away from the traditional concept of tragedy and marks new directions which are championed by Shakespeare. Edward II displays weakness and folly in his character which proves fatal for his downfall. He shows unrestrained love to Gaveston, and, by subsequent activities, alienates his loyal Barons and his own faithful queen. See his feelings for Gaveston:-

"Did never sorrow go so near my heart
As doth the want of my sweet Gaveston."

But, when Edward II is imprisoned, his sad plight demands pity. He, of course, is stupid, but certainly does not deserve so much humiliation meted out to him. The last scenes of the Play are saturated with deep pathos. But, unlike Dr. Faustus, the

pity is aroused from the misery of a man who has been a king. In *Dr. Faustus*, pity is associated with terror, but, here, all pity is for the man whose punishment is out of proportion to his folly. Thus we see that *Edward II* is a great Historical Play. —

4

Edward II: - Last Scenes: - A Tragedy of classical type: Tragic Hero.

P.G. Eng. - LL II

Edward II is one of the best dramas of English literature. The scenes in which Marlowe presents the downfall and agony of the King are the most powerful tragic scenes in Edward II. According to the Aristotelian theory of tragedy, a tragedy must deal with serious actions or serious incidents capable of arousing feeling of pity and fear in the hearts of the audience. In other words, a tragedy can be impressive if it succeeds in arousing pity and terror. Marlowe has succeeded in arousing pity and terror in the death scene. It is here that the drama becomes a stark tragedy of the classical type and King Edward reaches nearest to the concept of tragic Hero.

In order to inspire pity and terror, the hero should possess certain requisite qualities. He should be a good man. But, not perfectly virtuous one, for the tragic end of such a man would not arouse pity or fear but indignation. He should also not be deliberately virtuous, for his punishment would call forth approbation instead of pity or terror. So, the hero should possess some heroic qualities but, at the same time, he should be subject to some human frailty yielding to it in a moment of weakness, err and fall.

King Edward lacks the essential virtues of an ideal tragic Hero. That can inspire pity and fear. Till the end of the 1st Act, he presents himself as a pleasure seeker and knows nothing of serious thoughts and feelings. He does not perform kingly duties. He is only a frivolous character, with sudden bursts of emotions. He asserts his strength only in a state of passion and fury, but in doing so he expresses his weakness. He obscures and confuses his own nature that establishes that he is an unreal picture of a King. He does not win the sympathy of his subjects, not

even his brother. Consequently, he is deposed and mercilessly killed by his courtiers including his own wife. It is during his imprisonment and the time of his death that he wins our sympathy.

It is only with his fall at the end of Act IV that Edward begins to appeal to our sympathies. In fact, 'his reluctant pangs of abdicating royalty' have never been more finely interpreted than in the closing portion of the play. He behaves in a dignified manner in the prison and at the time of his death. He succeeds in winning the sympathy of the play audiences. He replies to the comforting words of Leicester as follows: -

"Leicester, if gentle words might comfort me
Thy speeches long ago had eased my sorrows."

When he is asked to abdicate throne in favour of his son, he says: -

"No, it is for Mortimer, not Edward's head
For he's a lamb encompassed by wolves."

He is also full of defiance, when utters: -

"I will not resign: but while I live
Traitors be gone and join you with Mortimer."

But, the very next moment he becomes aware of his utter helplessness: -

"But, what the heavens appoint, I must obey!
Here take my crown; the life of Edward too."

Edward is put to all sorts of humiliation. He is kept in the most tortuous and hellish condition as it is evident from these pathetic complaints: -

"And there in mire and puddle have I stood
This ten days' space; and, lest that I should sleep
One plays continually on a drum
They give me bread and water, being a king
So that for want of sleep and sustenance

my mind's distempered, and my body's numb'd,
And whether I have limbs or no I know not."

The murder scene transports us to the climax of pity, when the King vainly tries in vain to win over the murderer or by giving him a piece of jewel. But, suspicious lingers in his heart:-

"Small comforts finds poor Edward in thy looks!
Villain, I know Thou comest to murder me."

Edward's tragedy reaches its climax, when he says:-

"I am too weak and feeble to resist;
Assist me, sweet God and receive my soul."

Thus, we see that Marlowe has succeeded in touching upon the tragic elements in the final Act of Edward II. The cruelty and villainy with which Edward is killed excite the feelings and terror to their highest degree.

Volpone: - As a classical Comedy.

P. 4. Eng. CC - III

Ben Jonson occupies an important position in the hierarchy of English dramatists. He is a literary critic, an original thinker and enjoys deep insight into human nature. He minutely observes life around and interprets it in a satirical vein. His plays mark a progressive break from the Elizabethan Romantic tradition and revive the classical standard. He has been called a learned plagiarist of all the ancients. This view hides the native springs of his vitality but it emphasizes indebtedness to the classicists. He has been greatly influenced by the classical ideas about drama and endeavoured to write plays on the classical pattern. But, he was not a slavish imitator of the classical tradition for he declares that he follows the needful rules.

The Renaissance scholars had developed dramatic theories out of the study of Aristotle's Poetics and Roman Comedies. The most important principle was that every part of a drama should contribute to a single total effect. Ben Jonson was hostile to the common English practice of introducing comic scenes, though funny, but ~~irrelevant~~ irrelevant to the plot of the Comedy. He strongly advocated to follow the classical rules. In the Prologue to Volpone, he says:-

"And so presents quick Comedy refined

As best critics have designed

The laws of time, place, persons he observeth

From no needful rule he observeth."

Here, he acknowledges that he writes plays according to the established rules. He also refers to the three unities. The law of time means the unity of time. This unity of time is one of three unities, the other two being the unities of place and action. The unity of time implies the conformity between the time taken by the events of the play and that taken in their presentation on the stage. The action of Volpone is compressed to a single day. It begins in the morning and ends in the evening of the same day. It opens with Volpone getting out of his bed. He performs the morning prayers by worshipping his gold. He entertains his clients who pay their

morning visit to him. He puts off Lady would Be until 'some three hours hence'. It is still morning when she plays mount back Celia's window. In the afternoon, the first session of the Court takes place when the judges promise to deliver judgement 'ere night'.

The unity of place means one place and not one scene. Venice is the single place of action in the play. Different scenes are set at different places but all are within the city of Venice. The whole play is set in a single city that contributes to the concentration of action in the same cultural atmosphere. The third one is the unity of action that has been regarded to be the most essential. In Jonson's opinion, the real test of this rule is that nothing can be taken away without impairing the whole. Here, Jonson does not stick to the rule. In *Volpone*, the story of the English travellers does not seem to be an integral part of the main plot. Sir Politic would Be and Peregrine can be easily removed. It is so, as Ben Jonson has often advocated for he gives the example of his independence from the ruler when he needs independence. He wants would Bes to provide a link between Venice and England. By separating Sir Politic, he wants to emphasize English folly and intelligence and Italian vice.

Further more, Ben Jonson is very much alive to the law of persons. His main concern has been to make his characters to fit his plot. In conformity to the classical laws of persons, he makes every character represent some typical human qualities are typical combination of qualities. It is so that the pattern of interaction between the characters may be typical of human society. That is why his characters are types more than individuals under the influence of the Renaissance theory based on the classical principles.

Thus, we see that *Volpone* is a classical play. It observes the three classical unities of time, place and

action to a great extent. But Ben Jonson is not a blind imitator of the classical rules and tradition. Of course, he tries to observe the classical rules. But, he takes freedom whenever he feels necessary.

Volpone - 3rd Theme - A satire on Greed
P.G. Eng. ce-111 10

Ben Jonson occupies an important position in the hierarchy of the English dramatists. He is a literary critic, an original thinker and enjoys a deep insight into human nature. He minutely observes life around and interprets it in a satirical vein. His plays mark a progressive break from the Elizabethan romantic tradition and revive the classical standards. Unlike his *Everyman* in *His Humour* or *Alchemist*, his *Volpone* deals with crimes rather than follies. Human greed gets the main focus in the present play.

Though *Volpone* deals with different humours of human nature, its main concern is human greed. In fact, it is a vehement satire on greed for riches. Almost all the characters of the play are driven by the love of money. Even the judges, the most sensible members of the society, are not free from this vice. They treat Mosca with great respect when he becomes rich. The play seems to be a story of competitive greed. There is the greed of Volpone and Mosca competing with that of the clients. Then, there are the clients competing against one another's greed. At the end, there is the competition between the master and the servant themselves. All this shows how the whole society behaves greedily.

It is rightly observed that the play has been written in response to the developing free enterprise system. Jonson was aware of this social trait that was degrading human values of life. He was also a thorough student of human nature and pinpointed human urge to get to riches. This urge for possession is one of the basic human instincts. The play opens with reference to riches, when Volpone passionately adores his gold. He says that riches can get men virtue, honour, honesty, wisdom and all other things that make life worth living. Even the hell can be heaven for the rich men. Volpone says:-
"Riches, the dumb god, that giv'st all men tongues

Thou canst do nought, and yet mak'st men do all things
 The price of soul is even hell, with thee to boot
 Is made worth heaven! Thou art virtue, fame,
 Honour, and all things else! Who can get thee,
 He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise — or

But Ben Jonson says that human greed is a serious disease. The greedy men possess wealth as the sick men possess fever. In other words, it is not men who possess riches, rather, it is riches that possess men. ^{The arbiter} Ben Jonson comments:-

"These possess wealth as sick men possess fever
 which truer may be said to possess them."

This greed for wealth is so effective that Corvino goes to offer his innocent wife to Volpone. Of course, Volpone's lust for Celia speaks of his insatiable appetite for every type of pleasure. It can be traced to be one of the central ideas of the play. But Corvino's hope to gain Volpone's favour and his wealth by offering his own wife shows the inhuman effect of greed. Greed is really a highly infectious disease that may cause decay to the whole humanity in the age of material competition. Thus Ben Jonson ridicules human greed and warns that it can destroy all the basic values of life.

With human greed human pride is also explained. The main motives of Volpone and Mosca is to satisfy their vanity, their pride in themselves, specially their skill. Volpone declares

"... I glory
 more in cunning purchase of my wealth,
 than in the glad possession."

Volpone enjoys the triumph of his skill more than the pleasure of all woman-kind! In the first scene, Mosca is more interested in being treated as a gentleman than being rich. Human hypocrisy is also vividly exposed. Only Celia and Cananio are constant and true. All other characters are changing and false to one another in their dealings. They are never frank and true.

is their thought and appearance. From the beginning to the end, Volpone appears in disguise. Mosca plays the same tricks. Carrino calls himself a man of honour but sells his wife's virtue for riches.

Thus, we see that Volpone is a satire on human greed, human pride, human pretension, and social hypocrisy, human follies and abnormality. Ben Jonson depicts these human vices with reference to his contemporary social life. The message of the play can be said to be the fact that men have abandoned the moral values of life.

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