

William Shakespeare: indebted to University Wits

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Abstract

Although every great writer is unique, yet every writer except when he is deliberately experimenting works in the idiom of his age show the influence of his contemporary writers and his predecessors in his writings. This is exactly happened truly to Shakespeare and his works. Many of us are aware of this name William Shakespeare, a greatest writer, who spread his magic all over the English literature world through his writings. Furthermore, regarded as pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called the national poet of England and is known as the Baron of Avon. As we know his work has made a lasting impression on later theatre and literature. Though, he has had profound influence on our daily lives. But there is more to this. Who should have been behind so many successes? The credit for evolving a suitable dramatic medium must go the University Wits, from whom Shakespeare learned a lot. The University Wits became his inspiration.

Keywords: University wits, Renaissance Spirit, Contribution to Elizabethan age, influence of University Wits on William Shakespeare

Introduction

The University Wits were young scholarly group of playwrights from Oxford and Cambridge, who rejected the principles of Classical Drama to fever of the native British tradition bequeathed to them by the established the tradition of the Romantic Drama and did not care for the principle of the Classical Drama, but which care much for the approximation of the Drama the life of the day. They were all university men who had been trained and had learnt much about dramatic workmanship. These university wits are: - Thomas Kid, Christopher Marlowe, John Lyly, Robert Green, Thomas Lodge, George Peele and Thomas Nasche. They all lived Bohemian lives (Bohemians, one who does not care the rules of society). They were all acquainted with actual life which they made the basic for English Drama.

In Elizabethan age, about to 16th century, the University Wits absorbed the new Renaissance spirit and synthesizing the vigour of the native tradition with more refined classism. They are called university wits because they were the witty students of Cambridge and Oxford and had fondness of introducing heroic themes in their dramas. They often took it from the lives of great figures and gave heroic treatment to the heroic themes.

All of them were actively associated with theatre and the theatrical works they wrote marked a pronounced phase of development of the drama that existed before them. Furthermore, in their intellectualism, they were true embodiment of the impact of the Renaissance on English culture and sensitivity. So they all had pretty good relationships with each other and usually didn't help each other to write or complete dramatic shows.

The University Wits

Whatever is said against their reprehensible careers as human beings, it must be admitted that, to quote Allardyce Nicoll, "they laid the secure foundation for English theatre". When college ingenuity started writing, there were two fairly different drama traditions before them. One was the native tradition (especially comedy), which was vigorous, of course, but lacked the artistic discipline of the classical Greek and Roman drama. The other was the tradition established by imitators of the ancient Roman drama. Works such as Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* (tragedy) and Ralph Roister Doister (comedy) are examples of their tradition. These works, while showing a broad awareness of the classic form and control, lack the vigour of purely indigenous works. Allardyce Nicoll observes the difference between popular and classical tradition: "the classists had shape but not fire". The function of the university's ingenuity was to combine form and fire. In addition, they also had a sense of form acquired by them by training in classical learning. They gave his shows the grace and power of literacy that offered Shakespeare "a viable and adequate means of expressing his genius".

One thing that should be widely emphasized is that although University Wits considered classical drama and incorporated its general respect for form into its productions, it never followed wisely. They have maintained enough freedom for themselves. In addition, Wits University has been devoted to drama language reform work. They made the means of dramatic expression extremely flexible and responsive to all the various moods that were intended to be transmitted through it.

Let us now consider the individual contribution of the various university experts to the development of the drama in English.

Thomas Kyd

Only two of Kyd's plays are extant (existing today) "The Spanish Tragedy" and "The Cornelia". Kyd's contribution to English Drama are many. He brought in to most

fully the tradition of tragedy of blood and revenge from Seneca, who is called the father of Revenge Tragedy. We find the imitation of Senecan tragedy in Gorboduc. But in Gorboduc though there is bloodshed and horror, murder and suicide, yet the true spirit of Senecan tragedy was absent. This spirit is not reproduced in English literature until we come to Kyd. Therefore, Kyd is described as the father of revenge tragedy. The Spanish Tragedy catches the various create of Senecan tragedy with its terror, supernaturalism and sensenalism. Revenge is the master motive of the play. Then there is the ghost of Andrea, the slain husband of Bell-imperia. The atmosphere of gloom, horror and terror hangs over the play and our mind is always under the grip of a fearful sensation. Our blood cuddles when we hear of Bell-imperia that the staring within the play and no mere stage representation but a realty.

Apart from the incorporation of the spirit of Senecan tragedy, Kyd had got the original contribution which lies in the advance which his plays make in construction, in the manipulation of the plot and the effective situation. Kyd is the first to discover the relationship between the movement of the story and characterization. He was the first to give the audience the hint of the development of the character which was the product of the story. Kyd avoided the dangerous of rhetoric by making the situation turn cleverly. Kyd also contributed a new type of tragic hero. Moreover, he presented hesitating type scene magnificently in Shakespeare 'Hamlet' with his pretended madness. Hieronimo does not at once sweet to his revenge. he moves a step forward, then hesitates draws back, falls in to a passion of indecision. 'Hamlet' is also like Hieronimo.

Christopher Marlow

Marlow has been described as the central sun among the university wits. He is the most individual and most talented of Pre-Shakespearean dramatist. He has educated at Cambridge university. He began to write around 1587 and produced in rapid succession his plays. They are 'Tamburlaine', 'Dr fastus', 'The Jew of Malta', 'Edward ii', and 'The Massacre at Paris'.

Marlow raised the subject matter of drama to a higher level. He treated big heroic subject that appealed to the imagination of the Elizabethan's. in his plays he deals with such subjects as the innuied (not satisfied) spirit of adventure, the passion of love and hate, the ideal of beauty and the great beings who are fired with the desire to climb the great heights of the infinitude of power, beauty and love. He gave life and reality to his characters. In the classical tragedies and Moralities and in the greater part of the Pre-Shakespearean tragedies the characters are mere puppets pulled by a sting. It was Marlowe who first provided the English tragic stage with living and breathing characters. Acting and beholding like human beings.

Marlow breaks away from the mediaeval concepts of tragedy. In the middle ages tragedy concerned prince and princess only. He was the vigorous child of the Renaissance; he replaces his mediaeval concepts of royalty of tragedy. By the renaissance ideal of tragedy. By the renaissance ideal of individual worth. For him tragedy became a thing of individual heroes. Though 'Tamburlaine' becomes a king, he is a born a peasant. The Jew of Malta was a money lender and Faustus was an ordinary German doctor. Again in the middle ages tragedy was a mere matter of the fall of illustrious prince. It presented the prince as a play thing in the hands of the God. The Gods seems to smile in him for a while and then suddenly stuck him down, though he

had done nothing wrong. Marlow bids good bye to these concepts and shows a giant figure try to achieve God like powers as in Tamburlaine to wealth (as in The Jew of Malta) and to knowledge (as in Dr Faustus), beyond the limits of ordinary possibilities, until as a consequence he meets his tragic dooms. In Marlow the interest lies not in the struggle between inaccessible ambition and the limitation it seeks to overcome.

Moreover, Marlow give unity to drama. He did this by making the events of the play revolved around some single great personality, engaged in some titanic struggle for power. He also made on another great contribution, before he wrote his plays had dealt only with external conflict. In Marlow's plays there is the presentation of a struggle in the mind of the hero. Thus Marlow's heroes become the greatest tragic figures in the 16th century English drama. Outside the works of Shakespeare.

Marlow substitute 'Blank Verse' for the 'Gigging Veins of Rhyming Mother Wits'. This substitution of blank verse for Rhymed poetry is considered by some critics as a greatest contribution of Marlow to English drama. There are no denying facts that already by the time of the writing of 'Gorboduc'. Blank Verse has replaced rhymed as a chip medium of tragic dialogue. But the blank verse used in Gorboduc was without form, artificial and monotonous. In the blank verse of the Senecan school each line ended which has strongly accented syllable and stood by itself, separated by a pause from the precoding lines and the following lines. It was Marlow who breathed to it, the life spirit of poetry. He was first to realize that tragic action must be the character himself. the seeds of their tragic fate lies in their own nature. Thus, Marlow's contribution to Drama far surpasses that of any other of the University Wits.

John Lyly

Indeed, Lyly's contribution were many. He established prose as the right medium of expression for commend. Lyly's prose removed from the stage the bad kind of poetry use in early popular comedies.

But his really importance in the history of English literature is that he was the first to bring together on the English stage the element of, "high-comedy", theory repairing the way for Shakespeare's great comedy like "as you like it", "12th Night", "much ado about nothing". Lyly's high comedy deals with cultivated people in whom finer feelings have been breed by education and refining environment. The Gods and Goddess in Lyly's comedies are surely subjects of high comedy. They almost nothing of the classical characters but are close in thought, speech and attitude towards the life of the courtiers of Lyly's day, love in Lyly is not an all-consuming passion, nor is it physical appetite. It is a motive force behind even on scenes. It is refined and sublimated. Laughter in Lyly's comedies is harshen on thoughts and cannot be appreciated properly without the engagement of the mind. Lyly made use his skills in phrase to make his comedies successful. He uses language for dramatic purposes and from distinguished one character from another character. These careful praising emphasizes for the first time in the importance of language in a good play. Lyly understood the need for a characterization. The requirements of comedy were completed with Lyly's emphasis on language.

Though, Lyly raised English drama to the level of literature. He also created literacy test. He added the feminine qualities of grace and beauty to English drama. He is also responsible for the development of English comedy. Romantic comedy deals with people of high society. In it love plays a big role. This love does not lead to murder and suicide. It is not

a mere physical appetite. The beloved is an object adored and worship. Laughter in high comedy is thoughtful laughter. It is result of an act of wit. With the help of these concept Lyly was able to combined the tragic and the comic, the pathetic and the humour and the different worlds and the different part of existence, serious and laughter. Lyly wrote plays, they are: - 'Alexander', 'Compassion', 'Shapho and Phao', 'Endimion', 'Midas', 'Mother Bombie' and 'Loves Metamorphoses'.

Robert Greene

Green has left five plays, they are: - Orlando Furioso, Friar Bacon, Fryer Bungay, Alphonso king of Aragon, the Scottish history of James iv, a looking glass for London and England. Green contributed much to the development of romantic comedy in England. The main feature of romantic comedy is its longest and verity, it's combination of stories and interests, which was not compatible. In green's plays there are three distinct worlds- the world of magic, the world of the country. These are mixed together. In the plays the different moods and surroundings are interval, where princess meet with clowns and fairies with working people. The same interweaving of different part of existence are to be found in Shakespeare's great romantic comedies like the "mid summer's night dream". Greene fully elaborate that grammatical form in which realism meet elements what are contradictory move in common harmony.

However, the greatest contribution of Greene in his creation of his individual characters. In the medial moralities and interludes and in the greater part of Pre-Shakespearean, Elizabethan drama, every character belongs to a fix type, and has very little individuality. But Greene's women characters for the first time is no more a 'type Margaret of fleshing field in France Bacon and in friar Bungay is in the beginning coquette (a woman who flirt with men)

who sponges on her rural lovers, but he is also a passionate sweetheart who rejects with cool courage the advances of the hire.

As the prospect had abandoned but her husband, she resolved to go in to a nunnery. This characteristic shows that Elizabethan drama is overcoming the limitation impose on it by its classical models.

Thomas Lodge & Thomas Nasche

However, the dramatic works of these authors are almost negligible. Thomas lodge's 'The Wounds of Civil War' contains hardly anything that is new. He gave practically nothing to the theatre. He wrote poems, novels and plays. Besides, Lodge's most important work 'Rosalynde' is commonly believed and critically observed to be the inspiration for Shakespeare's 'As you like it'. His major literary works include 'An Alarm Against Usurers'(1584), Scillies Metamorphosis(1589), Euphues Shadow(1592), 'A Margaraite of America', and 'a treatise of the plague'(1603).

Lodge has adapted the story from Appian's Roman History, translated in 1578 as 'An Anucient Historie and Exquisite Chronicle of the Romanes Warres', a translation that was probably also consulted by Shakespeare when he wrote Julius Caesar and Antony Cleopatra.

Lodge took degrees of B.A and M.A form Oxford. His literary work 'An Alarum Usurers' (1584), exposed the ways in which money lenders used to lure young heirs in to extravagance and debt. This literary piece is known to have inspired another University wits writer named Thomas Nasche.

Lastly, the most significant extant play by Nasche is 'Summer's Last Will and Testament'. It is an allegorical play which makes satire with courtly compliment. Another

important work by this playwright is a picaresque tale titled 'The Unfortunate Traveller' or 'The Life of Jack'. His first publication, a preface to Robert Greene's 'Megaphone', was an attack on the writings of his contemporaries. He probably wrote one more of the anti-Puritan attacks on the Marprelate tracts. He became involved in prolonged literary battles, the best product of which is Pierce Penniless his Supplication to the Devil.

Nasche was strongly anti-Puritan and his together with his natural combativeness drew him into the Marprelate controversy: *An Almond for a Parrot* (1590), is now widely accepted as his along with a number of pseudonymous pamphlets. He reveals the conflict in cultural standards which arose between the humanities values of civility and eloquence and the racy vigour of popular folk-tradition.

George Peele

The Oxford graduate, one of the University wits playwrights left a legacy of 'Pastoral Plays', in his comic play 'The Old Wives' Tale' Peele's chief dramatic works are the arrangement of *Paris, the battle of Alcazar, the Chronical of Edward I, The old Wives' Tales, David and Bathsheba*. Peele, as an Elizabethan dramatist who experimented in many forms of theatrical art, contributed for development of dramatic style. He combines Marlowe's 'Misery Lines', a tenderness, softness and the play of colour. Marlow gave strength to style; Peele give sweetness of romantic humour. This kind of humour was taken to the greatest height by Shakespeare. He created humour by just apposing reality and romance. He created an atmosphere in which the worlds of reality and romance were united in harmony.

One of the earliest works includes *The Arraignment of Paris* (1581-1584 AD), which is anthological extravaganza written for the children of the Chapel, a troupe of boy actors, and performed at court before Queen Elizabethan I.

Shakespeare indebted to University Wits

Shakespeare is indebted to his predecessors, the university wits. He imitated them all and in each cases seemed mainly concerned to improve upon their works. He drew heavily from one of the University Wits, Christopher Marlowe, for his drama material. Plays like 'The Merchant Of Venice', 'Richard The Second are some of those plays that drew inspiration from Marlowe. Marlowe gave him the idea of the tragic hero and the masculinity of tragedy. Marlowe's heroes are lonely figures in world inhabited by smaller people. Shakespeare gave more individuality to his minor character is full of fierce energy like the central character of Marlowe. Marlowe's heroes, Shakespeare's heroes are also untampered by moral restrains, full of violent deeds. Moreover, Shakespeare's characters resemble Marlowe's characters for example: - Shylock in 'Merchant of Venice' resembles the 'The Jew of Malta'. Both the characters are full of greed, cruelty, revengefulness. Marlow also taught Shakespeare how to use 'Blank Verse'; moreover, like Marlow, Shakespeare gave no moral bias to his tragic catastrophe.

Shakespeare as an under obligation to Kyd learns the rules of writing Revenge Tragedies. Kyd's Spanish tragedies shows how Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' was influenced by it. Shakespeare learnt from Kyd the art of creating the hesitating hero. Shakespeare also learn from Kyd how to use every opportunity for dramatic effect, and how to develop characters through the characters. Besides, Thomas Kyd and Shakespeare were not passed out from any University. Once a time Robert Greene commented Shakespeare 'an upstart crow' in pamphlet 'The Groats worth of Wit'.

Shakespeare learns from Lyly how to write sparkling dialogue in the manner of court style and the handling of a classic legend and a fairy story for which he filled with gratitude towards John Lyly. He also learns from Lyly semantical balancing to structure which included

unity and artistic finish as well as how to put lots of lyrics in to his plays and disguising his heroines as boys.

However, much Shakespeare was indebted to Greene, from whom he learns the art of connecting scenes of genuine comedy with the serious element in his plays and of blending together different plots. Another aspect of Green's dramatic technique is made use of by Shakespeare. In most use of by Shakespeare. In most of his plays Greene mixed 'blank verse' with rhymed couplet. Shakespeare semantical-'the same way'. He borrowed tis trick from Greene.

Shakespeare was impressed by Peele's poetry and romantic humour. He also indebted to lodge and Thomas Nasche who are almost recognizable expert for the fact that their plays and romances might have provided the source of Shakespeare's plays.

But Shakespeare was not a slavish imitator. He made changes in what he borrowed. Shakespeare did not supervise the publication of his plays. The plays were mostly printed from the actor's copies. These copies were full of mistakes. This has created lots of problems and the texts we have are the result of the hard work by Shakespearean scholars like; Rowe and Samuel Johnson. These scholars used guesswork correction and emendation. The printed texts of the plays of Shakespeare are known as the First Folio (1623) and the Quartos, the bad and good were published a little earlier. It is assumed a little earlier. It is assumed that the bad reports given by editors are piratical edition.

Put together all writers in one side and Shakespeare on other side. You would find even Shakespeare heavier. But proper judgement and proper appreciation is required. Shakespeare's greatness does not lie in what he copies but how he makes that copied material his own by his genius wit.

Some Particular conscious and Techniques that Used

The Elizabethan stage was not a picture frame stage. It was a true storied structure with the upper story and a grand floor. The main stage was on the ground floor. It was a rectangular platform and the galleries for the audience ran round the three sides of it. Those who brought the cheapest ticket had to stand near the stage. there was a inner stage. The inner stage was used for some scenes like bed rooms, study rooms, etc. the upper stage has the balcony. There was an apparently no scenery and the plays were acted in day light. There was no drop-cotton. A scene ended when all the actors had gone out of the stage. Chairs showed Indore scenes. A man wearing an armour was on the battle field carrying a lantern indicated the city street at night. Women were not allowed to act. So that boys played the role of women.

The absence of the drop cotton made the play move swiftly and the absence of scenery force the poet to provide the scenery through his poetry. Since the Elizabethan stage, there was a close intimacy between the actors and Spector. The audience all most became the part of the stage. These resulted in a large number of Soliloquies and asides in the plays. Though boys played the role of women. Shakespeare's women characters were true to life. However, love making in confined to the intimate contact developing in to modern theatre with female actress is able to present.

The audience during Shakespeare's time also influence the writing of the play. The greater of the Elizabethan's audience were crude and vulgar and they loved to scenes of violence, blood shade, thunder lighting etc. on the stage. This is the reason why Senecan features become popular with the audience.

The Elizabethans also loved dance and music, these resulted in the inclusion of money dances and songs in the plays. The Elizabethan audience was also fond of puns and repartees.

These limitations imposed by the audience, by the absence of female actors gave Shakespeare's plays the peculiar flavour.

Conclusion

Edward II, as the first important historical play by Marlowe that influenced Shakespeare's Richard II. Marlow intelligently handles the chronicle in Edward II. 'The Jew of Malta' foreshadows the world of Ben Johnson's 'Volpone' and Shakespeare's 'Shylock'. The university wits created the English national drama. They invested with honour and glory. They are also responsible for the development of romantic drama which does not care for the writers of time and space and action. They have raised the subject matter of drama to a higher level. They also revolutionized nature of the tragedy. They also contributed to the art of characterization.

University wits, thus, can be called as a group of university educated playwrights who are often credited with transforming English drama in the 1590s in terms of especially in being as essential link to the development of plot construction, characterization, development of tragic form and representation of their times through their literary works.

Further, it can be said that, this group of writers can be considered a prelude, their authentic ideas of writing paved all the way for the development of Shakespeare's dramatic genius. They paved the way for the subsequent Elizabethan and Jacobin drama.

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