

Attempt a critical note on University Wits and their Contributions or pre-shakespearean Dramatists.

Introduction:- The pre-shakespearean of a well known educated scholars who wrote dramas in the closing years of the 16th century. They were so named because they were actively associated with the theatre and universities of Cambridge and Oxford. They were John Lyly, Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe. These University Wits were actors as well as dramatists. They were all reckless, Bohemians. All of them had fairly good relation with one another.

The University Wits contributed to the composition of romantic comedies which flourished in the hands of W. Shakespeare. They also made definite involvement in the art of characterisation.

Some famous University Wits and their Contributions:

John Lyly - Lyly is better known for his prose romance 'Euphues' than his dramatic compositions. It must be remembered that he himself was a Courtier. His enchanting romantic plays are all comedies. He wrote eight plays in all out of which Campaspe, Endimion and Gallathea are the best known. Lyly's comedies and mythological and allegorical plays are extremely witty in character. We find that his plays are the products of scholarship united to an elegant fancy.

Lyly deals with a classical legend and a fairy love. In his different plays, Lyly used a mixture of verse and prose. He found a suitable blank verse

for comedy as Marlowe did for tragedy. His prose is full of puns and far fetched conceits. (deep thoughts).

Robert Greene — Robert Greene wrote five plays. He was a great, versatile literary genius as a dramatist. Of all his plays, his most interesting comedy is ~~Friar~~ *Bacon and Friar Bungay*. In this very play we find that there is the description of three kinds of the world.

The world of magic, the world of aristocratic life, and the world of the country. His plot construction is extremely laudable. A famous critic Nicoll quotes:

"Greene was the first to draw the Rosalind's and Celia's of the Elizabethan time but E. Albert had criticised him, "Greene is weak in creating characters and his style is not of outstanding merits."

George Peele — George Peele was also a very popular university wit. He wrote five plays of which the Arraignment of Paris. The famous 'Chronicle' of King Edward I and the Old Wives. His poetic style and decorative phrases are charming. His language is flowery. We observe that he has a command of imagery and language. Compton Rickett quotes, "Certainly Peele shares with Marlowe the owner of informing blank verse with that musical quality that in the later hand of Shakespeare was to be one of the most important characteristics."

Thomas Kyd :- Thomas Kyd was a very significant pre-Shakespearean dramatist. He wrote only one famous revenge play, entitled 'The Spanish Tragedy'. It has been modelled on Senecan revenge tragedies. The characters of this tragedy are very forceful, of course, there is the description of murders, blood sheds and several horrible incidents in the Spanish Tragedy.

His blank verse was rebuked and ridiculed for its exaggeration. He gave a new type of tragic hero who was neither a royal person nor a superman but an ordinary man. He introduced the element of self-inspection in the hero. Albert comments on the Spanish tragedy "There is a largeness of tragical conception about the play resembles the work of Marlowe, and their touches of style that dimly foreshadow the great tragical lines of Shakespeare."

Thomas Nashe — Thomas Nashe was the realist and the satirist and also the young Juvenal. He wrote famous play the wounds of civil war. Nicoll quotes, "Thomas Nashe is the best of the university wits."

Christopher Marlowe — Marlowe hold a significant position among all the university wits. In the words of Nicoll, "Marlowe is the most talented of pre-Shakespearean's". His famous plays are Tamburlaine, Dr. Faustus, The Jew of Malta and Edward II.

Marlowe ~~gave~~ gave life and reality to his characters. All his plays are quite different from the conventional plays in both its language and subjects. He revolutionised the old conception of tragedy and made it fit for the Renaissance. He added poetic grandeur and poetic excellence to the drama. It is true that he inhaled into drama the life spirit of poetry. There is a dramatic conflict between the ambitions of his heroes and the antagonistic forces of life. The blank verse of Marlowe is applaudable for its burning imagery. Of course he was the morning star of Elizabethan drama and when he perished in his prime of his youth, men felt that Lucifer had fallen from heaven.

Conclusion — The university wits set about work of reforming language of the drama. They made the medium

of dramatic expression extremely pliant and responsive to all the various Elizabethan moods. It is an undeniable fact that Lyly, Greene and Peele contributed much towards that establishment of the romantic comedy and Kyd and Marlowe, Elizabethan tragedy.