

## 2. University Wits

The growing popularity of drama attracted the attention of young University scholars to write new type of drama. The English drama is deeply indebted to these youngmen who cleared the way of Shakespeare. These youngmen who were associated with Oxford and Cambridge, did much to establish the 'Elizabethan School of Drama'. They were all, more or less, acquainted with each other. Most of them led a irregular and stormy lives. Christopher Marlowe is said to be the sun and round him Lyly, Greene, Peele, Lodge and Nash revolved.

John Lyly (1554-1606) The leader of the "University Wits" was Lyly. He was not a born dramatist. His education was classical. He was a brilliant man who did excellent works for drama. He was against the study of logic and philosophy. 'Euphues' is the masterpiece of Lyly. Besides this he has also written some good plays. Even Shakespeare was greatly influenced by his comedies.

George Peele was an actor as well as dramatists. His works include, 'The Arrangement of Paris', 'Edward I', 'Old Wives Tales' and other. 'The Spanish Tragedy' is the only known play of Thomas Kyd. Probably writing a little before Marlowe, Kyd gave the theatre in the Spanish tragedy. It is a story of love, conspiracy, murder and revenge.

Robert Greene wrote his first play when was at Cambridge. He was a storytellers, it attracted him. Greene has contributed to the development of drama by his sincerity and real insights into character. The dramatic works of Lodge and Nash was almost negligible. They were inferior to their cotemporaries.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) :- The greatest among the University Wits was Marlowe. He is considered the Protagonist of the Elizabethan drama. He is one of the most suggestive figures of the English Renaissance,

and the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors. The glory of the Elizabethan drama dates from his Tamburlaine (1587), wherein the whole restless temper of the age finds expression. Marlowe was born in Canterbury, only a few months before Shakespeare. He was the son of a poor shoemaker, but through the kindness of a patron was educated at the town grammar school and then at Cambridge.

The first of these is Tamburlaine, the story of Timur the Tartar. Timur begins as a shepherd chief, who first rebels and then triumphs over the Persian king. Tamburlaine is an epic rather than a drama.

Faustus, the second play, is one of the best of Marlowe's work. The story is that of a scholar who longs for infinite knowledge, and who turns from Theology, Philosophy, Medicine and Law, as a child might turn from jewels to tinsel and coloured paper.

In order to learn magic he sells himself to the devil on condition that he shall have twenty-four years of absolute power and knowledge. The play is the story of those twenty-four years like Tamburlaine.

Marlowe's third play is 'The Jew of Malta' and Marlowe's last play is 'Edward II', a tragic study of a king's weakness and misery. Marlowe is the only dramatist of the time who is ever compared with Shakespeare. He is also called the father of English dramatic poetry. Marlowe found the drama crude and chaotic but left it a great force in English literature.