

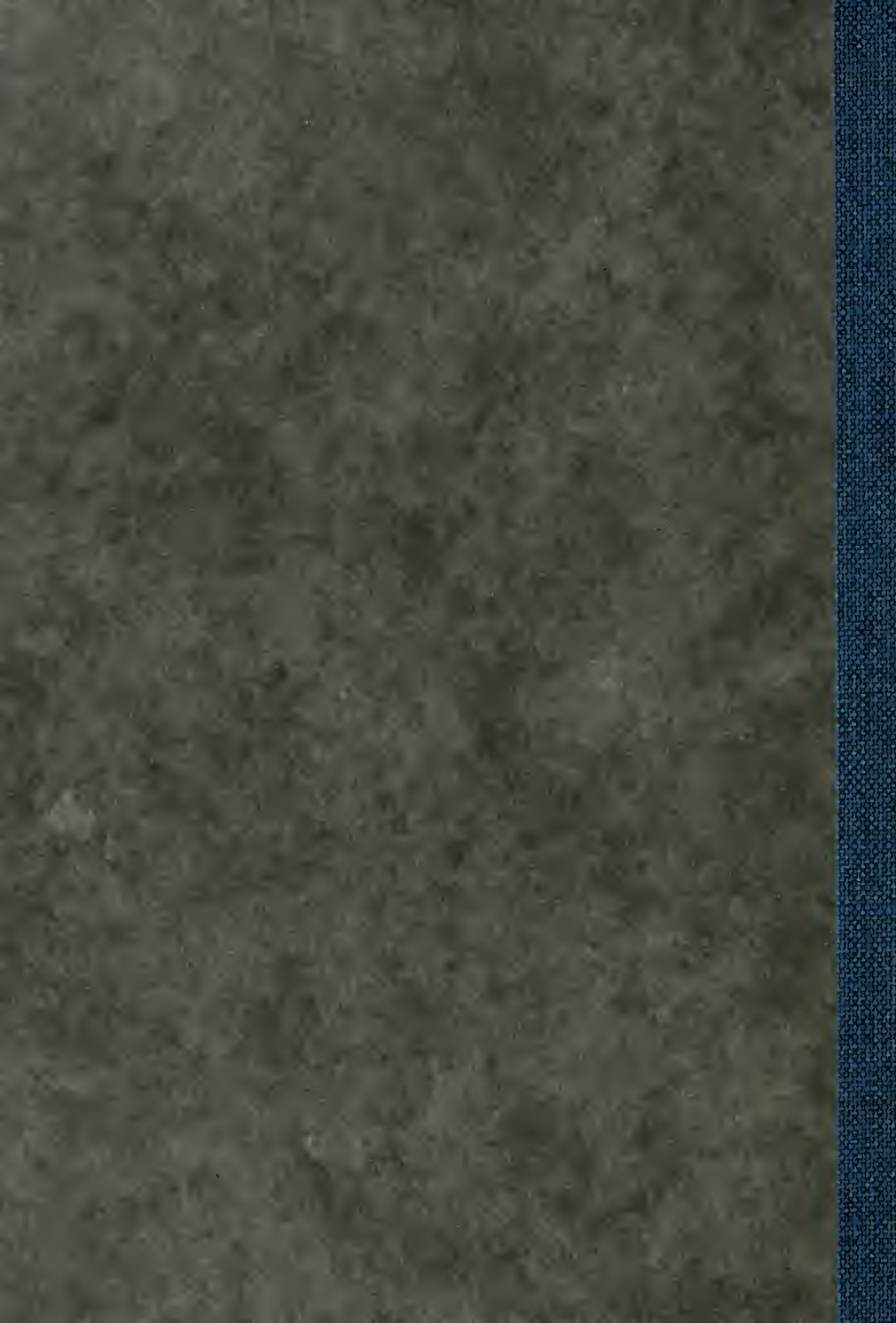
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THE

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE  
ON SHAKSPERE'S EARLIER STYLE,

BEING THE

HARNESS PRIZE ESSAY FOR THE YEAR 1885.

BY

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NOTE.

IN writing the following Essay I have consulted the usual authorities, two of whom ought perhaps to be particularised. Mr Bullen's *Introduction* to his edition of *Marlowe* contains, I imagine, every fragment of fact connected with the poet's life and works that has been discovered, together with some careful criticism; I have laid him very largely under contribution. In the account of the rise of blank verse I have followed Mr Symonds, who in his *Shakspeare's Predecessors*, in three essays appended to his *Sketches and Studies in Italy*, and in an article in the *Cornhill Magazine* (Vol. xv.) has discussed the question very fully. To each of these writers my obligations are almost too obvious to need acknowledgement. For the rest, the terms under which the prize was awarded required that the successful essay should be printed; this, of course, is my sole reason for publishing what otherwise would have sought some friendly fireplace.





THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE  
ON SHAKSPERE'S EARLIER STYLE.

SCHLEGEL in his *Dramatic Literature* devotes a paragraph of ten lines to Christopher Marlowe ; after mentioning Lyly, he says, 'Marlowe possessed more real talent and was in a better way. He handled the history of Edward the Second with very little art it is true, but with a certain truth and simplicity, so that in many scenes he does not fail to produce a pathetic effect. His verses are flowing but without energy : how Ben Jonson could come to use the expression "Marlowe's mighty line" is more than I conceive.' As an expression of Schlegel's own opinion the quotation is not very significant ; he wrote, as Mr Swinburne suggests, the epitaph of his criticism in the egregious statement that *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, *Thomas*, *Lord Cromwell*, and *Sir John Oldcastle* were not only written by Shakspeare—of that there could be no doubt in the mind Schlegelian—but

should really be classed amongst the poet's 'best and maturest works.' At the time, however, when his remarkable dictum on Marlowe was given to the world Schlegel was regarded as a great Shaksperian critic, and that he should have dismissed the author of *Tamburlaine* with a few lines of benevolent contempt is, I think, not a little significant. It is typical of the strange ignorance which existed even beyond the beginning of this century concerning some of the greatest of our Elizabethan dramatists. The method of comparative criticism was practically ignored. Shakspeare was treated as an isolated phenomenon, independent of the contemporaries above whom he towered; they were lost in his shadow and met with the barest recognition, or none at all. It never struck the older commentators and critics that Shakspeare must have been profoundly influenced—at any rate at the outset of his career—by the literary activity of the dramatists round him, and yet we may be pretty sure that there were a thousand influences moulding the genius of the poet from the day when he may have seen the 'Queen's Players' at Stratford in 1587 to the day when he finished his share in *Henry VIII.* and gave up writing altogether. And of these influences none surely could exceed the effect which the works of his contemporaries must have had on his style and method, and of these contemporaries who greater than Christopher Marlowe? To appreciate the development of Shakspeare's genius and art we



must see him affected by the example now of one dramatist, now of another. It is one great family, and we must study their works in common, precisely as an artist deals with a school of painters. There are many points of contact between the different members; there is likewise much diversity. Special characteristics are represented by special writers, and all are summed up in Shakspeare, the central sun, so to speak, of which the others are but partial reflections.

To insist on this is to insist on what has become the merest truism—'I sing the Obsolete'—but it is a doctrine on which proper stress was never laid until Coleridge<sup>1</sup>, Hazlitt and Lamb made the great discovery that other writers besides Shakspeare had lived in what is familiarly called the Elizabethan era. During the eighteenth century, of course, it was hardly probable that our old dramatists would receive much attention. Shakspeare himself had fallen on evil days—and evil editors. The public rested secure under the benevolent despotism of the rhymed couplet, the critics raised their ceaseless *Ave Imperator*

<sup>1</sup> Even Coleridge barely alludes to Marlowe in his *Lectures*, while Scott in his essay on the drama has the following passage: 'The English stage might be considered equally without rule and without model when Shakspeare arose...He followed the path which a nameless crowd of obscure writers had trodden before him. Nothing went before Shakspeare, which in any respect was fit to fix and stamp the character of a national drama.' How wide of the mark this criticism is my essay will attempt to show.

to 'one Boileau,' and the poets—well, Keats has described them for us :

'A schism  
Nurtured by foppery and barbarism  
Made great Apollo blush for this his land.  
Men were thought wise who could not understand  
His glories; with a puling infant force  
They swayed about upon a rocking-horse,  
And thought it Pegasus'—

Pope felt no scruples in emending the text of Shakspeare much as a German editor handles the text of Sophocles. Colley Cibber and others laid sacrilegious hands on some of the plays and 'adapted' them; the public applauded, and even the great Garrick was content to keep in his acting versions what Lamb rightly calls the 'ribald trash' of Tate and his fellow-workers. Johnson himself in editing Shakspeare scarcely took the trouble to open the works of Shakspeare's contemporaries. But it is superfluous to multiply instances. The force of the classical movement lasted a long time, and while it remained it was not unlikely that the lesser dramatists, at any rate, of Elizabeth's reign would continue under a cloud. And this was so until towards the end of the century. Then interest in forgotten works began to revive. In 1773 Hawkins brought out his valuable work, *The Origin of the English Drama*; in 1779 Steevens reprinted a volume of the old Chronicle plays; in the next year a still greater advance was made with the issue of Dodsley's admirable *Collec-*

tion. The preface indeed to the last-mentioned work is not a little instructive. The editor seems to have felt that his publication of forgotten pieces needed some apology, and accordingly he begins with the remark—‘Our ancient dramatic writers have suffered a very long and, some few excepted, a very general neglect,’ a state of things for which he endeavours—not very successfully—to account. Amongst the ‘some few’ to whom he alludes Christopher Marlowe certainly can not be included. It was not till 1826 that he was edited at all, and then the duty fell to an editor who contested his claims to the authorship of *Tamburlaine*. But if, roughly speaking, up till 1820 Marlowe was neglected, assuredly since then his merits—and they are great—have been freely recognised. At least three admirable editions<sup>1</sup> of his works have been published, besides innumerable essays dealing with various aspects of his genius. Praise has been awarded him unstintingly; indeed it may be questioned whether the rhapsodies of enthusiastic admirers have not been as great an injury to his name as was the neglect of earlier critics. Mr Swinburne has exhausted the resources of his perfervid rhetoric in doing justice—perhaps something more than justice—alike to Marlowe’s own merits as a writer, and to the influence which he exercised on his

<sup>1</sup> Those of Dyce, Cunningham and Bullen. To these may be added editions of separate plays, amongst which *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*, edited by Professor Wagner, as also by Professor Ward, and *Edward II.* by Mr Fleay, may be specially mentioned.

still greater successor; Mr Symonds has echoed these praises in a lower key, and recently Mr Symonds has been followed by Mr Bullen. The field in fact has been gleaned; every fragment of fact has long since been garnered, and scarcely a single point of contact between Shakspeare and Marlowe remains uninvestigated. One cannot in bringing forward the humblest view confidently exclaim with Touchstone, 'An ill-favoured thing, sir, but mine own.' Mr Leslie Stephen complains somewhere of the hard lot which condemns essayists in general to utter paradoxes or platitudes—'the difficulty of saying anything new' is so overwhelming; and the difficulty is complicated a thousandfold when Shakspeare is the subject. The ordinary writer has at the outset two alternatives, and practically only two: he may determine to be eccentric, and unhesitatingly ascribe, say, the whole of *Titus Andronicus* to Shakspeare, in the fond hope of being thought original, or he may content himself with saying over again what has been said before, and doubtless said better. The latter seems to me the preferable course; hence most of this essay (where right) will have been seen before, and a comprehensive application of Mr Puff's ingenious theory of coincidences will be quite essential throughout.

Perhaps before passing to the narrower question of Marlowe's immediate connection with Shakspeare it may be well to touch, first, on the position of the English stage when Marlowe appeared before the

world as a playwright; secondly, on the peculiar character of his dramas judged on their own merits; it will then be possible to appreciate more exactly the influence he exercised on his great successor.

When Christopher Marlowe left Cambridge, 'a boy in years, a man in genius, and a god in ambition,' and coming up to London threw in his lot with the dramatists of the day, everything pointed to the development of a great national stage. England had passed through one of those crises that occurring rarely in the history of a people must profoundly affect its fortunes, for good or for evil. Such crises may leave behind them a course of wreck and ruin, or they may produce opposite results. They may rouse and stimulate a nation to a sense of power and strength hitherto undreamed of; they may kindle an enthusiasm which must find vent, partly in action, partly in artistic expression. It is impossible to determine the laws which at such moments guide men in their unconscious choice of a method of self-revelation: we can only appeal to the past and be governed by its teaching, and in the case of the drama experience shows us at least one thing. Great dramas have arisen in different countries under different circumstances to which their various divergences may be traced, but amid all external differences one vital condition has always been observed—a great national stage has never been developed in any country in a period of national stagnation. The sine-qua-non of a



national dramatic literature is national life and activity; energy of thought and energy of deed go side by side. It is only at some turning-point in its fortunes, when dangers have been triumphantly surmounted and a new era of strength and prosperity is opening out before it, that a people can produce great dramatists. Men have lived, have saved themselves by action, and it is to the stage that they instinctively turn as capable, in a degree unattainable by any other art, of giving definite artistic expression to their passionate energy; for the central idea of the stage is man in action, and thence comes the strength of its appeal.

A great crisis, then, may not necessarily call into being a great national stage, but without the former history seems to show that the latter is impossible, and through such a crisis the England of Elizabeth had assuredly passed in its struggle with Spain. There was, too, activity of thought. It was part of the widespread Renaissance spirit, of that strange quickening of latent and well-nigh forgotten powers. On every side new forces were at work. The old order was changing; the spell was broken; Europe awoke from its long, long dream, and the nations again were young, and strong, and stirred with passion. In all directions the new learning began to spread, and it was not likely that this country would remain unaffected by the general movement. Since the beginning of the reign of Henry VIII. its history had been one long struggle. It was not till the ac-



cession of Elizabeth that men enjoyed anything like political security; then they reaped the fruit of long efforts. Religion was free. The great Reformation movement had been successful; the Bible could be in every man's hands. It was a time of transition, when the miserable despotism of Rome was a thing of the past and the equally oppressive rule of Puritan dogma was still undreamt of. And if there was freedom in religion there was likewise comparative political freedom. Men looked back on the absolutism of Henry VIII., they remembered the reign of terror established by Mary, and they felt themselves fortunate in being under the rule of a Queen like Elizabeth. There were, too, other causes favourable to the rise of the stage. There were masses of local traditions that had never been employed for literary purposes, thoroughly national ballads like the Robin Hood cycle still untouched. It remained for some dramatist to draw on the every-day working life of the country people for inspiration, to introduce on the stage the atmosphere of rural England, to paint such scenes as those which Shakspeare has given us in the fourth act of *The Winter's Tale*. Again, there was the wealth of foreign literature, especially Italian, that poured into England. Translations of foreign books abounded; the playwright was not put to the trouble of inventing his plots; the bookstalls of London were covered with Italian<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thus Ascham's *Schoolmaster*—printed, we may remember, in 1579—is full of references to the influx of Italian books into England.

novels from which to borrow. Indeed the connection between England and the Continent was one more proof of the activity of the time. London itself, the heart and brain of the nation, was a vast cosmopolitan centre; men of all nationalities were to be seen in the streets. It was an age of discovery and enterprise, and commerce of every kind was centred in the great capital, then, it may be remembered, not too unwieldy to be moved by something akin to a general public opinion. There is at least one other point that deserves to be noticed—men were uncritical; they did not at every turn call in question the dramatist's accuracy. When the Poet Laureate in his last play, *Becket*, rearranged his materials to heighten the dramatic interest, he was very generally condemned for departing from history, and naturally, for the modern, the critical, spirit craves for fidelity, for truth even at the expense of artistic effect. It was not so with an Elizabethan audience. They asked to be amused, nothing more. They did not condemn *Richard III.*, because Richard is made to woo the widow of the dead prince, Edward. The episode added to the stage-effect; it gave another aspect of Richard's heartlessness, and dramatically that was its justification. Again, men were credulous. Romance was in the air. They were ready to accept wonderful legends with a half child-like complacency and joy. A modern statesman once laughingly excused his ignorance of a new theory that had been mentioned

in his presence, on the ground that he was 'born in the pre-scientific period.' Shakspeare and his fellow workers were in much the same position, and perhaps it is well that they were. There may be something after all in Macaulay's old paradox that imagination declines as civilization advances. The critical spirit will have nothing to say to the popular legends, the illogical superstitions which supply the mind of a Walter Scott with the most sympathetic material on which to work. Science dispels the thousand and one myths that cluster round mountain and forest and river.

Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air and gnomèd mine—  
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender person'd Lamia melt into a shade.

Unfortunately not only the angel's wings are clipped but—it is infinitely more important—the dramatist's too. Thus a modern playwright would be very shy of introducing into his work a device like that of the magic crystal employed by Greene in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* with the quaintest possible effect, and yet it is just the scene where the prince looks into the 'glass prospective,' and watches the love-making of Margaret—one of Greene's best

characters—and Lacy, that we care for most ; it is all delightfully incongruous, with the prince's running commentary on the unconscious lovers. Greene could introduce such an incident because at a time when magic in all its branches was believed in, many of the spectators would not find the crystal so ridiculous. But on the modern stage the whole piece would be impossible ; the advice of the Friar—'sit still, my lord, and mark the comedy'—would scarcely be followed. Again, with what terrible realism does Marlowe treat the Faust legend. There is not a shred of symbolism in the play ; from first to last it is charged with the simplicity that attaches to everyday life, for the supernatural in that age of universal superstition was hardly supernatural at all. People believed—probably Marlowe did himself—that the devil had actually carried off the great wizard to a crude accompaniment of stage-thunder and evil angels, and accordingly we move throughout in the atmosphere of accepted facts. There is no philosophy to vex us—no hidden meaning to be read between the lines. Helena and Faustus meet, and we forget all about the union of the classical and the mediæval which in the history of literature the incident is taken by Goethe to represent. Helena, as Vernon Lee says, is only some lovely mediæval lady,

'divinely tall  
And most divinely fair ;'

some Galatæa-like statue into which the poet has

breathed the breath of life; what she is in the old *Faust-book* that she remains in Marlowe's play. She moves across the stage—she is passing beautiful—and she means nothing. And Marlowe could handle the legend with this nakedness of detail, this materialising directness, because to him and to his audience the whole story was not in the least degree out of the way. Was it not all duly set forth in the famous *Historia von D. Johann Fausten, dem weitbeschreyten Zauberer und Schwartzkünstler?* and if, as the shepherd opines in *The Winter's Tale*, we may be sure that a ballad in print is and must be true, who would hint or hesitate a doubt against the *Historie, newly imprinted and in convenient places imperfect matter amended*, which the unknown 'P. F. Gent' (the Ollendorf of the age) kindly translated for the benefit of his fellow-countrymen?

These, and other causes that might be mentioned, pointed to the rise of a drama that should express with the utmost imaginative fulness and force the tendencies of the time. It was essential to the success of such a movement that it should be in the widest sense representative: to be identified with any particular school meant comparative failure. It could not afford to court the patronage of the queen and of the nobles, any more than it dared submit to the pedantry of scholars. It had to deal with all aspects of life; it had to appeal directly to the people at large, and its style was bound to be romantic. That such a

drama did eventually spring up is a matter of history; that it did not exist in 1587, when<sup>1</sup> *Tamburlaine* was, in all probability, first acted, is, I think, equally a matter of history. On the contrary, the stage was then 'encumbered with a litter of rude, rhyming farces and tragedies.' Fortunately of these plays we have some specimens, and if we compare them with the first forms of tragedy and comedy, and with the still earlier religious plays, we shall see that, up to 1587, the development of the stage had been slow, but regular. As in all countries, its origin had been religious. To begin with there were the miracle-plays, which lasted to (about) the middle of the fifteenth century. Originally, no doubt, they formed part of the services of the Church, as a simple and effective means of instructing the unlettered laity. They were written and acted by clergymen, and it was not till some time after their introduction, which dates from the end of the eleventh century, that the Trade-Companies performed them annually, as at Chester, at their own expense. As was to be expected these plays dealt entirely with sacred<sup>2</sup> subjects, with the lives of saints, or stories from the Old and New Testaments. The dramatis personæ, it is worth remembering, were real characters. In the reign of Henry VI. these Miracles were in part supplanted by the Moral Plays, or it might perhaps be more correct

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mr Bullen's *Introduction*, 1. pp. xvi—xviii.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Collier, *History of Dramatic Poetry*, Vol. II. 123.



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to say that the former developed by a natural process into the latter, the transition being marked by the introduction into the Miracles of allegorical characters. 'The change,' says Collier (II. 259), 'was designed to give Miracle Plays a degree of attraction they would not have possessed, if year after year they had been repeated to the same audiences precisely in the same form.' As a matter of fact, however, the innovation was fatal to the Miracles. Once the change had been made these allegorical characters became more numerous, the action of the piece was impeded, and as the new figures were incompatible with the old the latter gradually fell into the background, so that 'in process of time what was originally intended to be a poetical embellishment became a new species of theatrical exhibition, unconnected with history.' Doubtless these Moral Plays were infinitely more interesting than the old pieces, which were merely sermons in disguise. The fable or plot became more elaborate, the characters more life-like and tangible. Moreover they had an extraneous interest; they served as satires on contemporary life. The Church was repeatedly the object of their attacks, indeed we gather from them a clear idea of the revolution of thought which changed the England of Henry VI. into the England of Elizabeth. Mediævalism dies out, and we see the gradual growth of the Reformation doctrines, and later of the Renaissance. It was as satirical pieces covertly alluding to popular prejudices and current events that these

Moral Plays continued to be acted up to the end of the 16th century, although their performance after 1570 was comparatively rare. Indeed they did not retain their undisputed sway later than 1520. Then came, in Heywood's *Interludes*, the first step towards a regular comedy. These *Interludes*—the name is appropriately chosen—were distinct from the Miracles and from the Moralities, bridging, as it were, the interval that separated the latter from the earliest form of comedy as given in *Roister-Doister*. Of one of these pieces—printed somewhere about 1533—Collier has a short sketch in his *History* (II. 385), while another is more accessible to the ordinary reader in Dodsley's *Collection* (I. 49). There is plenty of shrewd humour in the latter. The dramatis personæ, if drama it can be called, are a Palmer, who begins with a long account of his various pilgrimages, a Pardoner, obviously intended as a satire against the Church, a Poticary and a Pedlar, the last with his rough and ready wit giving us a far-off touch of Autolycus, the prince of strolling vagabonds. The metre varies; the Palmer commences with stanzas of four lines rhyming alternately, which afterwards give place to rhymed couplets of irregular lengths. Warton dismisses these *Interludes* somewhat contemptuously, but in the *Four P's* there is no lack of crude, out-of-door wit. Thus the pedlar's description of his wanderings is capital, the disquisition on the efficacy of relics hardly less so, while the wager—who can tell the

greatest lie—with which they conclude, has something of Greene's quaintness of conception. Historically the pieces are important as containing the first hint of the Comedy that was initiated more definitely by *Roister Doister*, somewhere between 1534 and 1541. Rather later than this innovation marked by the appearance of Heywood's *Interludes*, the Moralities underwent another modification—this time in the direction of the Chronicle-History. Near the middle of the sixteenth century Bale's *Kynge Johan* was written. Here the Morality Play merges into the Chronicle History of the older type, though semi-allegorical figures are still retained. Clergy, Seditious, Civil Order, and other survivals move about the scene, but fresh interest is given by the introduction of genuine historical figures, King John, Stephen Langton, and others. Even here indeed the new dramatis personæ are devoid of lifelike reality. Cardinal Pandulphus, for instance, is little more than the old Papal greed personified, which had done duty in innumerable Moral Plays. Nevertheless the employment of ordinary historical figures was a distinct advance, however incongruous the general effect might be.

The mention of this play brings us almost to the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, and so far, as we see from skimming over this well-beaten ground, the development of the English drama had been regular. From 1558 to 1587 this even course was, on the whole

maintained; then an altogether new start was made. The appearance of *Tamburlaine* revolutionised the stage. We may compare it to *Götz von Berlichingen*, or better still, as, I think, Mr Swinburne does, to *Hernani*. Victor Hugo and the Romanticists had a great literary system to crush. Classicism had all the prestige of the past in its favour, and only the sheer force of genius could overthrow such an adversary. In the same way Marlowe had formidable foes opposed to him, for in *Tamburlaine* he broke altogether with the traditions of the stage. His work was a passionate protest, and it had its effect. The drama that followed his *Tamburlaine*—the romantic drama of Shakspeare—had little in common with what had gone before. It was not so much that the waters parted, as that the old stream stopped flowing, and a new river sprang up to take its place. For what could the preromantic stage show? Nothing but a dead mass of plays that scarcely deserved to be called dramas at all. The pieces were, roughly speaking, of two descriptions. There were plays written for performance at Court, at the Universities, and at the Inns of Courts; this was the literary drama. Given an audience familiar with the *Poetics* of Aristotle it could be appreciated. But it had no claims to be considered national, indeed it had little or no connection at all with the people at large. It is true that some of the plays performed in the first instance at Court, notably those of Lyly—were after-

wards brought out at the London theatres, but this was the exception—indeed before 1776 no regular theatre existed. Most of these Court pieces were only suitable for cultured audiences; of such is the time-honoured *Gorboduc*. It is difficult to conceive anything duller than this venerable tragedy. Lamb, respecting its antiquity, speaks of the piece with kindly euphemism as ‘stiff and cumbersome—there may be flesh and blood, but we cannot get at it.’ If the flesh and blood be there, it must be hidden very far from sight; no critic has ever reached it. Excepting perhaps in the fourth act, there is absolutely no animation in the piece from beginning to end. The language is cold and sententious to a degree, stuffed with political maxims conveyed in speeches of insufferable length and dreariness. Thus in the second act (scene 2), in the debate between the King and his Courtiers, the characters are as prolix as Miss Griselda Oldbuck in the *Antiquary*. Philander takes 99 lines to state his case; Eubulus replies in 90, while the closing speech in Act v. extends to exactly 100 lines. Of course, the dramatists were hampered by the use of a new metre which they did not understand, and a dramatic theory which was radically mistaken. But a popular audience does not make allowances, and it would be in their eyes but a poor compensation for the dreariness of the piece, for its stilted sententiousness and want of action, that the authors observed the proper Horatian maxim, and,

instead of representing the death of the younger brother *coram populo*, took care that it should be narrated by the familiar messenger. That it should end with an anticlimax, the catastrophe coming in the fourth act and the concluding scenes being eked out with fresh and irrelevant matter, is a minor point. Here is, perhaps, the best speech in the play—that of Marcella :

O hard and cruel hap that thus assigned  
 Unto so worthy wight so wretched end:  
 But most hard cruel heart that could consent  
 To lend the hateful destinies that hand,  
 By which alas! so heinous crime was wrought.  
 O queen of adamant, O marble breast,  
 If not the favour of his comely face,  
 If not his princely cheer and countenance,  
 His valiant active arms, his manly breast,  
 If not his fair and seemly personage,  
 His noble limbs in such proportion cast,  
 As would have wrapt a silly woman's thought,  
 If this mought not have moved thy bloody heart,  
 And that most cruel hand the wretched weapon  
 Even to let fall, and kissed him in the face,  
 With tears of ruth to reave such one by death,  
 Should nature yet consent to slay her son?

In this perhaps there is a ring of pathos and passion that rises above the monotony of the verse—and what fearful monotony it is—but such passages are few and far between in the play, which, whatever it was, certainly cannot be called romantic in style. If *Gorboduc* lacked vitality, *Damon and Pythias*, to take another type of the drama popular at Court, possessed even less interest. It deserves, however, to be noticed



if only on account of the extraordinary reputation which its author, Richard Edwards, enjoyed. The critics of the period seem for some unknown reason to have conspired to praise him. He is mentioned by Meres in *Palladis Tamia* as 'best for comedy,' the list including 'mellifluous and honey-tongued' Shakspeare<sup>1</sup>; Puttenham in his *Arte of Poetry* is equally complimentary, while another critic saluted Edwards (but this was in an epitaph<sup>2</sup>) as

'flower of our realm  
And Phœnix of our age.'

On what this reputation rested we cannot say. Only one of Edwards' plays is extant; of another, his *Palamon and Arcyte*—which was played before the queen at Oxford in September, 1566, the stage, as we are told, literally giving way on the first night of performance, doubtless under the extreme heaviness of the piece—the name alone has survived. But if all the dramatist's works were like *Damon and Pythias* it is perhaps well that oblivion should have claimed them for her own, for assuredly Damon and his friend are 'far, far from gay.' The piece according to the prologue is a 'tragical-comedy,' and it would be hard to say which parts of it are worst. Perhaps the comedy, as represented by the dialogue between the Collier (from Croydon) and the two Servants of the court of Syracuse, is the most notably imbecile; in

<sup>1</sup> Dodsley's *Collection*, i. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Collier, iii. 2.

the tragic scenes one can at times trace an illusive touch of pathos. For the rest, *Damon and Pythias* is a dreary waste of rhymed crudities; there is no characterisation, no plot; the language is utterly commonplace, and the piece abounds with incongruities, such as the introduction of the Muses to mourn over the intended murder of 'poor Pythias.' And yet the author was a conspicuously popular Court poet! *Gorboduc* was produced at the Inner Temple; the 'children of the Queen's Chapel' performed *Damon and Pythias*. On a far higher level than either of these pieces, but belonging to the same type of literary drama, stands *The Arraignment of Paris*, written soon after Peele had left the University. As a dramatist Peele must be put low down in the scale—he seems to me much inferior to Greene in humour, in inventiveness, in capacity for delineating character—but as a poet his merits are considerable. His language is always clear and harmonious, his verse—and he could handle a variety of metres with remarkable ease and grace—always pleasant. His blank verse, it is true, rarely got beyond the limits of the couplet, and to the last remained monotonous, but then it is the monotony of sweetness. There is something indescribably cloying in all he wrote. Every line of *David and Bethsabe*, which Charles Lamb contemptuously dismissed as 'stuff,' breathes an atmosphere of luxurious languor. In his later works this became a mere mannerism, but in his *Arraignment of Paris*, and unfortunately this is

the only one of Peele's dramas written prior to the appearance of *Tamburlaine* that has survived, the poet is less conspicuously the 'Verborum Artifex' that delighted Nash<sup>1</sup>. *The Arraignment* indeed, which reads like a college exercise, is fairly simple in style. Dramatically, like the majority of Court plays, it is worthless; as a poem, unlike them, it is by no means devoid of beauty. It is pretty safe to say that the average piece acted by 'the Children of the Chapel' did not contain anything like the following passage. It is the speech of Cœnone, as she sits under the tree with Paris.

And whereon then shall be my roundelay?  
 For thou hast heard my store long since, dare say,  
 How Saturn did divide his kingdom tho'  
 To Jove, to Neptune, and to Dis below;  
 How mighty men made foul successful war  
 Against the Gods and state of Jupiter.

How fair Narcissus tooting on his shade  
 Reproves disdain, and tells how form doth vade.  
 How cunning Philomela's needle tells  
 What force in love, what wit in sorrow, dwells:  
 What pains unhappy souls abide in hell,  
 They say, because on earth, they lived not well—  
 Ixion's wheel, proud Tantal's pining woe,  
 Prometheus' torment, and a many moe:  
 How Danaus' daughters ply their endless task,  
 What toil, the toil of Sisyphus doth ask.

<sup>1</sup> The phrase occurs in the oft-quoted 'Address to the Gentlemen Students of both Universities,' prefixed to Greene's 'Arcadia, or Menaphon'—1587. Probably Nash is praising Peele at the expense of Marlowe, whom he attacks in the same pamphlet, though afterwards they worked together.

This is at least pleasing, fluent verse, with a delicate flavour of pastoral conceit; indeed, all the pastoral scenes are marked by the same freshness and lightness of touch. But the general effect is preposterous; as a drama *The Arraignment* is beneath criticism. Yet there were probably dozens of plays of the same description, pastorals, pageants, and what not, produced at Court, and differing only from this piece in that they lacked the one quality of genuine poetry which redeems<sup>1</sup> all Peele's work from utter oblivion. In the same way there were probably dozens of 'tragi-comedies' like *Damon and Pythias*, perhaps dozens of tragedies pure and simple like *Gorboduc*, that were performed in private. If we add to these the comedies of Lyly, which, it must be confessed, contained some elements of popularity, and the purely classical plays, whether adapted or translated directly from Seneca and Euripides, we have the main elements of what may be called the literary drama. Compared with the drama that followed and eclipsed it, the romantic drama of which there was scarcely a trace, when Marlowe came before the world with *Tamburlaine*, this literary drama was a mere mountain of dulness, 'gross, open, palpable.' To the nation at large it

<sup>1</sup> Occasionally Peele gives us really fine lines in Marlowe's style; thus in *The Tale of Troy* he speaks of the Greek fleet leaving Aulis,

As shoots a streaming star in winter's night,  
A thousand ships well-rigged, a glorious sight,  
Waving ten thousand flags.

could make no appeal. The uncritical audiences who thronged the playhouses on the Bankside, who were to be found in the Innyard of the Bell Savage, asked for something more imposing than these vamped-up classical puppets moralising on stilts. The schoolmaster in the *Heart of Midlothian* was contemptuous of our 'modern Babylonian jargons:' they struck him as being really poor compared with the 'learned languages.' But the average Elizabethan audience had no such enthusiasm for the classics. They were in the position of Shakspeare himself, of knowing 'little Latin and less Greek,' and to such everyday men and women the *Poetics* of Aristotle mattered not at all. A dramatist might, if he liked, violate all the unities in a single act, might scatter to the winds what one of Dickens' characters calls the 'universal dovetailedness,' that should harmonise the action of every play—so long as he could amuse his audience, could make their pulses beat quicker, could move their tears and laughter. They came—or at least they did later on—to laugh at, and laugh with, the 'Epicurean rascal' Sir John Falstaff, to sigh over the sorrows of Romeo and Juliet, to follow the fortunes of 'warlike Harry' and others whose names had become household words. The scene might be rude, but imagination compensated for its poverty; they were ready to admit the poet's appeal.

But pardon, gentles all,  
The flat unraised spirits that have dared

On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object; Can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt?  
O pardon, since a crooked figure may  
Attest in little place a million,  
And let us ciphers to this great accompt  
On your imaginary forces work.

A popular audience, then, wanted sensation, they wanted amusement. The literary drama as it then existed could give them neither, and so they turned elsewhere; and naturally their demand was met. Comedies and farces of the crudest type; melodramas of 'the high, heroic fustian' order, in which there was at least flesh and blood; Moral Plays, like Lupton's *All for Money*, which the author indefinitely termed 'A pitiful comedy' and 'A pleasant tragedy,' the piece having no claim to either title; Chronicle Plays in prose; tragedies written in every possible variety of metre, in ballad lines of 14 syllables, in stanzas, in the ordinary rhymed couplet—in a word, all sorts and conditions of plays overflowed the stage. But everything was crude; dramas were tossed off. The public were in the first state of enthusiasm, when admiration is for the time stronger than criticism. They gratefully accepted what the dramatist gave them, however bald, however undigested, and so the divorce between literature and the stage, which forms nowadays the text of periodical magazine articles, was almost complete. The popular drama was not



literary; the literary drama was not popular. Their union was the problem, which some great dramatist had to solve, and that dramatist was Christopher Marlowe. He found the stage choked with a cumbrous mass of rubbish, and his feeling towards it was that of the Walrus and the Carpenter, when (in both senses of the word) they expatiated on the sand of the sea-shore:

“‘If this were only cleared away’,  
They said, ‘it *would* be grand’.”

The speakers, it will be remembered in Mr Carroll's little poem, gave up their ideal as unattainable; the sand remained. Marlowe was more successful. He swept the stage clear of the miserable stuff that Court poets and the rhymsters of the Bankside foisted upon the people as plays. He did not attempt to breathe new life into the dead bones of the classical drama. Had he done so, critics might have pointed to the English stage as one more proof of the truth of Montaigne's pregnant aphorism, ‘C'est un bel et grand adoncement sans doute que le grec et le latin—mais on l'achapte trop cher;’ on the other hand he did not adopt the course suggested in Johnson's cynical couplet—

The drama's laws, the drama's patrons give;  
For those who live to please, must please to live.

He determined to wean the public from ‘the jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits’ that made the popular drama debased in the extreme, and to do this

he created something that differed absolutely from what men had hitherto seen on the stage. What that something was it is time to inquire.

In considering Marlowe's works it is well to remember one thing, that he is the most personal of poets; it is impossible to think of him apart from his plays, and vice versâ. Usually the attempt to read between the lines, as the phrase is, and by so doing to evolve some idea of an author's personality, is not very successful: yet it is a task which some critics find extremely congenial and entertaining. Touchstone's irritating query, 'Hast any philosophy in thee?' is always on their lips when they approach a new work, the presumption in their minds being that the writer must have started with a definite purpose, 'a criticism of life' in some form or other; and this central idea once discovered ought theoretically to reveal in a measure the character of the author, and thus the true seeker is, as it were, personally conducted behind the scenes into the presence of the writer himself. Everyone remembers Schumann's indignant commentary on these acrostic-solvers, who of course almost invariably lose themselves in a maze of conflicting theories till at last 'Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense.' And so long as we deal with the Immortals of literature it must always be so, for the best work is always impersonal. The great poet is not one man, he is, in sympathy, in humanity, a dozen. It is when we come to writers of the second class that we find

ourselves on firmer ground. There are some poets whose personality breathes in every line, each work being a revelation of their character, an autobiographical fragment; of such, to take the time-honoured instance, is Byron. Everything he wrote was touched with egotism, and it is this very intrusion of the personal element that lends his best work the sovereign quality of 'sincerity and strength,' which, in Mr Swinburne's words, 'covers all his offences and outweighs all his defects.' Marlowe belonged to this class of writers; for once it is safe to put a poet's work into the critical crucible. Each of his plays can be resolved into the prime conception from which the dramatist started, and each in turn brings us into close contact with the author himself. It is well to keep this in mind in looking at his dramas.

His works may be easily grouped. *Edward II.* stands by itself; it represents the highest development of the poet's genius, it represents too what was practically a new creation of Marlowe's, the genuine historical play. The tragedy of *Dido*, left unfinished at his death, is rather a love poem than a drama, and may be classed with the writer's exquisite *Hero and Leander*, both expressing in a high degree the purely sensuous Italian love of beauty for beauty's sake which was typical of the Renaissance spirit. *The Massacre at Paris* is a mere fragment; the text is so imperfect and corrupt that for purposes of criticism the play is wellnigh useless. We are left with three dramas—

representing Marlowe's earlier style, the two parts of *Tamburlaine*, the *Jew of Malta*, and the *Tragical History of Dr Faustus*. They may be treated together, since each was written in conformity with a dramatic theory peculiar to Marlowe. Various writers have pointed out<sup>1</sup>—what indeed is sufficiently obvious—that each of these plays is a one-character drama. In *Tamburlaine* we have the great conqueror, who towers above all rivals; in the *Jew of Malta* we have Barabas, the prototype of Shylock; in *Faustus*, the magician of mediæval legend. In each case the interest centres round the one overshadowing personality; there are practically no minor characters. And if each play resolves itself into a single character, so each of these characters is the personification of a single prevailing passion. *Tamburlaine* represents the lust of dominion: here is the expression of his creed, given in some of the finest lines the poet ever wrote—

The thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown  
That caused the eldest son of heavenly Ops  
To thrust his doting father from his chair,  
And place himself in the empyreal heavens,  
Moved me to manage arms against thy state.  
Nature that framed us of four elements,  
Warring within our breasts for regiment,  
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:  
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend

<sup>1</sup> No one more successfully than Professor Dowden, *Fortnightly Review*, January 1870.

The wondrous architecture of the world<sup>1</sup>,  
 And measure every planet's wandering course,  
 Still climbing after knowledge infinite,  
 And always moving, as the restless spheres,  
 Wills us to wear ourselves, and never rest,  
 Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,  
 That perfect bliss and sole felicity,  
 The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.

(ii. 7, 11—29, Part 1.)

In these lines we have the gist of the whole play; and it is the same in the *Few of Malta*. There may be a second plot—the love story of Abigail and her death—but primarily the interest centres in Barabas, and Barabas is the thirst for gold personified. Here is the outburst of his grief, when he believes that he has lost all :

My gold! My gold! and all my wealth is gone!  
 You partial heavens, have I deserved this plague?  
 What! will you thus oppose me, luckless stars?  
 To make me desperate in my poverty?  
 And knowing me impatient in distress,  
 Think me so mad as I will hang myself,  
 That I may vanish o'er the earth in air  
 And leave no memory that e'er I was?  
 No, I will live.

(i. 2, 258—266.)

And so he schemes to recover his possessions, and when, in the next act, Abigail flings down the bags

<sup>1</sup> 'The wondrous architecture of the world'—and yet Schlegel could not understand what Ben Jonson meant by 'Marlowe's mighty line'! though Marlowe might have been the 'better spirit' of whom Shakspeare himself wrote :

'Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,  
 . . . . .  
 That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse.'

to him, the intensity of his passionate joy is almost fiendish and uncanny.

O my girl!

My gold, my fortune, my felicity,  
 Strength to my soul, death to my enemy!  
 Welcome the first beginner of my bliss!  
 O Abigail, Abigail, that I had thee here too!  
 Then my desires were fully satisfied.  
 But I will practise thy enlargement hence:  
 O girl! O gold! O beauty! O my bliss!

Faustus typifies an incomparably nobler passion, the thirst for boundless knowledge. In the prologue to the *Jew of Malta* Machiavel is made to say,

‘I count religion but a childish toy,  
 And hold there is no sin but ignorance.’

That is the philosophy of Faust. He is a very Paracelsus in ambition. Nature shall reveal her secrets to him; he will no longer be bound with the fetters imposed on other men.

In each play, then, it is this all-dominating, overpowering passion that runs like a golden thread of silk through the tangled intricacies of the parts, giving coherence to all, and ensuring harmony of effect. It is in depicting the rise and progress of this central passion that the dramatist expends all the resources of his art.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peele in his *Honourable Order of the Garter*, or rather in the prologue ‘ad Mæcenatem’, naturally alludes to Marlowe, and it is to this very capacity of the poet for depicting passion that he refers,

‘Unhappy in thine end,  
 Marley, the Muses’ darling for thy verse,  
 Fit to write passions for the souls below,  
 If any wretched souls in passion speak.’



He shows us its beginning, a flame that slowly brightens and broadens until its fire fanned by the wind sweeps mightily onward, devastating all and at last consuming its originator. This peculiarity in Marlowe's earlier plays is undoubtedly a source of weakness. To think of one of Shakspeare's greatest tragedies is not to think of a single character; if *Othello* is mentioned, our mind does not recur to *Othello* alone. The interest is spread over the whole. Each of the dramatis personæ contributes his share to the general effect; they are not mere ciphers moving idly about the scene, as impotent and unreal as the ghosts that gibbered round Odysseus. A great drama is complex; it flashes upon you, like the facets of a diamond, with a thousand different lights. But it is not so with Marlowe's different plays. Each emits one steady stream of scorching fire; no more. To recall to mind *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*, is to remember the man who to win the world lost his own soul; on the other characters we bestow not a thought. And the same is true of the other plays—of *Tamburlaine*, and the *Few of Malta*. I said above that no poet was more self-revealing than Marlowe. The impress of his personality is stamped on every page with clear, firm lines; for, although the passions which his various characters personify, seem to us at first sight to be distinct, yet if we look closer we find that in reality they are one and the same. They are but different aspects of the all-absorbing passion that

burns deep down in the heart of the poet—the flame that feeds on his very soul. And that passion is desire of power. Lust of dominion—lust of wealth—lust of knowledge—they all come to that. Tamburlaine craves for kingship: like the Duke of Guise, he will weary the world with his wars—and why? To conquer is to be powerful, and it is in the exercise of power when won that he delights with a wild pagan joy.

*Tamburlaine.* Is it not brave to be a king, Techelles?  
 Is it not passing brave to be a king,  
 And ride in triumph through Persepolis?  
*Tech.* O, my lord, 'tis sweet and full of pomp.  
*Usur.* To be a king, is half to be a god.

This is the spirit of the play. Again, Barabas loves his gold as he loves his child; it is almost flesh of his flesh. But his passion is not petty; it is no sordid avarice. To Silas Marner, with no faith in man, no trust in God, with the desolation of despair in his heart, his money was the one tiny ray of light and love that shone across the gloom of his life. 'His gold as he hung over it and saw it grow, gathered his power of loving together into a hard isolation like its own.' But Barabas does not amass gold for gold's sake. It is for the power that money brings that he cares, and still more for the revenge it may give him on his enemies.

Thus trowls our fortune in by land and sea,  
 And thus are we on every side enriched.  
 These are the blessings promised to the Jews

And herein was old Abraham's happiness:  
 What more may heaven do for earthly man  
 Than thus to pour out plenty in their laps,  
 Ripping the bowels of the earth for them,  
 Making the seas their servants, and the winds  
 To drive their substance with successful blasts?  
 Who hateth me but for my happiness?  
 Or who is honoured now but for his wealth?  
 Rather had I a Jew be hated thus,  
 Than pitied in a Christian poverty. (i. 1, 102—115.)

This extract may give some idea of the feeling—  
 'Money is power'—that, not perhaps formulated in  
 any one passage, nevertheless breathes throughout  
 the whole play<sup>1</sup>. And if Tamburlaine and Barabas

<sup>1</sup> By the 'whole play' I mean of course such parts as can be safely assigned to Marlowe. The true history of this drama we can never know; only one thing is certain, that "the first two acts of the *Jew of Malta* are more vigorously conceived both as to character and circumstance than any other Elizabethan play except those of Shakspeare"—Hallam, *Literature of Europe*, II. 270. This is high praise, but not I think too high. The poet displays astonishing power and grasp in the first scenes; at the end of the second Act he has a noble plot in hand, and then suddenly he seems to drop the threads, and all is a hopeless maze of grotesque buffoonery. In the fifth Act there is a partial revival of power. In Acts III. and IV. we doubtless have some of Marlowe's work, but it is mixed up with the crudest clownage, the rhyme, we may note, increasing considerably. A sufficient proof of the corruptness of the text is, I think, furnished by the following passage. Ithamore is speaking to Bellamira,—iv. 4, 95—105,

We will leave this paltry land,  
 And sail from hence to Greece, to lovely Greece,  
 I'll be thy Jason, thou my golden fleece,  
 Where painted carpets o'er the meads are hurled,  
 And Bacchus' vineyards overspread the world,  
 Where woods and forests go in goodly green,  
 I'll be Adonis, thou shalt be Love's queen.

have their conception of power and, each in his own way, strive to compass their ideal, still more is this the case with Faustus. Knowledge is his end and aim ;

But on her forehead sits a fire:  
 She sets her forward countenance  
 And leaps into the future chance  
 Submitting all things to desire.

Half-grown as yet, a child and vain,  
 She cannot fight the fear of death.  
 What is she, cut from love and faith,  
 But some wild Pallas from the brain

Of Demons? fiery hot to burst  
 All barriers in her onward race  
 For power.

These lines<sup>1</sup> are a perfect epitome of the Faust legend, as treated by Marlowe. It is at power that Faustus grasps, and knowledge, he thinks, can give

The meads, the orchards and the primrose lanes,  
 Instead of sedge and reeds, bear sugar-canes:  
 Thou in these groves, by Dis above,  
 Shalt live with me and be my love.

Is it credible that the poet could have written this pitiable parody of his own incomparable pastoral? Half the poets of the period attempted to imitate the inimitable 'Come live with me'. To copy it, as in the eighteenth century to write an essay on the *Spectator* model, was the Ulysses' bow which everyone tried to draw. It is scarcely probable that Marlowe himself would have dragged into his play the jingling jargon given above, ineffably worse than the worst of the avowed imitations of his lyric. The writer, I imagine, inserted them as an easy way of palming off his own 'jigging wits' as Marlowe's work. The average spectator would catch the last line and be deluded into the belief that the whole act was by Marlowe. The lyric is parodied in precisely the same way in "*Lust's Dominion*," for the same reason.

<sup>1</sup> *In Memoriam*, Canto CXIV.

it—but not ordinary knowledge. He has tried every science—he has exhausted them all. He passes them in review, and dismisses each with a sad, ‘Why, Faustus, hast thou not attained that end?’ And yet his longing has not been satisfied: he is ‘but Faustus, and a man.’ A man! what bitter irony for one, who has the ambition of a God. And then the thought comes that magic will put the world at his feet. It intoxicates him. He can resist no more. He agrees to seal the compact, bids Mephistopheles return to Lucifer, and there, standing on the very brink of the precipice, is lost in one more vision of what the future will bring.

*Faustus.* Go and return to mighty Lucifer,  
And meet me in my study at midnight,  
And then resolve me of thy master's mind.

*Mephist.* I will, Faustus. [Exit.

*Faustus.* Had I as many souls as there be stars,  
I'd give them all for Mephistophilis.  
By him I'll be great emperor of the world  
And make a bridge thorough the moving air,  
To pass the ocean with a band of men:  
I'll join the hills that bind the Afric shore  
And make that country continent to Spain,  
And both contributory to my crown.  
The emperor shall not live but by my leave,  
Nor any potentate of Germany.

‘L'amour de l'impossible’—to borrow Mr Symonds' phrase—is the keynote of these three plays. It is likewise the keynote of the poet's own character. One can trace in all he wrote the presence impalpable, indefinable, of a will for ever warring with convention.

He pants to be free. There is nothing petty in Marlowe's poetry. He soars aloft, 'affecting thoughts coequal with the clouds.' He reminds one of Shelley—not the 'real Shelley'—but the poet who speaks to us in some of the noblest verse and the noblest prose that our literature contains. Each was in a state of perpetual revolt against the tyranny of social custom, and each might be addressed in Shelley's own lines to William Godwin.

Mighty eagle, thou that soarest  
O'er the misty mountain forest,  
    And amid the light of morning,  
Like a cloud of glory hiest,  
And when night descends, defiest  
The embattled tempest's warning.

We see the revolutionary bent of Marlowe's nature in the very fact that he scornfully turned aside from the path trodden by previous dramatists, and boldly struck out a new course.

What glory is there in a common good  
That hangs for every peasant to achieve?

is the spoken thought of the Duke of Guise, and it is no less the soliloquy of the poet. He blindly stretches his hands to heaven, and clutches at something 'that flies beyond his reach.' He is like the men round him, who hardly knew what they could, and could not, do. The world had drunk too deep of the Renaissance doctrines<sup>1</sup>. Men were intoxicated with an un-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Shakspeare's Predecessors*, p. 629.



known sensation of life, and power, and passion, pulsating in their hearts. They yearned after—they hardly knew what—and Marlowe was the incarnation of this spirit. We know very little about his life, but that little strengthens the conviction that his powers, though great, were undisciplined, uncontrolled. He has scarcely any sense of their limitation. His earlier work is lacking in proportion; it is bitter, extreme, exaggerated. Tradition accuses him of Atheism. Probably Marlowe was no more an atheist than Shelley was<sup>1</sup>. *Faustus* surely is a sufficient answer to this charge. The man who could paint with such terrible truth the desolation of despair, the agony of repentance, not merely fear, that sweeps over the soul of Faustus, was assuredly not devoid of religious emotion. But that Marlowe hated the Church as the Church was then constituted, that he hated its dogma, its tyranny, its system, seems to me beyond all doubt. There are passages in his plays that breathe the deepest loathing of Christianity; passages, where the bitterness of the speaker seems out of all proportion to the dramatic requirements of the context. At such times we seem to catch the ring of the poet's own voice.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mr Bullen's *Introduction*, LXVII.—VIII. Meres, in *Palladis Tamia* says, 'As Jodelle, a French tragical poet, being an epicure and an atheist, made a pitiful end, so our tragical poet Marlowe, for his epicurism and atheism, had a tragical death.' Mr Bullen and Dyce quote similar evidence.

To emphasize in this way the deeply personal element in Marlowe's work is not, I think, superfluous. It is surely remarkable that his first three plays should contain only three strongly-drawn characters, and that each of these should be guided by a passion, which in turn we find to have been the prevailing passion of the poet's own nature. For to say this is equivalent to saying that Tamburlaine, Barabas and Faustus are merely different aspects of the poet himself. And yet it is so. To conceive them he had to draw upon himself; he appealed to his own emotional experience. They are not the offspring of a purely creative imagination—they are rather projections from the poet's own inmost soul. Marlowe, in other words, is not in these three plays the spectator *ab extra* who conceives by the sheer force of imaginative genius a great character,—great in its goodness, or the reverse—with which he has no personal sympathy; he is the character. His passions are the passions of Faustus. There is no gulf between the poet and the beings whom he paints in his poetry; he is merged in them. Mr Furnivall in his valuable introduction to the *Leopold Shakspeare* has some remarkable words on this point. He says, "As to the question how far we are justified in assuming that Shakspeare put his own feelings—himself—into his own plays, some men scorn the notion; ask you triumphantly which of his characters represents him, assert that he himself is in none of them, but sits apart, serene, unruffled him-

self by earthly passion, making his puppets move. I believe on the contrary that all the deepest and greatest work of an artist, playwright, orator, painter, poet, is based on personal experience, on his own emotions and passions, and not merely on his observations of things or feelings outside him, on which his fancy and imagination work...He himself (Shakspeare), his own nature and life are in all his plays." As applied to Shakspeare, this doctrine is at least unusual. If ever there was a poet with a supreme faculty for conceiving situations into which experience had never brought him—of drawing characters as unlike his own as Lear is unlike Falstaff—of being swayed, as it were, in the persons of these characters by passions which had no part or share in his own nature—that poet, one would have thought, was Shakspeare. However, as far as the theory refers to Shakspeare it is no task of ours to examine it. Many people would be inclined to dissent from the general proposition, that the greatest work of a great artist is based on personal experience. But so far as Marlowe is concerned, the passage quoted above admirably expresses the truth. In *Tamburlaine*, the *Few of Malta*, and *Faustus*, Marlowe does not display the highest type of imagination. He gives us three

<sup>1</sup> An article in the *Cornhill Magazine*, Vol. XLIII.—'Why did Shakspeare write Tragedies?'—signed with the initials 'J. S.' and presumably written by Mr James Spedding, contains a fine criticism of Mr Furnivall's point.

characters; each character is, more or less, the poet himself, and each is finely drawn. But when he goes outside himself, and has recourse to the purely imaginative faculty—whatever it be—he fails completely. The other dramatis personæ are mere shadows, simulacra modis pallentia miris. Who, as a writer<sup>1</sup> on the subject fairly remarks, ever realized Cosroe, Mycetes, and the rest? To the last Marlowe never succeeded in drawing a female character. Greene was the first to give the stage women at all comparable to those of Shakspeare. Again, Marlowe was deficient, I think, in the lower form of imagination. He had little inventiveness; he had none of Greene's inexhaustible fancy. Greene was never at a loss; he was full of the playwright's resource; he could always devise some ingenious scene. But Marlowe in his earlier plays shows a remarkable poverty in this respect. When he attempts a striking situation, his work is crude and rough-hewn. His effects, to vary the metaphor, are too often achieved by simple dashes of paint on the canvas.

To turn now to the first of the three works previously discussed. The two parts of *Tamburlaine*, like the two parts of *Henry IV.*, form a complete drama in ten acts, and may fairly be treated as a single play. The faults of this play are obvious; they are in the main such as would naturally spring from the peculiarities of Marlowe's dramatic method.

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, October, 1885.

*Tamburlaine* is not, properly speaking, a drama at all; it is rather a series of impressive scenes. We have no plot, no complexity of action, no interdependence and balance of parts. It does not begin at any definite point, and dramatically there is no very definite reason why it should end. *Tamburlaine* at the outset intended to conquer the world; by the close of the tenth act he cannot, like Alexander, complain that his conquests are exhausted. Instead therefore of his death, we might have expected a third part, and so on; except indeed that of the subsidiary characters<sup>1</sup> few reach even the tenth act. Whereas in a play of Shakspeare's we have a dozen threads that run in and out, and half tangled, half unravelled, are in the end gathered up by the dramatist and united, there is in *Tamburlaine* but a solitary streak of gold. This slender thread of interest—at times drawn perilously fine—that keeps the whole together, is of course *Tamburlaine's* lust of power. His passion for conquest is the *leitmotif* of the piece. There is no other continuous interest, because there are no other characters. There are indeed fine episodes, such as the death of Bajazeth (Part I. v. 1.) the love scenes with Zenocrate, and the death scene

<sup>1</sup> The list of deaths in *Tamburlaine* is almost as formidable as the catalogue drawn up by Mr Ruskin in his criticism on *Bleak House*, e.g. Part I. ii. 7, Cosroe dies—iii. 2, Argier—v. 1, Bajazeth and Zabina—Soldan of Egypt. Part II. ii. 3, Sigismund—ii. 4, Zenocrate—iii. 4, Captain of the Fort—iv. 2, Calyphas—iv. 3, Olympia—v. 1, Governor of Babylon—v. 3, *Tamburlaine*.

of Zenocrate, Part II. ii. 3. But it is on Tamburlaine himself that the action of the whole drama turns, from the first scene where we hear him exclaim, 'I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove'—to the last, where, tracing out 'the world of ground' that lies westward he complains that he must 'die and this unconquerèd.' The poet was determined that the central figure should arrest attention, and indisputably he has succeeded in drawing a figure of extraordinary effectiveness, the very embodiment of Titanic will and force. In the second act Tamburlaine is described.

Of stature tall, and straightly fashioned,  
Like his desire, lift upward and divine,  
So large of limbs, his joints so strongly knit,  
Such breadth of shoulders as might mainly bear  
Old Atlas' burden; twixt his manly pitch,  
A pearl, more worth than all the world, is placed,  
Wherein by curious sovereignty of art  
Are fixed his piercing instruments of sight,  
Whose fiery circles bear encompassèd  
A heaven of heavenly bodies in their spheres,  
That guide his steps and actions to the throne,  
Where honour sits invested royally;  
Pale of complexion, wrought in him with passion,  
Thirsting with sovereignty and love of arms:  
His lofty brows in folds do figure death,  
And in their smoothness amity and life.  
About them hangs a knot of amber hair,  
Wrappèd in curls, as fierce Achilles' was,  
On which the breath of heaven delights to play,  
Making it dance with wanton majesty.  
His arms and fingers long and sinewy;  
Betokening valour and excess of strength,  
In every part proportioned like a man,  
Should make the world subdued to Tamburlaine.



This might be a description of some picture by Rembrandt. We seem to see the face of the great world-conqueror lit up with one of those dazzling streams of light that Rembrandt could introduce into his portraits with such infinite effect. The reader, as distinguished from the spectator, is able to realise the poet's conception of Tamburlaine in every detail, and it is this conception alone that gives coherence, or something like it, to a series of unconnected pageants. Remove Tamburlaine and the ten acts are simple chaos. That this should be so, that the play should depend entirely on the presence on the stage of one character, that there should be no balance of parts, no relief, no evolution of thought, nothing, in short, but the progress of the central figure as conqueror, is surely a great dramatic flaw. Another fault in Tamburlaine is the extravagance of style<sup>1</sup>, shown in two ways. In the first place there are 'the huffing braggart lines,' which 'Mine Ancient' in *Henry IV.* vainly endeavours to imitate. On this point indeed Pistol is the best critic, as he was one of the first, and really there is nothing more to be said

<sup>1</sup> If the introduction to the golden age of Elizabethan literature was marked by exaggeration of style, the silver age, the age of Tourneur and others, is open to the same charge. Cf. Mr Edmund Gosse's remarks on this point, *Shakespeare to Pope*, p. 29. The explanation is obvious. The extravagance of those who precede the great period is the extravagance of inexperience; the extravagance of those who follow a Shakspeare is that of imitation. The first class of writers have no models to guide them: the second class have models, whose greatness they only parody in their attempts to reproduce it.

on the subject. It would be superfluous to insist on the mere Midsummer madness of such speeches as that of Tamburlaine in the second part (iv. 4), introduced by the famous line, 'Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia.' After all Marlowe was very young when he wrote this play, and relying on the truth of a familiar epigram we may say that even the youngest poets must make mistakes. Such faults are exactly those of an unformed style. Moreover, as Collier suggests<sup>1</sup>, Marlowe had to satisfy his audience; he could not afford at the outset to soar clean over their heads. He had taken away their rhyme, and as a substitute gave them 'high astounding terms.' The extravagance of language in *Tamburlaine* is balanced by extravagance of incident. 'Schiller,' says Coleridge, 'has the material sublime; to produce an effect he sets you a whole town on fire, and throws infants with their mothers into the flames, or locks up a father in an old tower. But Shakspeare drops a handkerchief, and the same, or a greater effect, follows.' This is exactly applicable to Marlowe. When the poet would move pity, a whole troop of maidens must be put to the sword; Zenocrate dies, and the flames of Larissa can alone quench the tears of Tamburlaine.

It is this *ferocité* in tone and treatment that repels French critics of our Elizabethan literature. It is the waste of energy, the squandering of power, that a 'literature of genius' according to Mr Matthew Arnold,

<sup>1</sup> iii. 117.

inevitably entails. Given a literary Court of Judgment like the French Academy, such excesses would be impossible; but then such an innovation as the introduction of blank verse would have been equally out of the question. We must balance the good with the evil. There are many faults in *Tamburlaine*, but there are also astonishing merits. To begin with—the play is full, from the first scene to the last, of the noblest poetry—poetry, that is ‘simple, sensuous, impassioned,’ that sweeps the reader along in its resistless course. It is verse of the kind that Wordsworth called ‘inevitable;’ every line fell into its place without the poet knowing how it came there. Alfred de Musset, according to tradition, would only write by fits and starts, and then with a blaze of light about him. One can imagine Marlowe working in the same way, throwing off scene after scene at white heat, never stopping to erase a single line. Hence, while much that he wrote bears the clearest marks of the author’s haste and carelessness, the good—and the great body of Marlowe’s poetry is supremely good—has the true ring of absolute spontaneity. The poetry comes welling up from the depths of the poet’s heart—no tiny thread, whose every drop must be husbanded—but a rich, full stream. And poetry such as *Tamburlaine* contains was new to the stage. The melody was intoxicating. Putting aside for the present the question of metre, where in the contemporary drama shall we turn, with any hope of finding such lines as

the following—sonorous as the notes of an organ, rhythmic as the ebb and flow of the sea-waves?

*Tamburlaine.* Now walk the angels on the walls of heaven  
 As sentinels to warn the immortal souls,  
 To entertain divine Zenocrate.  
 Apollo, Cynthia, and the ceaseless lamps,  
 That gently looked upon this loathsome earth,  
 Shine downward now no more, but deck the heavens  
 To entertain divine Zenocrate.  
 The crystal springs, whose taste illuminates  
 Refined eyes with an eternal light,  
 Like trièd silver, run through Paradise,  
 To entertain divine Zenocrate.  
 The Cherubins and holy Seraphins,  
 That sing and play before the King of kings,  
 Use all their voices and their instruments,  
 To entertain divine Zenocrate.  
 And in the sweet and curious harmony,  
 The God that tunes this music to our souls,  
 Holds out his hands in highest majesty,  
 To entertain divine Zenocrate.  
 Then let some holy trance convey my thoughts  
 Up to the palace of the empyreal heaven  
 That this my life may be as short to me,  
 As are the days of sweet Zenocrate. Part II. ii. 4.

This is poetry without 'the difference.' Again, could Greene, or Peele, or Kydd, have written the dying speech of Zenocrate in the same scene?

*Zenocrate.* Live still, my lord! O let my sovereign live!  
 And sooner let the fiery element  
 Dissolve and make your kingdom in the sky,  
 Than this base earth should shroud your majesty:  
 For would I but suspect your death by mine,  
 The comfort of my future happiness,  
 Turned to despair, would break my wretched breast,  
 And fury would confound my present rest,

But let me die my love; yet let me die;  
 With love and patience let your true love die!  
 Your grief and fury hurts my second life—  
 Yet let me kiss my lord before I die,  
 And let me die with kissing of my lord—

The English stage had never rung to the rhythm of such periods. Against verse like this there could be no appeal.

‘His raptures were  
 All air and fire’,

says Drayton in the oft-quoted lines on Marlowe, and these simple words exactly sum up the poetical qualities which made *Tamburlaine* at the time of its appearance unique and epoch-making. It contained more genuine poetry than all previous dramas put together, from the first Miracle-Play down to the last piece of rhymed fustian, that Nash, or Peele, or Kydd, may have brought out, while Marlowe was busy on the work which was to raise him high over their heads.

And if Marlowe rendered the stage a signal service in showing that the drama might be, and indeed thenceforth was bound to be, in the widest sense poetical, he did scarcely less good in definitely fixing the form or structure, which the drama should in the future adopt. He brings us in *Tamburlaine* straight into the presence of his characters. There are none of the ingenious contrivances of which contemporary plays are full, and which, as a rule, defeat their own end. These devices were numerous enough; to see what they were, and how supremely ridiculous, we

need only turn to the works of Greene and Peele, next to Marlowe the foremost writers of the time. In Greene's *James IV.* we have a play within a play, Bohan and Oberon keeping up a running commentary on the course of the piece. The *Looking for London and England*<sup>1</sup>, is a perfect storehouse of crude incongruities. Oseas periodically appears to point the moral; a good and an evil angel are introduced, the latter amongst other things tempting the usurer to kill himself, even 'offering the knife and rope,' as the stage-directions quaintly inform us, and yet one more absurdity from the same piece, a burning sword is let down from heaven. *The Comical History of King Alphonsus* begins and ends with an assemblage of the Muses, and throughout Venus acts as a kind of chorus; in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* the introduction of the supernatural is managed rather clumsily. Peele is quite as great an offender in these matters as Greene. The *Arraignment of Paris* is confessedly classical in subject and style, but even in a classical piece the entrance of Ate ('from the lowest hell') with a prologue in her hand seems a gratuitous absurdity. In *Sir Clyomon and Clamydes*<sup>2</sup> there are personifications of Rumour and Providence, not indeed that

<sup>1</sup> Probably, however, Lodge was responsible for the greater part of this terrible 'Morality'. Dyce, *Greene and Peele*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Is it quite clear that this piece was by Peele? Mr Dyce says 'On the title-page of a copy of this play a MS. note in a very old hand attributes it to Peele, and I have no doubt rightly.' The evidence, as Mr Symonds says, does not seem very conclusive; there is one small point worth



anything could possibly add to the faults of a piece of which one can only say that in point of dulness it is a case of Eclipse first and the rest nowhere. The *Old Wives' Tale* deserves considerate handling as having not improbably suggested the idea of Milton's *Comus*; moreover it contains some pleasant scenes. But, like *James IV.*, it is a play within a play and the device in the hands of Peele does not succeed. In *David and Bethsabe* we have a regular chorus; in the *Battle of Alcazar* the action is eked out by the help of a Presenter, a Dumb-show, and Hercules and Jonah. Finally in *Edward I.* an earthquake takes place by special request and gets rid of the Queen for an act or two, though she subsequently reappears through a *deus ex machina*-device which the dramatist does not stop to elucidate. All these artifices were mechanical and utterly clumsy, but none the less playwrights employed them as part of their legitimate dramatic machinery. Marlowe brushed them on one side, and rightly, for such contrivances can only produce a general effect of incongruity. No doubt some of the devices were effective enough, if sparingly used. In the *Winter's Tale*, for instance, the chorus is indispens-

noticing. Some dramatists—notably Greene, as Mr Richard Grant White pointed out in discussing the *Henry VI. Parts II. and III.* question—are very fond of the peculiar idiom 'for to' with an infinitive. Peele does not often employ it: there are only scattered instances in his works, e.g. two in the *Old Wives' Tale*, three in the *Arraignment of Paris*. In *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*—a very long piece it is true—I have noted over 70 examples.

able, and the same may be said of *Henry V*. Similarly *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—not to mention *Hamlet* and the *Taming of a Shrew*—shows us what admirable effects may be attained by putting a play inside a play. But when such shifts were employed continually careless and incongruous work was the result, and everything that stands outside the main course of a play tends to create a feeling of unreality, precisely the danger against which a good dramatist guards. Hence it was an immense gain that in *Tamburlaine* the audience were brought at the outset into the presence of the dramatis personæ, that the action of the play developed naturally, that no chorus trotted in and out at odd moments, that in a word the piece possessed the primary elements of naturalness and reality.

We may say, then, that Marlowe in giving poetry a place on the stage, and in laying down sound principles of dramatic structure, did no small service to the drama. But there is another point in *Tamburlaine*. The poet was trying a great experiment, and it was essential to the success of this attempt that the material out of which his play was constructed should possess the strongest elements of popularity; he was bound to interest the spectators. His choice of a subject was admirable. The story of *Tamburlaine* is heroic, romantic, one that would naturally seize the attention of a large audience. The very extravagance of the piece—*Tamburlaine's* thirst for power—his sacrifice of all, even of his child, to the passion of his

life, admitted of the sensational, melodramatic treatment that satisfied the craving for strong excitement natural to an English audience. He tells us in the prologue what we have to expect—

‘We’ll lead you to the stately tent of war,  
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine:  
Threatening the world with high, astounding terms,  
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.  
View but his picture in this tragic glass  
And then applaud his fortune as you please.’

This is the poet’s promise, and it is amply fulfilled. After *Tamburlaine* there could be no question of any continuation of the Religious, or Classical drama. Both were routed, and still more important, the ‘jiggling veins’ and ‘the conceits of clownage’ were likewise swept on one side.

‘Marlowe was trying a great experiment.’ Like Polyphemus, who thoughtfully reserved Odysseus to the end of his banquet as a choice morsel, I have kept this point—the introduction of blank verse—to the last. Few questions in English literature are more interesting than the history of blank verse. The honour of having first employed this metre for dramatic purposes is usually given to Sackville and Norton; I think the credit belongs entirely to Marlowe.<sup>1</sup>

Let us consider the circumstances under which rhyme was discarded. Surrey<sup>1</sup>, in his translation of

<sup>1</sup> Vide what Meres, plagiarising from Ascham, says in *Palladis Tamia* of Surrey, who, by the way, called his own verse ‘a strange metre’, which it certainly was.

the fourth book of the *Æneid*, was the first writer who ended his lines with a vacant or blank syllable. Probably the impulse came from Italy. Like Gascoigne, Greene, Peele and many other writers, Surrey had travelled in that country, and there the transition from rhymed to unrhymed verse had long been effected. Trissino, the father of Italian tragedy, Rucellai, and other poets had all written the so-called *versi sciolti*<sup>1</sup>. The abandonment therefore of rhyme was due to external circumstances; in other words, it was artificial. But, although in all probability the example of Italian writers<sup>2</sup> was the immediate cause of the change, yet the idea that rhyme was a barbarous survival sprang in either case from the classicism fostered by the Renaissance. Æschylus, Sophocles and the other Greek poets had not employed rhyme, the world recognised these writers as amongst the greatest, therefore rhyme was bad; the argument seemed complete, *totus teres atque rotundus*.

We have several critical treatises on the subject by writers of the time, most of whom argue for the abolition of rhyme in favour of what they call the 'Carmen iambicum,' their theory being that a metre can be transplanted from one language to another quite irrespectively of the inherent differences that may separate those languages. That is the view

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Symonds, *Shakspeare's Predecessors*, p. 592. The *Sophonisba* of Trissino—praised by Pope—was produced in 1515.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Guest, *History of English Rhythms*, p. 528.

advanced in Ascham's *Schoolmaster*. Ascham discusses the rhyme question in a spirit of the very narrowest pedantry, appealing at every step to the classical writers, precisely as Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* begins each paragraph with the inevitable 'As Homer,' or 'As Sophocles,' etc., 'So Chaucer,' etc.—And it is the same with the other critics. Puttenham<sup>1</sup>, for instance, speaks of the 'rhyming poesie of the barbarians,' and in his sixth chapter (Book I.) explains how it was that the idea of rhymed compositions first arose, with all the disastrous results that followed thereupon. Again in Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetry*<sup>2</sup> (1586), rhyme is indifferently called 'tinkerly verse,' 'brutish poesie,' and 'a great decay of that good order of versifying,' the moral of Webbe's criticism being, that poets should follow the Greek model and eschew everything but classical metres. In a later work, Campion's *Art of English Poesie*<sup>3</sup>, 1602, we have specimens of two kinds of iambic lines—the 'iambic pure,' and the 'licentiate iambic.' The arguments of these several writers were all variations on the same note, the gist of their criticisms simply amounting to this, that the only true authorities on

<sup>1</sup> Haslewood, I. p. 7—9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* II. p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> Haslewood, II. As a specimen of the 'pure iambic' Campion (p. 168) gives the following line:

'The more secure the more the stroke we feel.'

This, he says, is a 'licentiate iambic'—

'Hark how these winds do murmur at thy flight.'

questions of literary form and taste were the classical writers, that there could be no departure from the critical canons they observed, that a rhythm which suited the peculiar character of the Greek language would (in the face of facts) suit the English, that therefore these classical metres should be introduced and native metres discarded in their favour—or, as Ascham puts it—poets should ‘leave off their rude barbariousness in rhyming and follow diligently the excellent Greek and Latin examples in true versifying.’ These doctrines were widely spread. Critics affected to look with contempt on the English language and on its metres. On the one hand Philip Sidney and his little Academe<sup>1</sup> were making heroic efforts to introduce unrhymed hexameters and sapphics into English literature. This was ‘artificial versifying,’ and it was doomed to failure. Such metres depend on quantity, and for quantity the English language can only offer the poor substitute of accent. On the other hand, the purely scholastic critics approached their mother tongue in the spirit of Holofernes, who was ‘a scholar at the least.’ They were bent on subjecting native rhythms to elaborate rules drawn from their study of classical models. They did not stop to reflect that the poetry of a nation grows with the language, that the metrical forms most suited to the peculiarities of the language

<sup>1</sup> Even Spenser was guilty of dabbling in these pseudo-classical metres. Cf. Church’s *Spenser* (‘English Men of Letters’ Series) p. 27.



survive, while others die out, or remain unattempted altogether, that, in short, metrically, whatever is best, and that 'one language', as Johnson says, 'cannot communicate its rules to another'. They found the normal heroic line of five feet 'the standard metre of serious English poetry, in epic story, idyll, satire, drama, elegy and meditative lyric.' It was one of the oldest metres. It had been used by various writers in various combinations, by Chaucer in the couplet and rime royal<sup>1</sup>, by Surrey and other poets in the sonnet, by Spenser in the stanzas of the *Faery Queen*. But in every case the lines had rhymed. Never, until Surrey made the innovation, had the last foot been left blank or unrhymed. But Surrey's abandonment of rhyme seemed a decided step in advance. The heroic line—minus the rhyme—was somewhat like the Greek iambic line, and the critics thought that they could make the resemblance still stronger. There were, of course, certain difficulties in the way. To begin with, the heroic line is shorter by a whole foot than the Greek senarius<sup>2</sup>, a fact which was conveniently ignored. Again—and this was the serious stumbling-block—the Greek iambus, like all Greek

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the ballet stave of 8 lines. Guest, bk. iv. chap. v. Cf. *Shakspeare's Predecessors*, p. 591.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel in his *Defence of Rhyme* notes this point. 'For what', he says, 'do we have here, what strange precept of art about the forming of an iambic verse in our language, which, when all is done, reaches not by a foot, but falleth out to be the plain Ancient Verse, consisting of 10 syllables or 5 feet, which hath been used among us time out of mind.'

metres, is based on the quantitative structure. But the English language does not admit in its prosody the idea of quantity at all ; hence the impossibility of applying to the English heroic line the system of scansion by quantity. All rhythmic effects in English verse rest on the principle of accent, so the scholastic critics decided that an unaccented syllable should represent a short syllable, and, contrarily, an accented, a long syllable ; in this way they hoped to overcome the quantitative difficulty. Now, as long as a writer, following this principle, alternated an unaccented with an accented syllable, he could produce pure iambic lines of five feet, each foot being an iambus, and each line ending, on the classical model, with a syllable counted long, the tendency obviously being to isolate the lines. But further than this he could not venture. Once abandon this normal structure, and he was certain to break his prescribed rules. The result was obvious. The English iambic line was infinitely poorer than the Greek iambic line. How could it be otherwise ? The Greek dramatist was not bound to have an iambus in every foot. In the first, third, and fifth places other feet were admissible. He could vary his lines by the introduction of tribrachs, anapaests, dactyls and spondees ; a trochee he could not use. Consequently the trochee could find no place in the English iambic line of these Elizabethan critics, and yet there is no foot that English poetry admits more readily, a signal proof of the futility of attempt-

ing to impose upon one language the rules of another. Thus the English iambic failed to reproduce any of the richness and rhythm of the Greek iambic—qualities directly traceable to the peculiarities of the Greek language—and at the same time it lacked the old charm which it had derived from the genuinely English principle of rhyme. The critics in short had fallen between two stools. As the result of these various shifts and expedients they had produced a metre which was limited to one foot, and proportionately monotonous. To prove this, one need only quote a passage from *Gorboduc*. Here is an extract from Videna's speech at the beginning of the fourth Act—one of the most vigorous in the play—

'Why should I live and linger forth my time,  
 In longer life to double my distress?  
 O me most woeful wight! whom no mishap  
 Long ere this day could have bereaved hence,  
 Mought not these hands by fortune or by fate  
 Have pierced this breast, and life with iron rest?  
 Or in this palace here where I so long  
 Have spent my days, could not that happy hour  
 Once, once have happ'd, in which those hugy frames  
 With deathly fall might have oppressed me?  
 Or should not this most hard and cruel soil,  
 So oft where I have pressed my wretched steps,  
 Some time had ruth of mine accursed life  
 To rend in twain and swallow me therein,  
 So had my bones possessèd now in peace  
 Their happy grave within the closèd ground  
 And greedy worms had gnawed this pinèd heart  
 Without my feeling pain.'

This is indeed 'the even road of a blank verse.' The

only objection to such lines is that we never leave the level ground. It is the monotony of a Cambridge-shire landscape. We can hardly wonder that any theory which led to the production of such verse should have been fiercely assailed. The rhymed couplet was not suitable for use on the stage, but this hybrid line with its solitary foot<sup>1</sup>, its almost invariable pause at the end of the fourth syllable, and the repeated monosyllabic ending<sup>2</sup>, was infinitely worse. The heroic couplet could at least claim to be considered poetry, but who would undertake to define its successor? The latter simply represented the apotheosis of pedantry.

The fetters of rhyme therefore had been broken without any good result following. Playwrights were no nearer than before to a solution of the problem—what was the most fitting vehicle of dramatic expression. The tyranny of the iambic was worse than the tyranny of rhyme. And there could be no pro-

<sup>1</sup> What Gascoigne said in his '*Notes of Instruction, Concerning the making of Verse or Ryme in English*', 1575, is perfectly true. 'Note you that commonly nowadays in English rimes (for I dare not call them verses), we use none other order but a foot of two syllables, whereof the first is depressed or made short, and the second is elevate or made long, and that sound or scanning continueth through the Verse...and surely I can lament that we are fallen into such a plain and simple manner of writing that there is none other foot used but one.' Gascoigne was no champion of rhyme; he merely protested against the tyranny of this solitary, iambic foot. Haslewood, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Thus in the above passage of 18 lines there are 14 monosyllabic endings.

gress until some poet should arise, who taking the old heroic line, could free it alike from the bonds of the couplet and from the classical rules imposed upon it. This Christopher Marlowe did. He borrowed the heroic line, and in his hands the instrument was touched to nobler issues than hitherto. He created a verse system radically different from the verse of *Gorboduc*. In the latter the couplet, or perhaps the single line was the unit; in blank verse proper the whole paragraph is the unit. And herein lies its merit. The central idea of a speech in Shakspeare is progress. All thought is progressive, or at least all thought passes through different stages. Now blank verse above all verse is best calculated to express the transitions of spoken thought, because changes passing in the speaker's mind are expressed by changes in the time and rhythm of his words. The basis of blank verse, as of all English prosody, is accent, and accent is only another form of emphasis. A speaker by means of emphasis, by means of variety in the pause, by means of accelerated and slackened rhythm can give perfect expression to everything that directs the train of his thoughts. The verse, in a word, reflects every shade of his meaning. The distribution of the rests, the incidence of the accent can emphasise the relative importance of his sentences. The thought conveyed, and the language in which it is conveyed, go side by side. Blank verse, to employ a simile, is like the drapery that a sculptor chisels round a

statue; it clothes the thought, or, to vary the simile, we may say that a paragraph of blank verse resembles the human hand. The internal system of the lines in themselves—the accent, the pause, and the rhythm—represents the structure of bones and sinew that constitute the framework of the hand; the thought that vivifies and penetrates every syllable of the speech is parallel to the blood that reaches into every crevice of the member, making the whole living, united, supple. No one understood the art of merging the thought in its expression better than Milton. ‘In the flow’—says Dr Guest<sup>1</sup>—‘of his rhythm, in the quality of his letter-sounds, in the disposition of his pauses, his verse almost ever fits the subject. And so insensibly does poetry blend with this, the last beauty of exquisite versification, that the reader sometimes doubts whether it be the thought itself, or merely the happiness of its expression, which is the source of a gratification so deeply felt.’ Dr Guest, however, goes on to blame Milton for his ‘unsettled accentuation,’ for ‘running the verses one into the other<sup>2</sup>,’ and observes, ‘few readers are to be met with, who can make the beginning or the ending of Milton’s lines perceptible to the audience.’ This, he says, may be a beauty, but it is beyond the legitimate range of metre. ‘Versification ceases to be a science,

<sup>1</sup> Guest’s *English Rhythms*, p. 530.

<sup>2</sup> In the same way Daniel in his *Defence of Ryme*, objects to the ‘boundless running on of the classics.’



if its laws may be thus lightly broken.' It is of course only a repetition of Johnson's well-known criticism, that 'the variety of pauses, so much boasted by the lovers of blank verse, changes the measures of an English poet to the periods of a declaimer.' Johnson meant this sentence to be a reproach. As a matter of fact he sums up with admirable terseness the peculiar excellence of blank verse. It is essentially rhetorical, and consequently, whatever its fitness or unfitness for purposes of epic narration, it is indisputably the best of all metres as a means of dramatic expression. It can approximate to the prose of every-day life without losing its dignity as poetry; it can give the natural rhythm of conversation, and yet remain verse. But obviously all depends on the actor's, or reader's, fineness of ear. A line may be deficient by a syllable, lacking, as is often the case in Marlowe's verse, the initial syllable, or it may be redundant, having a syllable packed in the middle, or—as in Fletcher's plays—an extra emphatic syllable at the end—or an ordinary 'feminine' ending—or the verse may be an apparent Alexandrine, or—in short, it may represent any one of the various departures from the normal blank verse line employed by dramatists; but in such cases examination will show that, though the number of syllables be defective, or redundant, yet the sound, regulated by the sense of the line—is in one case sufficient, in the other not really excessive. To say this now is to repeat the merest common-

place. But we must remember who it was that first introduced these apparent irregularities, who first developed the 'licenciate iambic'—who, in a word, first conceived a true idea of the metrical beauty, to which blank verse might properly attain. In verse of the *Gorboduc* type there was nothing but lifeless monotony—almost each line was isolated, certainly each couplet. At the very outset therefore it was clear, that such verse could never be suitable for the stage. There can be no true evolution of thought in single lines; ideas are splintered into fragments. This had been the great fault of the rhymed couplet; each pair of lines was complete in itself. The characters talked in epigrams, because what they wished to say had continually to be concentrated within the narrow limits of the two lines. It is the flaw in Shakspeare's earliest plays. The dialogue is too sharp and pointed; there is none of the diffuseness, the easy expansiveness of natural conversation. And similarly in longer speeches a finicking metre which brings the speaker to a close at the end of every line, or pair of lines, precludes a large and gradual flow of ideas. What is passing in the character's mind must be twisted and strained to suit the requirements of the metre. Thought expressed in blank verse, such as Shakspeare wrote in the later plays, resembles the flow of a stately stream; thought expressed in rhymed couplets is like a brook that foams and frets at each rock in its course, at every turn in its twisted

channel. As for the metre of *Gorboduc*, the expression of thought in such lines is almost impossible—the movement of the verse is the motion of a stagnant river, that barely progresses at all. After listening to the play, the audience might well have said with Jaques, ‘Nay, then, God be wi’you, an you talk in blank verse.’ But Marlowe flung to the winds all rules. He transformed the ‘drumming decasyllabon;’ he introduced the hitherto forbidden trochees and other feet. His lines were sometimes deficient by a syllable, sometimes redundant; they were ‘unstopt.’ There was no longer the invariable pause after the fourth syllable; the single couplet was no longer the unit. The emphasis fell naturally on the right words, and the lines were combined into periods through which the sense could develop in easy transitions, ‘variously drawn out,’ to speak with Milton—‘from one verse into another’<sup>1</sup>. The sound was an echo to the sense. The rhythm perpetually changed—‘lift upward and divine,’ to echo the passions of Tamburlaine; swift, broken abrupt to ring the desolation, the despair that closes over Faustus, in that terrible ‘last scene of all’; sonorous and sad to tell the tragedy of Marlowe’s King. And so in his first play the poet could give us lines like these,

If all the pens that ever poets held  
Had fed the feeling of their masters’ thoughts,

<sup>1</sup> This ‘boundless running,’ as Daniel terms it, has well been called the ‘overflow’: *Shakespeare to Pope*, p. 6.

And every sweetness that inspired their hearts  
 Their minds and muses on admirèd themes :  
 If all the heavenly quintessence they still  
 From their immortal flowers of poesy,  
 Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive  
 The highest reaches of a human wit,  
 If these had made one poem's period,  
 And all combined in beauty's worthiness,  
 Yet should there hover in their restless head  
 One thought, one grace, one wonder.at the least  
 Which into words no virtue can digest.

Mr Swinburne<sup>1</sup> in one of his essays takes four lines from Wordsworth's poem 'The Solitary Reaper.'

Will no one tell me what she sings?  
 Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
 For old unhappy far off things  
 And battles long ago.

If, he says, all that Wordsworth ever wrote had perished, with the exception of this half stanza, yet the poet's name must have been immortal. These few verses were enough to keep fresh the fame of any writer. May not the same be said of the passage from Marlowe quoted above? If of Marlowe's plays not one had survived, if *Hero and Leander* had sunk into the waters of oblivion under the weight of Chapman's continuation of the original, if the two or three lyrics ('old-fashioned poetry, but choicely good') that we possess, had gone the way that the other lyrical poems which he must have written were doomed to go, still these 13 lines of blank verse,

<sup>1</sup> This was written before contending critics had crushed all the poetry out of the hapless half-stanza.

enshrined in one of the many anthologies of the time, would surely have been sufficient to prove that a true poet had lived, and suffered, and sung, and been forgotten. The instrument which contented Norton and Sackville, and the court audiences, could give forth a solitary note. The instrument created by Marlowe could ring out, at the touch of its master, the full diapason of an organ. It is possible that Bottom, who had 'a reasonable good ear in music,' might have traced some connection between the two.

Ben Jonson exactly described (Schlegel notwithstanding) the main characteristics of the poet's verse, when he spoke of Marlowe's 'mighty line.' As a rule, such epigrammatic definitions are not very satisfactory. Attempts to label a writer's work with a convenient reference-phrase usually mean that one aspect of his character is emphasised and brought into relief at the expense of the rest; side points must perforce be left out of sight. But 'mighty' perfectly expresses, so far as any one epithet can express, the peculiar quality of Marlowe's poetry. It is in what Mr Matthew Arnold calls the 'grand style,' and of this style the last lines that I quoted are an admirable specimen. It would be a mistake however to suppose that the poet always wrote in this vein. On the contrary, his verse displays, especially in his best work, *Edward the Second*, considerable variety. He handles the metre with consummate ease, and the secret of his rhythmic effects lies in the skill with which the movement of the lines

is always adapted to the subject. Here is a passage that might, as Mr Bullen says, have come out of *Paradise Lost*.

The galleys and those pilling brigandines  
That yearly sail to the Venetian Gulf,  
And hover in the straits for Christian wreck,  
Shall lie at anchor in the isle Asant,  
Until the Persian fleet and men of war,  
Sailing along the oriental sea,  
Have fetched about the Indian Continent  
Even from Persepolis to Mexico  
And thence unto the straits of Jubaltèr.

*Tamburlaine*, Part I. iii. 3, 248—255.

‘Sailing along the oriental sea’—the subtle swing of the line is perfectly expressive of the easy motion of a fleet. We have the same kind of effect in a passage in the *Few of Malta*, i. I. 41.

Why then I hope my ships  
I sent for Egypt and the bordering isles  
Are gotten up by Nilus winding banks:  
Mine Argosy from Alexandria,  
Loaden with spice and silk, now under sail,  
Are smoothly gliding down by Candy shore  
To Malta, through our Mediterranean Sea.

Here again the smooth rapidity of the last line and a half exactly suggests the idea of a ship under canvas; on the other hand, the laboured effect of the third verse is noticeable.

Earlier in the same speech occurs the following remarkable paragraph:

Give me the merchants of the Indian mines  
That trade in metal of the purest mould;



The wealthy Moor, that in the Eastern rocks  
 Without control can pick his riches up,  
 And in his house heap pearls like pebble stones,  
 Receive them free and sell them by the weight.  
 Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,  
 Jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds,  
 Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,  
 And seld seen costly stones.

Lines more hopelessly irregular according to the principles laid down in *Gorboduc* it would be difficult to conceive. 'Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,' the effect is as beautiful as it was original; the description seems to reflect the light flashing from the facets of the gems; we are dazzled by the combination of words. The *Tragedy of Dido* contains at least half a dozen remarkable lines with the true Marlowesque ring.

Then he unlocked the horse; and suddenly,  
 From out his entrails, Neoptolemus,  
 Setting his spear upon the ground, leapt forth,  
 And after him a thousand Grecians more  
 In whose stern faces shined the quenchless fire  
 That after burnt the pride of Asia.'      ii. 1, 183—88.

The resistless sweep of these verses, an effect altogether beyond the reach of Nash, vividly reproduces the action described; even the epithet ('quenchless') is characteristic. Again in the same scene the poet has a fine combination of monosyllables.

And, as he spoke, to further his intent,  
 The winds did drive huge billows to the shore,  
 And heaven was darkened with tempestuous clouds.

In the movement of the second line one seems to catch an echo of the rush and roar of the actual waves. This play exhibits a curious phenomenon in the poet's handling of the blank verse, viz. a return at times to the structure of the old couplet. As a specimen, the following speech will serve.

Aeneas, I'll repair thy Trojan ships,  
Conditionally, that thou wilt stay with me,  
And let Achates sail to Italy:  
I'll give thee tackling made of rivelled gold,  
Wound on the barks of odoriferous trees;  
Oars of massy ivory, full of holes,  
Through which the water shall delight to play;  
Thy anchors shall be hewed from crystal rocks,  
Which, if thou lose, shall shine above the waves;  
The masts, whereon thy swelling sails shall hang,  
Hollow pyramides of silver plate;  
The sails of folded lawn, where shall be wrought  
The wars of Troy—but not Troy's overthrow.

This passage, as Mr Symonds points out, is not at all in Marlowe's usual, or at any rate later, style. It is only blank verse in the sense that there are no rhymes. As an explanation it may be worth while to suggest that the play was written while Marlowe was busy with the composition of his incomparable *Hero and Leander*. The latter was entered at Stationers' Hall 1593; the *Tragedy of Dido* was published 1594. As I said before, both are really love-poems, and the passage just quoted is exactly such a description as might have occurred in *Hero and Leander*. Perhaps it is not unnatural to suppose that

the poet in writing the drama would occasionally glide into the couplet form employed in the sister-poem.

It is in *Edward II.* that Marlowe's power of writing vigorous blank verse in dialogue is best seen. His handling of the metre in *Tamburlaine* was a little stiff. The lines lacked flexibility. The characters resembled mediæval warriors in complete, but somewhat unwieldy suits of mail. But against *Edward II.* no such reproach can be made. He had acquired a perfect mastery over his weapon; the verse was supple and pliant in his hands. To borrow Johnson's famous remark about Milton, the poet could, if he wished, carve the daintiest work on a cherrystone, and this command of the metre is naturally most conspicuous in the dialogue. The difficulty of writing lines that should have all the naturalness of conversation without ceasing to be poetical, was of course great, especially at the outset, when the resources of blank verse remained comparatively undeveloped. In this art of reconciling the simplicity that is essential to really good dialogue with the dignity of verse, Shakspeare is unapproachable. Dekker, according to Coleridge, comes next. But Shakspeare and the other dramatists in this, as in other respects, only reaped the fruit of what Marlowe had previously done. If we turn to *Edward II.* we find that the dialogue is wonderfully strong. All through the scenes where the king disputes with his courtiers the verse is marked by animation and firmness. Take,

for instance, a passage like the following in the first act; it is a fair specimen.

- Edw.* What are you moved that Gaveston sits here?  
It is our pleasure, and we will have it so—
- Lan.* Your Grace doth well to place him by your side,  
For nowhere else the new Earl is so safe.
- E. Mort.* What man of noble birth can brook this sight?  
See what a scornful look the peasant casts.
- Pemb.* Can kingly lions fawn on creeping ants.
- War.* Ignoble vassal, that, like Phaeton,  
Aspir'st unto the guidance of the sun.
- Y. Mort.* Their downfall is at hand, their forces down:  
We will not thus be faced and overpeered.
- Edw.* Lay hands on that traitor Mortimer!
- Mort.* Lay hands on that traitor Gaveston!
- Kent.* Is this the duty that you owe your king?
- War.* We know our duties, let him know his peers.
- Edw.* Whither will you bear him? stay, or ye shall die.
- E. Mort.* We are no traitors, therefore threaten not.
- Gav.* No, threaten not, my lord, but pay them home:  
Were I a king—
- Y. Mort.* Thou villain, wherefore talk'st thou of a king  
That hardly art a gentleman by birth?
- Edw.* Were he a peasant, being my minion  
I'll make the proudest of you stoop to him.      I. 4.

It seemed to me necessary to dwell at some length on Marlowe's introduction of blank verse—as we understand blank verse—and, in doing so, to draw freely on his works for quotation. After all, it was in enriching the stage with a metre, which for dramatic purposes is incomparable, that Marlowe conferred on English literature the most signal and sovereign benefit. His creation of blank verse, for the transfiguration that the verse of *Gorboduc* under-

went in his hands was nothing short of a creation, was, one might almost say, a vindication of the dignity and resource of the English language and of English metres. What Spenser was doing for poetry in general, Marlowe did (without Spenser's affectation of antiquarianism) for dramatic poetry in particular. He proved that men could give up their perpetual appeal to the classics, that if they wanted inspiration there was plenty to be found nearer home, that attempts to revive classical metres were futile, if not something worse; above all, that the language of Chaucer was really a very effective instrument when handled by a man of genius.

And there is one more point in Marlowe's work—he created, in *Edward II.*, the first genuine historical play. Chronicle plays like *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* certainly could lay no claim to this title—they were not dramas at all<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the early Historical Shaksperian plays, 1 *Henry VI.*, which Professor Dowden assigns to the 'Pre-Shaksperian Group,' 1590—91, i.e. only retouched by Shakspeare, is clearly only a good specimen—good, because of two or three fine scenes, added by Shakspeare—of the Chronicle Play proper. There is also the 'Marlowe-Shakspeare' group. Whatever theory be adopted as to the authorship of *Henry VI.* Parts II. and III., and *The Contention*, and *True Tragedy*, these plays do not I think mark any decided advance on the Chronicle history. They lack the unity of purpose, the continuous dramatic interest essential to a genuine drama. There is the widest possible gulf between them and the true historical drama of which *Edward II.* was the earliest specimen, the drama which Shakspeare carried further in *Richard II.* and *King John*, and brought to its fullest development in his trilogy of *Henry IV.* Parts II. and III., and *Henry V.* There is one other play belonging to

The writers merely strung together with the loosest possible thread of interest a series of historical scenes; the action dragged over a long space of time, there was no coherence of parts, and in the end it was discovered that after all the piece had been leading no whither. Infinitely better to my mind than the

the Marlowe-Shakspeare group, viz. *Richard III.* Various dates are assigned to its production. Mr Fleay says 'probably 1595' (*Shakespeare Manual*, p. 31); Professor Dowden gives 1593. In the Clarendon Press edition the date 1593 or 1594 is 'conjecturally' assigned to it (*Introduction*, p. v). Now *Edward II.* was entered at Stationers' Hall July 6, 1593, and may well have been produced some time earlier. Warton, for instance, definitely states that it "was written in the year 1590"; unfortunately he does not give any evidence in support of his statement. Perhaps 1591—92 would be a fair date to assign. In this way it would have preceded *Richard III.*, as it obviously did *Richard II.* It may be worth while to note that we could fix the date of *Edward II.* at least as early as 1593 (independently of the fact that Marlowe died in that year) from what appears to me to be an obvious reference to the play in Peele's *Order of the Garter* (1593). Peele has these lines:

And Mortimer a gentle trusty lord,  
More loyal than that cruel Mortimer,  
That plotted Edward's death at Chillingworth,  
Edward the Second, father to this King,  
*Whose tragic cry even now methinks I hear,*  
When graceless wretches murdered him by night.

Surely these lines refer to Marlowe's play, especially as Peele mentions Marlowe in the prologue; I have not seen the point noticed. Peele, by the way, puts the death of Edward at Kenilworth. May he not be following Marlowe's account, and may not the editors be wrong in giving Berkeley as the scene in Act v. s. 7? At the end of scene 3. 49, Edward is taken to Kenilworth; from that point to the murder scene we do not hear of his leaving the Castle, cf. however, v. 2. 63. Marlowe, we may remember, was careless about such historical points. Cf. Act II. in the same play, scene 2. 188—193 and Mr Fleay's note.



ordinary chronicle-histories are Peele's *Edward I.*, and Greene's *James IV.*; the only two plays that approximated at all to the form of drama initiated in *Edward II.* But neither is to be compared to Marlowe's work. *James IV.*, as we have said, is a play within a play, and that alone is enough to condemn the piece: the historical of all forms of drama requires the simplest and most realistic presentment. Moreover the play is really a love-story; it reads like the dramatisation of some old Scottish ballad, where true love is faithful to the last and has its reward. Dorothea and Ida are the characters that interest us; the king is a mere puppet. Some fragments, too, of the old 'jigging wits' cling to the piece. As Bohan says at the end of Act III.

The rest is ruthless, yet to beguile the time,  
Tis interlaced with merriment and rhyme.

On the same level as Greene's work stands Peele's *Edward I.*, printed 1593. Mr Dyce calls it 'one of the earliest of our chronicle-histories.' It seems to me decidedly better in many respects than the ordinary chronicle-play; it represents a definite effort to write a consecutive, coherent drama. But Peele's attempt falls far short of Marlowe's achievement. The dramatist displays no sense of proportion and but little power of characterisation, the scene changes with bewildering frequency, and the incidents are often grotesque, or brutal, or both. And yet these

two pieces, *James IV.* and *Edward I.*<sup>1</sup> may fairly, I think, be regarded as at least equal to anything approximating to the historical drama that had been

<sup>1</sup> It is by no means quite clear that either of these dramas preceded *Edward II.* I take them however as typical plays to show what the best playwrights of the time—Marlowe excepted—could, or rather could not, do. With regard to *James IV.* it must have been written at least as early as 1592, as that was the year of Greene's death. It was published in 1598. *Edward II.* was printed 1593. "It may be reasonably conjectured that it was played some years before it was published." *Collier*, iii. 198. The writer of the Article in the *Quarterly Review* (October 1885) strongly expresses the opinion that *Edward I.* was written before *Edward II.* I have noticed a curious case of plagiarism in the two plays, though which dramatist was the plagiarist we cannot say; it is this:

Peele has (Dyce's Edition, p. 413) the following lines:

Unhappy king, dishonoured is thy stock—  
Hence feignèd weeds, unfeignèd is my grief.

Compare this with *Edward II.* IV. 6, 96,

Sweet Spenser, gentle Baldock, part we must—  
Hence feignèd weeds, unfeignèd are my woes.

It is obvious that one writer—which, we do not know—has plagiarised from the other. A somewhat similar instance occurs in Peele's 'David and Bethsabe', where we have the line (p. 465)

'And makes their weapons wound the senseless winds.'

This is clearly an imitation of Marlowe's

'And make your strokes to wound the senseless light',  
*Tamburlaine*, III. 3, 158.

That *David and Bethsabe* was written after the production of *Tamburlaine* is obvious from the verse: in *David and Bethsabe* occurs the well-known simile (p. 473) taken from the *Faery Queen*, bk 1. canto 5, 2.

And yet one more instance of 'conveying'; in *Anglorum Ferie* (1595) the expression

'the rising sun  
Gallops the zodiac in his fiery wain'

is strongly suggestive of *Titus Andronicus*, II. 1, 7.

written previous to the production of *Edward II.* But with that play an immense advance was made. *Edward II.* exhibits Marlowe's powers as a dramatist at their highest. The play is full of sober strength, very different from the Titanic force that overflowed in *Tamburlaine*. The characters stand out in the boldest relief; their motives are clearly defined, and the events of the drama are made to flow naturally from one central cause. The whole action of *Edward II.* turns on the king's abuse—infatuated abuse—of his power. Edward has no sense of the difficulties of his position; he resolutely shuts his eyes to the harshness of facts. He is a king, and will suffer no limitation of his prerogative—'Am I a king, and must be overruled,' is his perpetual reply to all objections, and this point, emphasized at the outset, is never lost sight of. A wide gulf of time has to be bridged over, but the poet connects the two parts of his play with marked skill. In the first two acts Gaveston is the cause of dissension between the king and his nobles: in the third and fourth acts, up to the point where the king is defeated and deposed, the Spencers take the place of Gaveston. When Gaveston is first banished Edward exclaims,

And thou must hence, or I shall be deposed,  
But I will reign to be revenged on them.

And he is as good as his word. He determines to vindicate his own honour—for Edward never forgets that he is a king—and to avenge the wrong done to

his friend. But fate is too strong for him. Gaveston returns, only to be eventually taken and killed, and again the king swears a solemn revenge.

*Edward.* By Earth the common mother of us all,  
 By heaven, and all the moving orbs thereof,  
 By this right hand, and by my father's sword,  
 And all the honours 'longing to my crown,  
 I will have lives and heads for him, as many  
 As I have manors, castles, towns and towers.  
 . . . . .  
 And in this place of honour and of trust,  
 Spencer, sweet Spencer, I adopt thee here:  
 And merely of our love we do create thee  
 Earl of Gloucester, and Lord Chamberlain,  
 Despite of times, despite of enemies."

With the blind tenacity of a weak nature he clings desperately to his purpose. He refuses to dismiss the Spencers at the demand of the barons; they are installed as his favourites, and thus we have the required balance between the two divisions of the play. From this point Edward's character is worked out on the same lines. When fortune declares for him, almost his first words are—

Methinks you hang the heads,  
 But we'll advance them, traitors: now 'tis time  
 To be avenged on you for all your braves,  
 And for the murder of my dearest friend.

Here again he strikes the two keynotes of the piece, vindication of his honour, fidelity to his friends. But once more his purpose is defeated. The barons escape; Edward has to fight for his throne, and at

last is beaten, and even then his chief sorrow seems to spring from the parting with his favourites.

Sweet Spencer! gentle Baldock, part we must!

And go I must. Life, farewell with my friends.

He loses them: he loses all hope of revenge, and thus the secondary theme of the drama is exhausted, and the poet returns to his original motive, the king's exaggerated conception of his kingship. Throughout the fifth act it is developed with surpassing power and impressiveness. Professor Dowden speaks somewhat contemptuously of *Edward II.* as being 'rather a series of scenes from the chronicles of England than a drama.' I cannot help dissenting from this view. *Edward the Second* seems to me, and I am merely repeating what critics (from Charles Lamb to Mr Swinburne) have said, to be a play of remarkable power; finely conceived, and finely carried out. It is not merely an enormous advance on everything of the kind that had preceded it—the piece can bear comparison with Shakspeare. Marlowe here, if not in his earlier dramas, displays a really great imaginative faculty. We have no longer a play with but one character; the action is not dominated by a single passion. True, everything primarily springs from Edward's infatuated conception of his power as king. It is this (and his weakness) that makes him foist his favourites on the court, and that in turn leads to the struggles with the jealous nobles. But all through

there is complexity of motive, and all through it is quite clear what the different characters are striving for. And of these dramatis personæ at least three are finely drawn, Edward himself, on whom we have already touched sufficiently, Mortimer, and Gaveston. The last is a 'peevish Frenchman,' fond in a way of Edward, but determined to push his own interests through the weakness of the king; defiant in the presence of the barons and ready 'to pay them home,' he remains reckless and jaunty to the last, even when he sees

That heading is one, and hanging is the other,  
And death is all. ii. 5, 27—29.

It is a fine touch that, the last words which Gaveston speaks in the play refer to his master:

'Traucherous Earl, shall I not see the king?' iii. 1, 15.

Not less vigorous is the portrait of Mortimer, the terribly stern unyielding man, who never turns aside from the path of ambition, pursuing to the end his 'deep-engendered schemes,' and passing at last from the stage with stoical submission:

Base fortune, now I see that in thy wheel  
There is a point, to which when men aspire,  
They tumble headlong down: that point I touched,  
And seeing there was no place to mount up higher,  
Why should I grieve at my declining fall?  
Farewell, fair queen: weep not for Mortimer,  
That scorns the world, and, as a traveller,  
Goes to discover countries yet unknown.

There is one decidedly weak point in the play, and that is the portrait of the queen. The poet's hand



seems to have faltered over the work; he had no definite conception in his mind; in any case it is not to be extracted from the play. Some of the scenes indeed where the queen is present are admirable. The reconciliation, for instance, between her and the king (Act I. 4. 320—340) exhibits wonderful delicacy and lightness of treatment. But at other times her connection with Mortimer is at the very least equivocal. It is to him that she appeals for help in the first instance, and all through, up to Act III. sc. 2, her position is doubtful. Still, when she leaves the king to sail for France, her words are,

‘Unnatural wars, where subjects brave their king,  
God end them once!’

and yet in the next act she is herself intriguing against Edward, and for the rest of the play is definitely ranged against him, until in Act V. (2. 43—45) she hints at his death, just as in *Richard II.* Bolingbroke ambiguously suggests the murder of Richard.

This is to my mind the only fault in the play. For the rest it is emphatically a powerful drama, with fine characterisation, a clear and continuous thread of interest running throughout, and a climax of incomparable pathos. In the death scene of Edward the poet strikes the deepest note of tragedy. Those three simple lines,

Tell Isabel, the queen, I looked not thus  
When for her sake I ran at tilt in France,  
And there unhorsed the Duke of Clermont,

are a fine specimen of what Mr Ruskin calls penetrative imagination. They reach to the very heart of things; they remind one of Faustus' 'o lente lente currite noctis equi'—of Othello's—

And say besides that in Aleppo once,  
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk  
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,  
I took by the throat the circumcised dog  
And smote him thus.

In such cases by one simple sentence, by the half-conscious reminiscence, the poet brings into full relief the tragedy of the situation, pointing the pitiless contrast between the present and the past. And the whole scene in *Edward II.* is on this level; the dramatist never falters. The agony is short, sharp and concentrated, unspoil't by the diffuseness that mars the parallel scene in *Richard II.* It is like the death of the queen in *Henry VIII.* Putting aside Shakspeare, where shall we find in our dramatic literature anything equal in point of pure pathos to Marlowe's work in the close of his tragedy? It is like the 'wild preternatural' grief that hangs as a cloud over the terrible fourth act of the *Duchess of Malfy*, with its masquerade of madness and death.

I began this essay by suggesting that Marlowe's merits had been rather over-estimated. Second thoughts are best; it seems to me almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of what he did. When Marlowe came before the world the stage was in a

state of chaos. Playwrights had abundance of crude power and energy, but so far there was no channel into which this dramatic activity could flow. Men, to vary the metaphor, were still groping about in the dark; what they did was at the best merely tentative, because no definitive form of drama existed. But with Marlowe came a steady stream of light that proclaimed the new order of things. And the presence of this new power in literature was soon felt; there could be no resistance<sup>1</sup>. One after another he showered his benefits on the stage. He created the noblest vehicle of dramatic expression of which any language is capable; he created a new dramatic form; he created in *Edward II.* a new type of play; he annihilated the classical drama, he annihilated the vernacular drama; and in place of them he substituted something infinitely richer than men had ever dreamed of, something that appealed to all classes, that teemed with life and passion, that gathered into itself all the

<sup>1</sup> Nash, of course, as befitted the satirist of the day (vide Mr Bullen's *Introduction*), and Greene both bitterly attacked Marlowe (Dyce, *Greene and Peele*, p. 35). They thought, in Horatio's phrase, that he 'might have rhymed', damned his plays, and afterwards stole the metre of them, precisely as the manager purloined poor Dennis' 'thunder'. Later on we find Nash working with Marlow at *Dido*, or rather finishing the play (in more senses than one), and Greene, very probably, collaborating with him in *The Contention* and *True Tragedy*. As for Marlowe's plays their popularity steadily increased; Tamburlaine became the typical stage hero, Barabas, the typical villain. Allusions to them occur continually, e.g. in Peele's *Farewell* (p. 549 in Dyce's edition), in *Alcasar*, I. 2, in *Alphonsus* (p. 242) etc.; cf. too, Heywood's prologue to the *Few of Malta*. *Faustus* even penetrated to South Germany.

intellectual power and vigour of the people, something, in a word, that could be—as the classical drama could not, as the vernacular drama could not—the supreme and final expression of all that men thought, and did, and suffered. He had, in fact, solved the problem with which we started. He had shown how the stage could be, and should be, in the very widest sense a national institution.

And now what influence did this young poet exercise on his successor Shakspeare? What are their relative positions in the history of the English drama?

In the growth of every art there is a period of preliminary development; full and final perfection is not reached all at once. The facts, the technical possibilities, so to speak, that form the science of the art, and that once revealed are the property of all, have to be explored, and usually this task of discovery falls to the share of inferior craftsmen. Talent does its work, it accumulates the required knowledge, and then genius comes and inherits the labours of its humbler predecessor. And so it was with the Elizabethan drama, with this difference, that the chief of Shakspeare's forerunners, the writer who next to Shakspeare himself did more than any one else for the stage, was himself a man of supreme power. The drama, the very crude drama of the morality writers, of Greene, of Kydd, passed through the alembic of his genius, and it shone with a thousand fresh lights. It was transfigured, transformed, and when the work fell from Marlowe's

hands Shakspeare took up the task and carried it through to a superb completion. At one time critics read Shakspeare and Shakspeare alone, and they fell into the very natural error of assigning to him honour which belonged by right to his friend and rival; for Shakspeare's obligations to Marlowe in at least two points were enormous, and what these were it is not very difficult to see. Coleridge says, 'Shakspeare's blank verse is an absolutely new creation'; a large portion of this essay has been devoted to an attempt to show that blank verse, as we understand it, as Shakspeare understood it, came into birth at the bidding of Christopher Marlowe. This, then, is one of our points; Shakspeare's treatment of the historical drama is the other. In both matters his debt to Marlowe was, I think, very great. To take the question of blank verse. The history of Shakspeare's use of this metre is the history of his slow emancipation from the bonds of rhyme. It is useless to speculate on what he might have done had not Marlowe led the way and introduced blank verse on the stage. Shakspeare might have developed the verse for himself, or he might have gone on in the path which dramatists had long been treading and given us a rhymed *Hamlet*. In the same way he might but for Marlowe have thrown in his fortunes with the classical school; he might have observed all the unities, anticipated 'exact Racine,' and won the praise of Voltaire. The what-might-have-beens of literature are not a profit-



able study—'such things are vain.' An ounce of fact is worth a ton of conjecture, and it is enough to know that, as a mere matter of history, Shakspeare did not write tragedies of the *Gorboduc* type, but did carry on to its utmost limits the romantic and historical drama initiated by Christopher Marlowe: likewise it is enough to know that Marlowe was the recognised leader of the blank verse school, while Shakspeare for a time at least did not abandon the old rhymed couplet. Fortunately it is a matter of statistics, all duly set forth in Mr Fleay's *Shakespeare Manual*, where (p. 135) we may see the number of rhymed lines and of blank verse lines in the early comedies (which ought surely to include the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*), in the histories up to *Henry V.* and in the first tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*.

A cursory glance at Mr Fleay's tables demonstrates one thing, that the proportion of rhyme in Shakspeare's earlier plays is remarkably large: Shakspeare had obviously not adopted the theories of his rival. At the same time is it not a somewhat extreme statement of the case to say, as Mr Fleay does, that Shakspeare definitely 'joined the advocates of rhyme at first'? I should have thought rather that the poet was uncertain of his ground, that he was halting between the two schools, that in fact he had not yet 'found himself.'

The quantity of rhyme in the early plays is very great, but still they are not definitely written in rhyme.



Blank verse exercised already a strong influence on the poet, and what is really instructive to observe is not so much the quantity as the quality of the scenes in rhyme. Let us look for a moment at some of these dramas in detail. The First Part of *Henry VI.* is clearly not to be assigned wholly to Shakspeare; on the contrary he wrote, as far as we can judge on the evidence of style, only a very small part of what has come down to us as 1 *Henry VI.* His critics, however, agree in attributing to him at least one scene in the play, ii. 4, the plucking of the roses in the Temple Gardens<sup>1</sup>, and I think that, as Mr Swinburne suggests, Shakspeare was responsible for the noble parting of Talbot and his son, Act iv. 5. Now the first of these scenes is in blank verse, the second in rhyme, and it cannot be said that either metre definitely wins the day. The poet seems to give each a fair chance, and the combatants come off equal. So much then for the earliest specimen of Shakspeare's historical drama; let us take now the comedies. *Midsummer Night's Dream* can be dismissed at once; no argument can be based on the fact that it contains a strong proportion of rhyme. The rhyme is appropriate: artistic fitness justifies its use, whether or no Shakspeare designedly employed it to obtain certain definite effects, which indeed was probably the case. Doubt-

<sup>1</sup> Of course, if, as Mr Fleay suggests, *Shakespeare Manual*, p. 31, this scene was written, 'late, c. 1596', then the argument in the text goes for nothing.

less Titania, after proclaiming herself to be a 'spirit of no common rate,' would in Fairyland, as in the play, have proceeded to state her passion for Bottom in dainty rhymed couplets. The *Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labour Lost* are more to the point. In the first rhyme decidedly holds its own; 380 lines in a short play of 1770 lines represents a strong infusion of the metre ultimately abandoned by Shakspeare altogether. And yet even in this fantastic, farcical piece, the poet when he would strike a deep note of pathos has recourse to blank verse; he can give us lines like these, which, but for the regularity of rhythm, might come out of one of the latest plays.

Not know my voice! O time's extremity  
 Hast thou so cracked, and splitted my poor tongue  
 In seven short years, that here my only son  
 Knows not my feeble key of untuned cares?  
 Though now this grained face of mine be hid  
 In sap-consuming winter's drizzled snow,  
 And all the conduits of my blood froze up,  
 Yet hath my night of life some memory,  
 My wasting lamps some fading glimmer left,  
 My dull deaf ears a little use to hear:  
 All these old likenesses—I cannot err—  
 Tell me thou art my son Antipholus.

This passage seems to me to show that even thus early Shakspeare's instinct was guiding him towards the right path; it proves that at least in moments of real passion he appreciated the infinite superiority of blank verse as a means of expressing deep moral earnestness. And the same is true of *Love's Labour*

*Lost.* The infusion of rhyme is very strong, nearly two rhymed lines to every one of blank verse; but incomparably the noblest passage in the play, the great speech of Berowne in Act iii. (3. 289—365) is throughout in blank verse, with only one pair of rhymes (297, 98); the poet even forbears to end the speech with the usual jingling couplet. It would be unsafe to found any argument on *Henry VI., II.*<sup>1</sup> and *III.*, but passing on to *Romeo and Juliet*, of which the first draft was written, perhaps, somewhere about 1591, we find that although rhyme, especially alternate rhyme, still holds its ground, yet the 'quality of the scenes chiefly written in blank verse is far higher than that of the rhyming passages.' The quotation is from Professor Dowden, and no one would readily dissent from the opinion expressed in it. To think of *Romeo and Juliet*<sup>2</sup> is to think primarily of the two scenes that are the crown of the poet's lyrical tragedy; they are of course the garden scene, ii. 2, and the balcony scene, iii. 5. Both are in blank verse of wonderful fluency and sweetness. Looking therefore at these five plays—at the three comedies, at the historical play, and at his earliest tragedy, I do not think we are justified in saying that Shakspeare definitely represented the school opposed to Marlowe. It would I believe be nearer the truth to suppose that he perceived here 'a divided duty,' that instinct was

<sup>1</sup> Cf. however, Fleay, *Shakespeare Manual*, 32, 33.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Swinburne, *Study of Shakespeare*, p. 35.

leading him towards adoption of the metre from which Marlowe, be it noted, had never swerved, while tradition and conservatism kept him faithful in a measure to the old system. There are two other important plays on the list, *Richard III.* and *Richard II.*

After reading the criticisms of various writers—and still more—after reading the plays themselves, I cannot doubt that *Richard III.* is the earlier work. The two dramas raise one of the questions, where the metrical test conflicts with the æsthetic. But in such cases the internal evidence of style and treatment cannot be neglected; some special explanation of the metrical peculiarity must, if possible, be sought for, and the principle can be applied here. In all respects but one, *Richard II.* is a far finer play than *Richard III.* The latter, however, is written in blank verse; the former contains much rhyme. But there is a special reason why blank verse should preponderate in *Richard III.* In that play Shakspeare was writing altogether on the lines of Marlowe; his treatment of the subject, apart from the metre, strongly reflects the influence of his friend. In all probability they had been working together at the revision of *Henry VI.*, Parts II. and III., and it is clearly to that group, dealing with the fortunes of the House of York, that *Richard III.* belongs. Shakspeare in contributing his share to Parts II. and III. had been guided by Marlowe's example, and we may fairly assume that in

rounding off the series he would keep to the method employed in the first two dramas of what is really a trilogy of plays.

In the same way it is not unnatural to suppose that in writing *Richard II.* Shakspeare, being removed from the immediate influence of his friend who had died in 1593, would at times slip back into the old channel. And even in *Richard II.* his instinct is true as ever. The superb speech of Gaunt (ii. 1. 31—68), is not profaned by the jingle of any rhyme; the vigorous speeches of York in the same scene are equally rhymeless (163—185 and 186—208); similarly the great soliloquy of Richard in the fifth act is all in blank verse, and generally throughout the play the poet rarely in the best parts falls back into rhyme. It is in the first scene where, like the eagle in Horace, he is getting ready for a flight, that rhyme runs riot, and again in the fifth act, scene 3, where it makes desperate struggles to hold its ground. For the rest the poet can write vigorous and varied blank verse, until in *King John* rhyme has perceptibly decreased to 150 lines in a total of 2403; afterwards it steadily declined, as Mr Fleay's table shows, until in the *Tempest* there are but two rhymed lines, in the *Winter's Tale*, not one. At times, of course, Shakspeare employed it even in his greatest plays, but always for some special object. In *Othello* for instance, as Professor Dowden points out, in Act iii. 2. 210—220, the bitterness of Brabantio's reply to the

Duke's frigid commonplaces is immeasurably heightened by the rhymed parody of the cold comfort offered to him, 'the vacant chaff well-meant for grain;' and other instances might be quoted.

This blank verse question is obviously one of great importance, and if I might summarise my impressions I should say that the credit of having created blank verse belongs not to Shakspeare—assuredly not to Norton and Sackville, but absolutely to Christopher Marlowe—that there were when Shakspeare came up to London as a playwright two dramatic schools, engaged in a fierce struggle over the question of rhymed or unrhymed compositions—that Marlowe, the author of blank verse, was the recognized leader of the blank verse party, while Greene perhaps was his most distinguished opponent on the other side—that Shakspeare did not definitely join either school, but preserved for a time an ambiguous attitude, poetic instinct leading him to adopt blank verse as the most natural vehicle of dramatic expression, while tradition, inexperience and perhaps personal sympathies made him adhere to the old rhymed system—that in his earlier plays we can trace the struggle of these two motives, the more serious and reflective parts of his work being written as a rule in blank verse, the higher and less earnest in rhyme—that somewhere about the time of the composition of the original draft of his first tragedy *Romco and Juliet*, where the quality of the scenes in blank verse



is markedly superior to the general level of the scenes in rhyme, he became associated with Marlowe in the revision of the earlier sketches of *Henry VI.*, Parts II. and III.—that while still working under the influence of Marlowe's style he produced *Richard III.*, in which blank verse is for the time triumphant—that after the death of Marlowe he wrote *Richard II.*, and in the scenes which on general æsthetic grounds must be placed on a lower level than the body of the work, relapsed into the old groove,—that the ground lost in *Richard II.* was quickly recovered in *King John*, and the battle finally won in the Trilogy of *Henry IV.* Parts II. and III. (1597), and *Henry V.* (1599), in favour of blank verse. Whether, if Marlowe had not preceded Shakspeare the latter would have attained to his perfect mastery over blank verse, or would only partially have developed the resources of the metre, or, again, would never have broken the fetters of rhyme at all—these are questions which it is useless to ask, because impossible to answer. We need not waste time in theorising on a subject where the most “exquisite reason” must of necessity be purely subjective, and therefore valueless. There is only the one bare fact, that with the force of Marlowe's example to influence him, Shakspeare for some time was at least unwilling to give up the familiar rhyme; from this each will deduce his own conclusions.

I said that there was one other point in which Shakspeare was strongly affected by the work of his

predecessor. This was Marlowe's treatment of the historical play. The connection between the drama of Shakspeare and the drama of Marlowe is best seen in *Richard III.* and *Richard II.* No argument can be based on *Henry III.*, Part I. It is quite certain that that is a composite work, in which Marlowe and, probably, Peele had the principal shares, while Shakspeare added one or two scenes in the subsequent revision of the piece. In the same way we can put *Henry VI.* Parts II. and III. on one side, as being of disputed authorship. The first two historical plays of Shakspeare that we can feel any certainty in discussing are *Richard III.*<sup>1</sup> and *Richard II.*; each was written on a model furnished by Marlowe. *Richard III.* approximates to the peculiar type of drama represented by *Tamburlaine*, the *Few of Malta* and *Faustus*; in *Richard II.* we have a continuation of the legitimate historical play first seen in *Edward II.* In other words, these two plays correspond to the radical differences of dramatic construction that divide the earlier and the later styles of Marlowe. *Richard III.* is a one character play; the main interest of the piece turns on the central figure of Richard. We follow him from scene to scene, as slowly but surely, consumed

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that *Richard III.* may, as Mr Fleay thinks, represent Shakspeare's revision of an older play by Peele, a suggestion made by Coleridge, *Lectures*, p. 27. We are justified, however, in assuming that the character of Richard himself is absolutely the work of Shakspeare alone.

by pent-up fiery energy, he works his way like some pitiless personification of destiny to the final goal. The rest of the play only hangs together so far as it is all dominated by this one overshadowing power. Some of the characters are finely drawn, especially the queen-mother, Margaret, the prophetess of evil and despair in the piece, but we instinctively feel that the dramatist only created them to be the victims of Richard's far-reaching, resistless ambition. If we might employ a very homely metaphor, we should compare them to ninepins set up for Richard to knock down. But the structure of the play is far superior to that of any of Marlowe's pieces, *Edward II.* alone excepted. The minor characters in *Tamburlaine* are mere ciphers, part, as it were, of the dramatic machinery; the minor characters in *Richard III.* serve as foils. Each constitutes his tiny contrast to the cruel power that crushes them one and all, as man may crush the flies that light on his hand. And this central figure is supremely impressive in its unredeemed, self-avowed villany. Richard is the incarnation of cynical heartlessness; he is morally colour-blind; he sees—not good, but possibilities of evil in everything. Iago is a villain, 'the most perfect evil-doer, the most potent demi-devil,' but even in Iago the voice of conscience, or of what passes with him as such, can make itself heard. He puts himself to the trouble of spinning elaborate sophistries for his own self-deception, and when his scruples are particularly

persistent falls back on the idea that he has been wronged, a thought which gnaws at his heart like 'a poisonous mineral.' He lashes himself into a fury of counterfeit passion, and in what Coleridge finely calls 'the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity' casts about for excuses, for self-justifications which he almost manages to believe in. Iago in short cannot look unblenching into the hell that he is preparing with infinite care for others—and for himself. Richard is Iago without the saving clause. The first scene of the play flashes the light into his black, self-centred heart. 'I am determined to prove a villain' is his boast, and he is as good as his word. He has infinite powers of deception, and he takes an intelligible pleasure in contemplating these powers; but he knows all the same that there is just one person against whom they can avail nothing, and that person is himself. Self-deception for such a man would be useless, and wisely enough he never attempts it. Richard, in fact, is rather like Mr Stevenson's friend Mr Hyde; he is all bad, the heir of all the ages of the House of York, in the sense that he has inherited all the evils of his line. Years of sin and civil war have produced that 'foul indigested lump,' and yet by a freak of nature, or rather by the perfect fairness of Shakspeare, Richard possesses the greatest intellectual powers, and thus our loathing of him is heightened tenfold. He is the only character in Shakspeare in whom the moral element is non-existent, and this conception of

flawless, self-conscious, self-confessed villany is essentially Marlowesque. Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*<sup>1</sup>, Barabas in the *Jew of Malta*, and Richard III. are characters conceived and worked out on the same principle<sup>2</sup>. The first two enumerate with complacent cynicism their crimes in the past; Richard, his crimes past, present and to come.

I am determined to prove a villain  
 And hate the idle pleasures of these days;  
 Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,  
 By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams,  
 I've set my brother Clarence and the King  
 In deadly hate the one against the other.

We are reminded too of Marlowe in another point. There is little evolution in Richard's character; he is practically the same throughout. As a rule character-development is one of Shakspeare's great merits; his men and women seldom pass from the stage at the end what they were when the curtain rose. They change, and rightly, as the course of the drama proceeds: the Macbeth who drives with Banquo across the heath is not the Macbeth who will never fear 'till Birnam forest come to Dunsinane.' It is rare that we have a character who springs Pallas-like from the brain of its creator fully equipped, fully developed; and Richard is one of the few. This was quite in

<sup>1</sup> It is, I suppose, fairly safe to assume that *Titus Andronicus* is in great part the work of Marlowe.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Titus Andronicus*, IV. I. 98—120; 124—144, *Jew of Malta*, II. 3. 177—202; 203—215, and *Edward II.*, v. 4. 30—8.



Marlowe's manner. Marlowe did not care very much about the finer shades of character-drawing; the subtler *nuances* that came readily enough to the delicate touch of Shakspeare stood outside the range of his power. His heroes move upon the scene splendid, impressive, and after they have fretted their hour on the stage we can trace no material difference in them; as some one has expressed it, they are counters stamped at the outset. Thus Marlowe might have drawn Richard III.; Richard II. he could never have achieved, just as even in *Richard III.* the terrible irony that runs throughout the play, lending to the simplest scenes the most weird intensity of meaning, would have been equally beyond his reach. Another peculiarity in Shakspeare's tragedy that points pretty clearly to the influence of Marlowe is the wild, passionate, melodramatic energy that marks some of the incidents, reminding us of the Titanic vigour, the truculence almost of *Tamburlaine*. The action of the piece is too violent, the whirl of passion too overwhelming. The effects, too, are crude, rock-hewn. The dramatist is not careful to mould the forms with minute delicacy; he trusts to the general impressiveness of the figures. In his great plays Shakspeare never neglects the details; all is chiselled with consummate skill; the work leaves his hands flawless to the most critical eye. But *Richard III.*, like Marlowe's earlier works, produces its effect—and what a supreme effect it is!—by the sense of superhuman power and force-



fulness that it breathes ; we must stand at a distance, where the eye can take in the full impression of the bold masterly outlines. Of minor matters, the figure of the Queen Mother is precisely such a character as Marlowe might have drawn, had he possessed any faculty at all for realizing strongly the passions of a woman's heart, while the death scene of Clarence is clearly a reminiscence of *Edward II.*, Act v. 5. Shakspeare may too have had in his mind's eye the murder of Guise, *Massacre at Paris*, Scene xxi. Cf. also *Henry VI.*, Part III. Act v. 6.

If *Richard III.* was modelled on Marlowe's earlier style, *Richard II.* is a continuation of the later method adopted in *Edward II.* I endeavoured in speaking of the latter to show that it is the first specimen of genuine historical drama our literature possesses. Up to the production of *Edward II.*, there had been chronicle plays, but no proper dramatization of history, pageants loosely strung together, but never an animated organic whole. A true historical drama, like any other play, must be wrought round some definite idea—unity of purpose must inform the various parts. The playwright has abundance of material from which to choose, but in selecting his incidents he bears in mind their applicability to the development of his plot. He admits nothing superfluous. Each scene must be a link in the chain. And so with the characters. Complexity of motive is essential to the action of a piece, and in each case the

motives of the dramatis personæ must be patent and adequate. The historical play, in other words, only differs from the ordinary drama in that the poet drawing on history takes the actual events as the framework of his story, and fills in the rest with such dramatic details as his imagination suggests. This Marlowe had done in *Edward II.*, and henceforth the historical drama proceeded on the lines laid down in that play. If *Edward II.* marked a decided advance on the construction of *Tamburlaine*, *Richard II.* was, I think, no less superior in general conception and effectiveness to *Richard III.* We no longer have the concentration of interest, the singleness of motive that made the latter turn from first to last on the one figure which dominated the scene; *Richard II.* is more complex, penetrated altogether with a finer dramatic spirit. Primarily indeed our gaze is riveted on the king himself, the man of brilliant phrases who can do nothing; we follow him from scene to scene, somewhat pitiful, as Mr Swinburne says, but not pitiable, and by the sheer force of his suffering our sympathy is wrung from us. But Richard does not stand alone; there are other characters in the piece in whose motives and action the dramatist strives to interest us. Whether he succeeds, whether York, Aumerle and Mowbray are as tangible, as life-like as the parallel dramatis personæ in Marlowe's plays is another question; Mr Swinburne thinks they are not. 'They are shifting,' he says 'fitful, vaporous, their outlines change, withdraw, dis-

solve...they cannot "hold this visible shape" in which the poet presents them even long enough to leave a distinct image, a decisive impression for better or for worse, on the mind's eye of the most simple and open-hearted reader.'

For myself, I do not think any serious exception can be taken to this criticism; Mortimer to my mind is a far more solid and vivid creation than any of the subsidiary characters, York perhaps alone excepted, who gather about Richard. We need not, however, institute any elaborate comparisons between the two plays; it is enough to have noted the points of connection between them, above all to have emphasized the importance of Marlowe's work as marking an immense advance in the direction of the true historical drama.

To estimate exactly the obligations of one writer to another is always a difficult, if not altogether impossible, task: the second comer enters upon the inheritance, the literary capital, so to speak, that the efforts of his predecessor have amassed, and we must rest content with showing what this inheritance was. If Marlowe had never lived, would Shakspeare have written as he did? who can say? As I have already remarked, we can only assume that Marlowe's introduction of blank verse on the stage rendered the use of that metre much easier for Shakspeare; in the same way, we can only assume that Marlowe's having led the way with *Edward II.* made it much less difficult

for Shakspeare to write *Richard II.*, and the historical plays that followed, than would have been the case had the works of Greene, and Peele, and Kydd been his sole guide what to avoid and what to aim at. To show what Marlowe did, and what previous dramatists (save the mark) had not done, is here, I think, as always, the best commentary on Shakspeare's debt to him. That the reluctant pangs of abdicating royalty in *Edward II.* suggested the main idea of *Richard II.* anyone who read the two dramas could see for himself without requiring to possess the critical sagacity of a Charles Lamb: whether the second version is an improvement on the first is likewise a question that each reader will decide on his own account. There is just one scene in *Richard II.* that Marlowe, I believe, could never have conceived; it is the scene in the Duke of York's garden. There is nothing in *Edward II.* parallel to this exquisite interlude. Shakspeare gives us here an instance of the happy tact that stooping to small things lends such convincing individuality to his plays, bringing home to us the terrible truth of what he describes. We have a similar instance of this fine felicity in the introduction of the old servant in the last act, with the homely talk that follows. By such prosaic touches the full force of what is passing on the stage is borne in upon us. We stand with the queen and listen to the gardener, and when at last she cries out the break in the silence comes as a positive relief to our tension. And the same effect is

produced by the entrance of the groom just after Richard's soliloquy. It helps us more than anything else to realize the position of the king; the terrible blending of the tragic and the commonplace is the realism of life, and it is all part of Shakspeare's unfailing sensibility, of that indefinable quality which made him write—to borrow Wordsworth's phrase—'with his eye on his object,' a quality of which Marlowe was singularly devoid. On the other hand, if Marlowe could not have hit on the garden scene, assuredly he would never have been guilty of 'the jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits' that disfigure the intolerable scene in Act v.—'Speak it in French, king, say "pardonne moi"'—in all Marlowe's work there is no line like this.

And now my 'occupation's gone,' and only one more question suggests itself—is a peroration essential? Perhaps, seeing how many eloquent passages in the 'Ercles vein' have been written on Marlowe, we can dispense with one. It was long before his merits were recognised, but time has done him justice, and no history of the English drama would be complete, or definitive, that did not assign to him the first place in the crowd of pre-Shaksperian dramatists. For us the works of Marlowe have a double interest, historically, because they are incomparably superior to anything that had gone before; intrinsically, because they contain a wealth of poetry the most splendid, the most imperishable.

## APPENDIX.

AMONG the plays assigned to Shakspeare there are four of which it is practically certain that Marlowe was a part author; they are, of course, *Henry VI.*, I., II. and III., and *Titus Andronicus*. How far each of these dramas is the work of Shakspeare, and how far the crude originals have survived in them, we cannot say: there is only the internal evidence to guide us, and that everybody naturally interprets his own way. But though on points of style differences of opinion may exist, peculiarities of diction, out-of-the-way words, odd turns of expression, ἀπαξ λεγόμενα in short—and of such there is no lack in these four plays—cannot be explained away; consequently they should I imagine, be allowed to constitute a tiny link in the chain of evidence. If, for instance, from Shakspeare's authentic works not one undoubted use of the curious phrase 'to this gear' can be quoted, if the expression occurs repeatedly in Marlowe's plays, and if, as is the case, we find the word in *Henry VI.* and *Titus Andronicus* in passages where the general style and atmosphere is Marlowesque, the coincidence surely must cast its atom of weight in favour of any theory that would assign the passages in question to the author of *Tamburlaine*. Individually such points may be of infinitesimal importance; collectively they are not so contemptible. Every writer has his vocabulary, and having once used a word he is likely to employ it again. Now in



*Titus Andronicus*, as Mr Fleay points out, there are 204 non-Shaksperian words; in the same way in the three parts of *Henry VI*. I have marked a good number of unusual words and peculiar phrases, the more important of which it seemed worth while to bring together, noting too some of the more marked parallelisms in style between passages in these three plays and passages in Marlowe's undoubted works.

With regard to Parts II. and III., accepting to a certain extent (for want of something better) the theory advanced in the New Shakspeare Society's *Proceedings* by Miss Lee, I have referred very frequently, under the abbreviations *C*, and *TT*, to the two plays, *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*. By 'non-Shaksperian' I mean that the word is not found in any of the undoubted plays, my authority in each case being Schmidt's invaluable *Lexicon*. As bearing somewhat on the authorship of Parts II. and III. it may not be amiss to note the great number of classical references in the two plays; we repeatedly light on allusions and even quotations that strongly suggest the hand of the young (Nash would have added 'idiote') 'art-master' fresh from the University. Here are some chance references, many of the lines having no equivalent in the parallel passages in *The Contention* and *True Tragedy*.

Part II. Act i. 4, 20—not in *C*; same scene, line 65—not in *C*; iii. 2, 92, and 116—19; iv. 1, 99 and 116—not in *C*, and 135—137; v. 1, 26—not in *C*, and 100 (where the simile is taken from Propertius, *Elegies* ii. 1, 63); v. 2, 59—not in *C*, and 62.

Part III. Act i. 3, 47—not in *TT*; ii. 1, 51—53; ii. 2, 146—148—not in *TT*; ii. 3, 53; ii. 5, 120; ii. 6, 12; iii. 2, 188—190—not in *TT*; iv. 2, 19—21—not in *TT*; iv. 8, 24; v. 6, 21—22.

As for the random notes that follow, some of the coincidences have been previously pointed out; some, perhaps, not.

*Henry VI. Part I.*

| Act | Scene | Line  |  |
|-----|-------|-------|--|
| i   | 1     | 1—5   | Obviously Marlowesque; cf. <i>II. Tamburlaine</i> , v. 3, 1—7. Cf. Coleridge, <i>Lectures</i> , p. 272.  |
| „   | „     | 149   | cf. <i>II. Tamburlaine</i> , iv. 4, 42.  |
| „   | „     | 177   | ‘stern’ (=helm). Cf. <i>II. Henry VI.</i> iii. 2, 91 (where not in <i>C</i> ): elsewhere only in <i>Pericles</i> iv. 1. 64 (by Shakspeare?); Marlowe, <i>Dido</i> , iii. 1, 108; v. 1, 61. |
| „   | 2     | 95    | ‘buckle with’; cf. iv. 4, 5; v. 3, 28, <i>II. Henry VI.</i> i. 4, 50. Non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>Dido</i> i. 2, 19.   |
| „   | 4     | 100   | ‘gathered head’—of troops, cf. <i>II. Henry VI.</i> iv. 5, 10; <i>Titus Andronicus</i> iv. 4, 64. Non-Shaksperian; <i>Edward II.</i> ii. 2, 121; <i>Massacre at Paris</i> xi. 27.          |
| „   | 5     | 12    | ‘high-minded’. Non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>Edward II.</i> i. 1, 149.   |
| ii  | 3     | 21    | cf. <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> ii. 1, 9 and line 29.  |
| iv  | 1     | 184   | ‘decipher’ (=detect): cf. <i>Titus Andronicus</i> iv. 2, 8.  |
| v   | 3     | 76—77 | cf. <i>Titus Andronicus</i> ii. 1, 82—83. <i>Richard III.</i> i. 2, 228. Sonnet 41.  |
| „   | 4     | 87    | ‘reflex’: verb non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> iii. 1, 52; iv. 4, 2; v. 1, 70.  |
| „   | „     | 121   | Obviously by Marlowe.  |
| „   | 5     | 9     | ‘fruition’; non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> ii. 7, 29.  |
| „   | „     | 108   | cf. <i>Edward II.</i> v. 4, 65—66; <i>Massacre at Paris</i> xi. 45.  |

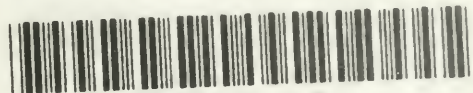
*Henry VI. Part II.*

|   |   |     |  |
|---|---|-----|--|
| i | 1 | 24  | cf. Version of Margaret’s speech in <i>C</i> with <i>Dido</i> iv. 4, 116.  |
| „ | „ | 249 | cf. <i>Massacre at Paris</i> ii. 47; cf. the speech here and in <i>C</i> with Guise’s great soliloquy.           |
| „ | 3 | 54  | ‘run a tilt’; non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>I. Henry VI.</i> iii. 2, 51; <i>Edward II.</i> v. 5, 66; not in <i>C</i> . |
| „ | „ | 83  | cf. <i>Edward II.</i> i. 4, 407; not in <i>C</i> .   |
| „ | „ | 86  | ‘baseborn’; non-Shaksperian, cf. iv. 8, 49; <i>III. Henry VI.</i> ii. 2, 143, occurs repeatedly in               |

| Act | Scene | Line   |   |
|-----|-------|--------|---|
|     |       |        | Marlowe; in Greene, e.g. <i>Orlando Furioso</i> p. 108.   |
| i   | 3     | 164    | <i>C</i> has Greene's favourite 'for to'; altered in the revision.  |
| "   | 4     | 17     | 'To this gear', not in <i>C</i> ; found once in Shakspeare, <i>Richard III.</i> i. 4, 148, where however folios read 'shall we fall to worke?' cf. <i>Titus Andronicus</i> iv. 3, 51, cf. <i>Edward II.</i> v. 5, 36; <i>Dido</i> i. 1, 121; <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> ii. 2, 1; Greene has it, e.g. <i>Looking glass for London</i> p. 126 (Dyce's Edition). |
| iii | 1     | 164    | 'Liefest liege'; non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>Dido</i> v. 1, 256 ('liefest love'), Greene has 'liefest', e.g. <i>James IV.</i> v. 6, 14.   |
| "   | "     | 281—87 | cf. the lines here and in <i>C</i> with <i>Edward II.</i> ii. 2, 162.   |
| "   | "     | 293    | 'farfet', not in <i>C</i> ; non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>Dido</i> iii. 3, 64; <i>First Book of Lucan</i> 94.   |
| "   | "     | 331    | cf. Guise's speech, <i>Massacre at Paris</i> ii. 33—107.  |
| "   | 2     | 81     | 'Alehouse sign'—as term of reproach—only here, and <i>Titus Andronicus</i> iv. 2, 98, and <i>II. Henry VI.</i> v. 2, 67; not in <i>C</i> .  |
| "   | "     | 83     | in <i>C</i> ; cf. <i>Edward II.</i> iv. 6, 34.  |
| "   | "     | 216    | 'buckler' (=to defend), only here, and <i>Taming of Shrew</i> iii. 2, 241, and <i>III. Henry VI.</i> iii. 3, 99, cf. <i>Edward II.</i> i. 4, 288; ii. 5, 18; in <i>C</i> .  |
| iv  | 1     | 1—7    | Clearly by Marlowe; not in <i>C</i> .   |
| "   | "     | 48     | cf. <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> i. 2, 198; v. 1, 187.   |
| "   | 2     | 136    | 'pass not for'—in <i>C</i> —is it Shaksperian? Greene uses 'pass' in this sense, e.g. <i>Friar Bacon</i> p. 156, where Dyce quotes an instance from Chettle's <i>Kind-Harts Dream</i> ; for Marlowe, cf. <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> i. 1, 109; <i>Edward II.</i> i. 4, 142; v. 1, 77. Peele too has it, e.g. <i>Old Wives' Tale</i> p. 449.                    |
| v   | 1     | 191    | 'Sophister'; non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>Edward II.</i> i. 4, 255; not in <i>C</i> .  |
| "   | 3     | 31     | 'eternized'; non-Shaksperian, occurs six times in Marlowe, <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> i. 2, 72; <i>II. Tamburlaine</i> v. 1, 35; v. 2, 54. <i>Faustus</i> i.   |

| Act                        | Scene | Line    |  |
|----------------------------|-------|---------|--|
|                            |       |         | 15; <i>Dido</i> i. 1, 112; <i>Ovid's Elegies</i> x. 60. Greene has it, e.g. <i>Orlando Furioso</i> pp. 89, 108; <i>Friar Bacon</i> p. 155. Several instances in Mere's <i>Palladis Tamia</i> . |
| <i>Henry VI. Part III.</i> |       |         |  |
| i                          | I     | 1       | cf. Act ii. 1, 1; cf. <i>Edward II.</i> ii. 4, 21.   |
| "                          | "     | 60      | cf. line in <i>TT</i> with <i>Edward II.</i> ii. 2, 198.   |
| "                          | "     | 97      | cf. <i>Edward II.</i> iii. 2, 132; in <i>TT</i> .  |
| "                          | "     | 196     | 'conditionally'; non-Shaksperian: cf. <i>Faustus</i> v. 91; <i>Dido</i> iii. 1, 113; in <i>TT</i> .  |
| "                          | "     | 239     | cf. <i>Edward II.</i> ii. 2, 166.  |
| "                          | "     | 242     | cf. <i>Edward II.</i> v. 1, 41.  |
| "                          | 2     | 30      | cf. <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> ii. 5, 60—63.  |
| "                          | "     | 44      | 'what resteth'; not, I believe, Shaksperian: often in Marlowe, e.g. <i>II. Tamburlaine</i> ii. 1, 11; <i>Edward II.</i> iv. 5, 72; not in <i>TT</i> .  |
| "                          | 4     | 21      | 'overmatching'; non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> ii. 1, 39; not in <i>TT</i> .   |
| "                          | "     | 28      | 'quenchless'; non-Shaksperian in <i>Plays</i> ; <i>Lucrece</i> 1554; cf. <i>II. Tamburlaine</i> iii. 5, 27; <i>Dido</i> ii. 1, 187; <i>Edward II.</i> v. 1, 44; in <i>TT</i> .                 |
| "                          | "     | 72      | 'preachment'; non-Shaksperian, cf. <i>Edward II.</i> iii. 2, 22; iv. 6, 112.   |
| "                          | "     | 137     | the famous line plagiarised from Greene.   |
| ii                         | 3     | 4       | cf. <i>I. Tamburlaine</i> ii. 1, 9; in <i>TT</i> .   |
| "                          | "     | 56      | 'foreslow'; non-Shaksperian, <i>Edward II.</i> ii. 4, 39; <i>Ovid's Elegies</i> vii. 46; cf. Peele's <i>Alcazar</i> p. 436; not in <i>TT</i> .   |
| "                          | 6     | 32      | cf. line in <i>TT</i> with <i>Massacre at Paris</i> xviii. 2.  |
| iii                        | 2     | 123—195 | Like all Gloucester's speeches this passage is quite in Marlowe's style.   |
| "                          | "     | 195     | Possibly a reminiscence of the prologue to the <i>Few of Malta</i> .   |
| v                          | 1     | 108     | cf. <i>Massacre at Paris</i> xxiv. 62; <i>Few of Malta</i> v. 5, 30.   |
| "                          | 6     | 29      | cf. <i>Edward II.</i> v. 5, 39; <i>Richard III.</i> i. 4, 165.   |
| "                          | "     | 61      | cf. <i>Edward II.</i> i. 1, 92; so Webster has 'but blood flies upward and bedews the heavens'.  |

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