

University Wits

The next stage of the development of British drama ranges from 1580-1596. It includes the plays of Lily, Peele, Green, Lodge, Nashe, Kyd and Marlowe, known as University wits because they came either from Oxford or from Cambridge. Commenting on the contribution of the University wits to British drama Nicoll writes, the classists had form, but no fire, the popular dramatist had interest but little sense of form, Drama that is to say, was struggling between a well-formed chill and structureless enthusiasm. The great merit of the University wits was that they came with their passion and poetry, and their academical training, to unite these forces, and thus to give Shakespeare a pliable and fitting medium for expression of his genius.

John Lily (1554- 1606)

Lily was a representative figure of University Wits. He basically wrote for private theatres. Lily first of all created genuine romantic

atmosphere linked with humour and fancy for romantic comedy. He deftly assimilated realism, classicism and romanticism in his comedies. Lily successfully depicted comic characters both as types and individuals. The device of mistaken identity, that is a girl dressed as a boy, is traced back to Lily. The introduction of songs, symbolical of mood or movement of a particular comedy owes its popularity to Lily. He thus paved the way for the blossoming of Shakespeare's dramatic genius. Some of his important plays are *Sapho and Pahoa* (1584) *The Woman in The Moon* (1588) *Midas* (1589) and *The Woman in The Moon*.

George Peele (1557- 1596)

Peele's work consists of *The Arrangement of Paris* (1584) *The Battle of Alcazar* (1594) and *The Old Wives's Tale* (1595). His range is versatile. He has left behind a pastoral, romantic tragedy, a chronicle history and a romantic satire. He juxtaposes reality and romance in his plays. His plays are full of passages of new and delightful poetry, and when the poetry is good, his blank verse and his heroic couplet are smooth and tender.

Robert Greene (1558- 1592)

Greene' plays include *The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon*, *The Honourable History of Fair Bacon and Fair Bungay* and *The Scottish History of James the 4th*. He was the first master of the art of plot construction in British Drama. In his plays, Greene has three distinct worlds mingled together – the world of magic, the world of aristocratic life, and the world of the country. There is a peculiar romantic humour and rare combination of realism and idealism in his plays.

Thomas Kyd (1558-1594)

Kyd' only play *The Spanish Tragedy*, a snecan tragedy, is land mark in drama. It is a well- constructed play in which the dramatist has skilfully woven passion, pathos and fear. He succeeded in producing dialogue that is forceful and capable. Kyd introduced the revenge motif in tragedy. He thus influenced Shakespeare' *Hamlet* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Thomas Lodge (1558-1625) and **Thomas Nash**, who wrote *The Wounds of Civil War* and *The Isle of Dogs* respectively.

Christopher Marlowe (1563- 1593) as a dramatist Marlowe surpassed all other university wits and as metrist is almost as great as William Shakespeare. His memorable plays are *Tamburlaine, Dr. Faustus, Edward 2 , The Jew of Malta, The Tragedy of Dido, The Queen of Carthage* and *The Massacre of Paris*. Swinburn calls him “*the first great poet, the father of English tragedy and the creator of Blank Verse*”.

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