

Theme of Humanism Complex in Christopher Marlowe's Tragedies

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Abstract: *Marlowe's plays reflected his strong emotions of humanism. Tambelain the Great reflects people's infinite pursuit of rights. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus reflects the infinite pursuit of knowledge. The Jew of Malta reflects the infinite pursuit of wealth. Marlowe showed their superman spirits that they outdid themselves and were able to do everything by shaping the heroes as supermen who never gave in and always transcended the limit of humans, which reflected both Marlowe's personal ambition and the spirit of the times that they wanted to struggle to break through all the limitations and get good things during the Renaissance.*

Keywords: *Christopher Marlowe; Humanism Complex; Features; Influence.*

1. INTRODUCTION

During the Renaissance, humanism was the core idea of politics, economy and culture in society. Although people had different understandings about humanism, the core content is the same. Humanism confirms the position of human in life. It holds the idea of people oriented and replaced the Theocracy that the church advocated for human rights. It confirmed the contemporary living to knock the asceticism and afterlife thoughts down. It relieved the imprisonment of church with the freedom of human beings. Humanists advocated the ration, the pursuit of knowledge and the exploration of the universe to object to the obscurantism. Humanism advocated mercy and philanthropism and praised friendship and personal morality. And then it returned the centrality from god to human beings. The vitality and spirit of creativity defeated the resistance of church gradually and became the spirit of times for human beings.

The plays during British Renaissance flourished based on the spirit of humanism. The characteristics of the plays during this time are as followed. First, it reflected people's patriotism and pursuit of peaceful life such as the historical plays created by Shakespeare. Secondly, the pursuit of a happy life was highly praised during this time. And at the same time, the plays condemned the social endemic and the evil of human beings such as the romantic comedy by Shakespeare and the secular comedy by Ben Johnson and so on. Third, it focused on the great powers of human beings. For example, the playwrights like Marlowe, the representatives during the Renaissance were aware of great creativity. But at the same time, it had the devastating power. If not restrained, it would endanger the normal life of people and society.

2. HUMANISM IN MARLOWE'S TRAGEDIES

Marlowe created seven plays in total. *Tambelain the Great*, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta* not only attracted the audience deeply during his time but also inspired the

readers in the future because of the great momentum and ups and downs. The heroes in these three plays are ambiguous, sovereign, and proficient in the knowledge of the universe, blinded by greed or predatory to get the treasures around the world, which reflected the humanism in Renaissance. Therefore, Marlowe became the most creative and innovative playwrights among the pioneers of Shakespeare and he became the founder of bloom of Elizabethan stage.

2.1. Aspiration for Power in *Tambelain the Great*

The play, *Tambelain the Great* made Marlowe famous overnight. Tambelain the Great was the Mongolian emperor in the 14th century, who was said to be the descendant of Genghis Khan. This emperor led his army with irresistible force to occupy a large area of the world, which ranged from the east, Turk to the west, ancient Persia and from the north, Siberia to the south, Indian subcontinent. Playwrights divided this play into two parts. The first part recalled the process how the emperor who was born in a poor family occupied Turk empire. The second part told us the success he made in Babylon. And he made the vanquished country pull his chariot. Meanwhile, there was love in this play. The Egyptian prince, Zenocrate became Tambelain's captive. But he spared her life due to his love for her. And this tragedy ended up with their death.

The hero's pursuit of rights reflected the humanism in *Tambelain the Great*. Marlowe created a Tambelain who is ambiguous, strong, aggressive and with great achievement. His behavior always revealed a haughtiness that he can conquer everything but he cannot be conquered just like a superman. In deed, he went forward step by step to the targets that were so strong. He conquered Persia, Turkey, Egypt and so on one after another. During the process, his strong desire to the rights can not be obstructed. For example, when fighting against Egypt, this superman would be faced not only with the smoke of gun power on the battlefield but also with the dissatisfactory in his life. However, at the same time of conquering Sudan, he tried to conquer his lover at any cost. Although his lovers interceded with him for her father, his hands kept still. Therefore, he abandoned the morality without any thoughts. The only principle in his life was the pursuit of life. Even after his son betrayed himself, he killed his son without gloves. In words, Tambelain's grandiloquence hit the floor. He called on his subordinate, "We need to work hard and never stop until succeed. The perfect happiness is the bliss in heaven. The great achievements are the crown in the world." He declared to the world that the world would succumb to the Tambelain the Great. And his ambition magnified with his feat. Therefore, he was unsatisfied after seeking hegemony. He wanted to be king of kings. And he said bravely that he would be the whip of god and the thunder of the universe.

It is the ambition of Tambelain that reflected the voice of this giant, Marlowe in Renaissance. It reflected the humanistic thoughts that are the arrogance of life, ignorance of human's limitation and his unsatisfactory. The brave Marlowe beyond the limits surpassed himself at any costs. His humanism was the reflections of this surmounting. And among the characters created by him, Tambelain the Great spared no efforts to surpass himself to gain his ends, which represented the unique humanistic thoughts. Therefore, the character, Tambelain reflected Christopher Marlowe, the pioneer of the bright humanism.

2.2. Aspiration for Knowledge in *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus was written in a special time. On the one hand, human beings were of self-enhancement. And on the other hand, people still believed in witchcraft or even they were afraid of it. Marlowe and others cooperated with each other and finished this tragedy. The main part of this play was created by Marlowe such as Faustus's monologue, the description of Helen and so on. The words were consummate and powerful. The expressions were accurate and succinct. Only this giant, Marlowe can create the "The Grand Verse", commented by Ben Johnson.

The humanity factor in *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* was the hero, Faustus's infinite pursuit of knowledge. In the first part of this play told us that Faustus signed a blood oath with the devil due to his unsatisfactory to the knowledge he already had. He sold his soul to the devil to exchange for 24-year superman's strength and joy. In the second part, Faustus was so satisfied with his new knowledge and strength and made use of them as much as he likes. He made fun of the pope with hidden magic. Once on a royal party, he was invited to bring the Alexander the Great and his lover back to life with the power of devil in the illusions. He made a warrior who irritated him grow a pair of horns on his head. He conjured up a string of ripe grapes to a dutchess in a cold winter from the south. In the third part, the 24-year strength and joy were run out. His soul was going to be dragged to the hell according to the contract. At the approach of the final moment, Faustus was so regretted and begged the god to be saved from the eternal curse. In desperation, he asked the devil to make Helen, a beautiful lady who caused the Trojan War to be his lover.

In this play, Faustus was an ambiguous, confident and aggressive man. He was the giant who wanted to know and conquer everything. And even he was an extraordinary character who sold his soul to exchange for knowledge and strength at any cost. He thought confidently that everything in the world was in his hand. He wasn't satisfied with everything in this world including knowledge and rights. Unsatisfactory was his name. He wanted to be a superman just like the god. And the infinite knowledge and rights are what he wanted most. He has a big stomach. In order to satisfy his own desire, he was willing to sell his soul to the devil at any cost.

The image of Faustus had its own historical meaning. He represented the ordinary type of the humanists that all the ordinary people wanted to be a superman during the Renaissance in the 16th century. He marked the new times and new period after the middle Ages. As the man in middle Ages, Faustus had already got everything which made them happy including knowledge and rights. But he didn't feel happy or lucky at all. He was a man who was never satisfied. He regarded the world as someplace that exist infinite strength and benefits. And everything in the world was his accessory and took orders from him. The emperors and kings ordered everything on their own limited territory. But his head was going to extend just like human's brains. He wanted to be a superman who was equal to the god even if he had to pay everything.

2.3. Aspiration for Wealth in *The Jew of Malta*

The Jew of Malta presented the aspiration for wealth though the Jewish hero, Barabas on the Malta island, which was similar to the two tragedies mentioned above. The difference is the aspiration for wealth instead of the aspiration for knowledge or the aspiration for rights.

Barabas was a rich Jewish on the Malta Island. He was deprived all the wealth including residential holdings because he refused the governor to pay the expenses. And then he revenged crazily for the money. He mobilized his daughter to lie that she was the Christian so that she can enter the privatzimmer which was confiscated and rebuilt as a monastery. And she moved the buried treasure to another place. Moreover, he provoked a fight between the two suitors of his daughter. At last, both of them died. In order to punish his daughter, he even poisoned all the nuns in the monastery. What's more, he killed four insiders in order to silence them. Later, in the seesaw battles between the Turkish and the Christians in Malta, the Turkish failed because he always steered according to the wind and changed his attitude at random. Finally, he put an end to his guilty life after falling into the boiled water which was prepared by him in advance.

In this play, Barabas wasn't a devil at the beginning but a man full of imagination like Tambelain and Faustus. He just lost the courage and ambition to ride the whirlwind. His target was not the vast territory or the knowledge for life but his personal aspiration and wealth. His mind was filled with the

merchant ships on the ocean. And his eyes stared at the purse filled with sapphire, amethyst, hard topaz and zeasite. But this dream that he wanted freedom broke quickly. A series of unfair things came to him. The governor of Malta who believed in Christianity imputed the geld that he should pay to Barabas first. And then he forced to confiscate his wealth. It was the religious oppression that made him change himself. Then he started to revenge and contrives and became a self-centered devil. Therefore, Barabas was not an evildoer but a victim.

Marlowe wanted to create the character Barabas to show that the wealth corrupted and destroyed people as a whole, but what interested us most was the author's hidden positive and approved attitude towards the hero. Barabas was opposed to heathenism and looked down upon the power of god. He emphasized personal strength and wisdom. He objected to the Christians because they were evil, hypocrisy and arrogant. After being persecuted, the fire to resist the religion and morality burned even more brightly. And later he began to revenge wantonly. He poisoned the greed and wanky clergy to loot the wealth from the governor of Malta. Then, he contrived to revenge the Turkish who wanted to "rob the gold". Therefore, Barabas became Marlowe's voice tube to attack the religion and morality. Moreover, he became Marlowe's tool to resist the temporal society. Besides, plenty of attractive qualities emerged on his way to self development, which made Marlowe stand by the side of the devil unconsciously just like Milton. Although he was in trouble and persecuted repeatedly, Barabas still resisted and never gave in like Satan. He looked down upon the power of god and believed in human beings' scheme and strength, which showed the creativity of the clever villain and heroic devil. Compared with the hypocrisy and rotten Christians, there was no doubt that Barabas who believed that the history was the result of human beings' actions was a fresh power with spiritual energy.

3. FEATURES OF MARLOWE'S HUMANISM

Marlowe's humanism highly praised the human beings' strength. He put the values that emphasize the status, the value and the will of human beings at his time into the creation of characters in literature, which reflected the strong spirit during the Renaissance. The tragedy of the heroes in the plays showed poignant anxiety to human beings who broke the law of nature and society to pursue personal aspirations. Therefore, his humanism tended to be a kind of "limited" humanism.

First, Marlowe's humanism was based on the respect, honor, benefits and self-conceit of human beings. That was the same as the humanism during the Renaissance. And it was also the same as the humanism of other humanists. There is no exception that humanists advocated to respect individual honor and benefits during the Renaissance. Compared with other humanists at that time, Marlowe attached much importance on surpassing the extremity of human beings besides respecting individual honor and benefits. He believed that human beings had the ability to surpass themselves and challenge their extremity. Through the heroes in his plays can we find Marlowe's heroic spirit of surpassing the limitations of human beings. Therefore, the heroes in Marlowe's plays had some rebelliousness. They looked down upon the tradition and ignore the regularity. They surpassed themselves and the limitations of human beings during the process of permanent pursuit. This kind of bravery was advocated by the humanists, Marlowe. It was also the unique point in Marlowe's works. Compared with the humanists at his time, the humanistic heroes in Marlowe's works were anti-tradition and free from the regularity. They ignored the tradition and pursued what they wanted at any cost. There was only one belief in their mind. That is the pursuit of their own goals endlessly. Even though their goals were beyond the extremity of human beings, they would never give up until death. Tambelain the Great, Doctor Faustus and the Jewish, Barabas in Malta were the best examples. The heroes in Marlowe's plays were the ones that can never be matched. They surpassed limitations of human beings' thoughts, morality and behavior and did everything that seemed to be impossible to achieve their own goals at any cost.

Then, the heroes in Marlowe's plays had to be faced with their limitations after vigorous pursuit. And their aspirations ended up with their death. The death not only meant the end of their life but also meant the end of their surpass of human beings. As a humanist in the Renaissance, Marlowe himself cannot come up with some good suggestions to resolve this contradiction. On the one hand, Marlowe and the heroes in his works all believed that human beings can surpass themselves and the universe. On the other hand, they knew the limitations of human beings. No matter who they were, they would go to death once they violated the law of nature. Even if he was Tambelain the Great, he had to be faced with his death. And Marlowe can not solve this difficult problem during his short life. The heroic humanists in Marlowe's plays had enough bravery and wisdom to surpass themselves and the limitations of human beings and made some achievements, but they still cannot escape from the death. To some degree, the death of those heroes reflected the limitations of Marlowe's humanism.

Even so, Marlowe's tragedies began a new period of human beings' epistemology. During this period, people waked up from their obedience to the outside power. They started to realize their own strength and importance. They began to identify and define themselves. If only they were human beings, their strength was limited. They always solicited and were greedy. As a result, they failed because of their excess. It was the tragedy which cannot be avoided in their life. But the struggle gave the new meanings and purposes to human beings' life.

4. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE FORMING OF MARLOWE'S HUMANISM

Marlowe was not born with the thoughts of humanism. It had its own process of formation and development. On the one hand, Marlowe's attitude towards life and his own thoughts were the main factor which formed his unique humanism. On the other hand, the trend of individualism has a great influence on the formation of his thoughts during the Renaissance.

4.1. Marlowe's Personal Growth Environment and Experiences

Marlowe was born in a poor family. His father was a shoemaker. His family was not rich and of good social status. He was admitted into Cambridge University depending on his hard work. In Cambridge University, he got good education and was highly improved. At that time, all the young people like Marlowe wanted to be the master of the world and took possession of great wealth. Therefore, they would never satisfy the wealth they already had. It not so hard to imagine Marlowe also wanted to enter the upper class, live a rich life with high social status. As a matter of fact, his biography suggested that he always showed up in the upper class of London and associated with the eminent persons. He thought he could get rid of his family background in that way. This kind of values had a great influence on Marlowe's humanism. Permanent pursuit became the key point of Marlowe's humanism. And those dreams to enter the upper class and take possession of much wealth were well described in his great plays. His heroes helped him achieve all the dreams. In his plays, he can share the happiness with these heroes who wanted to have supreme power, initiate knowledge and great wealth.

4.2. The Environment of Humanism During Marlowe's Time

On the other hand, Marlowe's humanism was influenced by the social environment and ethos at that time. During the Renaissance, the prevailing individualism had a great effect on the formation and development of Marlowe's humanism. At that time, humanism was well developed in Britain. The renaissance was in full swing. And humanism emphasized on individual status, value, dignity and individualism. It emphasized on human-centeredness and personality liberation. It affirmed the mundane life and the respect of rationality. Marlowe inherited and developed these humanistic ideas. Under this background, human beings tried their best to take a stand for their dignity and honor. With

those influence, Marlowe longed for him and his heroes in his plays to be the pioneer of a new era. He wanted to surpass themselves and human beings' limitations for their dignity and honor. As a young man during the Renaissance, Marlowe was eager to get the rights and wealth. He wanted to be recognized by the society. Compared with other humanists, this kind of surpass that Marlowe wanted was deprived from but far beyond the individualism advocated in the Renaissance. Therefore, Marlowe's humanism had to owe to the individualism in the Renaissance. Tambelain the Great written by Marlowe emphasized on the self-esteem and self-confidence of human beings. And this kind of self-esteem and self-confidence were the essence of the trend of humanism during the Renaissance.

5. CONCLUSION

Marlowe's plays were filled with humanism. Those plays not only reflected his own ambitions but also the spirits during his time. The trend of humanism which emphasized on human's status, values and wills during the Renaissance was put into the characters in the literature works by him. The ambiguous Tambelain, Faustus eager for knowledge and greedy Barabas presented the image of a superman who challenge the limitations of human beings and never gave in. They showed the spirit that they surpassed themselves and can do everything. They ignored every limitation just in order to struggle to get every good thing. Those were all the reflections of Marlowe's humanism.

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