CONCLUSION

After studying Marlowe’s plays, the vast criticism on his works and a few accounts about some incidents of his life, there is a thirst, a great curiosity, to know the real nature and personality of this dramatist. Unfortunately, the criticism of his works is too vast, but sadly details about his personal life are meagre. Marlowe’s personality may be visualised as a young energetic and dynamic man who indulged in innumerable activities. The son of a devout shoemakers’ family, was a precocious and brilliant student of Cambridge University, and an intellectual and a scholar par excellence. He was also a spy employed for government secret service, a visitor of taverns, a self appointed and zealous atheist, and a playwright. The more it is difficult to recreate his full character, the curiosity teases more to know him thoroughly. The personality of Marlowe comes before us as full of strength and energy, related to the court, the theatre, and the religious insurgency. The most surprising factor is that Marlowe was employed by the court as a spy. Of course there is no surprise that some of the great Elizabethan dramatists were dual fighters, even accused of murder like Ben Jonson. Marlowe also must have been a man of great courage, who fearlessly roamed about the London streets, the taverns and the under world. Inspite of all these social, political and literary activities, Marlowe seems to be a voracious reader. It is stated that he had no sufficient time to attend to his work and that is evident from the composition Doctor Faustus. We are amazed about Marlowe’s physical and mental capacity. His vast reading and startling knowledge are reflected in his plays. He might have nearly exhausted the classical, mythological illusions in his
plays and poems. Every discovery, and every new travel, the latest details about his history and geography were at his command. When Tamburlaine war exploits are traced, it becomes unbelievable for a Londoner to possess such perfect knowledge about geography. "The journeys of Tamburlaine’s three generals (I, vii)" says Ethel Seaton, where evidently planned by Marlowe with the Theatrum before him." She adds, "That Marlowe used this source at least with the accuracy of a scholar and the common sense of a merchant-venturer as well as with the imagination of a poet." She states that "He was something more than a dramatist of swashbuckling violence and chaotic inconsequence – a Miles Gloriousus of English drama."¹ (Marlowe’s map by Ethel Seaton ‘Marlowe Ed. by Leech.)

Marlowe’s involvement in atheism, for a modern student of his, is another amazing quality. During the last two decades of the sixteen-century, the ‘divided faith’ was the most common phenomenon among the educated, and the intellectual. Even some of the most sincere Christians, like Thomas More, were the victims of this. Marlowe took a lead in such intellectual and religious insurgency displays his high quality of progressive thinking and leadership. William Empson opined that Marlowe would have been burnt alive, even if he were not murdered, because a case of heresy was pending in the court against him at the time of his death. But it may equally be surmised that Marlowe with his legal expertise and knowledge of Machiavelli could have successfully argued his case and would have escaped imprisonment. Besides it cannot be ignored that he had closer relations with the court. So the first attribute of Marlowe’s dramas is that they present a fugitive but heroic personality of their author and they also inspire the
readers towards a more clear understanding of him. He must be a man of a imposing
ature, great intellect and dynamic zeal worthy to be a part and parcel of that great age.

Marlowe’s relation with the English literary Renaissance is a very scintillating
topic. In that great and glorious age of thrill of novelty and curiosity, Marlowe enjoyed
and experienced every part and every moment. Marlowe displayed the Renaissance’s
humanism that enabled him to realise the possibilities of human strength. Shakespeare
paid a handsome tribute to humanism in his famous words of Hamlet, “What a piece of
work is man”. But Marlowe provided a living shape to the Renaissance ideals of
humanism. Marlowe’s heroes are the direct products of this humanism. His love for the
revived classical knowledge is astounding. His plays are filled with his classical
knowledge and the classical spirit. But this was not limited to this alone. His romantic
imagination goes beyond in conjuring of variations of this classical knowledge.

Marlowe is an apostle of beauty. It may be slyly stated that he was more a
worshiper of Venus rather than Cupid. His love and admiration of beauty reaches the
dizzy heights. In his plays especially Tamburlaine, Doctor Faustus, he paid the greatest
tribute to beauty. Actually, Marlowe has an unlimited and licentious admiration of
beauty in not only sensuous but in sensual terms also. The excesses of the Renaissance
imagination galore in ‘Hero and Leander’. Such licentiousness made the Puritan critics
like Gosson to preach for more moral discipline. It is a matter of interest to realise that
Marlowe is for all purposes the child of the Renaissance. Though it appears superficially
like this, the spirit hovering his plays is also that of the reformation. Lastly, Marlowe is a 
natural inheritor of the Elizabethan exploits travels, discoveries.

Marlowe elevated the spirit and technique of the English drama. He handled the 
themes in his dramas in a skilful fashion. His themes are like his heroes, high and 
majestic. No other dramatist before him presented such themes, to make his audience 
startle and think simultaneously. While handling such themes, Marlowe provided a 
mighty tragic hero. He becomes the centre of the drama and all others are dwarfs before 
him and all incidents and all episodes are directly related to him. By this method 
Marlowe achieves a kind of undiluted concentration from his audience only towards his 
hero without any other diversions. In his case dramatic technique is to be understood in 
the context of his time. It may not stand to any scrupulous analysis to a prescribed set up 
rules and regulations. But it passes the permanent test for a drama, which is the 
audience’s satisfaction and delight. Marlowe was the most admired dramatist of the 
Elizabethan audience.

Marlowe is a born poet. He is a sensitive string that shivers at the touch of even a 
soft wind. It is not the poetry of a delicate sober and mellifluous nature. It is like the 
organ voice or the thunder of a drum. It suited to his passionate nature high imagination 
and strong and energetic communication. Marlowe’s poetry was very much coloured by 
all the aesthetic qualities of the Renaissance.
Marlowe’s attitude to religion is discussed in the previous chapter. Actually Marlowe’s concern for religious or spiritual issues may not interest us. But his plays suggest that the invisible ghosts of the religious fear or concern move stealthily in the psychological background. Tamburlaine’s calculated indifference for, or Barabas complete neglect for, any divine power, suggests suspicion. “Perfect simplicity is unconsciously audacious”. Faustus’s ‘bold fear’ indicates that ‘the seen’ is not the complete truth. It appears that Marlowe is more sincere and even serious about the religious and moral issues. If the reports about his religious insurrection and about his attempts to convert people in to atheism are authentic and correct, then this assumption becomes valid. The artist in Marlowe attempts to poetise the religious and moral issues. He is not an atheist then but a sincere and devout Christian, disillusioned by the decadence of the Anglican Church. As a courageous zealot, he wants an open discussion of the most controversial issues of religion. During the Tudor period ‘a mute Atheist’ was honoured rather than a sincere Christian courageous to speak out. Francis Bacon was the ideal Christian and Marlowe was called a heretic. Marlowe was born only fifty years before and that seems to be his sin. In view of all these things it may be assumed that more biographical details are needed to establish the real stand of Marlowe. Till then there is no harm in accepting that his religious stand is of the “inverse morality”.

Marlowe elevated the level of serious drama from that of an ordinary, sentimental melodrama. He also made it effective and appealing without the elements of bloodshed and cruelty. Tragedy in the hands of Marlowe has become a serious play of a conflict between mighty forces. Actually Tamburlaine Part 1 ends with joy, and yet it can not be
called a comedy. Because the clash of the mighty forces was presented with notional cruelty and blood and this concept of tragedy was the contribution of Marlowe. Marlowe enabled pathos to become a major force in heightening the level of tragedy. It may be by the presentation of the caged king Bajazeth or by displaying the carcasses of the virgins on the walls of Damascus. But pathos as presented in Doctor Faustus and Edward II culminates in sheer lyricism:

"O, I'll leap up to heaven! Who pulls me down?
See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament
"One drop would save my soul, half a drop:
ah, my Christ-
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
Yet will I call on him: O, spare me, Lucifer!
Where is it now? 'Tis gone; and see, where God stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows!
Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me,
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!
No, no!
Then will I headlong run into the earth:
Earth, gape! O, no, it will not harbour me!
You stars that reign'd at my nativity,
Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,
Now draw up Faustus, like a foggy mist
Into the entrails of yon labouring clouds,
That, when you vomit forth into the air,
My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths.
So let my soul may but ascend to heaven."³

Or the King Edward's last miserable cry:

"O, let me not die yet: stay, O, stay a while!" ---
"O I am too weak and feeble to resist.
Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul!"³

The depiction of pathos in the above scenes has been acclaimed by all alike. Marlowe has perfected a skill to achieve an epic grandeur by his descriptions. The passage of
Faustus, about Helen, flashes before our eyes not only the whole theme but also the spirit of the ancient Greek classic:

“Was this the face that launch’d a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium.
O sweet Helen make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul. See where it flies!
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.
I will be Paris, and for love of thee
Instead of troy shall Wittenberg be sacked,
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,
And wear thy colours on my plumed crest.
Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel
And then return to Helen for a kiss.
O, thou art fairer than the evening’s air,
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appeared to hapless Semele.
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa’s azure arms;”

In Marlowe’s impassioned outburst, there is a control exerted by his intellectual quality.

In his admiration for the divine beauty of Zenocrate, he finds “Fair is too foul an epithet for thee”. He questions

“What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then?” he replies:
“‘If all the pens that ever poets held
Had fed the feeling of their master’s thoughts.
And every sweetness that inspir’d their hearts,
Their minds, and muses and admired themes:
If all the heavenly quintessence they still
From their immortal flowers of poetry
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 their hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest.”
Marlowe’s conception of beauty takes an analytical turn, and argues in a logical fashion to state that it is that drop of essence extracted from all the flowers of the poems written everywhere and at every time.

These are good examples to show how Marlowe has transformed the very fibre of the drama into silken poetry. It goes to substantiate the view that he brought the genuine poetic drama on to the English stage. He has a heart and brain of a poet and his dramatic skill has metamorphosed the dross of real life into bright gold by his alchemy of genius.

Harry Levin stated that “Marlowe’s strongest claim is bound to be the fact that he did so much more than anyone else to bring that context (of Shakespeare) in to existence”. It is sometimes contended that Marlowe could have achieved greater and far nobler results, if he lived for more time. Whether it is a fond and vain yearning or not one cannot say. But as things stand, Marlowe’s achievement is no less greater and not less nobler. The reputation of Marlowe is very firm and very stable. It may grow as new research brings out more details about his biography, and as more scholars read and interpret his plays.

THE END
Reference Chapter: VI

1. Marlowe’s Map by Ethel Seaton (Critics on Marlowe ed. By. Leech)
2. Doctor Faustus (Act V, scene II, lines 75-91)
4. Harry Levin