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## A Study of Nature and Theme of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe

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### ABSTRACT

Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe were influential playwrights during the Renaissance period in England. They both contributed significantly to the development of English drama. Shakespeare is renowned for his vast body of work, encompassing tragedies, comedies, and historical plays, exploring themes of human nature, power, and love. Marlowe, on the other hand, is known for his intense and poetic plays that often tackled themes of ambition, desire, and political intrigue. Despite their distinct styles, both playwrights left an indelible mark on literature and continue to be celebrated for their enduring contributions to the world of theater.

**Keywords:** Contributed, Elizabethan, England, emotions

### I. Introduction

William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe are two of the most prominent playwrights and poets of the Elizabethan era in England. Both born in the same era (Shakespeare in 1564 and Marlowe in 1564), their works share similarities but also showcase distinct styles and themes. Shakespeare is known for his diverse range of plays and sonnets that delve into human emotions and complexities, while Marlowe is often associated with his powerful and dramatic works that explore themes of ambition, power, and the human condition. Despite their differing approaches, both writers have left an indelible mark on English literature and continue to be celebrated for their contributions.

William Shakespeare: Plays: "Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "Othello," "King Lear," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Tempest," "Much Ado About Nothing," "Twelfth Night," "Julius Caesar," and many more.

Sonnets: Shakespeare also wrote 154 sonnets, which explore themes of love, beauty, time, and mortality.

Christopher Marlowe: Plays: "Doctor Faustus," "Tamburlaine," "Edward II," "The Jew of Malta," "Dido, Queen of Carthage," and others.

Poems: Marlowe also wrote poetry, including works like "Hero and Leander," a narrative poem.

Both playwrights contributed significantly to the English Renaissance and have left a lasting impact on literature and theater. Their works continue to be studied, adapted, and performed to this day.

William Shakespeare, often regarded as the greatest playwright and poet in the English language, has left an indelible mark on literature that continues to resonate across centuries. His contributions encompass a wide range of themes, characters, and linguistic innovations that have significantly enriched the literary landscape.

Shakespeare's impact on literature can be seen in his remarkable plays and sonnets. His plays, which include tragedies, comedies, and historical dramas, delve into human nature, societal structures, and the complexities of emotions. One of his most famous tragedies, "Hamlet," explores themes of revenge, madness, and moral dilemmas, while "Romeo and Juliet" presents the quintessential tale of young love thwarted by family feuds. In "Macbeth," Shakespeare delves into the psychological consequences of unchecked ambition. His comedies like "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Twelfth Night" showcase his mastery of intricate plots, mistaken identities, and witty wordplay.

Shakespeare's characters are equally iconic. From the tormented Hamlet to the mischievous Puck, his characters are multidimensional, reflecting the human condition in all its facets. The internal struggles of characters such as Othello and King Lear highlight the complexity of human emotions and psychology. His strong, independent female characters like Lady Macbeth and Beatrice challenge societal norms and expectations of their time.

One of Shakespeare's most enduring contributions is his mastery of language. He coined numerous words and phrases that are now commonplace in the English lexicon. Expressions like "all's well that ends well," "break the ice," and "wild-goose chase" originated from his works. His innovative use of language, including metaphors, puns, and soliloquies, transformed the way dialogue was crafted in literature. His sonnets, a collection of 154 poems, explore themes of love, beauty, and mortality, showcasing his linguistic virtuosity.

Shakespeare's influence extends beyond the English language. His works have been translated into numerous languages and adapted into various art forms, including theater, film, and literature. His universal themes and relatable characters have transcended time and cultural barriers, making his works accessible and relatable to audiences worldwide.

The legacy of Shakespeare can be observed in the enduring popularity of his works. They continue to be performed on stages around the world and are studied in classrooms to this day. Scholars and writers draw inspiration from his narratives, characters, and language, incorporating his ideas into contemporary literature. Shakespeare's Contributions to Literature

William Shakespeare, often hailed as the "Bard of Avon," is one of the most celebrated and influential figures in the world of literature. His contributions to the literary landscape have left an indelible mark, shaping the way we understand and engage with storytelling, language, and the human experience. Spanning the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Shakespeare's impact continues to resonate through time. Shakespeare's most notable contribution lies in his mastery of language. He enriched the English vocabulary by introducing numerous words and phrases that have become integral parts of everyday speech. Expressions like "break the ice," "wild-geese chase," and "foregone conclusion" originated from his plays and sonnets. His linguistic creativity, coupled with his command of rhyme and meter, elevated the possibilities of poetic expression.

The depth and complexity of Shakespeare's characters remain unparalleled. His plays delve into the myriad facets of human nature, presenting characters who are multi-dimensional and often wrestling with conflicting emotions. From the tormented Hamlet to the conniving Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare's characters are not merely vessels for the plot but mirrors that reflect the intricacies of the human psyche.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's exploration of universal themes transcends time and culture. Love, jealousy, ambition, and power dynamics are just a few of the themes he tackled with remarkable insight. His exploration of human ambition, exemplified in plays like "Macbeth," continues to be relevant as individuals grapple with the consequences of their desires and actions.

Shakespeare's contribution to the art of drama cannot be overstated. He popularized the five-act structure that became a standard for many plays, providing a framework that allows for the development of intricate plots and character arcs. His understanding of pacing, tension, and climax set a benchmark for dramatic storytelling that has influenced countless playwrights, screenwriters, and storytellers.

The sonnet form was also greatly enriched by Shakespeare's innovation. He composed 154 sonnets that explore themes of love, time, and mortality. His mastery of this form extended beyond conventional themes, using the sonnet as a means to express emotions and ideas in compact yet profound ways. His "Sonnet 18," often referred to as "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" stands as a testament to his ability to capture the essence of beauty and love in just fourteen lines.

Shakespeare's works have not only been a source of artistic inspiration but have also contributed to the development of modern drama and theater. His plays were performed in the famous Globe Theatre, and his influence on stagecraft, including set design, costumes, and the use of soliloquies, helped shape the theatrical experience we know today.

Moreover, Shakespeare's impact extends beyond literature and the stage. His plays have been adapted into various art forms, from operas and ballets to films and novels. Countless artists, including painters and musicians, have drawn inspiration from his works, further cementing his legacy in the world of art and creativity.

In conclusion, William Shakespeare's contribution to literature is immeasurable. His linguistic innovation, exploration of human nature, universal themes, dramatic techniques, and enduring influence on various art forms have solidified his status as a literary icon. His works continue to captivate and resonate with audiences worldwide, demonstrating the timeless power of his creativity and insight.

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## II. Contribution of Christopher Marlowe

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) was a renowned Elizabethan playwright, poet, and translator who made significant contributions to English literature during the late 16th century. His innovative works, characterized by their dramatic intensity, poetic flair, and exploration of complex themes, have had a lasting impact on the literary landscape.

Marlowe's most celebrated play, "Doctor Faustus," exemplifies his unique approach to drama. The play explores the tragic downfall of Dr. Faustus, a scholar who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and power. Marlowe delves into the human psyche, examining themes of ambition, morality, and the pursuit of forbidden knowledge. The character of Faustus embodies the conflict between personal desires and societal norms, making the play a timeless exploration of human nature and the consequences of unchecked ambition.

Marlowe's language and verse were revolutionary for his time. He utilized the blank verse form, unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter, which would later become a hallmark of English drama. This innovation paved the way for the development of Shakespearean drama and greatly influenced the evolution of English poetry.

In addition to "Doctor Faustus," Marlowe's play "Tamburlaine" showcased his ability to create grand, epic dramas. The play centers around the rise and fall of the Scythian shepherd Tamburlaine, who becomes a powerful conqueror. Marlowe's use of extravagant language and bold imagery captivated audiences, and his depiction of a larger-than-life protagonist set the stage for the exploration of complex characters in later drama. Marlowe's contributions were not limited to drama; his poetry also left a mark. His unfinished narrative poem "Hero and Leander" tells the tragic love story of a priestess and a young man. Marlowe's skillful use of mythological allusions and vivid descriptions displayed his mastery of poetic techniques, influencing subsequent

generations of poets. Beyond his creative output, Marlowe's life was marked by controversy. He was known for his unconventional beliefs and was even accused of atheism, a serious charge in his time. His exploration of provocative ideas in his works challenged societal norms and encouraged critical thinking, leaving a lasting impact on the intellectual climate of his era.

Tragically, Marlowe's life was cut short at the age of 29 when he was fatally stabbed in a tavern brawl. Despite his relatively brief career, his works and ideas continued to resonate long after his death. Marlowe's influence can be seen in the works of his contemporaries, including William Shakespeare, who was influenced by Marlowe's dramatic style and thematic exploration.

In conclusion, Christopher Marlowe's contributions to English literature are profound and enduring. His innovative use of blank verse, exploration of complex themes, and bold characters laid the foundation for the flourishing of Elizabethan drama. His legacy lives on in the works of subsequent generations of writers, and his impact on English literature continues to be celebrated and studied to this day.

Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe are two towering figures in the realm of English literature, often compared due to their shared era and thematic similarities. While their works display certain commonalities, they also possess distinctive characteristics that set them apart. William Shakespeare, often referred to as the Bard of Avon, is renowned for his extensive body of work that spans plays, sonnets, and poems. His plays are characterized by their intricate exploration of human nature, complex characters, and innovative use of language. Works like "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and "Othello" delve into the depths of human psychology, portraying protagonists torn between ambition, morality, and fate. Shakespeare's sonnets are celebrated for their emotional depth and exploration of love, beauty, and the passage of time.

On the other hand, Christopher Marlowe, Shakespeare's contemporary, is known for his dramatic contributions that paved the way for Elizabethan tragedy. Marlowe's works, including "Doctor Faustus" and "Tamburlaine," often explore themes of power, ambition, and the consequences of unchecked desires. Marlowe's characters are often larger-than-life figures grappling with their own ambitions, reflecting the tensions of his era.

Comparing the two, their thematic explorations overlap, yet each writer approaches these themes with a unique style. While Shakespeare's characters often undergo profound internal conflicts, Marlowe's characters frequently face external challenges that lead to their downfall. Additionally, Marlowe's writing exhibits a more overt use of rhetoric and verse, which can be attributed to his background in academia and his interest in exploring the grandeur of language.

Both playwrights also differ in their portrayals of society. Shakespeare's plays tend to encompass a broader cross-section of society, from kings to commoners, offering a comprehensive view of human experience. Marlowe, on the other hand, often centers his narratives on individuals of high status or historical significance, honing in on the tragic flaws that lead to their downfall.

Despite these differences, both Shakespeare and Marlowe contributed significantly to the development of English drama. Their use of blank verse and iambic pentameter elevated the language of the stage and influenced subsequent generations of playwrights. Their exploration of morality, power dynamics, and the human psyche set the stage for the development of Renaissance drama and beyond. The works of Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe share thematic parallels while diverging in style, character complexity, and societal portrayal. Shakespeare's intricate characters and universal themes resonate across time, while Marlowe's grandiose language and tragic figures leave an indelible mark on the trajectory of English drama. Both playwrights continue to captivate audiences and scholars alike, their contributions forever woven into the rich tapestry of literary history.

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### III. Nature and Style

Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe were prominent English playwrights and poets during the Renaissance era, both contributing significantly to the Elizabethan and Jacobean literary landscape. Despite sharing the same theatrical environment, their works exhibit distinctive differences in terms of nature and themes.

In terms of nature, Shakespeare's writing displays a remarkable versatility that spans a wide spectrum of genres, from tragedies like "Hamlet" and "Macbeth" to comedies such as "Twelfth Night" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream." His plays are characterized by intricate character development, intricate plot structures, and a keen exploration of human emotions. Shakespeare's use of language is unparalleled, encompassing a rich blend of imagery, metaphors, and wordplay that adds depth to his works. His ability to capture the human experience, with its joys, sorrows, and complexities, is a hallmark of his writing.

On the other hand, Marlowe's writing is marked by its boldness and intensity. His works, such as "Doctor Faustus" and "Tamburlaine," often revolve around larger-than-life characters grappling with their ambitions and desires. Marlowe's use of blank verse, a style he helped popularize, lends a distinct rhythmic quality to his plays. His exploration of power, ambition, and the human desire for greatness resonates throughout his works. Unlike Shakespeare, Marlowe's plays typically focus on grand themes, often involving characters striving for supremacy and challenging conventional boundaries. Themes in their works also differ significantly. Shakespeare's themes often delve into the complexities of human nature, morality, and the consequences of one's actions. His tragedies often explore the downfall of characters due to fatal flaws, while his comedies examine love, mistaken identity, and the folly of human behavior. Additionally, Shakespeare's historical plays shed light on political intrigue and the power struggles of his time.

In contrast, Marlowe's themes are frequently centered around individualism, intellectual curiosity, and the pursuit of knowledge. "Doctor Faustus," for instance, examines the consequences of a man's pact with the devil in exchange for ultimate knowledge and power. Marlowe's characters often challenge societal norms and authority, reflecting his own unconventional views on religion and politics. His works are more concerned with the individual's journey towards self-discovery and enlightenment, often leading to tragic outcomes. While both Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe contributed significantly

to the Elizabethan and Jacobean literary canon, their writing nature and themes differ notably. Shakespeare's versatility and exploration of the human experience stand in contrast to Marlowe's intense focus on individualism, ambition, and intellectual curiosity. Together, their works enrich the tapestry of English Renaissance literature, offering a diverse range of perspectives on the human conditions. Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, two prominent playwrights of the Elizabethan era, shared many similarities in their themes while also demonstrating distinct differences in their approaches. Their works often explored common themes such as power, love, ambition, and the human condition, but they approached these themes in unique ways that reflected their individual styles and perspectives.

In Shakespeare's plays, power was a central theme that he explored in various forms. Whether it was political power, as seen in plays like "Macbeth" and "Julius Caesar," or the power dynamics within families, such as in "King Lear" and "Hamlet," Shakespeare delved into the corrupting influence of power and its impact on individuals and society. His characters often grappled with the consequences of their quest for power, highlighting the complexity of human ambition.

Similarly, Marlowe's works also delved into the theme of power, but with a focus on the individual's desire for greatness and the consequences of such aspirations. In his play "Doctor Faustus," Marlowe explored the dangerous pursuit of knowledge and power through the protagonist's pact with the devil. This play highlighted the tension between human desires and the moral consequences of unchecked ambition.

Love was another shared theme between the two playwrights. Shakespeare's exploration of love ranged from the idealized romanticism of "Romeo and Juliet" to the complex and often darker aspects of love in plays like "Othello" and "Antony and Cleopatra." His portrayal of love was multifaceted, showcasing the various forms it could take and its transformative effects on characters.

Marlowe's approach to love was often more sensual and passionate, evident in works like "Hero and Leander." He explored the intensity of desire and the emotional upheaval that love could bring, emphasizing the visceral and sometimes destructive nature of human emotions.

Both playwrights also tackled the human condition in their works. Shakespeare's characters were known for their depth and complexity, often representing a wide range of human experiences and emotions. His exploration of identity, madness, and mortality in plays like "Hamlet" and "King Lear" showcased his profound understanding of the human psyche.

Marlowe, on the other hand, often grappled with existential questions in his plays. In "Tamburlaine," he explored themes of mortality, power, and the transient nature of life, with the titular character's relentless pursuit of conquest serving as a reflection of human impermanence. In comparing the two, it's important to note that while both Shakespeare and Marlowe touched on similar themes, they did so with distinct styles and tones. Shakespeare's works often displayed a nuanced interplay of comedy and tragedy, while Marlowe's plays tended to be more grandiose and focused on epic themes. Shakespeare's characters frequently embodied internal conflicts, whereas Marlowe's characters were often driven by external desires.

## **Bibliography**

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William Shakespeare:

"Romeo and Juliet" (1597) - A tragic love story.

"Hamlet" (1603) - A play exploring themes of revenge and madness.

"Macbeth" (1606) - A tragedy depicting the rise and fall of a Scottish nobleman.

"Othello" (1603) - A tragedy about jealousy and manipulation.

"King Lear" (1608) - A tragedy focusing on family, power, and madness.

"The Tempest" (1611) - A fantasy play exploring themes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Christopher Marlowe:

"Doctor Faustus" (c. 1588) - A play about a scholar who makes a pact with the devil.

"Tamburlaine" (c. 1587) - A series of plays depicting the rise and fall of a conqueror.

"Edward II" (c. 1593) - A historical tragedy about the life and death of King Edward II.

"The Jew of Malta" (c. 1589) - A dark comedy exploring themes of greed and revenge.

"Dido, Queen of Carthage" (c. 1586) - A tragedy based on the story of Dido and Aeneas from Virgil's "Aeneid."

These are just a few of the notable works by Shakespeare and Marlowe, both of whom were influential playwrights during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras in England. Their contributions have had a lasting impact on English literature and drama.