

Question : - Discuss Milton as a belated Elizabethan.

Answer : - When Milton was born most of the Elizabethans had already written their great works. Spenser had written his 'Faerie Queene' and was dead before 1600. Sir Philip Sidney had died a dozen years before Spenser's birth. By the time Milton came to compose his epics, the spirit of Renaissance had almost died down and there was a marked change in the temper and outlook of the new age. But Milton did not allow himself to be tied down to his age. No doubt he was a puritan, but his ~~poor~~ puritanism had the catholicity of a broad-minded and large-hearted man. He could not bind himself to narrow puritanism of his age. He rose above his age and walked like a solitary and majestic figure. He did bestride the narrow world like a colossus, and the petty men walked under his huge legs, and peeped

about to find themselves dishonourable graves.

Milton was the intellectual giant but he was also solitary. The spirit of enquiry and rationalism which was uncongenial for high poetry was alien to Milton. He found himself outlandish in his own age. In outlook and temperament he belongs not to his age but to the Elizabethans. And though the first flush of Renaissance was over, it was greatly fortunate for Milton that his childhood was spent, as Raleigh says, in the very twilight of the Elizabethan age and it was greatly fortunate for him to have caught the afterglow of the sunset upon his face. When Milton was born Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were still writing their important works. Bacon was spreading the glow of his essays, and Spenser was read a great deal. All these naturally attracted Milton's attention. He

read them. His literary kinship is with the Elizabethans in his love for romance and beauty and in his craving for the Renaissance spirit of learning. We find in his poetry a continuation of the Elizabethan tradition. That is why many a critic agree to call Milton a belated Elizabethan. A. J. Wyatt remarks in this connection, "He belongs in spite of chronology, to the glorious earlier Elizabethan period, and not to the later period of partial decline." Mr. David Daiches observes, "Milton who in many respects was more of an Elizabethan, a man of the seventeenth century shared the Elizabethan feeling for Ovid as the great narrator of classical myth the poet who transmitted in lively and picturesque form the whole achievement of the classical imagination." Verity also believes that Milton belonged to the Elizabethans. He says "Milton was the last of the

Elizabethans, a lonely survival lingering on into days when French influence was beginning to dominate English taste. Even the metre of his poetry must have sounded stranger to ears familiarised to the crisp clearness and epigrammatic ring of the rhymed couplet."

In his use of Blank verse and in his classical strain Milton was truly an Elizabethan. His early poems grew on Elizabethan soil and drank Elizabethan air. They fully reveal his love of beauty and romance, a passion for music and art and imaginative exuberance. These were the qualities which characterized the Elizabethan poetry. For example, these lines from 'On May Morning' reveal his Elizabethanness:-

"Now the bright morning star,  
Day's harbinger  
Comes dancing from the east,  
and leads with her  
The flowery May, who

from her green lap throws

The yellow cowslip, and  
the pale Primrose -."

Milton's first substantial poem 'on the morning of ~~christ~~ Christ's Nativity' is written within the Spenserian tradition. There are clear echoes of Spenser himself, of Phineas Fletcher and other Elizabethans. 'The stanzaic forms and the texture are the culmination of Milton's early Spenserian phase'. Keats the great romantic, admired the lovely nineteenth stanza!

"To oracles are dummm  
No voices are hideous  
hummm

x x x

Apollo from his Shrine  
Can no more divine,  
With hollow shriek the  
steep of Delphos leaving!"

His Lycidas is based on the sixteenth century Italian pastoral poetry. Milton was never a more completely Renaissance

ance artist than he is in this poem. We have in this poem the echoes of Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid, Spenser, Sidney and Shakespeare. Lycidas recalls the Elizabethan elegies in tone and expression, though it is predominantly puritan. The Elizabethans composed sonnets frequently. Milton also wrote sonnets. In this too he was mostly an Elizabethan. The imagination, style and picturesque images of his great epics also establish his kinship with the Elizabethan poetry. His decision of writing the first national epic speaks of his Elizabethan quality, that is love ~~for~~ for the nation, nationalism and patriotism. In fact, he possesses the qualities of a true Elizabethan hero. "The world of Paradise Lost is also an ideal, conventional world, like the world of the Arabian Nights, or the world of the chivalrous romance, or that

of the pastoral novel."

Milton thus possesses all the major qualities found in the Elizabethans. He has a sense of beauty, love for music and art, rich imagination, liking for chivalry and romance. He also incorporates the supernatural in his epics. The refinement of his nature, his spirit of adventure, his passion for freedom, his love for art, nationalism and England all speak of his Elizabethan traits.

The end.

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