



# DRAMA

CRITICISM

VOLUME  
15





# DRAMA

## C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied  
Dramatic Works from all the World's Literatures

VOLUME 15

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藏书章

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## Preface

**D***rama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

*DC* was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *DC* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

## Scope of the Series

By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately five to ten authors are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that playwright's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *DC* volume.

## Organization of the Book

A *DC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.



- The list of **Principal Works** is divided into two sections. The first section contains the author's dramatic pieces and is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.
- Essays offering **overviews and general studies of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premier of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, precedes each piece of criticism.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *DC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *DC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *DC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order the individual plays discussed in the criticism contained in *DC*. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

## Citing *Drama Criticism*

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in *Drama Criticism* may use the following general formats to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to materials reprinted from books.

Susan Sontag, "Going to the Theater, Etc.," *Partisan Review* XXXI, no. 3 (Summer 1964), 389-94; excerpted and reprinted in *Drama Criticism*, vol. 1, ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), 17-20.

Eugene M. Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden* (Chatto & Windus, 1962); excerpted and reprinted in *Drama Criticism*, vol. 1, ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), 237-47.



## **Suggestions are Welcome**

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Managing Editor:

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# Thomas Lovell Beddoes

## 1803-1849

English poet and dramatist.

### INTRODUCTION

Called “The Last Elizabethan” by Lytton Strachey, Beddoes is chiefly remembered for his evocative poetic vision in such works as *Death's Jest Book* or *The Fool's Tragedy* (1850). Although his works are few, he was an important figure in the Elizabethan literary revival of the nineteenth century. His work skillfully combines macabre imagery, passages of haunting beauty, and elements of the supernatural.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Beddoes was born in Clifton, England, in 1803. His father was a celebrated physician of outstanding literary, as well as scientific, talent. Although he died when his son was young, he instilled in the young Beddoes an interest in literature and the sciences. Maria Edgeworth, Beddoes's aunt, was another important figure in his life and encouraged his writing. Beddoes was a brilliant child intellectually who won prizes for essays in Latin and Greek and published poetry in *The Morning Post* before entering college. However, he was also beset with emotional problems. His depression found expression not only in his personal life, but in the themes and characters of his works as well. In 1821 Beddoes attended Pembroke College, Oxford. After earning a B.A. and M.A., he traveled to Germany to attend medical school at Göttingen University. Beddoes was soon expelled from the university for drunken and disorderly behavior and for attempting suicide. He went on to Würzburg to earn a medical degree but was still dissatisfied with his achievements, and his outlook became increasingly morbid. In an effort to relieve his inner restlessness, Beddoes became involved with radical political activities. Beddoes traveled to Zürich, where he continued to work on *Death's Jest Book*, and wrote several short pieces, later collected in *Poems Posthumous and Collected of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (1851). As the political climate in Europe became more intense, so did Beddoes's interest in revolutionary politics. In Germany, he delivered lectures for the liberal cause. Eventually, he was deported for his activities, and from that time on, wandered aimlessly throughout Europe, never settling in one place for long. Beddoes isolated himself from English society and his family, and in a state of complete despair, committed suicide in Basel on January 26, 1849.

### MAJOR WORKS

In 1822 Beddoes wrote *The Brides' Tragedy*, a verse drama based on a college murder; this work established him as a writer of merit. The obsession with death and the grotesque imagery of the piece were to recur in much of his later verse. He began to compose *Death's Jest Book*, considered his major work, during his years in medical school. Although it contains brilliant passages and demonstrates definite lyrical talent, *Death's Jest Book* never satisfied Beddoes; he altered it repeatedly, and it was not published in his lifetime. A revenge drama set in thirteenth-century Ancona, Egypt, and Silesia, the play incorporates a mixture of verse and prose and is considered the ultimate manifestation of Beddoes's preoccupation with death.

### CRITICAL RECEPTION

Although Beddoes had a remarkable capacity for lyrical, imaginative poetic drama, he was a poet of uneven gifts. Many commentators have urged increased critical attention to his plays; in fact, some important critical studies on Beddoes have been published in the past few decades. Several critics have debated his place within the English literary tradition, in particular whether his work should be classified as Elizabethan, German Romantic, Jacobean, or Gothic; scholars have also debated whether his works should be considered poetry or drama. Whatever his categorization, Beddoes is recognized by commentators as a compelling minor figure in English literature.

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### PRINCIPAL WORKS

#### Plays

*The Brides' Tragedy* 1822  
*The Last Man* (fragment) 1823–25  
*Love's Arrow Poisoned* (fragment) 1823–25  
*Torrismond* (fragment) 1824  
*The Second Brother* (fragment) 1824–25  
*Death's Jest Book* or *The Fool's Tragedy* 1850  
*Thomas Beddoes: Plays and Poems* (poetry and drama) 1950

#### Other Major Works

*The Improvisatore, in Three Fyttes, with Other Poems* (poems) 1821



- Poems Posthumous and Collected of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (poetry) 1851  
*The Poetical Works of Thomas Beddoes* 2 vols. (poetry) 1890  
*The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (letters) 1894  
*The Poems of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (poetry) 1907  
*The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (collected works) 1935  
*Selected Poems* (poetry) 1976

## OVERVIEWS AND GENERAL STUDIES

### *Edinburgh Review* (essay date 1823)

SOURCE: "English Tragedy," in *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 38, No. LXXV, February, 1823, pp. 177-208.

[In the following essay, the anonymous reviewer attempts to place Beddoes within the context of English drama and praises the poetic language of *The Brides' Tragedy*.]

In the history of a nation, the progress and vicissitudes of its Literature are but too frequently disregarded. The crowning of kings, and the winning of battles, are recorded with chronological accuracy, and the resources of the country are laid open. The eye of the reader is dazzled with the splendour of courts, and the array of armies: The rise and fall of parties—the trial and condemnation of state criminals—the alternations of power and disgrace, are explained to very weariness. But of the quiet conquests of learning, there is small account. The philosopher must live in his own page, the poet in his verse; for the national chronicles are almost mute regarding them. The historian's bloody catalogue is not made up of units; but deals only with great assemblages of men—armies, fleets, and senates: The king is the only 'One' included in the story; but of him, be he a cipher or a tyrant, we are told in a way to satisfy the most extravagant desires of loyalty.

There is in this, we think, an undue preponderance—a preference of show to substance—of might to right. There is at least as much importance to be attached to the acquisition of *Paradise Lost*, or *Lear*, as to the gaining of an ordinary victory. Accordingly, we, profiting by the historian's lapse, and in order to do those ingenious persons (the poets and philosophers) justice, assume the right of tracing, from time to time, *their* histories upon our pages, and of discussing, with something of historic candour, their good qualities and defects.

In contemplating the great scene of Literature, the Muses are, beyond doubt, one of the brightest groups; and, among them, those of the *Drama* stand out preeminent. To quit allegory—it comes more quickly home to the bosoms of men; it is linked more closely to their interests and desires,

detailing matters of daily life, and treating, in almost colloquial phrase, of ordinary passions. It is as a double-sided mirror, wherein men see themselves reflected, with all their agreeable pomp and circumstance, but freed of that rough husk of vulgarity which might tempt them to quarrel with their likeness: while the sins of their fellows are stripped and made plain, and they themselves portrayed with unerring and tremendous fidelity.

Certainly dramatic poetry is more quick and decisive in its effects than poetry of any other kind; and this arises partly from its nature, and partly from the circumstances under which it is made public. In the imagination of a person visiting the theatre, there is a predisposition to receive strong impressions. The toil of the day is over, the spirits are exhilarated, and the nerves rendered susceptible by a consciousness of coming enjoyment. All the fences and guards that a man assumes in matters of business or controversy, are laid aside. Even the little caution with which he takes up a book (for we have now got a lurking notion that authors are not infallible) is forgotten: he casts off his care and his prudence, and sets both the past and future at defiance when he enters the limits of a theatre. It is impossible for a person unacquainted with dramatic representation, to understand the effect produced on a mixed mass of the people, when a striking sentiment is uttered by a popular actor. The conviction is instantaneous. Hundreds of stormy voices are awakened, the spirit of every individual is in arms, and a thousand faces are lighted up which a moment before seemed calm and powerless;—and this impression is not so transient as may be thought. It is carried home, and nursed till it ripens. It is a germ which blossoms out into patriotism, or runs up rank into prejudice or passion. It is intellectual property, honestly acquired; and yet debateable ground, on which disputes may arise, and battles are to be fought hereafter.

Men are often amused, and sometimes instructed, by books. But a tragedy is a great moral lesson, read to two senses at once; and the eye and the ear are both held in alliance to retain the impression which the actor has produced. A narrative poem is perhaps more tempting in its shape than a play, and may fix the attention more deeply in the closet; but it is addressed to a more limited class, and necessarily affects our sympathies less forcibly; for a Drama is an embodying of the present, while an Epic is only a shadow of the past. We listen, in one case, to a mere relation of facts; but, in the other, the ruin of centuries is swept away, and time annihilated, and we stand face to face with 'grey Antiquity.' We see and hear things which we thought had departed for ever; but they are (or seem to be) here again—in stature, in gesture, in habit, the same. We become as it were one of a crowd that has vanished; we mix with departed sages and heroes, and breathe the air of Athens, and Cressy, and Agincourt. Men who have been raised to the stars, and whom we have known but by the light of their renown, are made plain to our senses: they stand before us, flesh and blood like ourselves. We are apt to deny our sympathy to old events, when it is asked by the mere historian of the times; but,



when the mimic scene is unfolded before us, we are hurried into the living tumult, without the power (or even wish) to resist.

Schlegel, in his acute and learned Lectures on 'Dramatic Art and Literature,' inquires, '*what is Dramatic?*' A definition is seldom an easy thing. Although we can understand what is called dramatic writing, it may nevertheless be difficult to define it correctly. It certainly does not consist merely in its shape of dialogue, because dialogue may be, and often is, essentially *undramatic*. Speeches may be shaped, and separated, and allotted, and they may be raised or lowered in expression, as the king, or the merchant, or the beggar, is presented, yet the hue of the author's mind shall pervade them all. Such characters are *not* dramatic: they have no verisimilitude: they are like puppets worked with wires, the mechanism of the brain, but little more. They may startle our admiration, or tease our curiosity, by the ingenuity of the workmanship; but we have no faith in them, and they stimulate us to nothing. In Shakespeare (but he stands in this, as in every thing else, alone), we never see the prejudice of the author peeping out and interfering,—a mistake and an anachronism in the scene. He is the only one who ever had strength enough to cast off the slough of his egotism, and courage enough to lay his vanities aside, and array with the pure light of an independent intellect, the most airy creations of the brain. Like the prince in the Arabian fiction, he leaves one shape for another and another, animating each and all by turns; not carrying the complexion or tone, or diseases of the first, into the body of the second; and yet superior even to that ingenious metempsychosist, whose original love, if we remember aright, remained unaltered through all the changes that he underwent in story.

It is assuredly difficult,—and argues more than common disinterestedness, to set aside, of our own accord, our right to be heard, and to become the organ and mouthpiece of a variety of men. To invest ourselves for a time with the prejudices, and even with the very speech of statesmen and soldiers, kings and counsellors, knaves, idiots, friars and the like, seems like a gratuitous vexation of the intellect; and yet it must be done. We must give up our privilege to dictate, and lose the opportunity of saying infinitely better things than the parties concerned would utter, if we wish for eminent success in the drama. This is offensive to our self-love; and the truth is, that a vain man can never be a good dramatist. He must *forget himself* before he can do justice to others. We have heard it insisted, that this is neither possible nor desirable. But that it is possible, Shakespeare is a brilliant testimony. And that it is desirable, is equally certain, and, we apprehend, not very difficult of proof. A character (king or peasant) must speak like himself, or like another person, or like no person whomsoever:—which style is the best, we leave to the understanding of the reader. It is true that, without much of that particular faculty which we are inclined to call 'dramatic,' some authors have contrived to pourtray one or two characters with success; but these have been generally mere *beaux ideals*,—mere copies or modifica-

tions of themselves. Indeed, we have found, on a strict scrutiny, that their opinions might always be seen darkening one character, and their animal spirits gilding another; and that, whether didactic, or disputatious, or jocose, the fluctuation of their own spirit has been manifest through all the shiftings and disguises of their tale.

Schlegel, in reply to his own question of 'What is dramatic?' says—that it does not consist merely in dialogue, but that it is necessary that such dialogue should operate a change in the minds of the persons represented. If by this he means, that the character itself should be wrought upon and change, we think that this may be desirable; but the *nature* of the drama is a thing different from the result which it ought to arrive at. This assertion of Schlegel is therefore almost like saying, that argument is not sound (or rather that it is not argument at all) unless it shall produce conviction. In our own literature, at least, it is certain that we often find the personages at the end of the play in precisely the same state of mind as at the commencement. We make a play a succession and change of *events*, and not a change of sentiment. The sentiment of the hearer is indeed, if possible, to be wrought upon, but not necessarily that of any one character of the drama. The character, in fact, is frequently developed in the first scene, and we have nothing afterwards to learn except as to what accidents befall it. If the German critic means to say (for he is not very clear), that the tone of the several speeches in a play should be dependent on each other—that the first should give rise to the second, the second to the third, and so on, we entirely agree with him: For the bright spirit of dialogue can only be struck out by collision; and if the speech, the answer, and the replication, were mere independent and insulated sayings, each character would utter a series of monologues, and no more.

Shakespeare (as in the case of Macbeth and others) sometimes makes his tragedy an absolute piece of biography, and allows his characters to unfold themselves gradually, act by act: he does not, in truth, often bring forward a ready-made villain, whom we may know at a glance; but we have a map of the march and progress of crime or passion through the human heart: our sympathies are not assaulted or taken by surprise, but we move forward, step by step, with the hero of the story, until he perishes before our eyes. This is undoubtedly the perfection of the drama; but it exists in its weakness as well as in its strength; and even in Shakespeare, Iago is much the same person in the fifth act as he is in the first scene, and Richard undergoes little, if any, alteration.

If we were driven to a definition, we should say, that a good drama is—'A story told by action and dialogue, where the spirit and style of the speeches allotted to each character are well distinguished from the others, and are true to that particular character and to Nature.' It must involve a story (or event), or it will not have the strength and stature of a drama; for that is not a collection of scenes loosely hung together without object, but a gradual detail of one or more facts in a regular and natural way. It must



have action, or it cannot be fit for representation; and dialogue, or it would be but narration. The speeches must possess character and distinction, without which, a play would be monotonous, and like the voice of a single instrument breathed through different tubes of one diameter: and that those speeches should be true to the characters to which they are assigned, and (as a consequence) to Nature, must be presumed, until we can show that Nature is wrong, or can find a brighter model to imitate.

The earliest dramatic amusements of modern times (they were common to Italy, and Spain, and England), were of a religious nature, and with us passed under the name of 'Mysteries.' In these, which were stories taken from the Bible and Testament, the characters were sustained by monks, or boys attached to ecclesiastical establishments; and, indeed, the literary part of the Mysteries (such as it is) must have sprung from the same source.

Much discussion has occurred among our industrious and inquisitive brethren in learning, as to whether our Drama is of foreign or English growth. Something plausible may no doubt be urged on each side of the question; but we must rest on circumstantial proof at last: And, after all, the discovery would scarcely compensate for the pains that must be bestowed on the inquiry; for the subject itself is not very important to the interests even of the Drama.

Some derive our dramatic literature at once from the tragedies of the ancient Greeks; some from the comparatively modern entertainments which the Jews and early Christians were accustomed to exhibit at Constantinople (Byzantium) and elsewhere: others say that it originated at fairs in the ingenuity of the itinerant dealers, who thus exerted their wits to draw people and purchasers together; while the rest (without referring to this origin) contend only that it is of pure English growth, and has no connexion with any that we have mentioned, nor even with the Mysteries of Italy or Spain. Schlegel himself is, if we remember correctly, of this last opinion.

Now, we can scarcely suppose that our earlier writers were indebted to the classic Grecian models; for the 'Mysteries' have been traced back as far as the twelfth century; and Chaucer, in the fourteenth century, speaks of 'plays of miracles;' at which time we are not aware that the Greek dramatists were known in England. But there is a better reason still against this supposed derivation, which is, that the early English performances bear no resemblance whatever to the tragedies of the Greeks. The latter are fine and polished entertainments, discussing matters of daily life, or immortalizing events in their own history; while the former are meagre didactic matters, taken solely from sacred history, and destitute of the chorus which forms so stirring a feature in the character of the Grecian plays. Had our forefathers imitated Sophocles, or Euripides, or Eschylus, it is but fair to suppose that they would have imitated them entirely; for the taste of the nation was not at the point to suggest *selections* from their style, nor to justify any deviation from their successful system. We

must therefore conclude, that the ancient Grecians had little to do (nothing directly) with the birth of our English Drama.

As to the opinion that it began in mimic and buffoonery at fairs, we cannot understand why, if this was the case, the subjects should be of so serious a cast. It is not reasonable to suppose, that the wandering merchants of the time would strive to attract purchasers, by laying before them some signal instance of God's vengeance. If they had mimicked any thing, it would have been the manners or the follies of the time, the gesture or the gait of individuals, or things that were in themselves obviously susceptible of mirth, and readily to be understood by the spectators. But we see nothing of this in the earliest specimens of the English dramatic writers; and without this we cannot well accede to the opinions of Warton or Schlegel, and think that our drama had no connexion with that of foreign countries. In the first place, our English Mysteries were essentially like those of Gregory Nazianzen and the modern Italians. We had intercourse with Italy and Constantinople; and it is known that the stories of Boccaccio and his countrymen had been brought into England in the time of Chaucer.

If there had not been so decided a resemblance, in point of subject, between the 'Mysteries' of England and the sacred Dramas of Italy and modern Greece, we should have felt inclined to adopt the opinion of Schlegel. It is known that the same ingenious discoveries have been made in different parts of the world which had no acquaintance with each other; and it would have been but equitable to have given the English credit for a drama of their own invention. But, to say the truth, the earliest specimens of English plays do not look like inventions; they are at once too complete for originals, and too rude to be considered as copies from the polished Dramas of Sophocles and his cotemporaries. The first attempt at dramatic writing would naturally be in the form of a monodrama, or a simple colloquy, and not a drama with all its principal and subordinate parts illustrating a fact in history. It is said, indeed, that the Mysteries were composed by the monks, for the purpose of supplanting more vulgar entertainments of a similar nature; yet the fact of no such entertainments having come down to us, may well excite some scepticism; for the person capable of inventing a drama, would also, we should think, be able to record it. It is true, that the most ancient entertainment at Naples is Punch, who has descended, by tradition only, from father to son, and still keeps his place of popularity, in defiance both of improvement and innovation. But Punch was not the origin of the Italian Drama; nor would the fact of his having been so, or of his resemblance to our fair mimicry, alter the question as to the invention of the English 'Mysteries.' After all, however, the matter is not important, and scarcely worth the very small discussion which we have bestowed upon it.

The '*Moralities*' which followed, grew out of the old 'Mystery,' and were the natural offspring of such a parent.



They were mere embodyings of the vices and virtues; and though dressed up after a barbarous fashion, made some approach to the models of the ancient Greeks; at least in the titles of their *dramatis personæ*. 'Death,—Kindred,—Strength,—Discretion,' and others, for instance, which occur in the old Morality of *Everyman*, came nearer to the personages in the Prometheus of Æschylus than the nature of the 'Mysteries' would allow; and in the Morality of *Lusty Juventus*, the persons of 'Knowledge,—Good Counsell,—Sathan the Devyll,' and others, explain at once the nature of their offices, and the entertainment they are likely to afford. These compositions (especially the Morality called *Hycke-Scorner*) possess occasional gleams of dramatic spirit; but, generally speaking, they have little of that quality beyond what is discoverable in the romances and narrative poems of the same period.

The first regular English comedy, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, in every sense a very remarkable performance, is said to have been written in the year 1551; and if that statement be correct, the first English tragedy, *Ferrex and Porrex*, which was the joint composition of Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, and Thomas Norton, was written in the same year. Our business is not now with the comedy. With regard to the latter Drama, it is remarkable rather for its even style and negative merits, than for any one brilliant or sterling quality. It has none of the rudeness of the Dramas which preceded and followed it, but stands by itself, an elegant instance of mediocrity in writing. Without extravagance or flagrant error—without ribaldry, or any of the offensive trash that disgraced those days, it is nevertheless mournfully deficient in spirit and dramatic character. The hue of the authors' minds pervades the whole like a gloom. When Pope praised this tragedy for 'the propriety of sentiments, and gravity of style,' &c. 'so essential to tragedy,' and which, he says, 'Shakespeare himself perpetually neglected, or little understood,' he proves to us nothing but that he did not understand dramatic writing. Even Milton (and we say this very reluctantly) seems to have had an imperfect idea of true tragedy, when he calls the Greek writers 'unequalled,' and proposes them as models, in preference to our own great and incomparable poet. We have little to object to the 'propriety' of Lord Buchurst's sentiments, and nothing to the 'gravity' of his style. These things are very good, no doubt; but we have nothing else. There is no character—no variety, which is the soul of dramatic writing. What Lord Buckhurst says might as well be said in a narrative or didactic poem,—in a sermon, or an essay. But in a play, we want true and vivid portraits: we want the life and spirit of natural dialogue: we want 'gravity of style' occasionally, but we also want fancy, and even folly: we want passion in all its shapes, and madness in its many words, and virtue and valour,—not dressed up in allegory, nor tamed down to precept, but true and living examples of each, with all the varieties and inflections of human nature,—not too good for us to profit by, nor too bad for us to dread. Now, we have little of this in *Ferrex and Porrex*. The play is sterile in character, and, with all its good sense, is a dead and dull monotony. The following is one of the most favour-

able passages; but it will nevertheless afford a fair specimen of the style in which the whole is written. Hermon (a parasite) is addressing the King.

—If the fear of Gods, and secret grudge  
Of Nature's law, repining at the fact,  
Withhold your courage from so great attempt,  
Know ye that lust of kingdoms hath no law,  
*The Gods do bear, and well allow in Kings*  
*The things that they abhor in rascal routes.*  
When kings on slender quarrels run to wars,  
And then, in cruel and unindly wise,  
Commend thefts, rapes, murder of innocents,  
The spoil of towns, ruins of mighty realms,  
Think you such princes do suppose themselves  
Subject to laws of kind, and fear of Gods?  
Murders and violent thefts in private men  
Are heinous crimes, and full of foul reproach;  
Yet no offence, and deck'd with glorious name  
Of noble conquests in the hands of kings.

Act 2. sc. 1.

We have taken no liberty with this very edifying counsel, except that of altering the ancient spelling. The doctrine requires as little assistance.

After Lord Sacville followed *Edwards*, who, in 1571, wrote *The Comedy of Damon and Pythias*. It has, notwithstanding its title, some things of tragedy in it; but the serious parts are nearly worthless. The style is rude and bad enough, and the play is filled with anachronisms and inconsistencies; but there is an attempt at character in one or two of the persons of the drama, which serves in some small measure to redeem it. Aristippus is an instance of a philosopher turned courtier; and Carisophus is a specimen of the parasite plant, which we can easily suppose flourished and multiplied as readily at the foot of Etna, as on the banks of the Seine or the Thames, or on the shores of the sea of Archangel. About the same time with *Edwards* lived and wrote Thomas *Preston*, the author of *Cambises king of Percia*. This tragedy is remarkable only for its having been referred to, as is supposed, by Shakespeare in *Henry the Fourth*. The 'vein' of *Cambises*, however, is but a sorry vein; and is more dull than extravagant. It would probably long since have been forgotten, but for Falstaff's allusion. *Whetstone*, the author of *Promos and Cassandra*, is scarcely worth a mention, unless it be that Shakespeare has borrowed his subject of *Measure for Measure* from him;—neither is Kyd, who wrote *Soliman and Perseda*, and the Spanish Tragedy. We say this on the supposition that some other was the author of the scene in the latter play, where Hieronimo is discovered mad. There is in that scene, indeed, a wild and stern grief, painted with fearful strength, which we must not altogether pass over. The following short extract is powerful and fine.

*The Painter enters.*

*Paint.* God bless you, Sir.

*Hier.* Wherefore? why, thou scornful villain?

How, where, or by what means should I be blest?

*Isab.* What would'st thou have, good fellow?

*Paint.* Justice, madam.



*Hier.* Oh! ambitious beggar, would'st thou have that

That lives not in the world?

Why, all the undelved mines cannot buy

An ounce of Justice, 'tis a jewel so inestimable.

I tell thee, God hath engrossed all justice in his hands,  
And there is none but what comes from him.

*Paint.* Oh! then I see that God must right me for  
My murdered son.

*Hier.* How, was thy son murdered?

*Paint.* Ay, Sir: no man did hold a son so dear.

*Hier.* What! not as thine? that's a lie

As massy as the earth: I had a son,

Whose least unvalued hair did weigh

A thousand of thy sons, and he was murdered.

*Paint.* Alas! Sir, I had no more but he.

*Hier.* Nor I, nor I: but this same one of mine

Was worth a legion. But all is one; Pedro,

Jaques, go in a doors, Isabella, go,

And this good fellow here, and I

Will range this hideous orchard up and down

Like too she lions reaved of our young.

Besides these, there are some others who may be said to have flourished before the time of Shakespeare—*Wilmot*, who wrote *Tancred and Gismonde*—*Greene*, the author of *James the Fourth*—*Legge*, who is said to have written *Richard the Third*—the celebrated John Lily the Euphuist—George Peele, who wrote *David and Bethsabe* and *Mahomet and Hiron*, and some other dramas,—and last, but not least, Christopher Marlow. These authors, with the exception of Peele and Marlow (for Lily's plays can scarcely be considered within the limit of our subject) may be passed over without further mention. The lines of Peele are sweet and flowing, but they have little imagination and no strength; and he is without a notion of dialogue. He would have written pastorals perhaps smoothly and pleasantly, but the passions were altogether above him. One of his plays, *Mahomet and Hiron*, is probably the source from which ancient Pistol has derived a portion of his learning. David and Bethsabe reminds us of the Old Mysteries: its style, however, is different, and it has some lines that have undoubtedly great beauty. In Bethsabe's apostrophe to the air, she says—

Deck thyself in loose robes,  
And on thy wings bring delicate perfumes—

which is delicacy itself; nor can the following lines in the same play (describing a fountain) be denied the merit of being extremely graceful.

The brim let be embraced with golden curls  
Of moss that sleeps with sounds the waters make,  
With joy to feed the fount with their recourse:  
Let all the grass that beautifies her bower  
Bear manna every morn instead of dew;  
Or let the dew be sweeter far than that  
That hangs like chains of pearl on Hermon hill.

But *Marlow* was undoubtedly the greatest tragic writer that preceded Shakespeare. The spirit of extravagance seems to have dwelt in his brain, and to have impeded him

on to the most extraordinary feats: but his muse had a fiery wing, and bore him over the dark and unhallowed depths of his subject in a strong and untiring flight. This poet is less remarkable for his insight into human character, than for his rich and gloomy imagination, and his great powers of diction,—for whether stately, or terrible, or tender, he excels in all. His 'mighty line' was famous in his own time, and cannot be denied even now: Yet he could stoop from the heights of a lawless fancy, or the dignity of solemn declamation, to words of the softest witchery. He certainly loved to wander from the common track, and dash at once into peril and mystery; and this daring it was which led him naturally to his sublimity and extravagance. Unfortunately Marlow is never content with doing a little, nor even with doing enough; but he fills the cup of horror till it overflows. There is a striking instance of this in his tragedy of *Lust's Dominion*, which seems written from a desire to throw off a tormenting load of animal spirits. There is a perpetual spurning at restraints, a warring with reason and probability throughout the whole of the play. Eleazar, the Moor, is a mad savage who should have been shut up in a cage, and the queen, his paramour, with him; and the whole dialogue (though there are some strong well-sustained passages) is as unequal and turbulent as the characters.

Of all the plays of Marlow, *Faustus* is the finest, and *Edward the Second* perhaps the most equal. The *Jew of Malta* we cannot admire, (though there is in it certainly the first hint of Shylock); and *Tamburlaine*, generally speaking, is either fustian or frenzy. However, the poet's idea of the horses of the sun—

'That blow the morning from their nostrils,'  
is magnificent, and his description of Tamburlaine's  
person  
'(Such breadth of shoulders as might mainly bear  
Old Atlas' burden'—)

recals, not unpleasantly, to our mind the description of the great 'second spirit' of Milton. *Faustus* is the story of a learned man who sells himself to the devil, on condition of having unlimited power on earth for twenty-four years; and Mephostophilis (a spirit) is given to him as a slave. These two worthies pass from place to place, enjoying themselves in feastings, and love, and triumphs of various kinds; and, by the aid of Lucifer, they beat priests and abuse the pope to his face, and commit similar enormities in defiance of 'maledicats' and other formidable weapons of church construction. There are many single lines and phrases in this play which might be selected as incontestable evidence that Marlow was in felicity of thought, and strength of expression, second only to Shakespeare himself. (As a dramatist, however, he is inferior to others.) Some of his turns of thought are even like those of our matchless poet; as when he speaks of

—unwedded maids  
Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows  
Than have the white breasts of the queen of love;



or of a temple

That *threats* the stars with her aspiring top;

and where he refers to a man who has an amiable soul,

If sin by custom grow not into nature—

and many others. But Faustus's death is the most appalling thing in the play. It is difficult, however, to give the reader an idea of it by a brief extract—he must read it with its 'pomp and circumstance' about it. Faustus is to die at twelve, and the clock has already struck eleven. He groans forth his last speech, which begins thus—

O Faustus!  
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
And then thou must be damned perpetually.  
Stand still, you ever moving spheres of Heaven,  
That Time may cease, and Midnight never come!  
Fair Nature's eye, rise—rise again, and make  
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but  
A year—a month—a week—a natural day—  
That Faustus may repent, and save his soul, &c.

And now, to pass from the terrible to the gentle, nothing can be more soft than the lines which he addresses to the Vision of Helen, whom he requires to pass before him when he is in search of a mistress. He is smitten at once by her excelling beauty, and thus he speaks:

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?—  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss—  
Her lips suck forth my soul . . .  
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 Wittenburg be sacked,  
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,  
And wear thy colours on my plumed crest.  
—Oh! thou art fairer than the evening air,  
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;  
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter,  
When he appear'd to hapless Semele,  
More lovely than the monarch of the sky  
In wanton Arethusa's azure arms,  
And none but thou shall be my paramour.—

Following Marlow, but far outshining him and all others in the vigour and variety of his mighty intellect, arose the first of all poets, whether in the East or West—SHAKESPEARE. He had, it is true, many contemporaries, whose names have since become famous,—men who slept for a time in undeserved obscurity, and who are at last brought forward to illustrate the fashion of their time, and to give bright evidence of its just renown: Yet there is not one worthy of being raised to a comparison with Shakespeare himself. One had a lofty fancy, another a deep flow of melodious verse, another a profound reach of thought; a fourth caught well the mere manners of the age, while others would lash its vices or laud its proud deeds, in verse worthy of the acts which they recorded; but Shakespeare

surpassed them all. In the race of fame he was foremost, and alone. He was, beyond all doubt or competition, the first writer of his age or nation. He illuminated the land in which he lived, like a constellation. There were, as we have said, other bright aspects which cast a glory upon the world of letters; but *he alone* had that *radiating* intellect which extended all ways, and penetrated all things, scattering the darkness of ignorance that rested on his age, while it invigorated its spirit and bettered the heart. He was witty, and humorous, and tender, and lofty, and airy, and profound, beyond all men who have lived before or since. He had that particular and eminent faculty, which no other tragic writer perhaps ever possessed, of divesting his subject altogether of himself. He developed the characters of men, but never intruded himself amongst them. He fashioned figures of all colours and shapes and sizes, but he did not put the stamp of egotism upon them, nor breathe over each the sickly hue of his own opinion. They were fresh and strong, beautiful or grotesque, as occasion asked,—or they were blended and compounded of different metals, to suit the various uses of human life; and thus cast, he sent them forth amongst mankind to take their chance for immortality.

The contemporaries of Shakespeare were great and remarkable men. They had winged imaginations, and made lofty flights. They saw above, below, or around; but they had not the taste or discrimination which he possessed, nor the same extensive vision. They drew correctly and vividly for particular aspects, while he towered above his subject, and surveyed it on all sides, from 'top to toe.' If some saw farther than others, they were dazzled at the riches before them, and grasped hastily, and with little care. They were perplexed with that variety which he made subservient to the general effect. They painted a portrait—or two—or three only, as though afraid of confusion. He, on the other hand, managed and marshalled all. His characters lie, like strata of earth, one under another; or to use his own expression, 'matched in mouth like bells,—each under each.' We need only look at the plays of Falstaff, where there are wits and rogues and simpletons of a dozen shades,—Falstaff, Hal, Poins, Bardolph, Nym, Pistol, Hostess, Shallow, Silence, Slender,—to say nothing of those rich recruits, equal only to a civil war. Now, no one else has done this, and it must be presumed that none have been able to do it; Marlow, Marston, Webster, Decker, Johnson, Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher—a strong phalanx, yet none have proved themselves competent to so difficult a task.

It has been well said, that it is not so much in one faculty that Shakespeare excelled his fellows, as in that wondrous combination of talent, which has made him, beyond controversy, eminent above all. He was as universal as the light, and had riches countless. The Greek dramatists are poor in the comparison. The gloom of Fate hung over their tragedies, and they spoke by the oracle. They have indeed too much of the monotony of their skies; but our poet, while he had the brightness of the summer months, was as various as the April season, and as fickle and fantastic as May.



It is idle to say that the characters of writers cannot be discovered from their works. There is sure to be some betrayal,—(Shakespeare is a wonderful and single exception in his dramatic works—but he has written others)—there is always some mark of vanity, or narrow bigotry, or intolerant pride, when either of these vices darken or contract the poet's heart: there is some moment when he who is querrulous will complain, and he who is misanthropic will pour out his hate; but—passing by the dramas, in which, however, there is no symptom of any personal failings—there is nothing to be found in all his lyrical writings, save only a little repining; and this the malice of his stars may well excuse. The poets and wits of modern times would, we suspect, spurn at the servitude which Shakespeare wore out with patience. But he, rich as he was in active faculty, possessed also the passive virtue of endurance—the Philosophy which enabled him to meet misfortune, and to bear up against the accidents of poverty and of the time. It is to the eternal honour of Lord Southampton, that he could distinguish in some measure the worth of our matchless poet, and that he had generosity enough to honour and reward it. So much has been written and said on Shakespeare, that we will not add further to the enormities of criticism. He breathes like a giant under the loads of rubbish which his pigmy critics and commentators have flung upon him. One good editor, with a reasonable knowledge of the manners and diction of the times, would do the world a service by casting aside nine-tenths of the barren dissertation that has been wasted on the subject, and which now remains, like a *caput mortuum*, weighing down the better text of our greatest poet.

After Shakespeare, *Beaumont and Fletcher* have altogether the highest claims to consideration. For, though Ben Jonson was more eminent in some respects, and Massinger better in others, they were, as serious dramatic poets, decidedly superior to both. It is difficult to separate Beaumont from Fletcher; especially as all the plays wherein the former had a share are not certainly known. Beaumont is said to have had the better judgment (to have 'brought the ballast of judgment,') and Fletcher the livelier and more prolific fancy; but as the latter was the sole author of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, *Valentinian*, *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ['The Two Noble Kinsmen' is said to have been written by Fletcher and Shakespeare; and the early part of the play certainly betrays marks of the great master hand, or else an imitation so exquisite, as to cause our regret that it was not more frequently attempted.] besides being concerned jointly with Beaumont in some of the most serious plays which pass under their joint names, he is entitled on the whole to the greatest share of our admiration. An excellent critic has said of Fletcher, that he was 'mistrustful of nature.' We think rather that he was careless of her. He lets his Muse run riot too often. There is no symptom of timidity about him, (if that be meant:) he never stands on the verge of a deep thought, curbing his wit for propriety's sake. On the contrary, he seems often not to know where to stop. Hence it is that his style becomes dilated, and has sometimes an appearance of effeminacy.

If we may believe the portraits of Fletcher, there was something flushed and sanguine in his personal complexion. His eye had a fiery and eager look; his hair inclined to red; and his whole appearance is restless, and, without being heavy, is plethoric. And his verse is like himself. It is flushed and full of animal spirit. It has as much of this as Marlow's had; but there is not the same extravagance, and scarcely the same power which is to be found in the verse of the elder dramatist Fletcher, however, had a great deal of humour, and a great deal of sprightliness. There is a buoyancy in his language that is never perceptible in Massinger, nor even in the shrewder scenes of Ben Jonson;—but he had not a wit like Shakespeare, nor a tithe of his ethereal fancy. There is always something *worldly* in Fletcher, and the other poets of his time, which interferes with their airiest abstractions, and drags down the wings of their Muse. We see it in the *Witch* of Middleton, in the *Faithful Shepherdess* of Fletcher and others; whereas we do not feel it in *The Tempest*, nor in *Macbeth*, disturbing our delusion; and Oberon and Titania and her crew, even when they mix with the 'rude mechanicals,'

'Who work for bread upon Athenian stalls,'

remain to us a golden dream. They meet by moonlight upon the haunted shores of Athens, to make sport with human creatures, to discuss their tiny jealousies, to submit even to the thralldom of an earthly passion; but they still keep up their elfin state, from first to last, unsoiled by any touch of mortality.

Before we part with Fletcher, we will give the reader a passage from his tragedy of *Philaster*, that will illustrate, more than any thing we can say, both his merits and defects. Bellario (a girl in disguise) addresses the King of Sicily, on behalf of his daughter (Arethusa), who has just been married clandestinely to Philaster. The young couple come in as masquers; and thus the boy-girl intercedes:—

Right royal Sir, I should  
Sing you an epithalamium of these lovers,  
But having lost my best airs with my fortunes,  
And wanting a celestial harp to strike  
This blessed union on, thus in glad story  
I give you all. These two fair cedar branches,  
The noblest of the mountain, where they grew  
Straitest and tallest, under whose still shades  
The worthier beasts have made their layers, and slept  
Free from the Sirian star, and the fell thunder-storke,  
Free from the clouds, when they were big with humour,  
And delivered  
In thousand spouts their issues to the earth;—  
Oh! there was none but silent Quiet there;  
Till never-pleased Fortune shot up shrubs,  
Base under-brambles to divorce these branches;  
And for a while they did so:—  
And now a gentle gale hath blown again,  
And made these branches meet and twine together,  
Never to be divided.—The God, that sings  
His holy numbers over marriage beds,  
Hath knit their noble hearts, and here they stand  
Your children, mighty king; and I have done.'