

## CHAPTER VII

### THE THIRD DRAMATIC PERIOD

I HAVE chosen, to fill the third division of our dramatic chapters, seven chief writers of distinguished individuality, reserving a certain fringe of anonymous plays and of less famous personalities for the fourth and last. The seven exceptional persons are Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, Middleton, Heywood, Tourneur, and Day. It would be perhaps lost labour to attempt to make out a severe definition, shutting these off on the one hand from their predecessors, on the other from those that followed them. We must be satisfied in such cases with an approach to exactness, and it is certain that while most of the men just named had made some appearance in the latest years of Elizabeth, and while one or two of them lasted into the earliest years of Charles, they all represent, in their period of flourishing and in the character of their work, the Jacobean age. In some of them, as in Middleton and Day, the Elizabethan type prevails; in others, as in Fletcher, a distinctly new flavour—a flavour not perceptible in Shakespeare, much less in Marlowe—appears. But in none of them is that other flavour of pronounced decadence, which appears in the work of men so great as Massinger and Ford, at all perceptible. We are still in the creative period, and in some of the work to be now noticed we are in a comparatively unformed stage of it. It has been said, and not unjustly said, that the work of Beaumont and Fletcher belongs, when looked at

on one side, not to the days of Elizabeth at all, but to the later seventeenth century; and this is true to the extent that the post-Restoration dramatists copied Fletcher and followed Fletcher very much more than Shakespeare. But not only dates but other characteristics refer the work of Beaumont and Fletcher to a distinctly earlier period than the work of their, in some sense, successors Massinger and Ford.

It will have been observed that I cleave to the old-fashioned nomenclature, and speak of "Beaumont and Fletcher." Until very recently, when two new editions have made their appearance, there was for a time a certain tendency to bring Fletcher into greater prominence than his partner, but at the same time and on the whole to depreciate both. I am in all things but ill-disposed to admit innovation without the clearest and most cogent proofs; and although the comparatively short life of Beaumont makes it impossible that he should have taken part in some of the fifty-two plays traditionally assigned to the partnership (we may perhaps add Mr. Bullen's remarkable discovery of *Sir John Barneveldt*, in which Massinger probably took Beaumont's place), I see no reason to dispute the well-established theory that Beaumont contributed at least criticism, and probably original work, to a large number of these plays; and that his influence probably survived himself in conditioning his partner's work. And I am also disposed to think that the plays attributed to the pair have scarcely had fair measure in comparison with the work of their contemporaries, which was so long neglected. Beaumont and Fletcher kept the stage—kept it constantly and triumphantly—till almost, if not quite, within living memory; while since the seventeenth century, and since its earlier part, I believe that very few plays of Dekker's or Middleton's, of Webster's or of Ford's, have been presented to an English audience. This of itself constituted at the great revival of interest in Elizabethan literature something of a prejudice in favour of *les oubliés et les dédaignés*, and this prejudice has naturally grown stronger since all alike have been banished from the stage. The Copper Captain and the Humorous

Lieutenant, Bessus and Monsieur Thomas, are no longer on the boards to plead for their authors. The comparative depreciation of Lamb and others is still on the shelves to support their rivals.

Although we still know but little about either Beaumont or Fletcher personally, they differ from most of their great contemporaries by having come of "kenned folk," and by having to all appearance, industrious as they were, had no inducement to write for money. Francis Beaumont was born at Gracedieu, in Leicestershire in 1584. He was the son of a chief-justice; his family had for generations been eminent, chiefly in the law; his brother, Sir John Beaumont, was not only a poet of some merit, but a man of position, and Francis himself, two years before his death in 1616, married a Kentish heiress. He was educated at Broadgates Hall (now Pembroke College), Oxford, and seems to have made acquaintance with John Fletcher soon after quitting the University. Fletcher was five years older than his friend, and of a clerical family, his father being Bishop of London, and his uncle, Giles Fletcher (the author of *Licia*), a dignitary of the Church. The younger Giles Fletcher and his brother Phineas were thus cousins of the dramatist. Fletcher was a Cambridge man, having been educated at Benet College (at present and indeed originally known as Corpus Christi). Little else is known of him except that he died of the plague in 1625, nine years after Beaumont's death, as he had been born five years before him. These two men, however, one of whom was but thirty and the other not fifty when he died, have left by far the largest collection of printed plays attributed to any English author. A good deal of dispute has been indulged in as to their probable shares,—the most likely opinion being that Fletcher was the creator and Beaumont (whose abilities in criticism, were recognised by such a judge as Ben Jonson) the critical and revising spirit. About a third of the whole number have been supposed to represent Beaumont's influence more or less directly. These include the two finest, *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster*; while as to the third play, which may be put on the same level, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*,

early assertion, confirmed by a constant catena of the best critical authority, maintains that Beaumont's place was taken by no less a collaborator than Shakespere. Fletcher, as has been said, wrote in conjunction with Massinger (we know this for certain from Sir Aston Cokaine), and with Fowley and others, while Shirley seems to have finished some of his plays. Some modern criticism has manifested a desire to apply the always uncertain and usually unprofitable tests of separation to the great mass of his work. With this we need not busy ourselves. The received collection has quite sufficient idiosyncrasy of its own as a whole to make it superfluous for any one, except as a matter of amusement, to try to split it up.

Its characteristics are, as has been said, sufficiently marked, both in defects and in merits. The comparative depreciation which has come upon Beaumont and Fletcher naturally fixes on the defects. There is in the work of the pair, and especially in Fletcher's work when he wrought alone, a certain loose fluency, an ungirt and relaxed air, which contrasts very strongly with the strenuous ways of the elder playwrights. This exhibits itself not in plotting or playwork proper, but in style and in versification (the redundant syllable predominating, and every now and then the verse slipping away altogether into the strange medley between verse and prose, which we shall find so frequent in the next and last period), and also in the characters. We quit indeed the monstrous types of cruelty, of lust, of revenge, in which many of the Elizabethans proper and of Fletcher's own contemporaries delighted. But at the same time we find a decidedly lowered standard of general morality—a distinct approach towards the *fay ce que voudras* of the Restoration. We are also nearer to the region of the commonplace. Nowhere appears that attempt to grapple with the impossible, that wrestle with the hardest problems, which Marlowe began, and which he taught to some at least of his followers. And lastly—despite innumerable touches of tender and not a few of heroic poetry—the actual poetical value of the dramas at their best is below that of the best

work of the preceding time, and of such contemporaries as Webster and Dekker. Beaumont and Fletcher constantly delight, but they do not very often transport, and even when they do, it is with a less strange rapture than that which communicates itself to the reader of Shakespere *passim*, and to the readers of many of Shakespere's fellows here and there.

This, I think, is a fair allowance. But, when it is made, a goodly capital whereon to draw still remains to our poets. In the first place, no sound criticism can possibly overlook the astonishing volume and variety of their work. No doubt they did not often (if they ever did) invent their fables. But they have never failed to treat them in such a way as to make them original, and this of itself shows a wonderful faculty of invention and constitutes an inexhaustible source of pleasure. This pleasure is all the more pleasurable because the matter is always presented in a thoroughly workmanlike form. The shapelessness, the incoherence, the necessity for endless annotation and patching together, which mar so many even of the finest Elizabethan plays, have no place in Beaumont and Fletcher. Their dramatic construction is almost narrative in its clear and easy flow, in its absence of puzzles and piecings. Again, their stories are always interesting, and their characters (especially the lighter ones) always more or less attractive. It used to be fashionable to praise their "young men," probably because of the agreeable contrast which they present with the brutality of the Restoration hero; but their girls are more to my fancy. They were not straightlaced, and have left some sufficiently ugly and (let it be added) not too natural types of sheer impudence, such as the Megra of *Philaster*. Nor could they ever attain to the romantic perfection of Imogen in one kind, of Rosalind in another, of Juliet in a third. But for portraits of pleasant English girls not too squeamish, not at all afraid of love-making, quite convinced of the hackneyed assertion of the mythologists that jests and jokes go in the train of Venus, but true-hearted, affectionate, and of a sound, if not a very nice morality, commend me to Fletcher's Dorotheas, and Marys, and

Celias. Add to this the excellence of their comedy (there is little better comedy of its kind anywhere than that of *A King and no King*, of the *Humorous Lieutenant*, of *Rule a Wife and have a Wife*), their generally high standard of dialogue verse, their charming songs, and it will be seen that if they have not the daemonic virtue of a few great dramatic poets, they have at any rate very good, solid, pleasant, and plentiful substitutes for it.

It is no light matter to criticise more than fifty plays in not many times fifty lines; yet something must be said about some of them at any rate. The play which usually opens the series, *The Maid's Tragedy*, is perhaps the finest of all on the purely tragic side, though its plot is a little improbable, and to modern notions not very agreeable. Hazlitt disliked it much; and though this is chiefly to be accounted for by the monarchical tone of it, it is certainly faulty in parts. It shows, in the first place, the authors' greatest dramatic weakness—a weakness common indeed to all their tribe except Shakespere—the representation of sudden and quite insufficiently motived moral revolutions; and, secondly, another fault of theirs in the representation of helpless and rather nerveless virtue punished without fault of its own indeed, but also without any effort. The *Aspatia* of *The Maid's Tragedy* and the *Bellarion* of *Philaster*, pathetic as they are, are also slightly irritating. Still the pathos is great, and the quarrel or threatened quarrel of the friends Amintor and Melantius, the horrible trial put upon Amintor by his sovereign and the abandoned Evadne, as well as the whole part of Evadne herself when she has once been (rather improbably) converted, are excellent. A passage of some length from the latter part of the play may supply as well as another the sufficient requirement of an illustrative extract:—

*Evad.* "O my lord!

*Amin.* How now?

*Evad.* My much abused lord! (*Kneels.*)

*Amin.* This cannot be.

*Evad.* I do not kneel to live, I dare not hope it;

The wrongs I did are greater; look upon me

Though I appear with all my faults. *Amin.* Stand up.

This is a new way to beget more sorrow.  
 Heav'n knows, I have too many ; do not mock me ;  
 Though I am tame and bred up with my wrongs  
 Which are my foster-brothers, I may leap  
 Like a hand-wolf into my natural wildness  
 And do an outrage : pray thee, lo not mock me.

*Evad.* My whole life is so leprous, it infects  
 All my repentance : I would buy your pardon  
 Though at the highest set, even with my life :  
 That slight contrition, that's no sacrifice  
 For what I have committed. *Amin.* Sure I dazzle.  
 There cannot be a Faith in that foul woman  
 That knows no God more mighty than her mischiefs :  
 Thou dost still worse, still number on thy faults  
 To press my poor heart thus. Can I believe  
 There's any seed of virtue in that woman  
 Left to shoot up, that dares go on in sin  
 Known, and so known as thine is? O Evadne !  
 'Would, there were any safety in thy sex,  
 That I might put a thousand sorrows off,  
 And credit thy repentance ! But I must not :  
 Thou'st brought me to that dull calamity,  
 To that strange misbelief of all the world  
 And all things that are in it ; that, I fear  
 I shall fall like a tree, and find my grave,  
 Only remembering that I grieve.

*Evad.* My lord,  
 Give me your griefs : you are an innocent,  
 A soul as white as Heav'n. Let not my sins  
 Perish your noble youth : I do not fall here  
 To shadows by dissembling with my tears  
 (As, all say, women can) or to make less  
 What my hot will hath done, which Heav'n and you  
 Knows to be tougher than the hand of time  
 Can cut from man's remembrance ; no, I do not ;  
 I do appear the same, the same Evadne  
 Drest in the shames I liv'd in ; the same monster :  
 But these are names of honour, to what I am ;  
 I do present myself the foulest creature  
 Most pois'nous, dang'rous, and despis'd of men,  
 Lerna e'er bred, or Nilus : I am hell,  
 Till you, my dear lord, shoot your light into me

The beams of your forgiveness : I am soul-sick ;  
 And wither with the fear of one condemn'd,  
 Till I have got your pardon. *Amin.* Rise, Evadne.  
 Those heavenly Powers, that put this good into thee,  
 Grant a continuance of it : I forgive thee ;  
 Make 'hyself worthy of it, and take heed,  
 Take heed, Evadne, this be serious ;  
 Mock not the Pow'rs above, that can and dare  
 Give thee a great example of their justice  
 To all ensuing eyes, if that thou playest  
 With thy repentance, tne best sacrifice.

*Evad.* I have done nothing good to win belief,  
 My life hath been so faithless ; all the creatures  
 Made for Heav'n's honours, have their ends, and good ones,  
 All but the cozening crocodiles, false wome ;  
 They reign here like those plagues, those killing sores,  
 Men pray against ; and when they die, like tales  
 Ill told, and unbeliev'd they pass away  
 And go to dust forgotten : But, my lord,  
 Those short days I shall number to my rest,  
 (As many must not see me) shall, though late  
 (Though in my evening, yet perceive a will,)  
 Since I can do no good, because a woman,  
 Reach constantly at something that is near it ;  
 I will redeem one minute of my age,  
 Or, like another Niobe, I'll weep  
 Till I am water.

*Amin.* I am now dissolv'd.  
 My frozen soul melts : may each sin thou hast  
 Find a new mercy ! rise, I am at peace :  
 Hadst thou been thus, thus excellently good,  
 Before that devil king tempted thy frailty,  
 Sure, thou hadst made a star. Give me thy hand ;  
 From this time I will know thee, and as far  
 As honour gives me leave, be thy Amintor.  
 When we meet next, I will salute thee fairly  
 And pray the gods to give thee happy days.  
 My charity shall go along with thee  
 Though my embraces must be far from thee.  
 I should ha' kill'd thee, but this sweet repentance  
 Locks up my vengeance, for which thus I kiss thee,  
 The last kiss we must take."



The beautiful play of *Philaster* has already been glanced at ; it is sufficient to add that its detached passages are deservedly the most famous of all. The insufficiency of the reasons of Philaster's jealousy may be considered by different persons as affecting to a different extent the merit of the piece. In these two pieces tragedy, or at least tragi-comedy, has the upper hand ; it is in the next pair as usually arranged (for the chronological order of these plays is hitherto unsolved) that Fletcher's singular *vis comica* appears. *A King and no King* has a very serious plot ; and the loves of Arbaces and Panthea are most lofty, insolent, and passionate. But the comedy of Bessus and his two swordsmen, which is fresh and vivid even after Bobadil and Parolles (I do not say Falstaff, because I hold it a vulgar error to consider Falstaff as really a coward at all), is perhaps more generally interesting. As for *The Scornful Lady* it is comedy pure and simple, and very excellent comedy too. The callousness of the younger Loveless—an ugly forerunner of Restoration manners—injures it a little, and the instantaneous and quite unreasonable conversion of the usurer Morecraft a little more. But the humours of the Lady herself (a most Moliéresque personage), and those of Roger and Abigail, with many minor touches, more than redeem it. The plays which follow<sup>1</sup> are all comical and mostly farcical. The situations, rather than the expressions of *The Custom of the Country*, bring it under the ban of a rather unfair condemnation of Dryden's, pronounced when he was quite unsuccessfully trying to free the drama of himself and his contemporaries from Collier's damning charges. But there are many lively traits in it. *The Elder Brother* is one of those many variations on *cedant arma togæ* which men of letters have always been somewhat prone to overvalue ; but the excellent comedy of *The Spanish Curate* is not impaired by the fact that Dryden chose to adapt it after his own fashion in *The Spanish Friar*. In *Wit Without Money*, though it is as usual amusing, the stage preference for a "roaring boy," a senseless

<sup>1</sup> It may perhaps be well to mention that the references to "volumes" are to the ten-volume edition of 1750, by Theobald, Seward, and others.

crack-brained spendthrift, appears perhaps a little too strongly. *The Beggar's Bush* is interesting because of its early indications of cant language, connecting it with Brome's *Jovial Crew*, and with Dekker's thieves' Latin pamphlets. But the faults and the merits of Fletcher have scarcely found better expression anywhere than in *The Humorous Lieutenant*. Celia is his masterpiece in the delineation of the type of girl outlined above, and awkward as her double courtship by Demetrius and his father Antigonus is, one somehow forgives it, despite the nauseous crew of go-betweens of both sexes whom Fletcher here as elsewhere seems to take a pleasure in introducing. As for the Lieutenant he is quite charming; and even the ultra-farcical episode of his falling in love with the king owing to a philtre is well carried off. Then follows the delightful pastoral of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, which ranks with Jonson's *Sad Shepherd* and with *Comus*, as the three chiefs of its style in English. *The Loyal Subject* falls a little behind, as also does *The Mad Lover*; but *Rule a Wife and have a Wife* again rises to the first class. Inferior to Shakespere in the power of transcending without travesty human affairs, to Jonson in sharply presented humours, to Congreve and Sheridan in rattling fire of dialogue, our authors have no superior in half-farcical, half-pathetic comedy of a certain kind, and they have perhaps nowhere shown their power better than in the picture of the Copper Captain and his Wife. The flagrant absurdity of *The Laws of Candy* (which put the penalty of death on ingratitude, and apparently fix no criterion of what ingratitude is, except the decision of the person who thinks himself ungratefully treated), spoils a play which is not worse written than the rest. But in *The False One*, based on Egyptian history just after Pompey's death, and *Valentinian*, which follows with a little poetical license the crimes and punishment of that Emperor, a return is made to pure tragedy—in both cases with great success. The magnificent passage which Hazlitt singled out from *The False One* is perhaps the author's or authors' highest attempt in tragic declamation, and may be considered to have stopped not far short of the highest tragic poetry.

“ Oh thou conqueror,  
Thou glory of the world once, now the pity :  
Thou awe of nations, wherefore didst thou fall thus ?  
What poor fate followed thee, and plucked thee on  
To trust thy sacred life to an Egyptian ?  
The life and light of Rome to a hind stranger,  
That honourable war ne'er taught a nobleness  
Nor worthy circumstance show'd what a man was ?  
That never heard thy name sung but in banquets  
And loose lascivious pleasures ? to a boy  
That had no faith to comprehend thy greatness  
No study of thy life to know thy goodness ? . . .  
Egyptians, dare you think your high pyramids  
Built to out-dure the sun, as you suppose,  
Where y<sup>r</sup> unworthy kings lie rak'd in ashes,  
Are monuments fit for him ! No, brood of Nilus,  
Nothing can cover his high fame but heaven ;  
No pyramids set off his memories,  
But the eternal substance of his greatness,  
To which I leave him.”

The chief fault of *Valentinian* is that the character of Maximus is very indistinctly drawn, and that of Eudoxia nearly unintelligible. These two pure tragedies are contrasted with two comedies, *The Little French Lawyer* and *Monsieur Thomas*, which deserve high praise. The fabliau-motive of the first is happily contrasted with the character of Lamira and the friendship of Clerimont and Dinant ; while no play has so many of Fletcher's agreeable young women as *Monsieur Thomas*. *The Bloody Brother*, which its title speaks as sufficiently tragical, comes between two excellent comedies, *The Chances* and *The Wild Goose Chase*, which might serve as well as any others for samples of the whole work on its comic side. In *The Chances* the portrait of the hare-brained Don John is the chief thing ; in *The Wild Goose Chase*, as in *Monsieur Thomas*, a whole bevy of lively characters, male and female, dispute the reader's attention and divide his preference. *A Wife for a Month* sounds comic, but is not a little alloyed with tragedy ; and despite the pathos of its central situation, is marred by some of Fletcher's ugliest characters—the characters

which Shakespere in Pandarus and the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* took care to touch with his lightest finger. *The Lover's Progress*, a doubtful tragedy, and *The Pilgrim*, a good comedy (revived at the end of the century, as was *The Prophetess* with certain help from Dryden), do not require any special notice. Between these two last comes *The Captain*, a comedy neither of the best nor yet of the worst. The tragi-comic *Queen of Corinth* is a little heavy; but in *Bonduca* we have one of the very best of the author's tragedies, the scenes with Caratach and his nephew, the boy Hengo, being full of touches not wholly unworthy of Shakespere. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (where Fletcher, forsaking his usual fantastic grounds of a France that is scarcely French, and an Italy that is extremely un-Italian, comes to simple pictures of London middle-class life, such as those of Jonson or Middleton) is a very happy piece of work indeed, despite the difficulty of working out its double presentment of burlesque knight-errantry and straightforward comedy of manners. In *Love's Pilgrimage*, with a Spanish subject and something of a Spanish style, there is not enough central interest, and the fortunes by land and sea of *The Double Marriage* do not make it one of Fletcher's most interesting plays. But *The Maid in the Mill* and *The Martial Maid* are good farce, which almost deserves the name of comedy; and *The Knight of Malta* is a romantic drama of merit. In *Women Pleas'd* the humours of avarice and hungry servility are ingeniously treated, and one of the starveling Penurio's speeches is among the best-known passages of all the plays, while the anti-Puritan satire of Hope-on-High Bomby is also noteworthy. The next four plays are less noticeable, and indeed for two volumes, of the edition referred to, we come to fewer plays that are specially good. *The Night Walker*; or, *The Little Thief*, though not very probable in its incidents, has a great deal of lively business, and is particularly noteworthy as supplying proof of the singular popularity of bell-ringing with all classes of the population in the seventeenth century,—a popularity which probably protected many old bells in the mania for church desecration. Not much can

be said for *The Woman's Prize*, or, *The Tamer Tamed*, an avowed sequel, and so to speak, antidote to *The Taming of the Shrew*, which chiefly proves that it is wise to let Shakespere alone. The authors have drawn to some extent on the *Lysistrata* to aid them, but have fallen as far short of the fun as of the indecency of that memorable play. With *The Island Princess* we return to a fair, though not more than a fair level of romantic tragic-comedy, but *The Noble Gentleman* is the worst play ever attributed (even falsely) to authors of genius. The subject is perfectly uninteresting, the characters are all fools or knaves, and the means adopted to gull the hero through successive promotions to rank, and successive deprivations of them (the genuineness of neither of which he takes the least trouble to ascertain), are preposterous. *The Coronation* is much better, and *The Sea Voyage*, with a kind of Amazon story grafted upon a hint of *The Tempest*, is a capital play of its kind. Better still, despite a certain looseness both of plot and moral, is *The Coxcomb*, where the heroine Viola is a very touching figure. The extravagant absurdity of the traveller Antonio is made more probable than is sometimes the case with our authors, and the situations of the whole join neatly, and pass trippingly. *Wit at Several Weapons* deserves a somewhat similar description, and so does *The Fair Maid of the Inn*; while *Cupid's Revenge*, though it shocked the editors of 1750 as a pagan kind of play, has a fine tragical zest, and is quite true to classical belief in its delineation of the ruthlessness of the offended Deity. Undoubtedly, however, the last volume of this edition supplies the most interesting material of any except the first. Here is *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a play founded on the story of Palamon and Arcite, and containing what I think irrefragable proofs of Shakespere's writing and versification, though I am unable to discern anything very Shakesperian either in plot or character. Then comes the fine, though horrible tragedy of *Thierry and Theodoret*, in which the misdeeds of Queen Brunehault find chroniclers who are neither squeamish nor feeble. The beautiful part of Ordella in this play, though somewhat sentimental and

improbable (as is always the case with Fletcher's very virtuous characters) ranks at the head of its kind, and is much superior to that of Aspasia in *The Maid's Tragedy*. *The Woman Hater*, said to be Fletcher's earliest play, has a character of rare comic, or at least farcical virtue in the snell-feast Lazarillo with his Odyssey in chase of the Umbrana's head (a delicacy which is perpetually escaping him); and *The Nice Valour* contains, in Chamont and his brother, the most successful attempts of the English stage at the delineation of the point of honour gone mad. Not so much, perhaps, can be said for *An Honest Man's Fortune*, which, with a mask and a clumsy, though in part beautiful, piece entitled *Four Plays in One*, makes up the tale. But whosoever has gone through that tale will, if he has any taste for the subject, admit that such a total of work, so varied in character, and so full of excellences in all its variety, has not been set to the credit of any name or names in English literature, if we except only Shakespeare. Of the highest and most terrible graces, as of the sweetest and most poetical, Beaumont and Fletcher may have little to set beside the masterpieces of some other men; for accomplished, varied, and fertile production, they need not fear any competition.

It has not been usual to put Thomas Middleton in the front rank among the dramatists immediately second to Shakespeare; but I have myself no hesitation in doing so. If he is not such a poet as Webster, he is even a better, and certainly a more versatile, dramatist; and if his plays are inferior as plays to those of Fletcher and Massinger, he has a mastery of the very highest tragedy, which neither of them could attain. Except the best scenes of *The White Devil*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*, there is nothing out of Shakespeare that can match the best scenes of *The Changeling*; while Middleton had a comic faculty, in which, to all appearance, Webster was entirely lacking. A little more is known about Middleton than about most of his fellows. He was the son of a gentleman, and was pretty certainly born in London about 1570. It does not appear that he was a university man,

but he seems to have been at Gray's Inn. His earliest known work was not dramatic, and was exceedingly bad. In 1597 he published a verse paraphrase of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, which makes even that admirable book unreadable; and if, as seems pretty certain, the *Microcynicon* of two years later is his, he is responsible for one of the worst and feeblest exercises in the school—never a very strong one—of Hall and Marston. Some prose tracts of the usual kind are not better; but either at the extreme end of the sixteenth century, or in the very earliest years of the next, Middleton turned his attention to the then all absorbing drama, and for many years was (chiefly in collaboration) a busy playwright. We have some score of plays which are either his alone, or in greatest part his. The order of their composition is very uncertain, and as with most of the dramatists of the period, not a few of them never appeared in print till long after the author's death. He was frequently employed in composing pageants for the City of London, and in 1620 was appointed city chronologer. In 1624 Middleton got into trouble. His play, *The Game of Chess*, which was a direct attack on Spain and Rome, and a personal satire on Gondomar, was immensely popular, but its nine days' run was abruptly stopped on the complaint of the Spanish ambassador; the poet's son, it would seem, had to appear before the Council, and Middleton himself was (according to tradition) imprisoned for some time. In this same year he was living at Newington Butts. He died there in the summer of 1627, and was succeeded as chronologer by Ben Jonson. His widow, Magdalen, received a gratuity from the Common Council, but seems to have followed her husband in a little over a year.

Middleton's acknowledged, or at least accepted, habit of collaboration in most of the work usually attributed to him, and the strong suspicion, if not more than suspicion, that he collaborated in other plays, afford endless opportunity for the exercise of a certain kind of criticism. By employing another kind we can discern quite sufficiently a strong individuality in the work that

is certainly, in part or in whole, his ; and we need not go farther. He seems to have had three different kinds of dramatic aptitude, in all of which he excelled. The larger number of his plays consist of examples of the rattling comedy of intrigue and manners, often openly representing London life as it was, sometimes transplanting what is an evident picture of home manners to some foreign scene apparently for no other object than to make it more attractive to the spectators. To any one at all acquainted with the Elizabethan drama their very titles speak them. These titles are *Blurt Master Constable*, *Michaelmas Term*, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, *The Family of Love* [a sharp satire on the Puritans], *A Mad World, my Masters*, *No Wit no Help Like a Woman's*, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, *Anything for a Quiet Life*, *More Dissembles besides Women*. As with all the humour-comedies of the time, the incidents are not unfrequently very improbable, and the action is conducted with such intricacy and want of clearly indicated lines, that it is sometimes very difficult to follow. At the same time, Middleton has a faculty almost peculiar to himself of carrying, it might almost be said of hustling, the reader or spectator along, so that he has no time to stop and consider defects. His characters are extremely human and lively, his dialogue seldom lags, his catastrophes, if not his plots, are often ingenious, and he is never heavy. The moral atmosphere of his plays is not very refined,—by which I do not at all mean merely that he indulges in loose situations and loose language. All the dramatists from Shakespere downwards do that ; and Middleton is neither better nor worse than the average. But in striking contrast to Shakespere and to others, Middleton has no kind of poetical morality in the sense in which the term poetical justice is better known. He is not too careful that the rogues shall not have the best of it ; he makes his most virtuous and his vilest characters hobnob together very contentedly ; and he is, in short, though never brutal, like the post-Restoration school, never very delicate. The style, however, of these works of his did not easily admit of such delicacy, except in the infusion of a



strong romantic element such as that which Shakespere almost always infuses. Middleton has hardly done it more than once—in the charming comedy of *The Spanish Gipsy*,—and the result there is so agreeable that the reader only wishes he had done it oftener.

Usually, however, when his thoughts took a turn of less levity than in these careless humorous studies of contemporary life, he devoted himself not to the higher comedy, but to tragedy of a very serious class, and when he did this an odd phenomenon generally manifested itself. In Middleton's idea of tragedy, as in that of most of the playwrights, and probably all the playgoers of his day, a comic underplot was a necessity; and, as we have seen, he was himself undoubtedly able enough to furnish such a plot. But either because he disliked mixing his tragic and comic veins, or for some unknown reason, he seems usually to have called in on such occasions the aid of Rowley, a vigorous writer of farce, who had sometimes been joined with him even in his comic work. Now, not only was Rowley little more than a farce writer, but he seems to have been either unable to make, or quite careless of making, his farce connect itself in any tolerable fashion with the tragedy of which it formed a nominal part. The result is seen in its most perfect imperfection in the two plays of *The Mayor of Queenborough* and *The Changeling*, both named from their comic features, and yet containing tragic scenes, the first of a very high order, the second of an order only overtopped by Shakespere at his best. The humours of the cobbler Mayor of Queenborough in the one case, of the lunatic asylum and the courting of its keeper's wife in the other, are such very mean things that they can scarcely be criticised. But the desperate love of Vortiger for Rowena in *The Mayor*, and the villainous plots against his chaste wife, Castiza, are real tragedy. Even these, however, fall far below the terrible loves, if loves they are to be called, of Beatrice-Joanna, the heroine of *The Changeling*, and her servant, instrument, and murderer, De Flores. The plot of the tragic part of this play is intricate and not wholly savoury. It is sufficient to say that

Beatrice having enticed De Flores to murder a lover whom she does not love, that so she may marry a lover whom she does love, is suddenly met by the murderer's demand of her honour as the price of his services. She submits, and afterwards has to purchase fresh aid of murder from him by a continuance of her favours that she may escape detection by her husband. Thus, roughly described, the theme may look like the undigested horrors of *Lust's Dominion*, of *The Insatiate Countess*, and of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. It is, however, poles asunder from them. The girl, with her southern recklessness of anything but her immediate desires, and her southern indifference to deceiving the very man she loves, is sufficiently remarkable, as she stands out of the canvas. But De Flores,—the broken gentleman, reduced to the position of a mere dependant, the libertine whose want of personal comeliness increases his mistress's contempt for him, the murderer double and treble dyed, as audacious as he is treacherous, and as cool and ready as he is fiery in passion,—is a study worthy to be classed at once with Iago, and inferior only to Iago in their class. The several touches with which these two characters and their situations are brought out are as Shakesperian as their conception, and the whole of that part of the play in which they figure is one of the most wonderful triumphs of English or of any drama. Even the change of manners and a bold word or two here and there, may not prevent me from giving the latter part of the central scene:—

*Beat.* "Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,  
Or shelter such a cunning cruelty,  
To make his death the murderer of my honour!  
Thy language is so bold and vicious,  
I cannot see which way I can forgive it  
With any modesty.

*De F.* Pish!<sup>1</sup> you forget yourself:  
A woman dipped in blood, and talk of modesty!

*Beat.* O misery of sin! would I'd been bound

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<sup>1</sup> In orig. "Push," cf. "Tush."

Perpetually unto my living hate  
 In that Pisacquo, than to hear<sup>1</sup> these words.  
 Think but upon the distance that creation  
 Set 'twixt thy blood and mine, and keep thee there.

*De F.* Look but unto your conscience, read me *there* ;  
 'Tis a true book, you'll find me there your equal :  
 Pish ! fly not to your birth, but settle you  
 In what the act has made you ; you're no more now.  
 You must forget your parentage to me ;  
 You are the deed's creature ;<sup>2</sup> by that name  
 You lost your first condition, and I shall urge<sup>3</sup> you  
 As peace and innocency has turn'd you out,  
 And made you one with me.

*Beat.* With thee, foul villain !

*De F.* Yes, my fair murderess : do *you* urge *me* ?  
 Though thou writ'st maid, thou whore in thine affection !  
 'Twas changed from thy first love, and that's a kind  
 Of whoredom in thy heart : and he's changed now  
 To bring thy second on, thy Alsemero,  
 Whom by all sweets that ever darkness tasted  
 If I enjoy thee not, thou ne'er enjoyest !  
 I'll blast the hopes and joys of marriage,  
 I'll confess all ; my life I rate at nothing.

*Beat.* De Flores !

*De F.* I shall rest from all (lover's)<sup>4</sup> plagues then,  
 I live in pain now ; that [love] shooting eye  
 Will burn my heart to cinders.

*Beat.* O sir, hear me !

*De F.* She that in life and love refuses me,  
 In death and shame my partner she shall be.

*Beat.* (*kneeling*). Stay, hear me once for all : I make thee master  
 Of all the wealth I have in gold and jewels ;  
 Let me go poor unto my bed with honour  
 And I am rich in all things.

*De F.* Let this silence thee ;  
 The wealth of all Valencia shall not buy  
 My pleasure from me.

<sup>1</sup> Rather than hear.

<sup>2</sup> A trisyllable, as in strictness it ought to be.

<sup>3</sup> = "claim."

<sup>4</sup> This omission and the substitution in the next line are due to Dyce, and may be called *certissima emendatio*.

Can you weep Fate from its determined purpose?  
So soon may you weep me.

*Beat.* Vengeance begins;  
Murder, I see, is followed by more sins:  
Was my creation in the womb so curst  
It must engender with a viper first?

*De F. (raising her).* Come, rise and shroud your blushes in my bosom,  
Silence is one of pleasure's best receipts.  
Thy peace is wrought for ever in this yielding.  
'Las, how the turtle pants! thou'lt love anon  
What thou so fear'st and faint'st to venture on."

Two other remarkable plays of Middleton's fall with some differences under the same second division of his works. These are *The Witch* and *Women Beware Women*. Except for the inevitable and rather attractive comparison with *Macbeth*, *The Witch* is hardly interesting. It consists of three different sets of scenes most inartistically blended,—an awkward and ineffective variation on the story of Alboin, Rosmunda and the skull for a serious main plot, some clumsy and rather unsavoury comic or tragi-comic interludes, and the witch scenes. The two first are very nearly worthless; the third is intrinsically, though far below *Macbeth*, interesting enough and indirectly more interesting because of the questions which have been started, as to the indebtedness of the two poets to each other. The best opinion seems to be that Shakespere most certainly did not copy Middleton, nor (a strange fancy of some) did he collaborate with Middleton, and that the most probable thing is that both borrowed their names, and some details from Reginald Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft*. *Women Beware Women* on the other hand is one of Middleton's finest works, inferior only to *The Changeling* in parts, and far superior to it as a whole. The temptation of Bianca, the newly-married wife, by the duke's instrument, a cunning and shameless woman, is the title-theme, and in this part again Middleton's Shakesperian verisimilitude and certainty of touch appear. The end of the play is something marred by a slaughter more wholesale even than that of *Hamlet*, and by no means so

well justified. Lastly, *A Fair Quarrel* must be mentioned, because of the very high praise which it has received from Lamb and others. This praise has been directed chiefly to the situation of the quarrel between Captain Ager and his friend, turning on a question (the point of family honour), finely but perhaps a little tediously argued. The comic scenes, however, which are probably Rowley's, are in his best vein of bustling swagger.

I have said that Middleton, as it seems to me, has not been fully estimated. It is fortunately impossible to say the same of Webster, and the reasons of the difference are instructive. Middleton's great fault is that he never took trouble enough about his work. A little trouble would have made *The Changeling* or *Women Beware Women*, or even *The Spanish Gipsy*, worthy to rank with all but Shakespere's very masterpieces. Webster also was a collaborator, apparently an industrious one; but he never seems to have taken his work lightly. He had, moreover, that incommunicable gift of the highest poetry in scattered phrases which, as far as we can see, Middleton had not. Next to nothing is known of him. He may have been parish clerk of St. Andrew's, Holborn; but the authority is very late, and the commentators seemed to have jumped at it to explain Webster's fancy for details of death and burial—a cause and effect not sufficiently proportioned. Mr. Dyce has spent much trouble in proving that he could not have been the author of some Puritan tracts published a full generation after the date of his masterpieces. Heywood tells us that he was generally called "Jack," a not uncommon thing when men are christened John. He himself has left us a few very sententiously worded prefaces which do not argue great critical taste. We know from the usual sources (Henslowe's Diaries) that he was a working furnisher of plays, and from many rather dubious title-pages we suppose or know some of the plays he worked at. *Northward Ho!* *Westward Ho!* and *Sir John Wyatt* are pieces of dramatic journalism in which he seems to have helped Dekker. He adapted, with additions, Marston's *Malcontent*, which is, in a crude way, very much in his own vein; he

contributed (according to rather late authority) some charming scenes (elegantly extracted, on a hint of Mr. Gosse's, by a recent editor) to *A Cure for a Cuckold*, one of Rowley's characteristic and not ungenial botches of humour-comedy; he wrote a bad pageant or two, and some miscellaneous verses. But we know nothing of his life or death, and his fame rests on four plays, in which no other writer is either known or even hinted to have had a hand, and which are in different ways of the first order of interest, if not invariably of the first order of merit. These are *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The White Devil*, *The Devil's Law Case*, and *Appius and Virginia*.

Of *Appius and Virginia* the best thing to be said is to borrow Sainte-Beuve's happy description of Molière's *Don Garcie de Navarre*, and to call it an *essai pale et noble*. Webster is sometimes very close to Shakespere; but to read *Appius and Virginia*, and then to read *Julius Cæsar* or *Coriolanus*, is to appreciate, in perhaps the most striking way possible, the universality which all good judges from Dryden downwards have recognised in the prince of literature. Webster, though he was evidently a good scholar, and even makes some parade of scholarship, was a Romantic to the core, and was all abroad in these classical measures. *The Devil's Law Case* sins in the opposite way, being hopelessly undigested, destitute of any central interest, and, despite fine passages, a mere "salmagundi." There remain the two famous plays of *The White Devil* or *Vittoria Corombona* and *The Duchess of Malfi*—plays which were rarely, if ever, acted after their author's days, and of which the earlier and, to my judgment, better was not a success even then, but which the judgment of three generations has placed at the very head of all their class, and which contain magnificent poetry.

I have said that in my judgment *The White Devil* is the better of the two; I shall add that it seems to me very far the better. Webster's plays are comparatively well known, and there is no space here to tell their rather intricate arguments. It need only be said that the contrast of the two is striking and unmistakable;

and that Webster evidently meant in the one to indicate the punishment of female vice, in the other to draw pity and terror by the exhibition of the unprevented but not unavenged sufferings of female virtue. Certainly both are excellent subjects, and if the latter seem the harder, we have Imogen and Bellafront to show, in the most diverse material, and with the most diverse setting possible, how genius can manage it. With regard to *The White Devil*, it has been suggested with some plausibility that it wants expansion. Certainly the action is rather crowded, and the recourse to dumb show (which, however, Webster again permitted himself in *The Duchess*) looks like a kind of shorthand indication of scenes that might have been worked out. Even as it is, however, the sequence of events is intelligible, and the presentation of character is complete. Indeed, if there is any fault to find with it, it seems to me that Webster has sinned rather by too much detail than by too little. We could spare several of the minor characters, though none are perhaps quite so otiose as Delio, Julio, and others in *The Duchess of Malfi*. We feel (or at least I feel) that Vittoria's villainous brother Flamineo is not as Iago and Aaron and De Flores are each in his way, a thoroughly live creature. We ask ourselves (or I ask myself) what is the good of the repulsive and not in the least effective presentment of the Moor Zanche. Cardinal Monticelso is incontinent of tongue and singularly feeble in deed,—for no rational man would, after describing Vittoria as a kind of pest to mankind, have condemned her to a punishment which was apparently little more than residence in a rather disreputable but by no means constrained boarding-house, and no omnipotent pope would have let Ludivico loose with a clear inkling of his murderous designs. But when these criticisms and others are made, *The White Devil* remains one of the most glorious works of the period. Vittoria is perfect throughout; and in the justly-lauded trial scene she has no superior on any stage. Brachiano is a thoroughly life-like portrait of the man who is completely besotted with an evil woman. Flamineo I have spoken of, and

not favourably; yet in literature, if not in life, he is a triumph; and above all the absorbing tragic interest of the play, which it is impossible to take up without finishing, has to be counted in. But the real charm of *The White Devil* is the wholly miraculous poetry in phrases and short passages which it contains. Vittoria's dream of the yew-tree, almost all the speeches of the unfortunate Isabella, and most of her rival's, have this merit. But the most wonderful flashes of poetry are put in the mouth of the scoundrel Flamineo, where they have a singular effect. The famous dirge which Cornelia sings can hardly be spoken of now, except in Lamb's artfully simple phrase "I never saw anything like it," and the final speeches of Flamineo and his sister deserve the same endorsement. Nor is even the proud farewell of the Moor Zanche unworthy. It is impossible to describe the "whirl of spirits" (as the good old-fashioned phrase has it) into which the reading of this play sets the reader, except by saying that the cause of that whirl is the secret of the best Elizabethan writers, and that it is nowhere, out of Shakespere, better exemplified than in the scene partly extracted from Middleton, and in such passages of *Vittoria Corobona* as the following:—

*Cor.* "Will you make me such a fool? here's a white hand:  
 Can blood so soon be wash'd out? let me see;  
 When screech-owls croak upon the chimney-tops  
 And the strange cricket i' the oven sings and hops,  
 When yellow spots do on your hands appear,  
 Be certain then you of a corse shall hear.  
 Out upon 't, how 'tis speckled! 'h'as handled a toad, sure.  
 Cowslip-water is good for the memory:  
 Pray, buy me three ounces of 't.

*Flam.* I would I were from hence.

*Cor.* Do you hear, sir?  
 I'll give you a saying which my grand-mother  
 Was wont, when she heard the bell toll, to sing o'er  
 Unto her lute.

*Flam.* Do, an' you will, do.

*Cor.* 'Call for the robin-red-breast and the wren,

[*Cornelia doth this in several forms of distraction.*]



Since o'er shady groves they hover,  
 And with leaves and flowers do cover  
 The friendless bodies of unburied men.  
 Call unto his funeral dole  
 The ant, the field mouse, and the mole,  
 To rear him hillocks that shall keep him warm  
 And (when gay tombs are robb'd) sustain no harm,  
 But keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men,  
 For with his nails he'll dig them up again.'  
 They would not bury him 'cause he died in a quarrel ;  
 But I have an answer for them :  
 ' Let holy Church receive him duly  
 Since he paid the church-tithes truly.'  
 His wealth is summ'd, and this is all his store.  
 This poor rascal get, and great men get no more.  
 Now the wares are gone, we may shut up shop.  
 Bless you, all good people.

[*Exeunt* CORNELIA, ZANCHE, and LADIES.

*Flam.* I have a strange thing in me, to the which  
 I cannot give a name, without it be  
 Compassion. I pray, leave me.

[*Exit* FRANCISCO DE MEDICIS.

This night I'll know the utmost of my fate ;  
 I'll be resolv'd what my rich sister means  
 To assign me for my service. I have liv'd  
 Riotously ill, like some that live in court,  
 And sometimes when my face was full of smiles  
 Have felt the maze of conscience in my breast.  
 Oft gay and honoured robes those tortures try :  
 We think cag'd birds sing when indeed they cry.

*Enter Brachiano's ghost, in his leather cassock and breeches, and boots ; with a cowl ; in his hand a pot of lily flowers, with a skull in't.*

Ha ! I can stand thee : nearer, nearer it.  
 What a mockery hath death made thee ! thou look'st sad.  
 In what place art thou ? in yon starry gallery ?  
 Or in the cursèd dungeon ?—No ? not speak ?  
 Pray, sir, resolve me, what religion's best  
 For a man to die in ? or is it in your knowledge  
 To answer me how long I have to live ?  
 That's the most necessary question.  
 Not answer ? are you still like some great men

That only walk like shadows up and down,  
And to no purpose? Say :—

[*The Ghost throws earth upon him and shows him the skull.*

What's that? O, fatal! he throws earth upon me!  
A dead man's skull beneath the roots of flowers!—  
I pray [you], speak, sir : our Italian Church-men  
Make us believe dead men hold conference  
With their familiars, and many times  
Will come to bed to them, and eat with them.

[*Exit GHOST.*

He's gone; and see, the skull and earth are vanished.  
This is beyond melancholy. I do dare my fate  
To do its worst. Now to my sister's lodging  
And sum up all these horrors: the disgrace  
The prince threw on me; next the piteous sight  
Of my dead brother; and my mother's dotage;  
And last this terrible vision: all these  
Shall with Vittoria's bounty turn to good,  
Or I will drown this weapon in her blood."

[*Exit.*

*The Duchess of Malfi* is to my thinking very inferior—full of beauties as it is. In the first place, we cannot sympathise with the duchess, despite her misfortunes, as we do with the "White Devil." She is neither quite a virtuous woman (for in that case she would not have resorted to so much concealment) nor a frank professor of "All for Love." Antonio, her so-called husband, is an unromantic and even questionable figure. Many of the minor characters, as already hinted, would be much better away. Of the two brothers the Cardinal is a cold-blooded and uninteresting debauchee and murderer, who sacrifices sisters and mistresses without any reasonable excuse. Ferdinand, the other, is no doubt mad enough, but not interestingly mad, and no attempt is made to account in any way satisfactorily for the delay of his vengeance. By common consent, even of the greatest admirers of the play, the fifth act is a kind of gratuitous appendix of horrors stuck on without art or reason. But the extraordinary force and beauty of the scene where the duchess is murdered; the touches of poetry, pure and simple, which, as in the *The White Devil*, are

scattered all over the play; the fantastic accumulation of terrors before the climax; and the remarkable character of Bosola,—justify the high place generally assigned to the work. True, Bosola wants the last touches, the touches which Shakespere would have given. He is not wholly conceivable as he is. But as a “Plain Dealer” gone wrong, a “Malcontent” (Webster’s work on that play very likely suggested him), turned villain, a man whom ill-luck and fruitless following of courts have changed from a cynic to a scoundrel, he is a strangely original and successful study. The dramatic flashes in the play would of themselves save it. “I am Duchess of Malfi still,” and the other famous one “Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young,” often as they have been quoted, can only be quoted again. They are of the first order of their kind, and, except the “already *my De Flores!*” of *The Changeling*, there is nothing in the Elizabethan drama out of Shakespere to match them.

There is no doubt that some harm has been done to Thomas Heywood by the enthusiastic phrase in which Lamb described him as “a prose Shakespere.” The phrase itself is in the original quite carefully and sufficiently explained and qualified. But unluckily a telling description of the kind is sure to go far, while its qualifications remain behind; and (especially since a reprint by Pearson in the year 1874 made the plays of Heywood, to which one or two have since been added more or less conjecturally by the industry of Mr. Bullen, accessible as a whole) a certain revolt has been manifested against the encomium. This revolt is the effect of haste. “A prose Shakespere” suggests to incautious readers something like Swift, like Taylor, like Carlyle,—something approaching in prose the supremacy of Shakespere in verse. But obviously that is not what Lamb meant. Indeed when one remembers that if Shakespere is anything, he is a poet, the phrase may run the risk of receiving an under—not an over—valuation. It is evident, however, to any one who reads Lamb’s remarks in full and carefully—it is still more evident to any one who without much caring what Lamb or any one else has said,

reads Heywood for himself—what he did mean. He was looking only at one or two sides of the myriad-sided one, and he justly saw that Heywood touched Shakespere on these sides, if only in an incomplete and unpoetic manner. What Heywood has in common with Shakespere, though his prosaic rather than poetic treatment brings it out in a much less brilliant way, is his sympathy with ordinary and domestic character, his aversion from the fantastic vices which many of his fellows were prone to attribute to their characters, his humanity, his kindness. The reckless tragedy of blood and massacre, the reckless comedy of revelry and intrigue, were always repulsive to him, as far as we can judge from the comparatively scanty remnant of the hundreds of plays in which he boasted that he had had a hand, if not a chief hand. Besides these plays (he confesses to authorship or collaboration in two hundred and twenty) he was a voluminous writer in prose and verse, though I do not myself pretend to much knowledge of his non-dramatic work. Its most interesting part would have been a *Lives of the Poets*, which we know that he intended, and which could hardly have failed to give much information about his famous contemporaries. As it is, his most remarkable and best-known work, not contained in one of his dramas, is the curious and constantly quoted passage half complaining that all the chief dramatists of his day were known by abbreviations of their names, but characteristically and good-humouredly ending with the license—

“I hold he loves me best who calls me Tom.”

We have unfortunately no knowledge which enables us to call him many names except such as are derived from critical examination of his works. Little, except that he is said to have been a Lincolnshire man and a Fellow of Peterhouse, is known of his history. His masterpiece, *The Woman killed with Kindness* (in which a deceived husband, coming to the knowledge of his shame, drives his rival to repentance, and his wife to repentance and death, by his charity), is not wholly admirable.

Shakespeare would have felt, more fully than Heywood, the danger of presenting his hero as something of a wittol without sufficient passion of religion or affection to justify his tolerance. But the pathos is so great, the sense of "the pity of it" is so simply and unaffectedly rendered, that it is impossible not to rank Heywood very high. The most famous "beauties" are in the following passage :—

*Anne.* "O with what face of brass, what brow of steel,  
Can you unblushing speak this to the face  
Of the espoused wife of so dear a friend?  
It is my husband that maintains your state,  
Will you dishonour him that in your power  
Hath left his whole affairs? I am his wife,  
Is it to *me* you speak?"

*Wendoll.* "O speak no more :  
For more than this I know and have recorded  
Within the red-leaved table of my heart.  
Fair and of all beloved, I was not fearful  
Bluntly to give my life unto your hand,  
And at one hazard all my worldly means.  
Go, tell your husband ; he will turn me off  
And I am then undone : I care not, I,  
'Twas for your sake. — Perchance in rage he'll kill me ;  
I care not, 'twas for you. Say I incur  
The general name of villain through the world,  
Of traitor to my friend. I care not, I.  
Beggary, shame, death, scandal and reproach  
For you I'll hazard all—why, what care I?  
For you I'll live and in your love I'll die."

Anne capitulates with a suddenness which has been generally and rightly pronounced a blot on the play ; but her husband is informed by a servant and resolves to discover the pair. The action is prolonged somewhat too much, and the somewhat unmanly strain of weakness in Frankford is too perceptible ; but these scenes are full of fine passages, as this :—

*Fr.* "A general silence hath surprised the house,  
And this is the last door. Astonishment,

Fear and amazement beat<sup>1</sup> upon my heart  
 Even as a madman beats upon a drum.  
 O keep my eyes, you heavens, before I enter,  
 From any sight that may transfix my soul :  
 Or if there be so black a spectacle,  
 O strike mine eyes stark blind ! Or if not so,  
 Lend me such patience to digest my grief  
 That I may keep this white and virgin hand  
 From any violent outrage, or red murder,  
 And with that prayer I enter."

A subsequent speech of his—

"O God, O God that it were possible  
 To undo things done,"

hardly comes short of the touch which would have given us instead of a prose Shakespere a Shakespere indeed ; and all the rest of the play, as far as the main plot is concerned, is full of pathos.

In the great number of other pieces attributed to him, written in all the popular styles, except the two above referred to, merits and defects are mixed up in a very curious fashion. Never sinking to the lowest depth of the Elizabethan playwright, including some great ones, Heywood never rises to anything like the highest height. His chronicle plays are very weak, showing no grasp of heroic character, and a most lamentable slovenliness of rhythm. Few things are more curious than to contrast with *Henry VI.* (to which some critics will allow little of Shakespere's work) and *Richard III.* the two parts of *Edward IV.*, in which Heywood, after a manner, fills the gap. There are good lines here and there, and touching traits ; but the whole, as a whole, is quite ludicrously bad, and "written to the gallery," the City gallery, in the most innocent fashion. *If You Know No, Me You Know Nobody*, or *The Troubles of Queen Elizabeth*, also in two parts, has the same curious innocence, the same prosaic character, but hardly as many redeeming flashes. Its

<sup>1</sup> First ed. "Play," which I am half inclined to prefer.

first part deals with Elizabeth's real "troubles," in her sister's days; its second with the Armada period and the founding of the Royal Exchange. For Heywood, unlike most of the dramatists, was always true to the City, even to the eccentric extent of making, in *The Four Prentices of London*, Godfrey of Bouillon and his brethren members of the prentice-brotherhood. His classical and allegorical pieces, such as *The Golden Age* and its fellows, are most tedious and not at all brief. The four of them (*The Iron Age* has two parts) occupy a whole volume of the reprint, or more than four hundred closely printed pages; and their clumsy dramatisation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with any other classical learning that Heywood could think of thrust in, presents (together with various minor pieces of a somewhat similar kind) as striking a contrast with *Troilus and Cressida*, as *Edward IV.* does with *Henry VI.* His spectacles and pageants, chiefly in honour of London (*London's Jus Honorarium*, with other metaphorical Latin titles of the same description) are heavy, the weakness of his versification being especially felt in such pieces. His strength lies in the domestic and contemporary drama, where his pathos had free play, unrestrained by the necessity of trying to make it rise to chivalrous or heroic height, and where his keen observation of his fellow-men made him true to mankind in general, at the same time that he gave a vivid picture of contemporary manners. Of this class of his plays *A Woman killed with Kindness* is undoubtedly the chief, but it has not a few companions, and those in a sufficiently wide and varied class of subject. *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* is, perhaps, not now found to be so very delectable and full of mirth as it is asserted to be on its title-page, because it is full of that improbability and neglect of verisimilitude which has been noted as the curse of the minor Elizabethan drama. The "Cripple of Fenchurch," the real hero of the piece, is a very unlikely cripple; the heroines chop and change their affections in the most surprising manner; and the characters generally indulge in that curious self-description and soliloquising in dialogue which is never

found in Shakespere, and is found everywhere else. But it is still a lively picture of contemporary manners. We should be sorry to lose *The Fair Maid of the West* with its picture of Devonshire sailors, foreign merchants, kings of Fez, Bashaws of various parts, Italian dukes, and what not. The two parts make anything but a good play, but they are decidedly interesting, and their tone supports Mr. Bullen's conjecture that we owe to Heywood the, in parts, admirable play of *Dick of Devonshire*, a dramatisation of the quarter-staff feats in Spain of Richard Peake of Tavistock. *The English Traveller* may rank with *A Woman killed with Kindness* as Heywood's best plays (there is, indeed, a certain community of subject between them), but *A Maidenhead well Lost*, and *The Witches of Lancashire*, are not far behind it; nor is *A Challenge for Beauty*. We can hardly say so much for *Love's Mistress*, which dramatises the story of *Cupid and Psyche*, or for *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (Hoxton), a play rather of Middleton's type. But in *The Royal King and Loyal Subject*, and in *Fortune by Land and Sea*, the author shows again the sympathy with chivalrous character and adventure which (if he never can be said to be fully up to its level in the matter of poetic expression) was evidently a favourite and constant motive with him. In short, Heywood, even at his worst, is a writer whom it is impossible not to like. His very considerable talent, though it stopped short of genius, was united with a pleasant and genial temper, and little as we know of his life, his dedications and prefaces make us better acquainted with his personality than we are with that of much more famous men.

No greater contrast is possible than that between our last two names—Day and Tourneur. Little is known of them: Day was at Cambridge in 1592-3; Tourneur shared in the Cadiz voyage of 1625 and died on its return. Both, it is pretty certain, were young men at the end of Elizabeth's reign, and were influenced strongly by the literary fashions set by greater men than themselves. But whereas Day took to the graceful fantasticalities of Lyly and to the not very savage social satire of Greene, Tourneur (or Turner)



addressed himself to the most ferocious school of sub-Marlovian tragedy, and to the rugged and almost unintelligible satire of Marston. Something has been said of his effort in the latter vein, the *Transformed Metamorphosis*. His two tragedies, *The Atheist's Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, have been rather variously judged. The concentration of gloomy and almost insane vigour in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the splendid poetry of a few passages which have long ago found a home in the extract books, and the less separable but equally distinct poetic value of scattered lines and phrases, cannot escape any competent reader. But, at the same time, I find it almost impossible to say anything for either play as a whole, and here only I come a long way behind Mr. Swinburne in his admiration of our dramatists. *The Atheist's Tragedy* is an inextricable imbroglio of tragic and comic scenes and characters, in which it is hardly possible to see or follow any clue; while the low extravagance of all the comedy and the frantic rant of not a little of the tragedy combine to stifle the real pathos of some of the characters. *The Revenger's Tragedy* is on a distinctly higher level; the determination of Vindice to revenge his wrongs, and the noble and hapless figure of Castiza, could not have been presented as they are presented except by a man with a distinct strain of genius, both in conception and execution. But the effect, as a whole, is marred by a profusion of almost all the worst faults of the drama of the whole period from Peele to Davenant. The incoherence and improbability of the action, the reckless, inartistic, butcherly prodigality of blood and horrors, and the absence of any kind of redeeming interest of contrasting light to all the shade, though very characteristic of a class, and that no small one, of Elizabethan drama, cannot be said to be otherwise than characteristic of its faults. As the best example (others are *The Insatiate Countess*, Chettle's *Hoffmann*, *Lust's Dominion*, and the singular production which Mr. Bullen has printed as *The Distracted Emperor*) it is very well worth reading, and contrasting with the really great plays of the same class, such as *The Jew of*

*Malta* and *Titus Andronicus*, where, though the horrors are still overdone, yet genius has given them a kind of passport. But intrinsically it is mere nightmare.

Of a very different temper and complexion is the work of John Day, who may have been a Cambridge graduate, and was certainly a student of Gonville and Caius, as he describes himself on the title-page of some of his plays and of a prose tract printed by Mr. Bullen. He appears to have been dead in 1640, and the chief thing positively known about him is that between the beginning of 1598 and 1608 he collaborated in the surprising number of twenty-one plays (all but *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* unprinted) with Haughton, Chettle, Dekker, and others. *The Parliament of Bees*, his most famous and last printed work, is of a very uncommon kind in English—being a sort of dramatic allegory, touched with a singularly graceful and fanciful spirit. It is indeed rather a masque than a play, and consists, after the opening Parliament held by the Master, or Viceroy Bee (quaintly appearing in the original, which may have been printed in 1607, though no copy seems now discoverable earlier than 1641, as “Mr. Bee”), of a series of characters or sketches of Bee-vices and virtues, which are very human. The termination, which contains much the best poetry in the piece, and much the best that Day ever wrote, introduces King Oberon giving judgment on the Bees from “Mr. Bee” downwards and banishing offenders. Here occurs the often-quoted passage, beginning—

“And whither must these flies be sent?”

and including the fine speech of Oberon—

“You should have cried so in your youth.”

It should be observed that both in this play and elsewhere passages occur in Day which seem to have been borrowed or stolen from or by other writers, such as Dekker and Samuel Rowley; but a charitable and not improbable explanation of this has been found in the known fact of his extensive and intricate

collaboration. *The Isle of Gulls*, suggested in a way by the *Arcadia*, though in general plan also fantastic and, to use a much abused but decidedly convenient word, pastoral, has a certain flavour of the comedy of manners and of contemporary satire. Then we have the quaint piece of *Humour out of Breath*, a kind of study in the for once conjoined schools of Shakespere and Jonson—an attempt at a combination of humorous and romantic comedy with some pathetic writing, as here:—

“[O] Early sorrow art got up so soon?  
What, ere the sun ascendeth in the east?  
O what an early waker art thou grown!  
But cease discourse and close unto thy work.  
Under this drooping myrtle will I sit,  
And work awhile upon my corded net;  
And as I work, record my sorrows past,  
Asking old Time how long my woes shall last.  
And first—but stay! alas! what do I see?  
Moist gum-like tears drop from this mournful tree;  
And see, it sticks like birdlime; ’twill not part,  
Sorrow is even such birdlime at my heart.  
Alas! poor tree, dost thou want company?  
Thou dost, I see’t, and I will weep with thee;  
Thy sorrows make me dumb, and so shall mine,  
It shall be tongueless, and so seem like thine.  
Thus will I rest my head unto thy bark,  
Whilst my sighs ease my sorrows.”

Something the same may be said of *Law Tricks*, or *Who would have Thought it?* which has, however, in the character of the Count Horatio, a touch of tragedy. Another piece of Day’s is in quite a different vein, being an account in dramatised form of the adventures of the three brothers Shirley—a kind of play which, from *Sir Thomas Stukeley* downwards, appears to have been a very favourite one with Elizabethan audiences, though (as might indeed be expected) it was seldom executed in a very successful manner. Lastly, or first, if chronological order is taken, comes *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green*, written by Day in conjunction with Chettle, and ranging itself with the half

historical, half romantic plays which were, as has been pointed out above, favourites with the first school of dramatists. It seems to have been very popular, and had a second and third part, not now extant, but is by no means as much to modern taste as some of the others. Indeed both Day and Tourneur, despite the dates of their pieces, which, as far as known, are later, belong in more ways than one to the early school, and show how its traditions survived alongside of the more perfect work of the greater masters. Day himself is certainly not a great master—indeed masterpieces would have been impossible, if they would not have been superfluous, in the brisk purveying of theatrical matter which, from Henslowe's accounts, we see that he kept up. He had fancy, a good deal of wit, considerable versatility, and something of the same sunshiny temper, with less of the pathos, that has been noticed in Heywood. If he wrote *The Maid's Metamorphosis* (also ascribed conjecturally to Lyly), he did something less dramatically good, but perhaps poetically better, than his other work; and if, as has sometimes been thought,<sup>1</sup> *The Return from Parnassus* is his, he is richer still. But even without these, his existing poetical baggage (the least part of the work which we know he accomplished) is more than respectable, and shows more perhaps than that of any other distinctly minor writer the vast amount of loose talent—of miscellaneous inspiration—which was afloat in the air of his time.

<sup>1</sup> I agree with Professor Hales in thinking it very improbable.