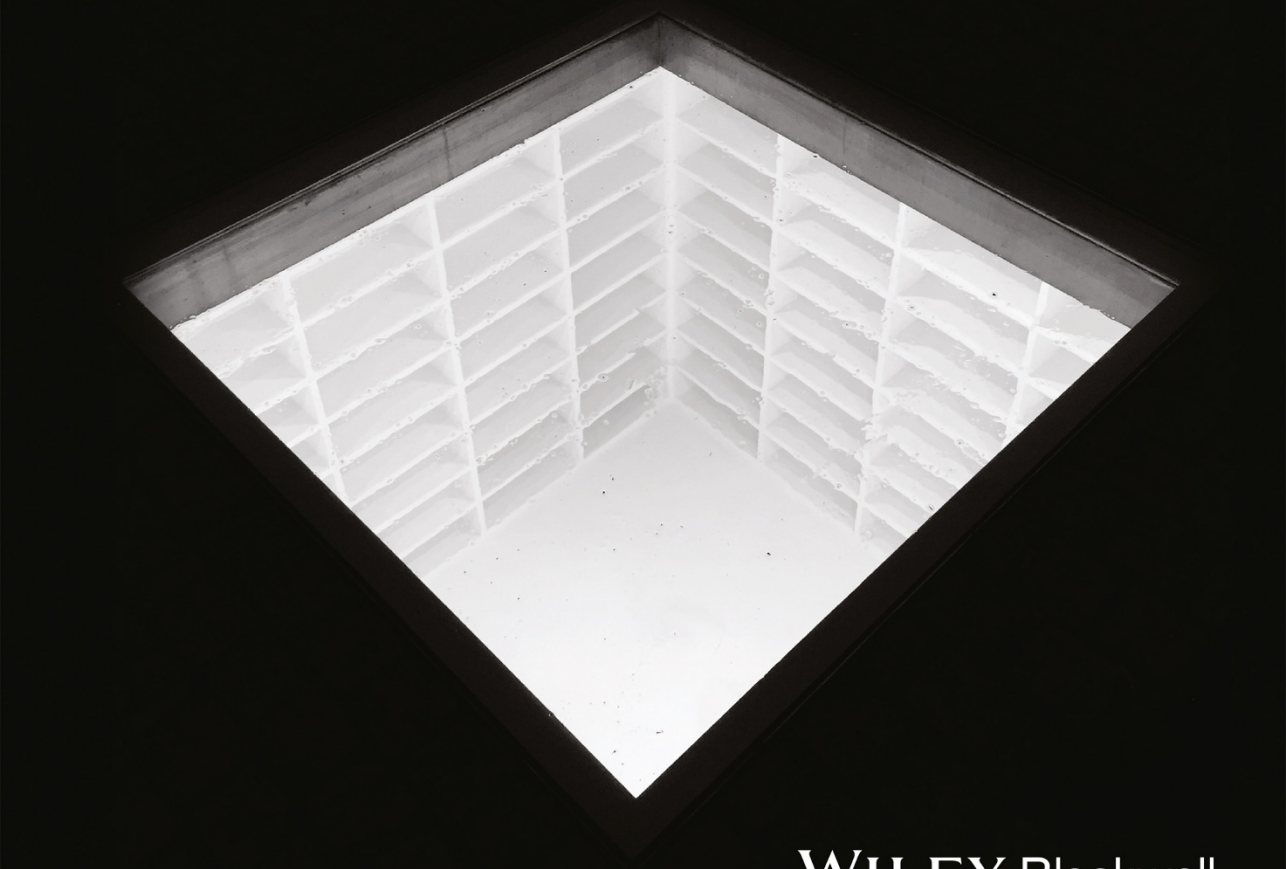
WHAT IS LITERATURE?

A CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY

MARK ROBSON



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A Critical Anthology

Edited by Mark Robson

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Introduction

Let us suppose that literature begins
at the moment when literature becomes
a question.
Maurice Blanchot, this volume p. 321

In this era of global capital triumphant,
to keep responsibility alive in the reading and teaching
of the textual is at first sight impractical.
It is, however, the right of the textual
to be responsible, responsive, answerable.
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Every anthology gathers a series of questions. It is not a display of answers. A true question voices a doubt, expressing a desire to know rather than giving expression to that which is known. To ask the right question entails identifying what it is that you don't know, and sometimes it is only once something apparently known becomes a question – is called into question, we might say – that in a shimmer of hesitation, of uncertainty, or of doubt, the gap makes itself known. This is what the quotation from Blanchot above invites us to think: what if literature only begins when we are no longer sure (what it is), when we suspend certainty, when we allow something to appear that can bear the name of literature without conforming to what we formerly understood by that name? And yet, as the quotation from Spivak that accompanies it reminds us, this does not allow us to abdicate responsibility. Reading and teaching are each activities or (institutional) spaces in which what is called literature – which remains a privileged domain of the textual – makes demands on all those prepared to read and to learn. Bringing these two thinkers and their words here together, we might say: responding to the unknown, unsure of where we are or what exactly it is that is making these demands, may seem, to borrow Spivak's term, impractical, but it is the only way to keep responsibility alive in the form of the question, that is, by taking the question seriously as a question.

This anthology bears a question as its title: *What is literature?* It will still sit there as a question on the cover even after you have read some or all of the contents. 'What is literature?' is not a new question. It has a history, and in fact it is historically bounded. Who,

What is Literature?: A Critical Anthology, First Edition. Edited by Mark Robson.

then, now, might hold the answer, assuming there is one? If we think of literature as a name, what does it name? Turning to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, for example, the clearest definition of the modern understanding of literature is found in entry 3a, which refers to a 'restricted sense' of 'writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect'. It then adds, almost as an aside, '*This sense is of very recent emergence both in Eng[lish] and Fr[ench]*', which is why I referred to it as the modern understanding. This is a sense of the word literature that emerges in modernity, and is inseparable from it. The *OED*'s definition contains two crucial elements for understanding how the word is commonly used, but doesn't entirely resolve the question of literature's identity. Quite the opposite.

'Beauty of form' makes us think about the shape or structure of the literary work, and at the same time makes us wonder how to define beauty (What are the criteria? Who decides? Is this a subjective or objective judgement? And so on). Then the definition takes a funny turn as it gives us the second element: 'or emotional effect'. Emotional effect is broad enough to cover everything from being profoundly moved to faintly irritated, from becoming intensely bored to intermittent anger, excitement, disgust, enchantment, fascination, puzzlement, arousal and despair. We can love a poem or hate a novel. All that seems fine, although we might want to add other possible effects that aren't purely emotional (bodily reactions, or even, now and then, the odd thought or idea). That's not the funny bit. The oddity, for me at least, is the 'or'. Is the form (beautiful or otherwise) not contributing to the effect on the reader? Does it have to be one or the other, either beauty or emotional effect, or is the definition simply saying that you only need one to qualify as literature? In both cases, this is only staking a claim to consideration. Who or what does the considering? How is this claim expressed? Maybe it has to be thought of as a kind of multivocal performance, in which a piece of writing – while being beautiful or making us cry or laugh or inspiring us to hurl it across the room – is also at every moment pointing at itself and inaudibly shouting 'Look, I'm literature'.

Beauty and emotion are not universal. The dictionary's use of them recognizes that this is a restricted sense of literature, but it has become the common one for us. For most modern critics, literature 'as such' is something that emerges in the long eighteenth century, replacing older categories based on poetics and rhetoric. This is the 'very recent' emergence of a sense of the word literature noted by the *OED* (for whom the eighteenth century remains very recent). The notion of literature in this specific sense is part of the foundations for the Romantic – and at the outset largely German – tradition of treating literature and other arts under the heading of the aesthetic. This tradition is the focus for this volume since its influence on later thinking about art remains decisive, both spawning a strong set of ideas that continue to feature in discussion of art and also producing a powerful allergic reaction in which the whole notion of the aesthetic is repeatedly rejected. The idea, for example, that art can open up the possibility of accessing knowledge or truth that could not be gained by any other means is still regularly proposed and equally persistently contested. The idea, then, that there is something special about art objects which marks them out from 'ordinary' objects remains controversial. An equivalent argument in literary studies might be the notion that there is something special about literary language that separates it decisively from ordinary language, or that there is something peculiar about the relation of the author to her or his – or more accurately our – language(s). Even if we believe this, we

need to be able to explain why. This is territory repeatedly contested in the texts gathered in this anthology.

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Any question that takes the form 'what is …?' asks us to think about the essence of something. In this sense, it is a philosophical question, and certainly there have been many philosophical attempts to define literature (often antagonistically, making clear that philosophy is not, even *should not* be, literature). In a well-known passage from Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates suggests that: 'You must know the truth concerning everything you are speaking or writing about; you must learn how to define each thing in itself; and, having defined it, you must know how to divide it into kinds until you reach something indivisible'. As the citation from the *OED* indicates, this knowing is not straightforward. What happens if we try to take this prescription and apply it to the discussion of literature?

While their texts do not appear in this anthology, there are two shadows that more than any other have fallen across this question of literature and its definition in the last couple of thousand years. For good or ill, they cannot be ignored. Knowing a little about their central ideas will help in understanding both the terms and the ground of the debates that appear in this book. The tradition of European philosophy that finds its roots in Plato (c. 427–c. 347 BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE) centres on representation in its handling of art and literature – circling around the Greek term *mimēsis*, which can be translated as either representation or imitation – and is dominated by two issues: can representation bring us any closer to truth, and, what social or political function might representation have? Plato famously has Socrates expel the poets from his *Republic*, primarily because he thinks that art is fundamentally imitative, and therefore takes us a step away from truth. If we want to know about tables, we learn more by looking at tables than at drawings of tables, for instance. The table is at least made by someone who knows how to make tables. An artist may not even know that much about the object presented, and cannot speak from a position of secure knowledge that guarantees truth.

Aristotle's thinking on poetry, like Plato's, is focused on the issue of *mimēsis*, but Aristotle's much more positive valuation of imitation and representation may be read as a conscious if indirect challenge to Plato. It is art's imitative nature that ties it fruitfully to the world, allowing it to become a means for understanding human behaviour and indeed to offer a model of conduct, and it is this positive worldly relation that is stressed over a more abstract notion of truth. What both Plato and Aristotle do in effect is to shift the ground away from literature itself towards something that frames it and, in doing so, gives it significance: truth, moral philosophy in the form of examples of behaviour, or a form of activity that enhances social cohesion (such as communal attendance at theatrical festivals in Aristotle's *Poetics*). Art and literature are important because they are philosophically useful, say these philosophers.

Thinking about literature from this functional perspective makes us rethink the question that we ask of literature, and the obvious question becomes no longer 'What is literature?' but rather 'What is literature for?' Aristotle is perhaps the first to have asked a version of this question, but it persists in relatively recent work such as Rita Felski's *The Uses of Literature* (2007). This is another way of asking what literature does in or to the world, leading us on to a series of other questions, including 'Who decides what literature is for?' and

'Who decides whether a particular work meets that expectation?' From this also stems the range of questions that centre on whose world is represented and how, on whose experience is thought to be suitable for representation, on whose voices can be heard. This can lead us to another set of questions that are equally important, and appear regularly in the texts collected here: Who is literature for? Who has the right or means to produce it? Why write? Who reads, why, and how?

The stakes of literature and its definitions can appear to be very high once we begin to recognize its entanglement with other values within a culture. As Jacques Derrida puts it in an essay in *On the Name* (1995):

> Literature is a modern invention, inscribed in conventions and institutions which, to hold on to just this trait, secure in principle its right to say everything. Literature thus ties its destiny to a certain non-censure, to the space of democratic freedom (freedom of the press, freedom of speech, etc.). No democracy without literature, no literature without democracy [...] And each time that a literary work is censured, democracy is in danger, as everyone agrees. The possibility of literature, the legitimation that a society gives it, the allaying of suspicion or terror with regard to it, all that goes together – politically – with the unlimited right to ask any question, to suspect all dogmatism, to analyze every presupposition, even those of the ethics or the politics of responsibility.

Derrida's sense of literature acknowledges the point made in the *OED* definition: what we have come to call literature is in fact a restricted sense of the word's historical usage, and literature thought of in this way is a 'modern invention'. In fact, the modernity of literature is part of what gives it its power, linked as it is to modes of expression and political organization that have themselves become characteristic of a certain (self-)image of modernity: democratic freedom, its conventions, its institutions, and so on. One word might be worth pausing over in this invocation of what might otherwise seem a safely consensual characterization of literature: terror. To pursue rigorously why literature might inspire terror is beyond the scope of this introduction, but it indicates precisely that unsettling sense of literature's potential to disturb that is tied to its survival.

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For some readers, this will no doubt appear to be a decidedly odd time to be producing an anthology entitled *What is Literature?* Isn't literature a thing of the past? Hasn't it been superseded by film, TV, streaming or gaming? Doesn't it demand a form of attention that none of us have time for any more? Hasn't the image definitively displaced the word?

Certain commentators believe that we are approaching or may already be in a 'post-literary' age. This belief is partly inspired by new technologies and the changing behaviours of the humans who interact with them. They will cite the impact of the internet, increasingly interactive and immersive gaming environments, attention spans more attuned to texting and tweets, the unstoppable flow of narrative from TV, movies, animation, social networking sites, and so on. The time of the printed word, and especially of the book, we are told, has run out. And just as the book has been declared obsolete, so too has literature. The functions of literature can all apparently be fulfilled by other media, or can be displaced by

newer forms such as fan fiction, flash fiction, microfictions, collaboratively-produced internet novels, screenplays, algorithms that can write the perfect narrative, and forms as yet unthought. Such views are often reinforced by a sense that literature was only ever one form of discourse among others, that what has come to be known as 'creative writing' is still, in the end, just writing, and that any form of art may – and should – be dissolved into a broader category of 'culture'. The study of literature should become cultural studies, if it hasn't already. In both arguments, literature as a distinct entity disappears, and the significance of the question 'What is literature?' disappears with it.

But, curiously, there is a more radical notion of literature's disappearance that might allow us to retain a sense of literature as something demanding our curiosity. In a 1953 piece entitled 'The Disappearance of Literature', Blanchot concludes:

> The essence of literature is precisely to evade any essential characterization, any affirmation which would stabilize or even realize it: it is never already there, it is always to be rediscovered or reinvented. It is never even certain that the words 'literature' or 'art' correspond to anything real, anything possible, or anything important. [...] Whoever affirms literature in itself affirms nothing. Whoever seeks it only seeks that which slips away; whoever finds it only finds what falls short of or, worse still, lies beyond literature.

This may help us to see why 'What is literature?' remains an open question. If Blanchot is right, it must remain open, since any answer to the question always turns out to have seized on something other than literature (which is perhaps what Plato and Aristotle encouraged). But for as long as it poses itself as a question – for as long as it evokes the desire for an answer, that is – literature has a future.

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All anthologies are defined by what is not in them. Certainly the selection of texts offered here will not meet with universal approval, and there are many omissions that have been made with great reluctance and regret. Some of these are due to being unable to secure permission to reproduce material, or else it only being possible to include them at a cost that would have made this anthology impossible for anyone to afford.

I have favoured substantial and, where possible, complete selections rather than attempting to cover everything with brief extracts. Equally, I have privileged texts which explicitly engage with the nature of literature itself over texts which, however important, vital and interesting, are addressed largely to consideration of what literature represents or should represent, or which limit themselves to specific works or authors. This should not be taken as an indication that these questions are somehow less important than those raised by the pieces included here. The aim of this anthology is modest and more distinct than more general 'theory' readers, and so the desire to have a volume that was both focused and manageable has also influenced my selections.

One thing that being confronted with an anthology such as *What is Literature?* might lead you to think is that there is nothing left to say. The weight of the history of the question might seem disabling. The fact that no satisfactory answer to the title question seems to have been arrived at yet might suggest that it is a question that is no longer – and perhaps

never was – worth asking. Alternatively, we can recognize that if we insist on these texts as themselves open to question, if we read them as starting points rather than endings, then working with and against them can give a context to habits of thought (our own and those of others). Unsettling these habits can allow for some of the strangeness and singularity of literary texts, their power to 'veer', in Nicholas Royle's (2011) term, to become legible. Reading becomes riskier, and more pleasurable.

This recognition has to sit alongside a more troubling sense that because literature has been located, defined and associated with a particular moment in European culture, and that this is the same moment that also sees forms of imperialistic and nationalistic thought and action at their height (and depth), literature itself cannot be disentangled from that oppressive history. This braided inheritance of culture and barbarism is a history that needs to be thought through and acknowledged. One of the guiding principles in this anthology is that there is (at least) a counter-history within the history of literature, and that any counter-history is legible precisely in the repeated insistence on calling literature into question. To ask 'What is literature?' is to refuse to accept the given answers, to insist that literature might be otherwise, and that this 'might be' acts retrospectively. Literature's identity cannot be presumed or assumed, it cannot be given a false stability except by acts of violent circumscription: there is a form of announcing a 'love of literature' that amounts to negating all those things that one might wish literature were not. Literature becomes what is left when everything that we want to call not-literature has been removed. This negative definition of literature can become a weapon.

This is not sufficient. Anthropocentric and ethnocentric definitions of literature have always been fictions. Some fictions may be enabling; these are not. Literature has always been a matter of swerving, spacing, uncertain hesitation, boldly confessing a desire that marks a gap, a blindspot, an ellipsis or exclusion. And these points move, at times dizzyingly fast, at other moments almost imperceptibly. Yet they move. The fact that so many thinkers have been led to consider this question testifies to its ongoing urgency, to the desire for literature, to the desire to know what literature might (come to) mean. And the history of that desire should suggest something of literature's potential power: its refusal to be reduced to such determinations, its flight from being enclosed in or reduced to that desire, to any single desire. This, I suspect, is literature's power, and it is a potency that rests in what I am tempted to call its power of flight.

References

Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (1995)
Rita Felski, *The Uses of Literature* (2009)
Michael Holland (ed.), *The Blanchot Reader* (1996)
Nicholas Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (2011)
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (2003)

Further Reading

In addition to the material contained in this volume, you might want to try:

Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013)
Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (2004)
Elizabeth Beaumont Bissell, (ed.), *The Question of Literature: The Place of the Literary in Contemporary Theory* (2002)
Pheng Cheah, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (2016)
Jonathan Culler, *The Literary in Theory* (2007)
David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (2003)
Robert Eaglestone, *Literature: Why it Matters* (2019)
Mary Eagleton (ed.),. *Feminist Literary Theory* (3rd edn., 2010)
Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed.), *Black Literature and Literary Theory* (1984)
Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (eds.), *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader* (2007)
Peggy Kamuf, *The Division of Literature: or the University in Deconstruction* (1997)
J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002)
Ankhi Mukherjee, *What is a Classic? Postcolonial Rewriting and Invention of the Canon* (2014)

1

Hamburg Dramaturgy (1769)*

G. E. Lessing

Introduction

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81) was one of the leading figures of the German Enlightenment, and perhaps its most prominent literary critic. Lessing played a crucial role in the shift that took place in the German tradition towards what is now thought of as modern criticism. Developing the techniques of the philological tradition and supplementing them with a historical awareness that works both to examine the contexts and sources of artworks and to consider their resonances for his own time, Lessing's thought is a vital step in the emergence of aesthetics as a serious discipline.

Lessing was keen that German literature should not be constrained by the rhetorical and neoclassical models that dominated poetics, suggesting that the plays of Shakespeare, for example, might provide a better template for the development of modern German drama than French classicism. Importantly, Lessing grounds his argument in a thorough reassessment (and in places retranslation) of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Since classicism appealed to a certain vision of Aristotelian thought for its validity, Lessing's unsettling of the very foundations of that appeal proved to be highly effective.

In his conception of criticism, Lessing sought to provoke a response from his readers rather than to provide a doctrine. In place of a form of poetics based on rules, taste and judgement are emphasized. But while the concept of taste often implies a certain universalizing urge – since the judgement of an individual work seeks to go beyond its singularity by comparison, and so on – Lessing insists on the historical determination of taste, and on the rootedness of artworks in their relation to a specific audience. So Greek tragedy takes the generic form that it does by virtue of the relation between drama and its social functions and audience; these generic elements are not appropriate to a modern drama that is addressed to a fundamentally different social relation.

Modern criticism continues to debate the nature of Lessing's thinking. For some critics, his is essentially an aesthetic and semiotic theory, related to the discussion of genius in, for example, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and in the wider debates within German

**Original publication details*: G.E. Lessing, from Hamburg Dramaturgy, 1769.

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Romanticism. For others, Lessing's work remains tied to the rhetorical tradition, anticipating later eighteenth century developments in hermeneutics. These twin axes may be discerned in his work, both in the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* and in his famous 1766 text *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Lessing's style as well as his ideas would prove to be deeply influential, especially in the German tradition, and he is acknowledged by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, A. W. SCHLEGEL and many later critics.

Further reading: A major new translation appeared too recently to be taken into account here: G. E. Lessing, *The Hamburg Dramaturgy: A New and Complete Annotated English Translation*, trans. Wendy Arons and Sara Figal, ed. Natalya Baldyga (2019). See also Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766, trans. 1982). Benjamin Bennett, *Beyond Theory: Eighteenth Century German Literature and the Poetics of Irony* (1993); Robert Leventhal, *The Disciplines of Interpretation: Lessing, Herder, Schlegel, and Hermeneutics in Germany, 1750–1800* (1994); Anthony Savile, *Aesthetic Reconstructions: The Seminal Writings of Lessing, Kant, and Schiller* (1987); David Wellbery, *Laokoon: Aesthetics and Semiotics in the Age of Reason* (1984).

No. 2.

Yet another remark, also bearing on Christian tragedies might be made about the conversion of Clorinda. Convinced though we may be of the immediate operations of grace, yet they can please us little on the stage, where everything that has to do with the character of the personages must arise from natural causes. We can only tolerate miracles in the physical world; in the moral everything must retain its natural course, because the theatre is to be the school of the moral world. The motives for every resolve, for every change of opinion or even thoughts, must be carefully balanced against each other so as to be in accordance with the hypothetical character, and must never produce more than they could produce in accordance with strict probability. The poet, by beauty of details, may possess the art of deluding us to overlook misproportions of this kind, but he only deceives us once and as soon as we are cool again we take back the applause he has lured from us. Applying these remarks to the fourth scene of the third act, it will be seen that Sophronia's speeches and acts could have roused pity in Clorinda, but were much too impotent to work conversion on a person who had no natural disposition to enthusiasm. Tasso also makes Clorinda embrace Christianity, but only in her last hour, only after she has recently heard that her parents were also inclined to this faith, subtle weighty reasons by whose means the operations of a higher power are, as it were, entwined with the course of natural events. No one has better understood how far this point may be carried on the stage than Voltaire. After the sensitive noble soul of Zamor has been shaken to its depths by example and entreaties, by generosity and exhortation, he allows him to divine rather than believe in the truths of a religion whose adherents evince such greatness. And perchance Voltaire would have suppressed even this surmise if it had not been needful to do something for the pacification of the spectator.

Even Corneille's 'Polyeucte' is to be condemned in view of the above remarks, and since the plays made in imitation of it are yet more faulty, the first tragedy that deserves the name of Christian has beyond doubt still to appear. I mean a play in which the Christian interests us solely as a Christian. But is such a .piece even possible? Is not the character of a true

Christian something quite untheatrical? Does not the gentle pensiveness, the unchangeable meekness that are his essential features, war with the whole business of tragedy that strives to purify passions by passions? Does not his expectation of rewarding happiness after this life contradict the disinterestedness with which we wish to see all great and good actions undertaken and carried out on the stage?

Until a work of genius arises that incontestably decides these objections, – for we know by experience what difficulties genius can surmount, – my advice is this, to leave all existent Christian tragedies unperformed. This advice, deduced from the necessities of art, and which deprives us of nothing more than very mediocre plays, is not the worse because it comes to the aid of weak spirits who feel I know not what shrinking, when they hear sentiments spoken from the stage that they had only expected to hear in a holier place. The theatre should give offence to no one, be he who he may, and I wish it would and could obviate all preconceived offence.

Cronegk only brought his play to the end of the fourth act. The rest has been added by a pen in Vienna: a pen – for the work of a head is not very visible. The "continuator" has, to all appearance, ended the story quite otherwise than Cronegk intended to end it. Death best dissolves all perplexities, therefore he despatches both Olindo and Sophronia. Tasso lets them both escape, for Clorinda interests herself for them with noble generosity. But Cronegk had made Clorinda enamoured, and that being the case, it was certainly difficult to guess how he could have decided between two rivals, without calling death to his aid. In another still worse tragedy where one of the principal characters died quite casually, a spectator asked his neighbour, "But what did she die of?" – "Of what? Of the fifth act," was the reply. In very truth the fifth act is an ugly evil disease that carries off many a one to whom the first four acts promised a longer life.

But I will not proceed more deeply with the criticism of the play. Mediocre as it is, it was excellently performed. I keep silence concerning the external splendour, for this improvement of our stage requires nothing but money. The art whose help is needful to this end is as perfect in our country as in any other, only artists wish to be paid as well as in any other.

We must rest satisfied with the performance of a play if among four or five persons some have played excellently and the others well. Whoever is so offended by a beginner or a makeshift in the subordinate parts that he turns up his nose. Nose at the whole, let him travel to Utopia and there visit the perfect theatre where even the candle-snuffer is a Garrick.

Interspersed moral maxims are Cronegk's strong point. . . . Unfortunately he often tries to persuade us that coloured bits of glass are gems, and witty antitheses common sense. Two such lines in the first act, had a peculiar effect upon me.

The one:

> "Heaven can pardon, but a priest never."

The other:

> "Who thinks ill of others is himself a scoundrel."

I was taken aback to see a general movement in the parterre and to hear that murmur with which approval is expressed when close attention does not permit it to break out. I thought on the one hand: Most excellent! they love morality here, this parterre finds pleasure in maxims, on this stage Euripides could have earned fame, and Socrates would gladly

have visited it. But on the other I noticed as well how false, how perverted, how offensive were these presumed maxims, and I greatly wished that disapproval had had its share in this murmur. For there has only been one Athens and there will ever remain but one Athens, where even the mob has moral feelings so fine and delicate that actors and authors run the risk of being driven from the stage on account of impure morality. I know full well that the sentiments in a drama must be in accordance with the assumed character of the person who utters them. They can therefore not bear the stamp of absolute truth, it is enough if they are poetically true, if we must admit that this character under these circumstances, with these passions could not have judged otherwise. But on the other hand this poetical truth must also approach to the absolute and the poet must never think so unphilosophically as to assume that a man could desire evil for evil's sake, that a man could act on vicious principles, knowing them to be vicious and boast of them to himself and to others. Such a man is a monster as fearful as he is uninstructive and nothing save the paltry resource of a shallow-head that can deem glittering tirades the highest beauties of a tragedy. If Ismenor is a cruel priest, does it follow that all priests are Ismenors? It is useless to reply that the allusion refers to priests of a false religion. No religion in the world was ever so false that its teachers must necessarily be monsters. Priests have worked mischief in false religion as well as in true, but not because they were priests but because they were villains who would have abused the privileges of any other class in the service of their evil propensities.

If the stage enunciates such thoughtless judgments on priests, what wonder if among these are found some foolish enough to decry it as the straight road to hell?

But I am falling back into the criticism of the play and I wanted to speak of the actors.

No. 11.

The appearance of a ghost was so bold a novelty on the French stage, and the poet who ventured upon it justified it by such curious reasons, that it really repays the trouble of investigating them a little.

"They cry and write on all sides," says M. de Voltaire, "that we no longer believe in ghosts and that the apparition of a ghost is held childish in the eyes of an enlightened nation. But how," he replies to this; "should all antiquity have believed in such miracles and should we not be permitted to adapt ourselves to antiquity? How? Our own religion has hallowed the belief in such extraordinary dispensations of Providence and it should be held ridiculous to revive them!"

These exclamations appear to me to be more rhetorical than philosophical. Above all things I should wish religion to be left out of the question. In matters of taste and criticism, reasons extorted from religion are all very well to silence an opponent, but not well suited to convince him. Religion as religion has nothing to decide here, and regarded as a form of ancient tradition her testimony has neither more nor less value than all other testimonies of antiquity. Consequently in this instance we have only to deal with antiquity.

Very good then; all antiquity believed in ghosts. Therefore the poets of antiquity were quite right to avail themselves of this belief. If we encounter ghosts among them, it would be unreasonable to object to them according to our better knowledge. But does this accord

the same permission to our modern poets who share our better knowledge? Certainly not. But suppose he transfer his story into these more credulous times? Not even then. For the dramatic poet is no historian, he does not relate to us what was once believed to have happened, but he really produces it again before our eyes, and produces it again not on account of mere historical truth but for a totally different and a nobler aim. Historical accuracy is not his aim, but only the means by which he hopes to attain his aim; he wishes to delude us and touch our hearts through this delusion. If it be true therefore that we no longer believe in ghosts; and if this unbelief must of necessity prevent this delusion, if without this delusion we cannot possibly sympathise, then our modern dramatist injures himself when he nevertheless dresses up such incredible fables, and all the art he has lavished upon them is vain.

Consequently? – It is consequently never to be allowed to bring ghosts and apparitions on the stage? Consequently this source of terrible or pathetic emotions is exhausted for us? No, this would be too great a loss to poetry. Besides does she not own examples enough where genius confutes all our philosophy, rendering things that seem ludicrous to our cooler reason most terrible to our imagination? The consequence must therefore be different and the hypotheses whence we started false. We no longer believe in ghosts? Who says so? Or rather, what does that mean? Does it mean: we are at last so far advanced in comprehension that we can prove their impossibility; that certain incontestable truths that contradict a belief in ghosts are now so universally known, are so constantly present even to the minds of the most vulgar, that everything that is not in accordance with these truths, seems to them ridiculous and absurd! It cannot mean this. We no longer believe in ghosts can therefore only mean this: in this matter concerning which so much may be argued for or against, that is not decided and never can be decided, the prevailing tendency of the age is to incline towards the preponderance of reasons brought to bear against this belief. Some few hold this opinion from conviction, and many others wish to appear to hold it, and it is these who raise the outcry and set the fashion. Meanwhile the mass is silent, and remains indifferent, and thinks now with one side, now with the other, delights in hearing jokes about ghosts recounted in broad daylight and shivers with horror at night when they are talked of.

Now a disbelief in ghosts in this sense cannot and should not hinder the dramatic poet from making use of them. The seeds of possible belief in them are sown in all of us and most frequently in those persons for whom he chiefly writes. It depends solely on the degree of his art whether he can force these seeds to germinate, whether he possesses certain dexterous means to summon up rapidly and forcibly arguments in favour of the existence of such ghosts. If he has them in his power, no matter what we may believe in ordinary life, in the theatre we must believe as the poet wills.

Such a poet is Shakespeare and Shakespeare only and alone. His ghost in 'Hamlet' makes our hairs stand on end, whether they cover a believing or an unbelieving brain. M. de Voltaire did not do well when he referred to this ghost, he only made himself and his ghost of 'Ninus' ridiculous by so doing.

Shakespeare's ghost appears really to come from another world. For it comes at the solemn hour, in the dread stillness of night, accompanied by all the gloomy mysterious accessories wherewith we have been told by our nurses that ghosts appear. Now Voltaire's ghost is not even fit for a bugbear wherewith to frighten children. It is only a disguised actor,

who has nothing, says nothing, does nothing that makes it probable that he is that which he pretends to be. All the circumstances moreover, under which he appears, disturb the illusion and betray the creation of a cold poet who would like to deceive and terrify us without knowing how to set about it. Let us only consider this one thing. Voltaire's ghost steps out of his grave in broad daylight, in the midst of an assembly of the royal parliament, preceded by a thunder-clap. Now where did M. de Voltaire learn that ghosts are thus bold? What old woman could not have told him that ghosts avoid sunshine and do not willingly visit large assemblies? No doubt Voltaire knew this also; but he was too timid, too delicate to make use of these vulgar conditions, he wanted to show us a ghost but it should be of a higher type, and just this original type marred everything. A ghost that takes liberties which are contrary to all tradition, to all spectral good manners, does not seem to me a right sort of ghost, and everything that does not in such cases strengthen the illusion seems to weaken it.

If Voltaire had paid some attention to mimetic action he would for other reasons have felt the impropriety of allowing a ghost to appear before a large assembly. All present are forced at once to exhibit signs of fear and horror, and they must all exhibit it in various ways if the spectacle is not to resemble the chilly symmetry of a ballet. Now suppose a troupe of stupid walking gentlemen and ladies have been duly trained to this end, and even assuming that they have been successfully trained, consider how all the various expressions of the same emotion must divide the attention of the spectator and withdraw it from the principal characters. For if these are to make their due impression on us, it is not only needful we should see them but it is well we should see nothing but them. Shakespeare let only Hamlet see the ghost, and in the scene where his mother is present, she neither sees nor hears it. All our attention is therefore fixed on him, and the more evidences of terror and horror we discover in this fear-stricken soul, the more ready are we to hold the apparition that has awakened such agitation as that for which he holds it. The spectre operates on us, but through him rather than by itself. The impression it makes on him passes on to us, and the effect is too vivid and apparent for us to doubt its supernatural cause. How little has Voltaire understood this artistic touch! At his ghost many are frightened, but not much. Semiramis exclaims once: "Heaven! I die," while the rest make no more ado about him than we might make about a friend whom we deemed far away and who suddenly walks into the room.

No. 19.

It is permitted to everybody to have his own taste, and it is laudable to be able to give the reasons why we hold such taste. But to give to the reasons by which we justify it a character of generality, and thus make it out to be the only true taste if these be correct, means exceeding the limits permitted to the investigating amateur and instituting oneself an independent lawgiver. [One] French critic [...] begins with a modest "we should have preferred," and then passes on to pronounce such universally binding dicta, that we could almost believe this "we" was the utterance of personified criticism. A true art critic deduces no rules from his individual taste, but has formed his taste from rules necessitated by the nature of the subject.

Now Aristotle has long ago decided how far the tragic poet need regard historical accuracy: not farther than it resembles a well-constructed fable wherewith he can combine his intentions. He does not make use of an event because it really happened, but because it happened in such a manner as he will scarcely be able to invent more fitly for his present purpose. If he finds this fitness in a true case, then the true case is welcome; but to search through history books does not reward his labour. And how many know what has happened? If we only admit the possibility that something can happen from the fact that it has happened, what prevents us from deeming an entirely fictitious fable a really authentic occurrence, of which we have never heard before? What is the first thing that makes a history probable? Is it not its internal probability? And is it not a matter of indifference whether this probability be confirmed by no witnesses or traditions, or by such as have never come within our knowledge? It is assumed quite without reason, that it is one of the objects of the stage, to keep alive the memory of great men. For that we have history and not the stage. From the stage we are not to learn what such and such an individual man has done, but what every man of a certain character would do under certain given circumstances. The object of tragedy is more philosophical than the object of history, and it is degrading her from her true dignity to employ her as a mere panegyric of famous men or to misuse her to feed national pride.

The translation of 'Zelmire' is in prose. But would we not rather hear nervous melodious prose than vapid and forced verses? Among all our rhymed translations there will be scarcely half a dozen that are tolerable. And I must not even be taken at my word and asked to name them! …

But does it repay our labour to expend industry on French verses until we have produced some in our language as watery and correct, as grammatical and cold? If on the contrary we transfer the whole poetical dress of the French into our prose, our prose will not through this become very poetical. It will be still far removed from the hybrid tone that has resulted out of the prose translations of English poets, in which the use of the boldest metaphors and images, together with a measured cadenced construction, recalls drunkards who dance without music. The expressions will, at most, not be raised above everyday speech, more than theatrical declamation should be raised above the common tone of social conversation. And therefore I wish our prosaic translators right many imitators, although I am not at all of the opinion of Houdar de la Motte, that metre is of itself a childish constraint to which the dramatic poet least of all should submit. For here the only question is to choose the lesser of two evils; either to sacrifice sense and emphasis to versification, or to sacrifice the latter to the former. Houdar de la Motte can be pardoned for his opinion, he was thinking of a language in which the rhythm of poetry is mere tickling of the ears, and cannot contribute to the strength of expressions. In our language on the other hand it is something more, we approach far more closely to the Greeks who were able to indicate by the mere rhythm of their verses what passions were expressed. The French verses have only the value of surmounted difficulties, and certainly this is a miserable value.

Herr Borchers played the part of Antenor uncommonly well … Herr Borchers has very much talent and this alone should insure our favourable opinion of him, that he is as ready to act old parts as young ones. This shows his love for his art, and a connoisseur thus distinguishes him at once from many other young actors who want for ever to shine on the

stage, and whose petty vanity to be seen and admired in nothing but gallant amiable parts often constitutes their foremost and only vocation for the stage.

No. 29.

Comedy is to do us good through laughter; but not through derision; not just to counteract those faults at which it laughs, nor simply and solely in those persons who possess these laughable faults. Its true general use consists in laughter itself, in the practice of our powers to discern the ridiculous, to discern it easily and quickly under all cloaks of passion and fashion; in all admixture of good and bad qualities, even in the wrinkles of solemn earnestness. Granted that Molière's Miser never cured a miser; nor Regnard's Gambler, a gambler; conceded that laughter never could improve these fools; the worse for them, but not for comedy. It is enough for comedy that, if it cannot cure an incurable disease, it can confirm the healthy in their health. The Miser is instructive also to the extravagant man; and to him who never plays the Gambler may prove of use. The follies they have not got themselves, others may have with whom they have to live. It is well to know those with whom we may come into collision; it is well to be preserved from all impressions by example. A preservative is also a valuable medicine, and all morality has none more powerful and effective, than the ridiculous.

On the thirty-fifth evening 'Rodogune' by Pierre Corneille was performed in the presence of HM the King of Denmark.

Corneille owned that he set most store by this tragedy, that he held it far above his 'Cinna' and 'Cid,' that his other plays had few merits that were not to be found all united in this; a happy theme, a totally new creation, powerful verses, thorough reasoning, strong passions; and interest that increased from act to act.

It is but just that we should linger a while over this great man's masterpiece.

The story on which it is founded is told by Appianus Alexandrinus towards the end of his book on the Syrian Wars. "Demetrius, surnamed Nicanor, undertook a campaign against the Parthians, and lived as captive for some time at the court of the Parthian king, Phraates, with whose sister, Rodogune, he married. Meanwhile Diodotus, who had served the former kings, seized upon the Syrian throne, and placed upon it the son of Alexander Nothus, a mere child, under whose name he ruled as regent. After a while however he made away with the young king, placed himself on the throne and called himself Tryphon. When Antiochus, the brother of the captive king, heard at Rhodes of his fate and of the disorders in his kingdom, he returned to Syria, conquered Tryphon with much difficulty and caused him to be executed. Then he turned his arms against Phraates and demanded the release of his brother. Phraates, who feared the worst, did indeed release Demetrius, but nevertheless Antiochus and he came to a battle in which the latter was overcome and killed himself in despair. Demetrius after his return to his kingdom was murdered by his wife Cleopatra out of hatred against Rodogune, notwithstanding that Cleopatra herself, exasperated at this marriage, had united herself to Antiochus, the brother of Demetrius. She had two sons by Demetrius, of whom the eldest Seleucus, ascended the throne upon the death of his father, and whom she shot to death

with an arrow, either because she feared he might avenge the death of his father upon her or because her cruel nature impelled her to this step. Her younger son, Antiochus, followed his brother in the government and forced his atrocious mother to empty the poisoned cup she had prepared for him."

In this story lay matter for more than one tragedy. It would have cost Corneille little more invention to make for it a 'Tryphon,' an 'Antiochus,' a 'Demetrius,' a 'Seleucus,' than it cost him to make a 'Rodogune.' What chiefly interested him therein was the outraged wife who deems that she cannot avenge too fearfully the usurped rights of her rank and bed. He therefore selected her and it is unquestionable that his play ought consequently to have been named after Cleopatra and not Rodogune. He himself acknowledged this, and it was only that he feared confusion among his auditors between the Queen of Syria with that famous last Queen of Egypt of similar name, that he preferred to take his title from the second instead of the first character in his play, "I believed myself," he says, "the more entitled to make use of this liberty, since I had observed that the ancients themselves did not deem it necessary to call a play after its hero, but without scruple would even call it after the chorus, whose connexion with the action is far less and more episodic, than that of Rodogune. For instance Sophocles has named one of his tragedies the Trachiniæ which nowadays we rarely name otherwise than the dying Hercules." This observation is in itself quite correct, the ancients considered a title as quite unimportant, they did not deem in the least that it need indicate the contents, enough if it served to distinguish one play from another and for this the smallest circumstance suffices. Yet for all that I scarcely believe that Sophocles would to-day name 'Deianira' the play he called the Trachiniæ. He did not hesitate to give it an insignificant name, but to give it a deceptive name, a name that draws attention to a wrong point, he would doubtless have avoided. Corneille's fears went too far. Whoever knows the Egyptian Cleopatra knows also that Syria is not Egypt, that various kings and queens have borne the same names, but who ever does not know of the one cannot confound it with the other. At least Corneille need not have avoided the name Cleopatra so carefully in the play itself; the first act loses thereby in lucidity, and the German translator did well to disregard this. No writer, and least of all a poet, must assume his readers to be so very ignorant; he may even at times think that what they do not know, they may inquire about.

No. 46.

It is one thing to circumvent the rules, another to observe them. The French do the former, the latter was only understood by the ancients.

Unity of action was the first dramatic law of the ancients; unity of time and place were mere consequences of the former which they would scarcely have observed more strictly than exigency required had not the combination with the chorus arisen. For since their actions required the presence of a large body of people and this concourse always remained the same, who could go no further from their dwellings nor remain absent longer than it is customary to do from mere curiosity, they were almost obliged to make the scene of action one and the same spot and confine the time to one and the same day. They submitted *bonâ fide* to this restriction; but with a suppleness of understanding such that in seven cases out of nine they gained more than they lost thereby. For they used this restriction as a reason

for simplifying the action and to cut away all that was superfluous, and thus, reduced to essentials, it became only the ideal of an action which was developed most felicitously in this form which required the least addition from circumstances of time and place.

The French on the contrary, who found no charms in true unity of action, who had been spoilt by the wild intrigues of the Spanish school, before they had learnt to know Greek simplicity, regarded the unity of time and place not as consequences of unity of action, but as circumstances absolutely needful to the representation of an action, to which they must therefore adapt their richer and more complicated actions with all the severity required in the use of a chorus, which however they had totally abolished. When they found however, how difficult, nay at times how impossible this was, they made a truce with the tyrannical rules against which they had not the courage to rebel. Instead of a single place they introduced an uncertain place, under which we could imagine now this, now that spot; enough if the places combined were not too far apart and none required special scenery, so that the same scenery could fit the one about as well as the other. Instead of the unity of a day they substituted unity of duration, and a certain period during which no one spoke of sunrise or sunset, or went to bed, or at least did not go to bed more than once, however much might occur in this space, they allowed to pass as a day.

Now no one would have objected to this, for unquestionably even thus excellent plays can be made, and the proverb says; cut the wood where it is thinnest. But I must also allow my neighbour the same privilege. I must not always show him the thickest part, and cry, "There you must cut! That is where I cut!" Thus the French critics all exclaim, especially when they speak of the dramatic works of the English. What an ado they then make of regularity, that regularity which they have made so easy to themselves! But I am weary of dwelling on this point!

As far as I am concerned Voltaire's and Maffei's 'Merope' may extend over eight days and the scene may be laid in seven places in Greece! if only they had the beauties to make me forget these pedantries!

The strictest observation of the rules cannot outweigh the smallest fault in a character. How tamely Polyphontes talks and acts in Maffei's play has not escaped Lindelle. He is right to mock at the needless maxims that Maffei places in the tyrant's mouth. To remove the best and noblest in the state; to sink the people in sensuality that should sap its strength and make it effeminate; to leave unpunished the greatest crimes under the guise of pity and mercy, etc.; if there be tyrants who reign in this silly mode, will they boast of their method? Thus tyrants are depicted in a schoolboy's essay, but they never speak thus themselves.[1] It is true that Voltaire does not suffer his Polyphontes to declaim in so chilly and insane a manner, but occasionally he lets him say things that certainly no man of his kind would speak: For example:–

> "Des Dieux quelquefois la longue patience
> Fait sur nous à pas lents descendre la vengeance"–

A Polyphontes ought to make this reflexion, but he never does. Still less would he make it at a moment when he encourages himself to new crimes.

> "Eh bien, encore ce crime !"

How absurdly he acts towards Merope I have already indicated. His behaviour towards Ægisthus is still less like a cunning and resolute man such as the poet depicted him at first. Ægisthus ought not to have appeared at the sacrifice. What was he to do there? To swear obedience? Before the people? Amid the cries of his despairing mother? Must not that inevitably occur which Polyphontes feared before?[2] He has everything to fear for his person from Ægisthus; Ægisthus only demands his sword back in order to decide the whole quarrel between them, and this madly bold Æsgisthus he suffers to come near him at the altar where the first implement he seizes upon, may be a sword. Maffei's Polyphontes is free from this absurdity, for he does not know Ægisthus and deems him his friend. What then was to hinder Ægisthus from approaching him at the altar? No one observed his movements, the blow was struck, the second ready before it occurred to any one to avenge the first.

"Merope," says Lindelle "when Maffei lets her know that her son is murdered, desires to tear the heart of the murderer from his body and to rend it with her teeth.[3] That is expressing oneself like a cannibal and not like a sorrowing mother; *bienséance* must everywhere be observed." Quite true; but though the French Merope is too refined to desire to eat such a raw heart without salt or dripping, yet it seems to me that she is at bottom as much of a *cannibal* as the Italian.

No. 49.

In a word, where the detractors of Euripides see nothing but a poet who from indolence or incapacity, or both causes, endeavours to make his work as easy to himself as possible; where they think that they discover dramatic art in its cradle, I think I see it in its perfection, and admire in Euripides the master who is in reality as correct as they demand, and only seems to be less correct because he wished to impart to his plays one beauty more for which they have no comprehension.

For it is clear that all the plays whose prologues annoy them so much would be completely and entirely comprehensible without these prologues. Erase for instance from 'Ion' the prologue of Mercury, from 'Hecuba' the prologue of Polydorus, let the one begin with the morning devotions of Ion, the other with the complaints of Hecuba, is either of them therefore in the least mutilated? How could you miss that which you have erased if it was not there at all? Does not everything maintain the same sequence, the same connexion? You must even confess that the plays would be more beautiful according to your mode of thought if we did not know from the prologues that Ion, whom Creusa intends to poison, is the son of this Creusa that this Creusa whom Ion wishes to tear from the altar to a shameful death is the mother of this Ion; if we did not know that on the very day on which Hecuba must abandon her daughter for sacrifice the unhappy old woman is also to hear of the death of her last surviving son. For all these would bring about excellent surprises, and these surprises would be sufficiently prepared without your being able to say they suddenly broke out like lightning from a white cloud; they do not follow, they arise, it is not intended to disclose something to you but to impose something upon you, and yet you still quarrel with the poet? You still reproach him with want of art. Forgive him a fault that a single stroke of the pen can make good, a gardener quietly lops off the superfluous branch,

without scolding at the healthy tree that has brought it forth. Now if you would assume for a moment – it is true I am going to ask you to assume a great deal – that Euripides had as much insight, could have as much taste as you, and you wonder the more how with so much insight, so refined taste, he yet could commit so grave a fault, come over to me and regard what you call his faults from my point of view. Euripides knew as well as we that his 'Ion' for instance could stand without the prologue, that without this it was a play which sustained the interest and uncertainty of the spectator to the close, but he did not care for this uncertainty and expectation. For if the spectator only learned in the fifth act that Ion was the son of Creusa, then it is not for them her son, but a stranger, an enemy, whom she seeks to make away with in the third act; then it is not for them the mother of Ion on whom Ion seeks to avenge himself in the fourth act, but only a murderess. Whence then should fear and pity arise? The mere presumption that could be deduced from coincident circumstances that Ion and Creusa might have some connexion would not be sufficient for this, this assumption must become a certainty, and if the spectator could only receive this certainty from outside, if it was not possible for one of the acting personages to initiate him, was it not better that the poet should initiate him in the only possible way rather than not at all? Say of this method what you will, enough if it has helped him to attain his goal, his tragedy is throughout what a tragedy should be, and if you are still dissatisfied that the form should give place to the essential then supply your learned criticism with nothing but plays where the essential is sacrificed to the form, and you are rewarded. Let Whitehead's 'Creusa' please you henceforth, in which no god predicts, in which you learn everything from an old garrulous confidante who is questioned by a cunning gipsy, let these please you better henceforth than Euripides' 'Ion,' I shall not envy you.

When Aristotle speaks of Euripides as the most tragic of all tragic poets he did not merely mean that most of his plays end with an unhappy catastrophe, although I am aware that many thus interpret the Stagyrite. For this trick could easily be copied, and the bungler who murders and slaughters right and left, and allows none of his personages to leave the stage whole or alive, would then be permitted to think himself as tragic as Euripides. Unquestionably Aristotle had various qualities in mind when he accorded him this epithet. No doubt the above-named quality belonged to those by means of which the author let the spectators foresee all the misfortunes that were to befall his personages, in order to gain their sympathy while these were yet far removed from deeming that they required sympathy. Sokrates was the master and friend of Euripides, and hence how many might imagine that the poet owed to this friendship with the philosopher all the wealth of splendid maxims that he has scattered so profusely throughout his plays! I think that he owed far more to him; he might have been just as rich in maxims without him, but he would scarcely have been as tragic without him. Fine sentences and moral maxims are just what we are likely to hear least from a philosopher like Sokrates, his life was the only moral that he preached. But what we learn in his society is to know man and ourselves; to be observant of our emotions; to search for and to love the smoothest and shortest paths of nature; to judge each matter according to its intention; this was what Euripides learned from Sokrates and what made him the first in his art. Happy the poet who has such a friend and can consult with him every day, every hour.

Even Voltaire seems to have felt that it would be well if he could acquaint us from the beginning with the son of Merope, if we could start with the knowledge that the amiable

unhappy youth whom Merope shields at first, and whom she afterwards desires to kill as the murderer of her Ægisthus, is Ægisthus himself. But the youth does not know himself, and there is no one there who knows him better and through whom he could learn it. What then does the poet do? How does he provide that we should know with certainty that Merope is raising the dagger against her own son, even before old Narbas calls to her? Oh! he sets about this most cunningly! Only a Voltaire could have thought of such an artistic trick. As soon as the unknown youth enters, he places the name Ægisthus in large, distinct beautiful letters over the first speech he has to make, and so on over all the following. Now we know it, for Merope has in the preceding scenes named her son more than once, and even if she had not done so we need only refer to the list of *Dramatis personæ* printed at the commencement, to find it there in full! It is certainly rather comic when the person above whose speeches we have a dozen times read the name Ægisthus, on being asked:–

> "Narbas vous est connu?
> Le nom d'Égiste au mains jusqu'à vous est venu?
> Quel était votre état, votre rang, votre père?"

replies:–

> "Mon père est un vieillard accablé de misère;
> Polyclète est son nom; mais Égiste, Narbas,
> Ceux dont vous me parlez, je ne les connais pas."

It is also remarkable that we hear no other name from this Ægisthus who is not called Ægisthus; that when he replies to the queen that his father is called Polycletus, he does not add, and I am called so and so. For a name he must needs have, and M. de Voltaire could surely have invented that also, seeing he has invented so much! Readers who are not well acquainted with the tricks of a tragedy, could easily go astray here. They read that a youth is brought in who has committed murder on the highway; this youth they see is named Ægisthus, but he says he is not called so, and yet does not say what he is called. Oh! this youth, they presume, is not all right, he is an accomplished highwayman, young though he is, and innocently though he poses. Thus, I say, inexperienced readers are in danger of concluding; and yet I believe seriously speaking, that it is better that the experienced reader should learn even in this wise from the beginning who the unknown youth is, than not at all. Only do not tell me that this method of informing them is in the least bit more artistic and subtle than a prologue after the manner of Euripides.

No. 70.

If in this comparison of the great and small, the original and counterfeit heroic farce, the satirical mood were not so prominent, it could be held to be the best apology for the comi-tragic or tragi-comic drama (mixed plays I have seen them called somewhere), the most conscientious deduction of Lope's thoughts, while at the same time it would confute them. It would prove that just the example of nature which is to justify the combination of solemn