

Landesbibliothek Oldenburg

Digitalisierung von Drucken

Poems On Several Occasions

Gay, John

London, 1745

The Preface.

urn:nbn:de:gbv:45:1-2019



THE
P R E F A C E.

AS I am the first who have introduced this kind of Dramatick entertainment upon the stage, I think it absolutely necessary to say something by way of Preface, not only to shew the nature of it, but to answer some objections that have been already rais'd against it by the graver sort of Wits, and other interested people.

We have often had Tragi-Comedies upon the English Theatre with success: but in that sort of composition the Tragedy and Comedy are in distinct Scenes, and may be easily separated from each other. But the whole Art
of

P R E F A C E.

of the Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce lies in interweaving the several kinds of the Drama with each other, so that they cannot be distinguish'd or separated.

The objections that are rais'd against it as a Tragedy, are as follow.

First, as to the Plot, they deny it to be Tragical, because its Catastrophe is a wedding, which hath ever been accounted Comical.

Secondly, As to the Characters; that those of a Justice of Peace, a Parish-Clerk, and an Embryo's Ghost, are very improper to the dignity of Tragedy, and were never introduc'd by the Antients.

Thirdly, They say the Sentiments are not Tragical, because they are those of the lowest country people.

Lastly, They will not allow the Moral to be proper for Tragedy, because the end of Tragedy being to shew human life in its distresses, imperfections and infirmities, thereby to soften the mind of man from its natural obduracy and haughtiness, the Moral ought to have the same tendency; but this Moral, they say, seems

P R E F A C E.

Seems entirely calculated to flatter the Audience in their vanity and self-conceitedness.

You all have sense enough to find it out.

To the first objection I answer, that it is still a disputable point, even among the best Criticks, whether a Tragedy may not have a happy Catastrophe; that the French Authors are of this opinion, appears from most of their modern Tragedies.

In answer to the second objection, I cannot affirm, that any of the Antients have either a Justice of Peace, a Parish-Clerk, or an Embryo Ghost in their Tragedies; yet whoever will look into Sophocles, Euripides, or Seneca, will find that they greatly affected to introduce Nurses in all their pieces, which every one must grant to be an inferior Character to a Justice of Peace; in imitation of which also, I have introduced a Grandmother and an Aunt.

To the third objection, which is the meanness of the sentiments, I answer, that the sentiments of Princes and Clowns have not in reality that difference which they seem to have; their thoughts are almost the same, and they only differ



P R E F A C E.

differ as the same thought is attended with a meanness or pomp of diction, or receive a different light from the circumstances each Character is conversant with. But these Criticks have forgot the precept of their Master Horace, who tells them,

---- *Tragicus plerumque dolet sermone pedestri.*

In answer to the objection against the Moral, I have only this to alledge, That the Moral of this piece is conceal'd; and Morals that are couch'd so as to exercise the judgments of the audience, have not been disapprov'd by the best Criticks ||. And I would have those that object against it as a piece of Flattery, consider, that there is such a Figure as the Irony.

The Objections against it as a Comedy are,

First, they object to the plot, that it throws the Characters into the deepest circumstances of distress: Inferiors trampled upon by the Tyranny of Power, a soldier to be shot for desertion, and an innocent maid in the utmost despair.

|| See Bossu's Chapter of concealed Sentences.

Secondly,

P R E F A C E.

Secondly, That Ghosts are introduced, which move terror, a Passion not proper to be moved in Comedy.

Thirdly, They will not allow the Sentiments to be comical, because they are such as naturally flow from the deep distresses above-mentioned. The Speech of a dying man, and his last advice to his child, are what one could not reasonably expect should raise the mirth of an audience.

First, that the Plot is comical, I argue from the Peripætia and the Catastrophe. Peascod's change of fortune upon the reprieve's being produced, Kitty's distress ending in the discharge of her sweetheart, and the wedding, are all incidents that are truly comical.

*To the second objection I answer, That Ghosts have not been omitted in the antient Comedy; Aristophanes having laid the Scene of his *Βαρυχοί* among the shades; and Plautus has introduced a *Lar familiaris* in his Prologue to the *Aulularia*, which tho' not actually a Ghost, is very little better.*

*As to the third objection, That the Sentiments are not Comical, I answer that the Ghosts are the only characters which are ob-
jected*

P R E F A C E.

jected to as improper for Comedy, which I have already proved to be justly introduced, as following the manner of the old Comedy; but as they allow that the Sentiments naturally flow from the characters, those of the Justice, Clowns, &c. which are indisputably Comical characters, must be Comical. For the Sentiments being conveyed in number and rhyme, I have the authority of the best modern French Comedies.

The only objection against it as a Pastoral falls upon the characters, which they say are partly Pastoral, and partly not so. They insist particularly, that a Sergeant of Grenadiers is not a pastoral character, and that the others are so far from being in the state of innocence, that the clowns are whoremasters, and the damsels with child.

To this I reply, that Virgil talks of Soldiers among his Shepherds.

Impius hæc tam culta Novalia miles habebit.

And the character of the Sergeant is drawn according to the Epithet of Virgil, *Impius Miles*, which may be seen in that speech of his,

You

P R E F A C E.

You Dog, die like a Soldier ——— and
be damn'd,

For, in short, a Soldier to a Swain is but just the same thing that a Wolf is to his Flocks, and is as naturally talk'd of or introduc'd. As for the rest of the characters, I can only say I have copied nature, making the youths amorous before wedlock, and the damsels complying and fruitful. Those that are the most conversant in the country are the best judges of this sort of nature.

Lastly, they object against it as a Farce.

First, Because the irregularity of the Plot should answer to the Extravagance of the characters, which they say this piece wants, and therefore is no Farce.

Secondly, They deny the characters to be Farcical, because they are actually in nature.

Thirdly, If it was a true Farce, the Sentiments ought to be strain'd, to bear a proportional

VOL. I.

L

portional



P R E F A C E.

portional irregularity with the plot and characters.

To the First I answer, that the Farcical Scene of the Ghosts, introduced without any coherence with the rest of the piece, might be entirely left out, and would not be allow'd in a regular Comedy. There are indeed a great number of Dramatick entertainments, where are Scenes of this kind; but those pieces in reality are not Comedies, but five Act Farces.

Secondly, Let the Criticks consider only the nature of Farce, that it is made up of absurdities and incongruities, and that those pieces which have these Qualities in the greatest degree are the most Farces; and they will allow this to be so from the characters, and particularly from that of the speaking Ghost of an Embryo, in the conclusion of the first Act. I have, 'tis true, Aristophanes's Authority for things of this sort in Comedy, who hath introduced a Chorus of Frogs, and made them talk in the following manner:

P R E F A C E.

Βρεκεκεκέξ, κοάξ, κοάξ,

Βρεκεκεκέξ, κοάξ, κοάξ,

Λιμναῖα κρηῶν τέκνα, &c.

*Mr. D'Ursey of our own nation has given all the fowls of the air the faculty of speech equal with the parrot. Swans and elbow-chairs in the Opera of Dioclesian have danc'd upon the English Stage with good Success. Shakespear hath some characters of this sort, as a speaking wall, and Moonshine *. The former he design'd to introduce (as he tells us himself) with something rough cast about him, and the latter comes in with a lanthorn and candle; which in my opinion are characters that make a good figure in the modern Farce.*

Thirdly, The sentiments are truly of the Farce kind, as they are the sentiments of the meanest Clowns convey'd in the pomp of numbers and rhyme; which is certainly forc'd and out of nature, and therefore Farcical.

* See his *Midsummer Night's Dream.*

I, 2

After

P R E F A C E.

After all I have said, I would have these Criticks only consider, when they object against it as a Tragedy, that I design'd it something of a Comedy; when they cavil at it as a Comedy, that I had partly a view to Pastoral; when they attack it as a Pastoral, that my endeavours were in some degree to write a Farce; and when they would destroy its character as a Farce, that my design was a Tragi-Comi-Pastoral: I believe when they consider this, they will all agree, that I have happily enough executed what I purposed, which is all I contend for. Yet that I might avoid the cavils and misrepresentations of severe Criticks, I have not call'd it a Tragedy, Comedy, Pastoral, or Farce, but left the name entirely undetermin'd in the doubtful appellation of the. What d'ye call it, which name I thought unexceptionable; but I added to it a Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce, as it comprized all those several kinds of the Drama.

The Judicious Reader will easily perceive, that the unities are kept as in the most perfect pieces, that the Scenes are unbroken, and Poetical Justice strictly observ'd; the Ghost of the Embryo and the Parish-Girl are entire

P R E F A C E.

tire new characters. I might enlarge further upon the conduct of the particular Scenes, and of the piece in general, but shall only say, that the success this piece has met with upon the Stage, gives encouragement to our Dramatick Writers to follow its Model; and evidently demonstrates that this sort of Drama is no less fit for the Theatre than those they have succeeded in.



Dramatis Personæ.

M E N.

Sir Roger	Mr. Miller.
Sir Humphry	Mr. Cross.
Justice Statute	Mr. Shepherd.
Squire Thomas, Sir Roger's Son, <i>alias</i> , Thomas Filbert	Mr. Johnson.
Jonas Dock, <i>alias</i> , Timothy Peascod	Mr. Penketbman.
Peter Nettle, the Sergeant	Mr. Norris.
Steward to Sir Roger	Mr. Quin.
Constable	Mr. Penroy.
Corporal	Mr. Weller.
Stave, a Parish Clerk	
The Ghost of a Child unborn	Mr. Norris Jun.
Countrymen, Ghosts and Soldiers.	

W O M E N.

Kitty, the Steward's Daughter, <i>alias</i> , Kitty Carrot	Mrs. Bicknell.
Dorcas, Peascod's Sister	Mrs. Willis Sen.
Joyce, Peascod's Daughter left upon the Parish	Miss Younger.
Aunt	Mrs. Baker.
Grandmother	

T H E