

was, he was not sparing of the *limae labor et mora*—counselled by Horace—and the polish assigned to characters and expression is the work of a thorough artist.

One more masterpiece Sheridan was to contribute to Drury Lane. On the 30th October, 1779, *The Critic, or, A Tragedy Rehearsed*, a dramatic piece in three acts, was shuffled on to the stage, the last act being written by Sheridan in confinement on the eve of the day of production. In the composition of this, Sheridan was directly inspired by *The Rehearsal* of the Duke of Buckingham, which, though produced in 1671, was still occasionally revived, and was influenced in a less degree by Fielding's *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*. In its way each of these satires is a masterpiece, and if all are now banished from the stage, the cause is found in the disappearance of the class of tragedies against which their shafts are directed. The wittiest as well as the most modern of all, *The Critic*, has been once or twice revived in days comparatively recent, though generally for a single occasion and for a benefit. The younger Charles Mathews even obtained a measure of reputation in the part of Puff. On such occasions no attempt was made to respect the text of the author. The wildest gags were permitted, and the whole was ordinarily a burlesque of a burlesque. In the number of stock quotations it supplies *The Critic* is inferior to neither *The Rivals* nor *The School for Scandal*, and it comes behind neither in style. Some resemblance in dialogue is traceable between it and *The School for Scandal*. Where Sneer objects to Puff: 'But, Mr. Puff, I think not only the Justice but the clown seems to talk in as high a style as the first hero among them,' Sheridan uses a reproach that had often doubtless been directed against his own previous works. The language of Puff when he boasts himself 'a practitioner in panegyric' is as florid as that of Sir Benjamin Backbite. The character of Cumberland as depicted in Sir Fretful Plagiary is perhaps the best drawn in Sheridan.

This was the last original work that the popular dramatist contributed to his own theatre. Little trouble