

Pope's legate. It is amazing the force of passion and dignity of sentiment which Constance exhibits in reply to the attempts of Philip to reconcile her to his alliance with King John, the usurper of her son's rights, and of Pandolph to give her ghostly advice, and administer consolation to her grief.

We need not instance the profound thought and fine philosophy of Hamlet—the wild tragic power of the murder scene, or the supernatural element in the weird witch scene, of Macbeth—the remarkable impersonation of fiendish malignity and cunning in the character of Iago, of jealousy in Othello, and patient and constant love in Desdemona—the terrific outburst of passion in King Lear, and the appalling examples of filial ingratitude and baseness in two of his daughters, with the noble exception, and beautiful fidelity and affection of the third. “The Tempest,” and “Midsummer Night's Dream,” show Shakspeare's power in the fairy and supernatural worlds, and there are passages in these plays of exquisite and marvellous beauty.

The humour of Shakspeare is equal to his other qualities. There has been no comedy like his, and it may be questioned if any humorist, in any age or country, has equalled him. He did not give himself professedly to humour as did Le Sage or Cervantes, or like the purely comic writers such as Moliere and Congreve, or such humorists as Rabelais, Swift, Fielding, or Smollett, not to mention those of our own day; but he perhaps, notwithstanding, excelled them all in creations of broad humour, hearty merriment, and genuine comedy.

On Shakspeare's minor poems it would be useless to enlarge. His “Venus and Adonis” is not the most modest of compositions. His Sonnets, though not written according to the regular laws of Sonnet, are fine productions. They give us Shakspeare in his most relaxed moods and moments, wearing neither the cothurnus nor the buskin, but Shakspeare himself. They are full of Shakspearean touches—lines, thoughts, images, which only Shakspeare could have embodied or produced. They form almost the only materials by which we can get an insight into the personal character and peculiarities of the great dramatist and poet. They are a sort of mirror in which his mental image is reflected to us. It is but little that we know of him otherwise. There is no writer that is more *impersonal*. He is something like the “Impersonal Reason” of which a certain philosopher speaks, except as regards his intellect—all that concerns his intellectual endowments. He retires himself behind his great creations—is merged in them; and yet we would gather that he was the most genial and loveable of men. He was known as the “gentle Shakspeare” among his companions; and it is perhaps the highest tribute to his character, that he had so few *peculiarities* to mark him out from his fellows, and to hand down his portrait to future times.

The other dramatists after Shakspeare—after in point of merit though contemporaneous in time—some of them were even prior in time, and were Shakspeare's precursors in the drama:—Heywood and Marlowe and Dekker—Ford, Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher—Webster, Ben Jonson, and Shirley—with many others—were characterised by great power in delineating character, masterly dialogue, often much beauty and sway over the passions; vivid fancy and powerful imagination. They fail, perhaps in the natural construction of plot, and they are deformed by great licentiousness. Ben Jonson wrote more after the classic model of antiquity, and condemns even Shakspeare's plays as departing from this. Shakspeare, however, may be amply vindicated in this respect; and it is exactly in a more unrestricted liberty in the matter of the *unities* that the modern drama, and especially Shakspeare's.