

### *Tragic Actors*

MONTFLEURY, a French player, was one of the greatest actors of his time for characters highly tragic. He died of the violent efforts he made in representing Orestes in *the Andromache* of Racine. The author of the “Parnasse Reformé” makes him thus express himself in the shades. There is something extremely droll in his lamentations, with a severe raillery on the inconveniences to which tragic actors are so liable.

“Ah! how sincerely do I wish that tragedies had never been invented! I might then have been yet in a state capable of appearing on the stage; and if I should not have attained the glory of sustaining sublime characters, I should at least have trifled agreeably, and have worked off my spleen in laughing! I have wasted my lungs in the violent emotions of jealousy, love, and ambition. A thousand times have I been obliged to force myself to represent more passions than Le Brun ever painted or conceived. I saw myself frequently obliged to dart terrible glances; to roll my eyes furiously in my head, like a man insane; to frighten others by extravagant grimaces; to imprint on my countenance the redness of indignation and hatred; to make the paleness of fear and surprise succeed each other by turns; to express the transports of rage

and despair; to cry out like a demoniac; and consequently to strain all the parts of body to render them fitter to accompany these different impressions. The man then who would know of what I died, let him not ask if it were of the fever, the dropsy, or the gout; but let him know that it was of the *Andromache!*”

The Jesuit Rapin informs us, that when Mondory acted Herod in the *Mariamne* of Tristan, the spectators quitted the theatre mournful and thoughtful; so tenderly were they penetrated with the sorrows of the unfortunate heroine. In this melancholy pleasure, he says, we have a rude picture of the strong impressions which were made by the Grecian tragedians. Mondory indeed felt so powerfully the character he assumed, that it cost him his life.

Some readers will recollect the death of Bond, who felt so exquisitely the character of Lusignan in *Zara*, which he personated when an old man, that *Zara*, when she addressed him, found him *dead* in his chair!

The assumption of a variety of characters, by a person of irritable and delicate nerves, has often a tragical effect on the mental faculties. We might draw up a list of ACTORS, who have fallen martyrs to their tragic char-

acters. Several have died on the stage, and, like Palmer, usually in the midst of some agitated appeal to the feelings.

Baron, who was the French Garrick, had a most elevated notion of his profession; he used to say, that tragic actors should be nursed on the lap of queens! Nor was his vanity inferior to his enthusiasm for his profession; for, according to him, the world might see once in a century a *Cæsar*, but that it required a thousand years to produce a *Baron!* A variety of anecdotes testify the admirable talents he displayed. Whenever he meant to compliment the talents or merit of distinguished characters, he always delivered in a pointed manner the striking passages of the play, fixing his eye on them. An observation of his respecting actors is not less applicable to poets than to painters. "RULES," said this sublime actor, "may teach us not to raise the arms above the head; but if PASSION carries them, it will be well done; PASSION KNOWS MORE THAN ART."

Betterton, although his countenance was ruddy and sanguine, when he performed Hamlet, through the violent and sudden emotion of amazement and horror at the presence of his father's spectre, instantly turned as white as his neckcloth, while his whole body seemed to be affected with a strong tremor: had his father's appa-

rition actually risen before him, he could not have been seized with more real agonies. This struck the spectators so forcibly, that they felt a shuddering in their veins, and participated in the astonishment and the horror so apparent in the actor. Davies in his *Dramatic Miscellanies* records this fact; and in the *Richardsoniana*, we find that the first time Booth attempted the ghost when Betterton acted Hamlet, that actor's look at him struck him with such horror that he became disconcerted to such a degree, that he could not speak his part. Here seems no want of evidence of the force of the ideal presence in this marvellous acting: these facts might deserve a philosophical investigation.

Le Kain, the French actor, who retired from the Parisian stage, covered with glory and gold, was one day congratulated by a company on the retirement which he was preparing to enjoy. "As to glory," modestly replied this actor, "I do not flatter myself to have acquired much. This kind of reward is always disputed by many, and you yourselves would not allow it, were I to assume it. As to the money, I have not so much reason to be satisfied; at the Italian theatre their share is far more considerable than mine; an actor there may get twenty to twenty-five thousand livres, and my share amounts at the most to ten or twelve thousand." "How the dev-

il!" exclaimed a rude chevalier of the order of St. Louis, who was present, "How the devil! a vile stroller is not content with twelve thousand livres annually, and I, who am in the king's service, who sleep upon a cannon and lavish my blood for my country, I must consider myself as fortunate in having obtained a pension of one thousand livres." "And do you account as nothing, sir, the liberty of addressing me thus?" replied Le Kain, with all the sublimity and conciseness of an irritated Orosmane.

The memoirs of Madlle. Clarion display her exalted feeling of the character of a sublime actress; she was of opinion, that in common life the truly sublime actor should be a hero or heroine off the stage. "If I am only a vulgar and ordinary woman during twenty hours of the day, whatever effort I may make, I shall only be an ordinary and vulgar woman in Agrippina or Semiramis, during the remaining four." In society she was nicknamed the Queen of Carthage, from her admirable personification of Dido in a tragedy of that name.