

of too bold a cast to be confined by any restrictions. One of his most admired productions (the *Cid*) is evidently of Spanish extraction; in this the unities of time are imperfectly observed, and those of place entirely neglected.

Of all the French tragedians Racine studied the ancients with the greatest attention. But the national taste was too decidedly fixed to allow of any innovations: he was, therefore, obliged to content himself with transporting to the Parisian theatre, those beauties which the taste and prejudices of the audience were prepared to receive. But whether this was a sacrifice to the opinions of his countrymen, or proceeded from natural inclination, it is equally certain that he adopted, in its fullest extent, the ridiculous system of effeminate gallantry, which is totally misplaced in a tragical composition, and at which the good sense of the ancients would have revolted.

The style of Racine is greatly admired, and is generally highly polished and elegant; but it is difficult to find a single page in which useless words, and even lines, are not introduced for the sake of the rhyme. The French talk much of the pleasure derived from contemplating the many obstacles which the poet must have overcome before he could produce *Britannicus* or *Phedra*. But can it be possible for any person of genuine taste, when he beholds *Talma* in one of his most admired characters, so far to abstract his attention from the object before him, as calmly to occupy himself with reflecting upon the difficulties an author must encounter in the regular arrangement of masculine and feminine rhymes? At least we envy not the state of that man's mind who is capable of so much stoicism.

Though but imperfectly acquainted with the literature of Greece, *Voltaire* sometimes speaks of her tragedians with enthusiasm, but it is merely for the purpose of attacking them with greater effect, when he compares them with the prodigies of national genius, among whom he modestly comprises himself. Intimately persuaded that he was destined to enlighten the world, (for nothing was too extravagant for his vanity to believe,) he formed a plan for improving the dramatic art, by giving greater splendour and animation to the stage. This was unquestionably a meritorious attempt, and entitles him to just commendation; but we cannot equally applaud his insidious attacks upon the throne and the altar, whenever an opportunity occurs of undermining the religion or loyalty of his countrymen. It is impossible, however, to deny that the theatre is indebted to him for various improvements, but particularly for bringing before the eyes of the spectators the final termination of the catastrophe, which is usually related in the plays of Racine by some courtly attendant. In the whole range of French tragedy we know

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