

know of nothing which, in point of effect, can compare with the fourth act of Mahomet.

Whenever the French tragedians have treated historical subjects, they have almost always been guilty of the same fault, that of substituting the manners of their own country, for those of the people they introduce; thus their portraits are totally destitute of truth and originality. Orosmane and Alexandre are essentially French in every thing except their appellation and dress. Bajazet makes love like a Parisian, and not like a Turk. It is true that the sanguinary policy of oriental despotism is admirably painted in the character of the vizir, but all the rest of the piece is exactly the reverse of Turkish manners. Instead of being slaves, the sultanas assume the reins of government, and intrigue for power with as much spirit and address as if they had been educated in the meridian of Versailles; and the manner in which they employ their authority is calculated to justify the precautions of the Ottomans in keeping them strictly confined.

‘On est dans l’histoire sur un terrain prosaïque; la vérité du tableau demande une grande précision, des détails circonstanciés, des traits caractéristiques dont la pompe de la tragédie ne s’accommode pas toujours, et qui font perdre au cothurne quelque chose de sa hauteur. Aussi Shakespear, le premier des poètes historiques, a-t-il introduit sans scrupule, une grande variété de tons dans ses tragédies. Les poètes Français n’ont jamais pu s’y résoudre, et c’est pourquoi leurs compositions dramatiques manquent de ces contrastes pittoresques, de ces vives couleurs, de ces traits marquans, qui donnent l’idée de la vie.’—vol. i. 149.

Another grievous defect is the manner employed to communicate to the audience the state of affairs at the commencement of the play. This is usually done by making a prince or a princess impart to a confidential attendant some important secret, with which it is impossible they should have been unacquainted. The absurdity of this proceeding was never more striking than in the *Œdipe* of Voltaire, who makes that unfortunate prince communicate to Jocasta his fatal contest with Laius, which with wonderful prudence he till then had kept to himself, though they had been married a considerable time.

‘Avec quel art admirable au contraire, Shakespear et Calderon n’instruisent-ils pas les spectateurs? Ils s’emparent de l’imagination dès l’entrée, et c’est seulement quand l’intérêt est excité, qu’ils développent les suppositions fondamentales de leur fiction.’—vol. ii. 169.

M. Schlegel appears to undervalue Molière, who is certainly inferior to no comic writer of modern times. *Le Tartuffe*, *L’Avare*, *Les Femmes Savantes*, *Le Misanthrope*, and *L’École des Femmes*, are all admirable in their way, and display infinite wit and humour. *Le Méchant* of Gresset is one of the most elegant productions