

**LOVE'S GRADUATE:  
A COMEDY**

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Love's Graduate: A Comedy by John Webster

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**JOHN WEBSTER**

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GRADVATE

A COMEDY

BY

JOHN WEBSTER

PRINTED AT THE PRIVATE PRESS OF

H. DANIEL

FELLOW OF WORCESTER COLLEGE

OXFORD

1887



*This Impression is limited to One Hundred & Fifty Copies,  
of which this is No. 59.*



#### NOTE

THE idea of this volume originated with Mr. EDWARD GOSSE, when he pointed out how, under an unpleasant title and among matter which would be offensive were it not contemptible, there lies obscured a charming domestic drama of English country life three centuries ago, the work of a famous hand. Even the title is due to Mr. Gosse, as much as the Essay he has kindly prefixed to the play.

JOHN WEBSTER has here laid aside the tragic thunders which his name calls to remembrance; or at least only lets them be heard in distant rumblings of sword-and-dagger fights on Calais sands, of Spanish Warships threatening the Kentish shore, or of fiery passions subdued just not too late. In "LOVE'S GRADUATE" we breathe a calmer and a fresher air; the virtues and failings of the Persons are those of our own country and of common life; by force of simple trustfulness evil is turned to good, and a tangled mesh of circumstance is unravelled to a happy conclusion. The crudities, for such there are, of metre, of plot, and sometimes of language, can easily be tolerated, and would, it may be thought, be mitigated in representation on the stage.

It has been the aim of the writer of this Note to restore WEBSTER's original work, so far as is now possible, by means of simple omission of the scenes and parts of scenes which contain the underplot; and for these omissions he alone is responsible. Otherwise the text is that of DYCE, with a few slight verbal alterations, and many of punctuation. There are many passages in the play which a Poetaster of English might greatly improve: and looking to the late date, 1661, at which it was first printed, the application to it of such critical ingenuity would seem at least defensible. This however cannot here be attempted.

Our play as now presented, enriched with the criticism of Mr. GOSSE, and embodied in the typography of Mr. DANIEL, is humbly commended to all true lovers of English literature.

S. E. S. R.

LONDON: March 23, 1885.





#### PREFATORY ESSAY

IN THE ensuing pages an enthusiastic lover of the fame of Webster has performed a pious duty. He has extraited the ore from "a mineral of metals base", and the poetry from a work in which a poetaster had more than a finger. It is peculiarly grateful to me that the Editor should ask me to introduce his experiment to the world of letters with a few critical words, since the conception of the fibeme was mine, as he kindly admits, and even the name of the new play. Moreover, if it be a discovery, it is the eldest child of my research. I was hardly more than a schoolboy when I formed the view of Kirkman's venture which has been accepted by the best critics, and I have a peculiar fondness for this the earliest trophy of my spear & of my pen. When I first found an opportunity of divulging my opinion, in 1874, it was met with general approval. When, in 1883, I embodied it, with more confident expression, in my volume of *Seventeenth Century Studies*, such refined and learned students of our drama as Mr. John Addington Symonds, Mr. George Saintsbury and Professor Edward Dowden pointedly congratulated me on it anew. Lastly, lest my theory should not be found to bear the passage of years, on receiving the Editor's invitation, I applied to my old friend and earliest censor, Mr. Swinburne, begging him to glance once more at

*the original and at my praises, and to tell me whether the latter still commended themselves to him. I take his reply as final in its encouragement. He tells me that on fresh examination he still "wholly concurs in my conclusion as to the parts respectively assignable to Webster and to Rowley". He adds, too indulgently, "Your analysis of the play in question was admirable", and I, remembering the tender and callow years I bore when that analysis was conceived, am reminded of that paradoxical remark of Théophile Gautier, that we change in taste, perhaps, certainly in force, from twenty upwards, but not in the quality of our opinions. Perhaps, then, I may be permitted to speak in this one instance of my conjectures as of facts, without seeming to throw my lot in with the school of arrogant pedants who measure verse with their fingers, or if with ears at all, with ears for thickness and length like those of Midas. With these men the trick of dividing dramatisæ from dramatisæ has become a disease, but I trust that the investigation, which our Editor has here at length illustrated, was conducted on my part with all due regard to none but sound imaginative and metrical traditions.*

*In 1661 the bookseller Francis Kirkman, who had been a collector of books before he took to the trade of a publisher, sent forth from his shop at the sign of John Fletcher's Head, on the back-side of St. Clement's Church, a play in quarto entitled A Cure for a Cuckold, A pleasant comedy As it hath been several times Acted with great Applause. Written by John Webster & William Rowley. It was then nearly forty years since Webster had been heard of alive, yet only seven since the first publication of his undoubted Tragedy of Appius and Virginia. Both the*

White Devil and the Dutchess of Malfy were very shortly to be revived, and Webster was the one Elizabethan poet, after Jonson, Fletcher and Shakespeare, in whom the Restoration would take an intelligent interest. There is no doubt that it was a revival of curiosity about Webster which induced Kirkman to print this old MS. play, in company with many others which he possessed. He was less happy in simultaneously presenting to the public the windy trash called The Thracian Wonder as being also a joint tragedy of Webster and Rowley. It has doubtless been the worthlessness of this latter play, which Dyce admitted into Webster's works in 1830, and then rejected again in 1857, which has led to the neglect of its sister-venture, A Cure for a Cuckold. At all events until I drew attention to this last, it had never received the critical examination which its partial beauty and dignity demand.

It is perhaps the only play of double authorship which has come down to us from the seventeenth century which we can confidently and yet not rashly divide in detail between its two parents. There seems in this one instance no danger whatever in dissecting the piece, scene by scene, and labelling each one "Webster" or "Rowley". The circumstances of its creation I have surmised to be these. William Rowley, a rough playwright of the Jacobean age, whose work bears no traces of that academic polish which a Cambridge man should have brought from the College which nourished Spenser and Gray, had attained a sudden success with such loose comedies as A Shoemaker a Gentleman & A New Wonder, Woman never vexed. He came into so good repute for patching up other men's serious work with light town-comedy, that we find