

**THE OLD DRAMATISTS; CONJECTURAL
READINGS ON THE TEXTS OF MARSTON,
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER, PEELE,
MARLOWE, CHAPMAN, HEYWOOD,
GREENE, MIDDLETON, DEKKER, WEBSTER**

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PREFATORY NOTE

MOST of the conjectures in this volume upon the texts of Marston, Beaumont and Fletcher, Peele, and Marlowe, with some that I have withdrawn, were printed for private circulation in 1894. These were so kindly received by several eminent scholars that, having now added six more of the old dramatists to my list, I venture to ask for a wider hearing.

Something in the way of apology should perhaps be said of an attempt which covers so large a field, especially as most of the dramatists with whose texts I deal have been subject to the criticism of many able editors and to the exercise of much sagacity. That I should hope to succeed where great names have failed may seem presumptuous. I am not, however, unmindful of the dangers of conjectural criticism, nor of the warnings addressed to would-be emendators. Among such warnings none perhaps is more to the point than that of the late Dr. Ingleby when he says in his *Shakespeare Hermeneutics*, p. 114: 'The simple

truth is, that successful emendation is the fruit of severe study and research on the one hand, and of rare sensibility and sense on the other. The number of really satisfactory conjectures are comparatively few ; and few are those critics who have shown any remarkable sagacity in this kind of speculation.'

Now I, of course, make no claim whatever to 'rare sensibility and sense' ; I cannot dignify my reading as 'severe study and research' ; still less do I imagine myself endowed with those excellent gifts so justly ascribed to scholars and critics like Theobald, Steevens, Dyce, and others of the past. At the same time, I shall be disappointed if these conjectures of mine are not recognised as the outcome of much patient industry, and of considerable familiarity with the language and thought of our old dramatists.

K. D.

THE OLD DRAMATISTS: CONJECTURAL READINGS

I. MARSTON¹

I. *Antonio and Mellida*, i. 1. 258 :—

'*Ros.* Sweet Lady, nay good sweet, now by my troth
We'll be bedfellows : *dirt on compliment froth!*
Exeunt ; ROSSALINE giving ANTONIO the way.'

Bullcn explains the last words of the speech thus : 'No empty compliments ! take the lead.'

In spite of the closer similarity of spelling between *troth* and *froth*, I would read, 'dirt on compliment ! *forth!*'

I. *Antonio and Mellida*, ii. 1. 14 :—

'*Dil.* Upon mine honour.

'*Cat.* Your honour with a paugh ! 'slid, now every jack-anapes loads his back with the golden coat of honour ; every ass puts on the lion's skin and roars his honour. Upon your honour ? By my lady's pantable, I fear I shall live to hear a vintner's boy cry "'Tis rich neat canary." Upon my honour !'

¹ The references are to Bullen's edition, 2 vols., 1887.

The inverted commas should come after *honour!* not after *canary*; the words "'Tis rich . . . honour!' being part of the boy's cry.

1. *Antonio and Mellida*, iii. 2. 9 :—

'I have walk'd all night,
To see if the nocturnal court delights
Could force me envy their felicity :
And by plain troth, I will confess plain troth,
I envy nothing but the *travense* light.
O, had it eyes, and ears, and tongues, it might
See sport, hear speech of most strange surquedries.
O, if that candle-light were made a poet,
He would prove a rare firking satirist,
And draw the core forth of imposthum'd sin.'

For *travense* Bullen conjectures *traverse*, 'i.e. light cast slantwise.' I can see no point in such an explanation, but would read *tavern's*.

1. *Antonio and Mellida*, iii. 2. 107 :—

For *dramatis persona Dil.* read *Cat.* Dildo has not entered yet.

1. *Antonio and Mellida*, iii. 2. 125 :—

'By the sugar-candy sky, hold up the glass higher, that
I may see to swear in fashion. O, one *loof* more would
ha' made them shine ; God's neaks, they would have shone
like my mistress' brow.'

Bullen says 'there is no meaning in the word "loof,"' and proposes 'touch': may not *loof* mean *turn*, i.e. of the barber's hand ?

1. *Antonio and Mellida*, iv. 1. 70:—

'O you that *made open* the glibbery ice
Of vulgar favour view Andrugio.'

For *made open*, Bullen gives *slide upon*, and *upon* is evidently right. But the change of *made* should, I think, be to *make*. In the sense of 'move,' *make* is frequent in the dramatists with prepositions and conjunctions, *e.g.*, to make to, towards, after, away forth, from, up, etc.

1. *Antonio and Mellida*, iv. 1. 80:—

'O rotten props of the crazed multitude,
How still you double, falter under the lightest chance
That strains your veins! Alas, one battle lost,
Your whorish love, your drunken healths, your houts
and shouts,
Your smooth God save's, and all your *devils last*,
That tempts our quiet to your hall of throngs.'

In l. 80, for *devils last*, I propose *devils' lust*. Bullen gives *devils lost*, which makes scarcely better sense than *devils last*, to say nothing of *lost* being used two lines above. After *throngs* something has apparently dropped out, to the effect of 'are heard no more,' or an aposiopesis should be marked.

In l. 77, I fancy that *double* and *falter* were originally alternatives, one of which, probably *falter*, Marston forgot to erase.

II. *Antonio and Mellida*, i. 1. 73 :—

‘That fair show
Of *death*, for the excessive joy of his fate
Might choke the murder.’

For *death*, I would read *grief*.

II. *Antonio and Mellida*, i. 1. 76 :—

‘Whose *sinking* thought frightened my conscious heart.’

For *sinking*, perhaps *soaking*. Compare *The Winter's Tale*, i. 2. 224,

‘Was this taken
By any understanding pate but mine?
For thy *conceit is soaking*, will draw in
More than the common blocks.’

Piero, as Bullen remarks, dreads lest his villainies should be detected by Feliche.

II. *Antonio and Mellida*, i. 2. 130-132 :—

Balurdo, ‘a rich gull,’ is relating a dream he has had.

‘For methought I dreant I was asleep, and methought the ground yawned and belkt up the abhominable ghost of a misshapen simile, with two pages; the one called master, even as going before; and the other mounser, even so following after; whilst Signor Simile stalk'd most prodigiously in the midst.’

On this Bullen remarks, ‘Balurdo is talking arrant nonsense.’ But punctuate as follows, and it will be seen that Balurdo is (for him) talking excellent sense: The one called master