

**THE BILIAD, OR, HOW TO
CRITICIZE; A SATIRE WITH
THE DIRGE OF REPEAL,
AND OTHER JEUX D'ESPRIT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649485987

The Biliad, or, How to Criticize; A Satire with the Dirge of Repeal, and Other Jeux D'esprit by T. M. Hughes

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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T. M. HUGHES

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THE
BILIAD,
OR,
HOW TO CRITICIZE;
A *Satire,*
WITH
THE DIRGE OF REPEAL,
AND OTHER JEUX D'ESPRIT.

BY T. M. HUGHES,
Author of "Revelations of Spain," "The Ocean Flower," &c.

Τὰ δὲ γραμματέως συγγράφομαι.

"I will write the tricks of the magisterial scribe."

Aristoph. Thesm.



LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,
AND MAY BE HAD OF ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1846.

INTRODUCTION.

MANKIND are certainly a ridiculous race enough, without the superadded ridicule of jackpuddings assuming the Censorship, and setting themselves up as flogging Ephori, while labouring under the grossest rudimental ignorance. In the following pages, without travelling out of the four numbers for a single month, October, 1845, of which alone I took the trouble to note the blunders during the past winter in Portugal, I have detected in the editor of a London literary journal the most scandalous ignorance of the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese languages, as well as of manners, statistics,

customs, and literature. I have likewise opened the larger question of the character of our criticism generally, and of the description of censorship which our present literature requires. In the smaller poems which follow I have impartially recorded the impressions produced on the mind of an Irishman resident abroad, removed from the sphere of faction, but keenly alive to his country's honour, concerning the Repeal movement.

When a man ensconces himself in chair or pulpit, and gives himself acroamatic airs, we sometimes inquire by what right he has taken the position he assumes, and oftener lazily submit to his dogmatism. But when he becomes disgustingly dictatorial, habitually ferocious, intolerably despotic and slaughtering for mere love of slaughter, we immediately apply for a writ of *quo warranto*? The answer here is that a certain unit hath scraped together types and set up a printing-press, and the only other title that can be set up with his types and pirnting-press is the naked one of sufferance.

When to this is added convicted ignorance, it becomes a needful task and paramount duty to pluck the jay of the quills with which his tail is bestuck, and show to the world what a pattern of Swift's "forked radish," what a naked and shivering straw-head mounted upon wires, is the Sir Oracle whom fools have worshipped.

The common mode in which these *Atrabilarian* critiques are written (for assumption the world has never seen their like) is to mix very slight praise with very great depreciation, where the work is of a valuable character, and, appropriating the information, proceed to re-write it and give it forth as the reviewer's own. When three or four pages are thus appropriated, and the trouble of throwing over the theft the slight veil of a change of style (retaining all the ideas) becomes too great, the reviewer condescends to snip out a dozen lines as they come from the author's brain, always taking care to append some such disparaging observation as "This is not strictly true," "The proposi-

tion thus stated is not quite correct," or some other pinch of dust for the eyes of the exoteric community. Then, having vindicated thus his pretensions to critical capacity, he proceeds with three or four pages more of wholesale robbery, until, wearied with his Gipsy-like task of disguising the features of the bantling, or compelled by the force of shame, he again is obliging enough to snip out half a dozen lines of your text, to which he appends the usual snub, without specifying the shadow of a reason. "*Non valet opinio sine momentis*," say the schoolmen; but the Seraphic Doctor himself was not so dogmatical. The edicts of this Grub-Street slaughterhouse, like Herod's, aim at massacring all the innocents that issue into literary life—but unlike Herod (*liberos proprios occidens*)—*except his cronies' and his own*. The *gobemouche* world, deceived by the lofty tone which the rogue has the cunning to assume, rush to the conclusion that, because he is so ruthlessly severe, he must be a monstrous wiseacre.

A lofty tone, quotha! I am reminded of a saying which I heard in a Parisian *salon* during the bellicose ferment of 1840: "Les Anglois ont prit le *haut ton*; eh bien, c'est à nous de prendre le *bdton* (bas ton)!"

It is time, indeed, that a more wholesome style of criticism should be introduced, and that the high and paramount duties of the public writer, the ordained priest of Civilization, should be better understood and practised. Forty years have elapsed since the just and noble views of an illustrious German, Fichte, were put forth upon this subject; but as yet they have produced but little effect, and though there is much splendid and just criticism in England, the reviews which I now am noticing, with some others of their class, instead of becoming humanized with the age, and moralized with its progress, are growing in assumption and in outrage daily. The wonder is how such an odious despotism and intolerable burthen should have been borne so long, how the tortures inflicted by the paper-capt Phalaris should not

have made him ere this the victim of a worse than Agrigentine clamour. I roast him here in a few of his own brazen *bulls*.

To be mocked by Medusa, and taxed with uncleanness by a shoeblack, is not very flattering to self-love; but to be twitted with ignorance by an ignoramus, and condemned as vulgar by an unshining shoeblack, might be compared for exquisite torture to the dripping of an icy spigot upon an unshaven crown. Between the horns of that terrible dilemma—Death or Hanwell Asylum—there is but one alternative, rushing into print. Midas confided his distress to a hole in the ground: by Pan and Apollo's leave, I mean to give the wrongs of authors to the world.

I am no opponent of severity of criticism upon needful occasions. It is a part of my temperament (which has compelled the production of the present work) to take the keenest delight in the exposure of humbug. And when a very ignorant or a very dull fellow puts himself forward as a genius, I feel as