

## Richard Cumberland, "Epilogue. [To The Battle of Hastings.] Spoken by Miss Younge"

by admin - Sunday, August 13, 2017

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RICHARD CUMBERLAND

### “Epilogue. [To *The Battle of Hastings.*] Spoken by Miss Younge”

From ancient Thespis to the present age,  
The world have oft been term'd a public stage;  
A thread-bare metaphor, which in its time  
Hath patch'd much prose, and heel-piec'd many a rhyme:  
Ev'n the grave pulpit sometimes *deigns* to use 5  
The emphatic terms of the proscribed muse;  
Calls birth our entry, death our exit calls,  
And at life's close exclaims – the curtain falls;  
And so concludes upon the drama's plan,  
That fretting, strutting, short-hour actor, man; 10  
*Are we all actors then?* – yes, all from Adam.  
*And actresses?* – I apprehend so, madam:  
Some fill their cast with grace, others with none;  
Some are shov'd off the stage, and some shov'd on;  
Some good, some bad, still we all act a part, 15  
Whilst we disguise the language of the heart.  
Nature's plain taste provides a simple treat,  
But art, the *cook*, steps in and mars the meat.  
The comic blade makes ridicule his test,  
And on his tomb proclaims that life's a jest. 20  
The swaggering braggart, in true tragic's cast,  
Bellows blank verse and daggers to the last.  
Whilst clubs of neutral petit maitres boast  
A kind of opera company at most;  
Whose dress, air, action, all is imitation, 25  
A poor, insipid, servile, French translation;  
Whose tame dull scene glides uniform along,  
In comi – farci – pastoral – sing – song –  
'Till all awaken'd by the rattling die,  
Club wits, and make – a modern tragedy; 30  
A tragedy, alas! good friends, look round,

What have we left to tread but tragic ground?  
Four authors leagu'd to shake the human soul,  
Unsheath the dagger, and infuse the bowl;  
At length descending to the least, and last, 35  
We hope the terror of the time is past;  
Full fated now with battle, blood, and murder,  
England is conquer'd – fate can reach no futher;  
Bid then the weeping *Pleiads* dry their eyes,  
And turn to happier scenes and brighter skies. 40

**NOTES:**

**Title** *The Battle of Hastings* A 1778 play by Richard Cumberland portraying the October 1066 battle over the disputed succession to the British throne after the death of King Edward in January 1066; *Miss Younge* Elizabeth Younge (1740-1797), a popular actress of the late-century period, best known for her Shakespearean roles.

**1** *Thespis* “The traditional father of Greek tragedy” (*OED*).

**6** *proscribed muse* That is, a forbidden poet; possibly alluding to Shakespeare, given the clear verbal echoes of *Macbeth* (V.ii.24-28) at line 10.

**11** *Adam* First human in biblical account of the creation of world (*OCB*).

**21** *Braggart* "One who brags too much" (*OED*).

**33** *Four authors* Likely a reference to Harold Godwinson, Tostig Godwinson, Harald Hardrada, and William I, who all made claims to the throne after the death of King Edward in January 1066.

**38** *England is conquer'd* Reference to the Norman victory in the Battle of Hastings, and subsequent rule of Britain by William I (c. 1028-1087), reigned from 1066.

**39** *Pleiades* “In Greek mythology, the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione” (*OED*).

**SOURCE:** *The London Magazine* (February 1778), pp. 89-90. [Google Books]

*Edited by J. John Storost*