Richard Cumberland, â??Epilogue. [To The Battle of Hastings.] Spoken by Miss Youngeâ?•

Description

RICHARD CUMBERLAND

â??Epilogue. [To *The Battle of Hastings*.] Spoken by Miss Youngeâ?•

From ancient Thespis to the present age,
The world have oft been termâ??d a public stage;
A thread-bare metaphor, which in its time
Hath patchâ??d much prose, and heel-piecâ??d many a rhime:
Evâ??n the grave pulpit sometimes *deigns* to use
The emphatic terms of the proscribed muse;
Calls birth our entry, death our exit calls,
And at lifeâ??s close exclaims â?? the curtain falls;
And so concludes upon the dramaâ??s plan,
That fretting, strutting, short-hour actor, man;
Are we all actors then? â?? yes, all from Adam.
And actresses? â?? I apprehend so, madam:
Some fill their cast with grace, others with none;
Some are shovâ??d off the stage, and some shovâ??d on;
Some good, some bad, still we all act a part,
Whilst we disguise the language of the heart.
Natureâ??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 lifeâ??s a jest.
The swaggering braggart, in true tragicâ??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,
A poor, insipid, servile, French translation;
Whose tame dull scene glides uniform along,
In comi â?? farci â?? pastoral â?? sing â?? song â??
â??Till all awakenâ??d by the rattling die,
Club wits, and make â?? a modern tragedy;
A tragedy, alas! good friends, look round,
What have we left to tread but tragic ground?
Four authors leaguâ??d to shake the human soul,
Unsheath the dagger, and infuse the bowl;

At length descending to the least, and last,
We hope the terror of the time is past;
Full fated now with battle, blood, and murder,
England is conquerâ??d â?? fate can reach no futher;
Bid then the weeping *Pleiads* dry their eyes,
And turn to happier scenes and brighter skies.

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 â??*The traditional father of Greek tragedyâ?• (*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* â??One who brags too muchâ?• (*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 conquerâ??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* â??In Greek mythology, the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleioneâ?• (*OED*).

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

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