

Review of The Contrast
Candour

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I was present last evening as the representation of the CONTRAST, and was very much entertained with it. It is certainly the production of a man of genius, and nothing can be more praise-worthy than the sentiments of the play throughout. They are the effusions of an honest patriot heart expressed with energy and eloquence. The characters are drawn with spirit, particularly Charlotte's; the dialogue is easy, sprightly, and often witty, but wants the pruning knife very much. The author has made frequent use of soliloquies, but I must own, I think injudiciously; Maria's song and her reflections after it, are pretty, but certainly misplaced. Soliloquies are seldom so conducted as not to wound probability. If we ever talk to ourselves, it is when the mind is much engaged in some very interesting subject, and never to make calm reflections on indifferent things. That part of her speech which respects Dimple, might be retained; she may very well be supposed to talk on so material a subject to her own happiness, even when alone, and her feelings, upon a marriage with a man she has every reason to despise and abhor, are very well painted. Col. Manly's advice to America, tho' excellent, is yet liable to the same blame, and perhaps greater. A man can never be supposed in conversation with himself, to point out examples of imitation to his countrymen: at the same time, the thoughts are so just, that I should be sorry they were left out entirely. And I think they [may be introduced with all propriety (?)]

I cannot help wishing the author had given a scene between Dimple and Maria. The affronting coldness of Dimple's manners might have interested us for Maria, and would in some degree have supplied the greatest defect of the play, the want of interest and plot. We might then have been more easily reconciled to the sudden affections and declaration of love between Manly and Maria, which cannot fail, as the play now is, to hurt our opinion of both. The author's great attention to the unity of time, which he has indeed very well preserved, has in some degree produced this sudden attachment.

Jessamy is a closer imitation of his master than is natural, and his language in general is too good for a servant; the character would have produced a better effect if he had been more awkward in his imitation. The satire of the play is in general just, but the ridicule of Lord Chesterfield's letters should be well considered. If he is sometimes so attentive to his son's person as to mention too trifling things, let us remember that his letters were certainly never meant for the public eye, and we may forgive a father's tenderness even when he recommends how to cut the nails, and if we must allow that he appears more solicitous to form his sons manner than his heart, (which might arise from thinking him more deficient in

the one than the other) let us not overlook his profound knowledge of the world, the excellent sense and most admirable style of his letters.

Jonathan's going to the play, and his account of it, is a very happy thought, and very well drawn. The laughing gamut has much humour, but is dwelt rather too much upon, and sometimes degenerates into farce. To point out the many beauties of the play, tho' an agreeable, would be an unnecessary task, the unceasing plaudits of the audience did them ample justice, and if cannot fail, if judiciously curtailed, be a great favorite. The play was preceded by a good prologue, which was very well spoken by Wignell, but the effect much spoiled by the unskilfulness of the prompter. It was very well acted. Mrs. Morris gave the sprightly coquet, with great ease and elegance, and if Wignell had not quite the right pronunciation of Jonathan, he made ample amends by his inimitable humour. Upon the whole the defects of the play are so much overbalanced by its merits that I have made no scruple of mentioning those which occurred to me, and I have done so the rather, because I think in general they may be easily remedied; and that the piece, particularly when considered as the first performance does the greatest credit to the author, and must give pleasure to the spectators.

CANDOUR