

Shakspeare Study.

Among the many solemn humbugs by which the world is fooled, there is not one more shallow than the pretense of some tragic art to be considered what are called "students of Shakspeare." If this claim means anything, it presumes that the works of this poet are of such mystic and misty profundity that deep research and kindred inspiration are required to discover his hidden meaning, and these actors are ordained to expound this bible of the stage. Humbug! A tragedy is a great literary effort designed, not to be read or meditated upon, but to be represented before a mixed audience. Its language, therefore, should be clear and unmistakable as it flows from the mouths of the speakers; its action should be clear and perspicuous. If it is not so, then the poet is all at fault. He is not a prophet; his business is not to tell lies about what is to be; so he has no reason to be obscure. There are no two ways about him; he has no reason for misleading or for mystifying the people.

The so-called student of Shakspeare is a narrow-minded fellow who seeks to torture the palpable meaning of trivial passages into what are termed "new readings" for the purpose of rendering himself conspicuous at the expense of the poet, to whom he imputes obscurity, the very worst fault a dramatist can exhibit. If such fellows could arouse the sleeping spirit of the grand old man, recall him like the ghost in "Hamlet" to revisit the glimmers of the moon, and then submit to him their new readings, I can imagine his reply.

"What on earth does it matter? Either interpretation will serve. I cannot remember which I intended. My dramas were written under the spur of necessity to meet the crying needs of the theater of which I was one of the managers. They will be found to contain errors and blemishes. Let them be so, and do not encourage infatuated worshipers to turn defects into beauties. Nature is full of imperfections, and if it pleased the great author to leave this work so to eternity, why seek perfection in every miserable little heap of dust? These trivial details you bring to my notice do not affect the purpose and shape of my play; and if they concern neither the action nor the passion nor the characters, why make so much ado about nothing? I am neither honored nor flattered by the blind worship bestowed upon my works by some writers. If my existence had depended upon these text grubbers, I should have been shamed two centuries ago between Ben Johnson and Massinger, or buried with Beaumont and Fletcher. I owe my existence to the stage, to the actor. No dramatic poet has any existence in the closet. Out of my thirty-six plays, about a dozen survive. The rest are preserved for the admiration of those who never read them. Each of the dozen will be found to afford a conspicuous and all-absorbing character for the great actor or actress. Whenever a well-written play affords such an opportunity, it will hold its life on the stage.

The "Two Gentlemen of Verona" and "Love's Labor Lost" are read as a matter of duty to the author of "Hamlet" and "Othello." I owe my existence to such actors as Edmund Kean and Garrick, who joined spirits with me, embraced my passion, and embodied my characters. They changed my language and reshaped my work to fit their qualities, and they did it well. This is the way to study Shakspeare."

The actor's power to represent a passion is a gift, not a deliberate artistic effort obtained by study. It is a faculty, to be developed and improved by practice. The poet only affords the actor an opportunity to display his powers; one is the complement of the other in the grand result. The actor who is built on a poet—such is the so-called student—is merely a mouthpiece, not an artist, for he should obtain his inspiration as the poet gets his, out of his inner gifts. I, who say this, am both an actor and a poet, and I speak of what I know.

Then—may I be forgiven for saying so—there are some young women whose education has stopped short somewhere between writing and spelling, who are thrust up into conspicuous positions on the stage, and taking refuge behind their good looks, profess to be students of Shakspeare.

O, the humbug of it all! and how the dear world is fooled by it!—Dion Boucicault.

The Purpose of Reading.

Every reader should know the purpose for which he reads. Usually this purpose is either rest, amusement, or what may be called improvement. A boy or girl, tired by work in the shop or house, takes up Hawthorne's "Wonder Book,"—that is reading for rest. Fretted by low marks at school, one becomes absorbed in "Swiss Family Robinson"—that is reading for amusement. Eager to instruct the mind, you read Bancroft's "History of the United States"—that is reading for improvement.

The three purposes are frequently combined. One may find in reading Macaulay's "Essay on Bacon," rest, amusement, and improvement.

Of these purposes that of improvement of mind and heart is most important. In all reading whose immediate aim is either recreation or pleasure, the remote aim should be the formation of a noble character. No one should read a book without resolving to be aided by it in every right endeavor.

The purpose for which one reads determines the choice of the book. If you are in doubt what to read, form a clear idea of the reason of your reading, and the selection of a proper book is made easy.—Morgantown Press.



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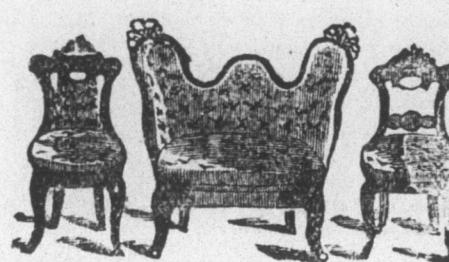
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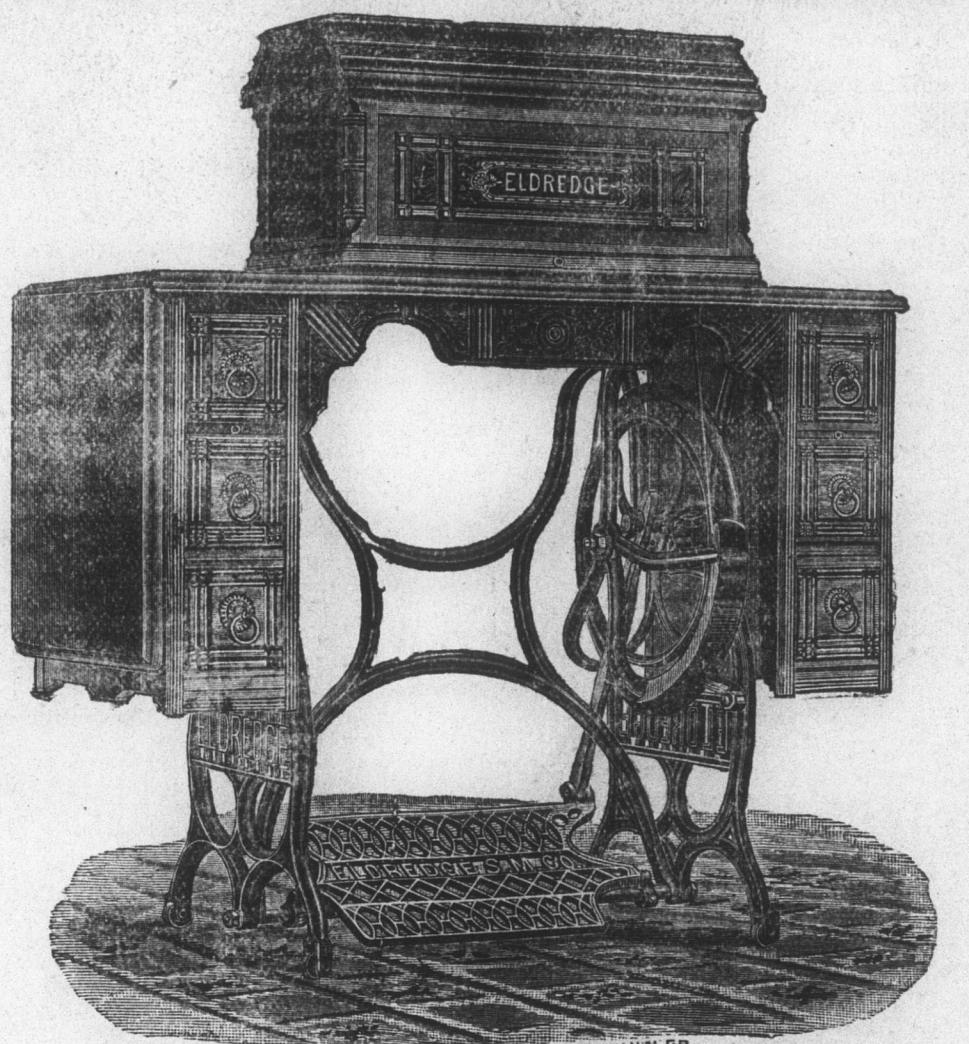
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