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978-1-108-05467-6 - From Shakespeare to Pope: An Inquiry into the Causes and Phenomena of the Rise of Classical Poetry in England

Edmund Gosse

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From Shakespeare to Pope

Edmund Gosse (1849–1928), best known for his memoir *Father and Son*, was one of the foremost literary critics of his day, even though he had not received a university education. Invited to give the prestigious Clark Lectures at Cambridge, he developed the materials for this book, first published in 1885. Gosse sets out his theory of classical poetry, analysing its rise in the seventeenth century in opposition to freer, more romantic blank-verse forms. The book became the subject of a famously excoriating forty-page review by Oxford-educated critic John Churton Collins. While Collins' estimation of the inaccuracies in Gosse's work was largely correct, the review went far beyond constructive appraisal and caused a literary scandal, though Gosse's reputation was not permanently damaged. This book and the controversy it caused form part of the story of English literature as it established itself as a professional academic discipline.

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EDMUND GOSSE



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TO POPE

AN INQUIRY INTO
THE CAUSES AND PHENOMENA OF THE RISE
OF CLASSICAL POETRY IN ENGLAND

BY

EDMUND GOSSE

CLARK LECTURER ON ENGLISH LITERATURE AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE
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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

THE following chapters were written in the form of lectures, and were first delivered to members of the University of Cambridge, in the Hall of Trinity College, during Michaelmas Term last year. They formed my inaugural course as Clark Lecturer. In the month of December I read them at the Lowell Institute in Boston, and during the same winter, in whole, or in part, before other academic audiences in America, before the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, in New York, before Yale College, Connecticut, and elsewhere.

It has been no small advantage to me that among the distinguished listeners to

G. *b*

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whom I have had the honour of reading these pages there have been more than a few whose special studies have rendered them particularly acute in criticising the links of my argument. In consequence of such criticism, I have been able profitably to revise the work, to add evidence where it seemed wanting, to remove rash statements and to remould ambiguous sentences. Above all, I have given a great deal of care to the accumulation, in the form of notes and appendices, of historical and critical data of a kind too particular for the purposes of a lecture, but not, I hope, without genuine importance to the student of the history of literature. In an enquiry of this nature, exact evidence, even of a minute kind, outweighs in importance any expression of mere critical opinion. The friendly criticism of which I have spoken has not, however, shaken me in the slightest degree with regard to my central idea. On the contrary, the effect of minute controversy

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface.

vii

has merely been to strengthen on every side my conviction that the theory which I have here laid down for the first time is substantially the true one, and that the opinion hitherto received regarding the sources of the classical school in our poetry is erroneous. I think I may at least claim, from the critic who is inclined to reject my views, a careful consideration of the arguments and evidence upon which they are founded.

It would be impossible for me to speak too warmly of the kindness which my friend Professor Samuel R. Gardiner has shown me in allowing me to see and use the unfinished MS. of the forthcoming volume of his *History*, and in leading me to MS. sources of seventeenth-century information. It is wholly owing to his generosity that I have been enabled, in the second chapter of this volume, to give an account of Waller's Plot which is much more complete and accurate than any hitherto published. Prof. Gardiner's volume, for which

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Edmund Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Preface.

students of the Caroline period can hardly command their impatience, will not, I am sorry to say, be in our possession for some years.

TRIN. COLL., CAMBRIDGE.

May, 1885.

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TO W. D. HOWELLS.

*The humming-bird in June
Sits, like a jewel, on your taut clothes-line,
And greets Charles River broad and opaline,
Till wanes September's honeysuckle moon
Too soon;*

*And then—away he goes,
A flash of ruby on the southward air,
And comes no more, though still the straits are fair,
Where misty Cambridge from the Beacon shows
Pale rose;*

*But leaves a plume behind,—
A little plume you fold into a book,
On which one day if you should chance to look,
Your tiny friend would rise, thro' storm and wind,
To mind.*

*The fluted conchs that came
Long since in Salem merchant-ships to town,
With polished porcelain lips and ridges brown,
Faint perfumed from the isles of eastern name
A-flame,—*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

To W. D. Howells.

*These still, if shaken, give
From their deep hearts a murmur of the dome
Where once their soft inhabitants could roam,—
Sonorous seas where Indian monsters thrive
And strive;*

*Their owners all are dead;
The mighty ships that brought them rot on shore;
Yet still that murmur lingers at their core,
And fancy's light across their tropic bed
Is shed.*

*I, less than bird or shell,
More volatile, more fragile far than these,
Lighting an hour by these New England seas,
Leave here my plume, my echo,—where it fell
To dwell;*

*You shook it from my wing!
You dived to lift it from my glimmering deeps!
Now, wakened by your voice no more, it sleeps
And grows less mine than yours; here let it cling
And sing;*

*Then, when at dusk you spy
The noiseless phantom-schooners warping down
To load in mouldering wharves of Boston town,
Turn sometimes to your lamp-lit shelves, where I
Shall lie.*

302 BEACON STREET, BOSTON.

Dec. 1884.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFACE	v
DEDICATION	ix
POETRY AT THE DEATH OF SHAKESPEARE.	3
WALLER AND SACHARISSA	45
THE EXILES	95
DAVENANT AND COWLEY	137
THE REACTION	181
THE RESTORATION	225
APPENDICES	
I. Sidney Godolphin and Sandys	269
II. Denham's Essay on Translated Verse	272
III. Waller's Address to the Queen	275
IV. The Preface to Waller's Posthumous Poems, 1690	278
INDEX	285