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978-1-108-06289-3 - Specimens of English Dramatic Poets: Who Lived about  
the Time of Shakespeare: Volume 1  
Edited by Charles Lamb  
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# Specimens of English Dramatic Poets

*Who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare*

VOLUME 1

EDITED BY CHARLES LAMB



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BY CHARLES LAMB.  
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## P R E F A C E.



MORE than a third part of the following specimens are from plays which are to be found only in the British Museum and in some scarce private libraries. The rest are from Dodsley's and Hawkins's collections, and the works of Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger.

I have chosen wherever I could to give entire scenes, and in some instances successive scenes, rather than to string together single passages and detached beauties, which I have always found wearisome in the reading in selections of this nature.

To every extract is prefixed an explanatory head, sufficient to make it intelligible with the help of some trifling omissions. Where a line or more was obscure, as having reference to something that had gone before,

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which would have asked more time to explain than its consequence in the scene seemed to deserve, I have had no hesitation in leaving the line or passage out. Sometimes where I have met with a superfluous character, which seemed to burthen without throwing any light upon the scene, I have ventured to dismiss it altogether. I have expunged without ceremony all that which the writers had better never have written, that forms the objection so often repeated to the promiscuous reading of Fletcher, Massinger, and some others.

The kind of extracts which I have sought after have been, not so much passages of wit and humour, though the old plays are rich in such, as scenes of passion, sometimes of the deepest quality, interesting situations, serious descriptions, that which is more nearly allied to poetry than to wit, and to tragic rather than to comic poetry. The plays which I have made choice of have been, with few exceptions, those which treat of human life and manners, rather than masques, and Arcadian pastorals, with their train of abstractions, unimpassioned deities, passionate mortals, Claius, and Medorus, and Amintas, and Amarillis. My leading design has been, to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors. To shew in what manner they felt, when they placed themselves by the power of imagination in trying situations, in the conflicts of duty and passion, or

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## PREFACE.

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the strife of contending duties ; what sort of loves and enmities theirs were ; how their griefs were tempered, and their full-swoln joys abated : how much of Shakspeare shines in the great men his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind.

Another object which I had in making these selections was, to bring together the most admired scenes in Fletcher and Massinger, in the estimation of the world the only dramatic poets of that age who are entitled to be considered after Shakspeare, and to exhibit them in the same volume with the more impressive scenes of old Marlowe, Heywood, Tourneur, Webster, Ford, and others. To shew what we have slighted, while beyond all proportion we have cried up one or two favourite names.

The specimens are not accompanied with any thing in the shape of biographical notices \*. I had nothing of consequence to add to the slight sketches in Dodsley and the *Biographica Dramatica*, and I was unwilling to swell the volume with mere transcription. The reader will not fail to observe from the frequent instances of

\* The few notes which are interspersed will be found to be chiefly critical.

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PREFACE.

two or more persons joining in the composition of the same play (the noble practice of those times), that of most of the writers contained in these selections it may be strictly said, that they were contemporaries. The whole period, from the middle of Elizabeth's reign to the close of the reign of Charles I., comprises a space of little more than half a century, within which time nearly all that we have of excellence in serious dramatic composition was produced, if we except the *Samson Agonistes* of Milton.

1808.

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