

by such standards very few Elizabethan dramatists—perhaps only Jonson and Chapman—could be found satisfactory, even though many of them had university degrees. And by such standards a mere “learned grammarian” as was Shakspeare had indeed “small *Latine*, and lesse *Greeke*.” One of the Greek dramatists might very occasionally get into the last years of grammar school, and Seneca appears in grammar school but very seldom before 1600. Nor is there anything apologetic about Jonson’s incidental statement concerning Shakspeare’s classic attainments. It is made merely by way of further emphasizing Jonson’s fundamental statement, which was the strongest of which Jonson could think; that is, if anything it is in highest praise, certainly not in apology. There is no apparent derogation in Jonson’s statement when fairly interpreted in its context, and the standard against which Jonson places Shakspeare’s attainments is the highest of which he had knowledge. The ordinary grammarian was never troubled with any of Jonson’s list, and it may be in Jonson’s mind that Shakspeare had not been so troubled.

For as Jonson turns now to account for Shakspeare’s excellence, it is the comedians whom he names for comparison. In his earlier list, he had named the tragedians and had referred to the comedians without naming them. Now he uses them in his accounting for Shakspeare as the result of great nature and some art. Presumably, therefore, Jonson is thinking of these writers of comedy as having contributed to Shakspeare’s art, and we know that the two Latins Terence and Plautus had done so, though there is no conclusive evidence, I believe, for the Greek Aristophanes. To continue quoting Jonson;

Nature her selfe was proud of his designes,
 And ioy'd to weare the dressing of his lines!
 Which were so richly spun, and wouen so fit,
 As, since, she will vouchsafe no other Wit.
 The merry *Greeke*, tart *Aristophanes*,
 Neat *Terence*, witty *Plautus*, now not please;
 But antiquated, and deserted lye
 As they were not of Natures family.
 Yet must I not giue Nature all: Thy Art,
 My gentle *Shakespeare*, must enioy a part.
 For though the *Poets* matter, Nature be,
 His Art doth giue the fashion. And, that he,
 Who casts to write a liuing line, must sweat,
 (such as thine are) and strike the second heat
 Vpon the *Muses* anuile: turne the same,
 (And himselfe with it) that he thinkes to frame;