Among the many things which surprised our British neighbors when they flocked to Paris at the close of the Napoleonic wars, the one which amazed them most was the condition of the French stage. France had had a revolution, twenty years of wars almost uninterrupted, had been defeated, and her soil invaded, yet the Parisian theatres were in a more flourishing state than those of London. What puzzled our British visitors even more was the general atmosphere of the Parisian theatres, and, above all, the attitude of the French public. At the Théâtre Français, for instance, the best of our national theatres, they immediately noticed that the costumes of the actors were beautiful and historical, as far as they could tell, but that there was no, or almost no, stage setting. The minute the actors appeared they played their parts conscientiously and well, without taking any notice of the public—never coming to the front of the stage, no bowing and smiling, no reciting of compliments so often done in England, no humble apologizing or soliciting of applause. There was about these French actors a professional air and a dignity which with their remarkable training, made an altogether favorable impression on foreign visitors.

Even the most prejudiced among our neighbors had also to admit that the attitude of the French public at the theatre was superior to that of the British public. Hazlitt himself, who was not particularly fond of French drama, confessed
that he had "never been so puzzled with this exception to the butterfly, airy, thoughtless, fluttering character of the French, as the first night he went to the theatre. The order, the attention, the decorum were such as would have shamed a London audience. The attention was like that of a learned society to a lecture on some scientific subject. Everybody seemed to have an immediate interest in the character of the national poetry, in the purity of the French accent, in the propriety of the declamation, and the development of the story. The least noise or irregularity called forth the most instant and lively disapprobation, and the restless and volatile French acted as if a spell had been thrown over them".

The number of British visitors in France, already large in 1814, increased rapidly in 1815, after Waterloo. Quite a number of English families settled definitely in France; others came for a short while only, and by the end of 1816 there were approximately fifty thousand English visitors in France. The theatre remained for those who lived in Paris a favorite pastime. In England the popularity of the French drama among the cultured English public was such that a French theatre was established in London as early as 1815, a private theatre, it is true, supported by subscription. Two theatres only were licensed in England at the time, and for commercial reasons, if for no others, foreigners would not have been allowed to compete with English companies, whose situation was already far from brilliant. The plays could not be advertised and the tickets could not be sold at the door or in any public place. The sponsors of the French theatre paid a certain sum, reserving thereby a number of seats.

The first plays were given in a large hall, rented for the season, on Argyle street. The managers at first secured good
actors from Paris and the theatre was very successful. Attending the French plays became a fashionable pastime among the aristocrats of London. But soon the management was satisfied with second- or third-rate actors, often taken from the French colony in London and including retired prima donnas, and other members of the colony trained for anything but the stage. To crown all, many of these performers did not learn their parts, claiming that "The English would not understand anyway." The British spectators, well educated as a rule, could not help noticing that there was something wrong with the manners and the tone of the company. There were vigorous protests and even clashes between the members of the audience and the actors and their admirers. On one occasion the fight ended in a police court and the British judge remarked that all managers and actors should be sent to jail. Nevertheless the French theatre in London went on, and the Literary Gazette of 1820 registers the protest of a British patriot who strongly objects to the English habit of patronizing foreign actors while the situation of English actors is so deplorable. The plays given in London were well chosen at first, later they were indifferent plays which could be put on easily, and, on the whole, the influence of the French theatre in London was very limited, and is worth mentioning only as a proof of the interest which English aristocratic circles were taking in the French drama.

Another indication of the attention with which our stage was followed in England is the number of articles published in English reviews and magazines between 1816 and 1825. Practically every book written in France on the stage is reviewed in England, whether it deals with the material organization of our national theatres, with the drama in general, or with the quarrel between Classicists and Roman-
ticists. The contribution made by British critics to the French controversy, which had been partly revived by the book of Lady Morgan, is by no means negligible. And yet it was extremely difficult for our British neighbors to follow our classical plays. These were written in verse and the actors of the time used to recite or chant them in a peculiar way which perplexed foreign visitors considerably. Planta, the author of a series of interesting books on France, warns his fellow-countrymen of the disappointment which they will experience when they go to the Théâtre Français. “It is well known that all French tragedies are written in heroic verse, and it may be easily imagined that, to an English ear at least, the constant recurrence of the rhymes is completely destructive of theatrical illusion. The actors are aware of it, and it is their evident object by frequent and often ill-placed bursts of passion to slur over the rhymes and conceal the uniformity of the measure.” Planta, like most English visitors, had also noticed another peculiarity of the French tragedy: “the inconceivable length of speeches”. The speech of a man who uses a language with which one is none too familiar is always too rapid and too long, as everybody knows. Even for those who merely read French plays, and thus had not to suffer from what Thackeray calls “the rolling of the verses and the painful recurrence of the rhymes”, the French drama was under a handicap because it was written in verse and came under the general condemnation in which French poetry was held, at the time, in England. Those who were ready to admit that in the matter of taste and decency the French drama stood far above the English, were almost compelled to recognize with Cole-ridge, Landor, Lamb and Hazlitt that “French poetry was no poetry” but “just like chopped logic, without any life; mere patchwork, all sharp points and angles, all super-
government"; even if they did not go as far as De Quincey, who, in 1820, declared that "French poetry had reached the last degree of senile (senile! no, of anile) imbecility", insisting that "the constitution of French poetry was in its best days marrowless and without nerve, its youth without hope, its manhood without dignity".

A favorable and broad-minded observer like Ireland, who is generally above national prejudice, suggests very judiciously that each nation should "attend a little to the taste and manners of its neighbors" as "perhaps a good taste might diffuse itself throughout Europe in consequence of such an intercourse of learning and from a useful exchange of observations. The English stage for example might be cleared of mangled bodies and the style of their tragic authors descend from a bombastic metaphorical mode of expression, while the French would learn from the English to put a new life into their tragedies and to contract their long speeches into shorter ones more tense with passion."

But when it comes to the matter of rhyme our critic dissents: "It may be natural enough for a lover to woo his mistress in rhyme, but to hear a philosopher utter a soliloquy in a similar measure, or a hero deliver his command in a jingle—nay, even a ghost revealing the secrets of the tomb in namby-pamby couplets, is a species of composition which an Englishman is not sufficiently refined to admire".

The English dislike of French poetry is so intense in some cases that we find critics who, like Coleridge, refuse to have anything to do with the French drama and condemn it at one stroke. "Racine's tragedies", declares Coleridge, "are not poetry, are not passion, are not imagination, they are a parcel of set speeches, of epigrammatic conceits and declamatory phrases." There is, none the less, a softening in the British hostility toward the French, around 1820, and
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the attitude of British critics toward French literature appears more tolerant and broad-minded. The change was but slight at first, and among the masses the prejudice against the French remained in full force. The Revolution had changed many things in France, but it had not altered the traditional picture of the Frenchman in the eyes of his British neighbor. The Frenchman was still represented on the English stage in clogs, with his never-failing crust of black bread and an onion or a frog, or else, in the better kind of drama, the stage Frenchman was the old Marquis with sword, pigtail, and spangled court dress; while the Englishman on the French stage invariably kept his red whiskers, red wig, his chequered coat, leather gaiters, and whatever he had to say, never failed to utter a well known oath. An unfailing way of bringing down applause in England was to produce on the stage a French peasant or a gesticulating Monsieur. In particular, a play, The Manager Puzzled, had an unusually long run because it presented the French in a ridiculous light; and at Sadlers' Wells, an actor representing a French general who had written a very uncharitable book on the English, was brought on the stage every night, compelled to kneel down and beg the pardon of English women for the shameful way in which he had slandered them in his book.

In spite of these and other manifestations of a deep-rooted prejudice and hostility toward the French, the intelligent public in England and liberal minded critics endeavored to look at French literature with less prejudiced eyes. Strange as it may appear, some of these critics were already disturbed by the popularity of Byron in France, as if they had a premonition of the excesses to which their Byronism would lead the French, and as if they wanted to undertake the defense of Racine who was generally not understood in
England: “Lord Byron has become very popular in France,” writes a critic in the *London Magazine*, “and it is a pity to see the French getting away from their old literary models, to which they had remained faithful in their infidelity to everything else. But we fear that if the French take to embracing the doctrines of the Romantic school we shall have them out-Heroding Herod, turning all proprieties, discretions, topsy-turvy,—in short behaving as they did in regard to liberty, disgracing a good cause by an indiscreet manner of supporting it”. We find the same anxiety reappearing on other occasions: “We have been trembling for some time back lest French critics should take to patronizing the Romantic sect or schism.” Equally surprising are such remarks as the following on the passing of Racine’s popularity in France: “Athalie will no longer be represented, a work that constitutes the finest and most incontestable title to the literary glory of France. *Polyeucte* (a play of Corneille), *Zaire* (one of Voltaire’s plays) will appear ridiculous where we think it most noble and pathetic. We will only have fantastic tales, operas and melodramas.” We even come across a vigorous denunciation of the “strong prejudice which has lately prevailed in England against the system upon which the French tragedy is founded”; and such a defense of that system as the following: “the dramatic productions of our neighbors have been prescribed in an indiscriminate, and in our humble judgment, very unjustifiable contempt. . . . There appears to be something of a natural antipathy in the inveterate scorn with which some very able but possibly mistaken men have treated the works from which every Frenchman has from infancy been taught to derive a portion of his individual glory”.

Protests of this sort, together with the publication of French books on the drama problem, resulted in a series
of conscientious and sometimes fairly original studies on the French drama, between 1820 and 1823, in such reviews and magazines as the Quarterly, the Edinburgh, Blackwood's, the London, the New Monthly Magazine, and the Literary Gazette. The authors of these articles remained mostly anonymous and in many cases are not easy to detect. Some were written by professional critics, some by Parisian correspondents or even by Frenchmen living in London, like M. de Chenevix, who had been brought up in England and knew both literatures extremely well. In the case of the London Magazine and the New Monthly Magazine, we know that most of their literary criticism on the question of the drama was written by a famous literary and art critic, Stendhal, the author of the well-known "Racine-Shakespeare" pamphlets.

The very fact that so many, and not infrequently conflicting, points of view were presented to the British reading public served to increase English interest in the French drama. Between 1815 and 1850 there are two or three periods in which British critics and the English public at large show a more favorable attitude toward French literature. The period from 1820 to 1823, or even 1825, is one of these. But while English poetry and the English novel were the first actually to enter France, the French drama, on the contrary, preceded in England every other form of French literature. Not only were some of our plays acted in French in London at the French theatre, not only were the efforts of our new dramatists followed with attention in English reviews, but innumerable translations and adaptations of our comedies, dramas, and melodramas were acted in England. There was a good deal of truth in the words of Bulwer Lytton, when he remarked that "if the French theatre lived on murders, the English existed upon
robberies”, adding “it steals everything it can lay its hands upon”.

It soon became possible for the best Parisian companies to come to England. In 1826 West London became the home of these companies. There was a subscription season of forty nights, the French actors playing no oftener than once or twice a week and only in winter and spring. The permission accorded Mlle. George, a leading French actress of the day, to play in London in 1826, was partly responsible for the authorization granted the following year to English actors to give English plays in Paris. When, in 1828, another well-known French company, that of Perlet, came to London, the British public was thoroughly accustomed to receiving French actors. The plays given were well attended, and the attitude of the press and the reviews was one of respect and caution; and the days of wholesale and hasty condemnation of the French drama had gone. One realizes, on the contrary, that a great effort was being made by the English to approach our drama in a sympathetic way and to understand it. The result of such effort was nevertheless rather disappointing. There was little or no real literary criticism at the time. Even professional critics like Hazlitt, Lamb, and Leigh Hunt find it almost impossible to dissociate a play from its presentation. What they judge is not the play in itself, as conceived and written, but the play as it appeared when acted on the stage, and, at times, these critics were occupied quite as much with the actor as with the author.

It was partly through the drama that the attention of British critics was drawn to a great change taking place in the literature of France in those days of Romanticism; and suddenly, in 1829, a few of the British woke up to the fact that there had been a complete revolution in the literature
of France, and that at last the French had poets and a poetry of their own: "The opinion in England that French poetry is not poetry at all, that it is, at its best, prose in metre, and, at its worst, a pompous jingle of big but unmeaning words, is so firmly rooted that we fear it is but lost time to inform the mass of our countrymen that, even in our sense of the word, the French are beginning to produce poetry and poets. Yes, poetry of the heart, of the imagination, poets of profound thoughts, aspiring, delicate, fanciful, drawing their recollections from remote epochs, gilding the past with the venerable hues of romantic association, painting the future in the brightest colors of hope and tenderness; and perhaps no poets, even in our own country, better understood the delicacy of sentiment." (Foreign Quarterly Review.) French poetry having rehабilitated itself in the eyes of part of the British public, the French drama should have become more and more popular in England. It was not so, for then came the Revolution of 1830 which took our British neighbors by surprise and soon divided them into two camps: the advanced liberals, who kept dwelling on the peaceful manner in which it had been accomplished, and others, who, turning their eyes despairingly toward the past, insisted that the first period of the Revolution of 1789 had been equally peaceful and that the worst was yet to come. The political tension in England at the same time was such that all other interests soon receded to the background and French literature fell into temporary neglect till after 1832. In 1833, and in the years which follow, we find English literary critics lined up in two distinct groups, as far as French literature goes, and on the whole the French drama in the estimation of the British public kept losing ground. A strong opposition then developed in England against our literature and par-
particularly against our novels and our dramas. Two causes account for this change of attitude on the part of the conservative and patriotic element in England. The literature of England was going through a period of depression. There was an interregnum, so to speak, between two generations of writers. Scott had died, the great romantic poets were no more, the drama was non-existent.

"The harps are hung upon the willows, the laurels are sere", as an English critic had it. Now, the years 1832-33-34, across the channel, were, on the contrary, the heyday of French Romanticism, when every form of literature seemed to be expanding and flourishing in France. In the most brilliant days of Louis XIV, France had never known such an intense literary activity, and the productions of her writers were placing her once more well ahead of all other nations on the Continent. This alone was enough to create a rather uncomfortable feeling among some of our neighbors. But worse than that, most of the creations of our Romantic writers were, in the eyes of the conservative element in England, both immoral and subversive. They were an incentive to rebellion; the worst example possible to those, and they were many in England, who, not contented with the Reform Bill, kept clamoring still for more reform. Our dramas and our novels, being the outcome of a revolution, the result of a dangerous fermentation of opinion, carried in themselves the spirit of rebellion. The lack of religious convictions in their authors, their subversive views in politics, and above all their cynical and licentious tone, seemed destructive of everything profound and permanent. None of the alarmed censors of our literature could imagine that the productions of our Romanticists were the creations of overheated minds, in an imaginary world, and therefore not submitted to the laws and conventions of a real
one. To those who failed to seize the main features of our Romanticism, these creations were devoid of cohesion, a mere series of wild visions, changing constantly, without sequence or meaning. It is not surprising, therefore, that they should have been shocked and alarmed at our Romantic literature. One of the best illustrations of this attitude toward our Romanticism would be afforded by Thackeray, were it not that in Thackeray we have a two-fold hatred of French Romanticism, compounded of his intense dislike of Romanticism in general and his horror of the peculiar form that it took in Paris.

For Thackeray and the conservative critics of the time our drama was nothing less than a school of satanism. "The drama of the common people is absurd, if you will, but good and right hearted, while the drama of Victor Hugo and Dumas and the enlightened classes is profoundly immoral and absurd." The French drama, according to the same Thackeray, is as monstrous as the monsters, and they are many, that it depicts. "The great Hugo has one monster to each play. The great Dumas has ordinarily half a dozen to whom murder is nothing—common intrigue, immorality, nothing; but who live and move in a vast, delightful complication of crime that cannot be easily conceived in England and much less described." Far from remarking like a well-known English critic that "these French books are very wicked, but I own to a fondness for them", Thackeray insisted that after having seen most of the "grand dramas produced in Paris for the last half-dozen years and thinking over all he has seen", he "was ashamed of the manner in which he had spent his time and of the hideous kind of mental intoxication in which he had indulged".

The same denunciations reappear in some of the best and most dignified organs of conservative opinion. From
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the Quarterly Review, for instance, the following remarks can give an idea of the tone of the controversy and of the intense hostility which the productions of our novelists and dramatists met with in some quarters of England. "A baser, meaner, filthier scoundrel never polluted society than M. de Balzac's standard of public morals." Not only were the works of our Romanticists the object of frantic denunciations, but the private lives of the authors came into question. Even Balzac, the most harmless, though absurdly extravagant creature, was taken to task. "No one better exemplified the divine warning: Even as a good tree bringeth forth good fruit, a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."

The French, I must admit, did not always relish such virtuous outbursts, and in a magnificent retort one of our best critics, Sainte Beuve, flayed our British censors, exposing their pretensions, their ignorance, their utter lack of understanding of the spirit of French literature and taunting them mercilessly for their worship of Paul de Kock and other third- and fourth-rate "littérateurs". Unfortunately Sainte Beuve and the French at large did not realize that such denunciations represented only the opinion of the conservative element in England and that quite a number of other critics more liberally-minded were still making a praiseworthy effort to see our dramatists and novelists in a less prejudiced light. Timidly, hesitatingly, groping as it were in the dark and rendered uneasy by the clamor of their conservative rivals, who had the ear of the majority, they try to approach our dramas in a sympathetic spirit. Their methods are almost always the same. They give detailed and very conscientious summaries of our plays, mentioning every incident, and bringing in every character. In some cases these summaries, though exhaustive, are fairly rapid and, on the whole, well done. Their authors are, as a rule,
very prompt in detecting similarities between the characters and the situations of the different dramas. But when it comes to the general characteristics of the play or a group of plays, the reviews fail completely. As late as in 1837, when the first book on "The Modern Literature of France" was published, we find English critics surprised at seeing the author Reynolds attempt to connect together our great Romantic writers, "as though, because they are contemporaries, they should belong to the same class, possessing the same gifts in common, and deriving their inspiration from the three days of July" (the three critical days of the Revolution of 1830).

Strange as it may seem, the most striking traces of the influence of Shakespeare, Scott, and Byron pass entirely unnoticed. On the other hand, the mistakes constantly made in the names and dates of the plays, even by the most conscientious critics, are simply appalling. In the case of two dramatists such as Victor Hugo and Dumas, who more or less competed for several years, it is not an indifferent matter to know whether a certain play of Dumas was written before or after a particular play of Victor Hugo—and vice versa. The best and the most original studies are amazingly inaccurate, though their authors deal with contemporary writers. Constantly one feels what a pity it is that comments which would be invaluable to us, as giving the unprejudiced opinion of the more broad minded among our neighbors, should be marred and often rendered worthless by such indifference to facts and to accuracy, the most elementary rule of criticism. With their imperfections, they remain, however, as an indication of the fact that, in spite of the campaign of the merciless enemies of France and of French Romanticism in England, the French drama managed to retain part of its hold on the English public.
The plays of a popularity seeker, like Bulwer Lytton, afford us another instance of the strong impression that the French Romantic drama made on some English minds, and are an indirect tribute to our dramatists. In 1837 a tremendous effort was made in England to revive the British drama. It was a time when everybody wanted to come to the rescue of Macready, the newly appointed manager of Covent Garden. Every dramatist, or would-be dramatist, was trying to answer Macready's appeal. The most successful of all the attempts then made to rejuvenate the English drama is that of Lytton, one of the most influential members of a commission appointed to investigate the condition of the British drama. Lytton owes far more to the French than the setting of his French plays, *The Duchess of La Vallière, Richelieu,* and *The Lady of Lyons.* He constantly borrows dramatic situations from Dumas and Hugo, in the usual English manner, followed earlier by the English dramatists of the Restoration. *The Lady of Lyons,* particularly, is a clever combination of scenes taken from different plays of the two French dramatists. The last scene for instance, when the hero of the drama arrives just in time to see his former fiancée about to be married to a rival, is only a duplication of a famous scene in *Hernani.* The story of *Richelieu* is partly taken from Saintine, a source which Lytton acknowledged, and from *Cinq Mars* of Alfred de Vigny, but it is kept alive through situations and stage tricks borrowed from the plays and novels of Dumas and Hugo. A detailed comparison of the plays of Lytton and those of Dumas and Hugo could hardly come within the compass of this study. But it may be of some interest to remark that Macready consulted Vigny when he was staging Bulwer Lytton's *Richelieu,* and that when Bulwer Lytton’s son was looking for a dramatist who might
complete Darnley, which Lytton had left unfinished, he straightway thought of Dumas and offered him the task. Pleased as he was, the latter declined the offer, feeling that he would have to make too many changes. The play no doubt seemed too weak to the French playwright, as it was lacking in the intense life and passion of our romantic drama. Lytton borrowed situations, stage tricks, glossed the whole thing over with a smattering of French gallantry, but never acquired the vigor of a Dumas or the poetic inspiration of Victor Hugo.

It is none the less interesting to see that the best, and by no means least, successful attempt to revive the English drama in the 1830's was partly based on the plays of two French dramatists, Dumas and Victor Hugo, who were themselves heavily indebted to English dramatists, novelists, and poets—especially to Shakespeare, Scott, and Byron. As in almost every study in comparative literature, a few outstanding facts emerge from this cursory survey of the relations of our French dramatists with their English predecessors and contemporaries. The first is that a nation, at any given moment, will accept from a foreign literature, only what it is ready to receive—and no more. The French, in 1823, were ready for a new drama. In 1827 their desire had not found satisfaction in France. Hence the eagerness with which our dramatists seized upon Shakespeare, whose dramas were interpreted by such remarkable actors as Kean, Macready, and Kemble, upon Byron who provided romantic heroes and rich food for thought and meditation, and upon Scott who suggested highly colored settings and a new use of history. On the other hand, though much in need of new inspiration, the English dramatists could not overcome the repugnance of the English public toward the situations and scenes which they found in our romantic drama. Hence the
limited influence in England of Dumas and Victor Hugo as dramatists.

Another remark, of a more encouraging nature, which can be made in conclusion, is that, in the literary relations between two nations, what has been once acquired is never completely lost, even in days when the pendulum swings the other way. Whatever gain has been attained in the understanding of the thought and literature of a foreign nation, may in time of political tension be partly lost but never entirely wiped out. While rather slow, perhaps, and subject to fluctuations, the improvement in the literary relations of nations who make an effort to understand each other's thought and literature, is more steady and on the whole more certain than that accomplished in the field of politics and diplomacy. Towering above commercial competition and other material considerations, indifferent to the political combinations of a day, and smiling at sensational manifestations and world stirring gestures, it goes on its way slowly, constituting nevertheless the soundest and the safest basis for an understanding between nations.

Marcel Moraud.