

From GRAY, Monday 20 October 1746

Printed from MS in Waller Collection.
Dated by Mason: 1746.

Camb[ridge], Oct. 20 [1746].

My dear Sir,

I FOUND (as soon as I got hither) a very kind letter from Mr Chute,¹ from whence I have reason to hope we may all meet in town about a week hence.² You have probably been there since I left you, and consequently have seen the Mr Barry³ you desired some account of; yet as I am not certain of this, and should be glad to know whether we agree about him, I will nevertheless tell you what he is, and the impression he made upon me.⁴ He is upwards of six foot in height, well and proportionably made, treads well, and knows what to do with his limbs; in short a noble graceful figure. I can say nothing of his face but that it was all black, with a wide mouth and good eyes. His voice is of a clear and pleasing tone, something like Delane's, but not so deep-mouthed, not so like a passing-bell. When high-strained, it is apt to crack a little and be hoarse, but in its common pitch, and when it sinks into any softer passion, particularly expressive and touching. In the first scenes, especially where he recounts to the Senate the progress of his love, and the means he used to win Desdemona, he was quite mistaken, and I took a pique against him: instead of a cool narration he flew into a rant of voice and action, as though he were relating the circumstances of a battle that was fought yesterday. I expected nothing more from him,

1. Missing. Gray received Chute's letter 10 Oct. and answered it on the 12th (*Gray's Corr.* i. 248-9).

2. HW was living at Windsor (*post* 15 Dec. 1746) where he spent 'the greatest part of every week,' with frequent 'jaunts to town' (HW to Mann 21 Aug. 1746, O.S.).

3. Spranger Barry (1719-77), the Dublin actor, who made his London *début* as Othello at Drury Lane 4 Oct. (*Daily Adv.* 1 Oct. 1746).

4. Contemporary witnesses bear out Gray's favourable criticism. There appeared in the *Daily Advertiser* 7 Oct. 1746

a letter by an 'impartial admirer, A.B.,' who comments: 'Your attitudes were often masterly, particularly where you kneel, and in the bed scene (which from the elegance and grandeur of your figure seem[s] to me inimitable by any other actor at present on the stage), your gait and deportment were easy, natural, and graceful; but you were too frequent in your bows; your voice is such as the present age hath not heard in any other actor. . . . Therefore it must be your own fault if you are not the greatest player in time that this nation has seen.'