

From GRAY, Wednesday 20 February 1751

Reprinted from *Works* v. 387.

My dear Sir,

Ash Wednesday [Feb. 20], Cambridge, 1751.

YOU have indeed conducted with great decency my little *misfortune*; you have taken a paternal care of it, and expressed much more kindness than could have been expected from so near a relation. But we are all frail; and I hope to do as much for you another time. Nurse Dodsley has given it a pinch or two in the cradle,¹ that (I doubt) it will bear the marks of as long as it lives. But no matter; we have ourselves suffered under her hands before now,² and, besides, it will only look the more careless and by *accident* as it were. I thank you for your advertisement,³ which saves my honour, and in a manner *bien flatteuse pour moi*, who should be put to it even to make myself a compliment in good English.

You will take me for a mere poet, and a fetcher and carrier of sing-song,⁴ if I tell you that I intend to send you the beginning of a drama,⁵ not mine, thank God, as you'll believe when you hear it is finished, but wrote by a person whom I have a very good opinion of. It is (unfortunately) in the manner of the ancient drama, with choruses, which I am, to my shame, the occasion of; for, as great part of it was at first written in that form, I would not suffer him to change it to a play fit for the stage, as he intended, because the lyric parts are the best of it, and they must have been lost. The story is Saxon, and the language has a tang of Shakespear that suits an old-fashioned fable very well. In short, I don't do it merely to amuse you but for the sake of the author, who wants a judge, and so I would lend him *mine*; yet not without your leave, lest you should have us up to dirty our stockings at the bar⁶ of your house for wasting the time and politics of the *nation*. Adieu, Sir! I am

Ever yours,

T. GRAY

1. For the misprints in the *Elegy* see *post* 3 March 1751.

2. I.e., in Dodsley's *Collection* (*ante* ca Jan. 1748).

3. See *ante* ?10 Feb. 1751, n. 7.

4. See Pope's *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, l. 226.

5. 'This was the *Elfrida* of Mr Mason' (Berry).

6. Until 1772 it was the custom in both Houses of Parliament for prisoners to receive judgment kneeling at the bar (see *Mem. Geo. II* i. 29; Sir Thomas E. May, *Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 13th edn, ed. Sir T. L. Webster, 1924, p. 103).