

THOMAS GODFREY: PROTÉGÉ OF WILLIAM SMITH (Part Two)

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FOR one of his age and lack of educational advantages Godfrey's performance was genuinely amazing and testified not only to his innate powers but likewise to the powers of his mentor, William Smith. The poem abounds in mythological and historical references, all handled in a manner demonstrating familiarity. Its pattern is of course derivative, and many of the lines echo the two sources cited by Evans. This fact in itself proves Godfrey's first-hand acquaintance with these masters. His poem is not, however, a mere imitation of Chaucer with traces of Popean influence. Godfrey had assimilated his sources and out of the fusion of them with his own mind produced a new work of real merit.

While in Philadelphia superintending the publication of *The Court of Fancy* Godfrey kept his eye out for further and more lucrative employment. His chief friend of influence, William Smith, was in Philadelphia for little of the year 1762 before going to England on his mission for the college. Godfrey,

. . . finding nothing offer, that was advantageous, . . . determined to make another voyage abroad; and, accordingly, procured some small commissions, and went, as a super-cargo, to the Island of New-Providence, where he was for some months, but met with no great encouragement. From New-Providence, . . . he sailed, once more, to North-Carolina.³⁰

Smith did not allow his absence from Philadelphia to halt his efforts on behalf of his protégé. With him he carried the manuscript of the latter's poem "Victory," which was published, surely at his recommendation, in an English periodical, *The Library*,

³⁰ Thomas Godfrey, *Juvenile Poems*, p. vi.

in 1762.³¹ Later in the year Godfrey himself sent a manuscript copy of "Victory" to Philadelphia. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* published the poem on January 6, 1763, with this introduction:

*The following Piece wrote abroad, about three Years since, by the ingenious Author of the Court of Fancy, we have lately received a Copy of by One of his Friends. As we think it a masterly Panegyric, and is wrote by a Native of our City, we presume it will be an acceptable Present to our Readers.*³²

"Victory," dealing with the successful conclusion of the French and Indian wars, is hardly worthy of Evans' description of it as a "nervous and noble song of triumph." The most that can be said of the hurriedly conceived and written piece is that it occasionally rises to heights of compact expression that are nearly lost in its general mediocrity. The haste with which it was put together undoubtedly accounts for the inclusion within it of Godfrey's one really serious lapse from good taste and poetic judgment, a lamentable stanza beginning with the words "*Horror* was Porter."

A second poem on the same general subject was in a vein better suited to its author. Obviously "A Cantata on Peace. 1763. To Mr. N. E." celebrated not victory and triumph but peace. The nobler subject brought forth the poet's talents in a much more pleasing manner than that in "Victory." First comes a recitative:

Where *Schuylkil's* banks the shades adorn,
And roses op'ning to the morn,
Give odours to the breeze;
Thus *Corydon*, a tuneful Swain,
Tun'd his soft reed a soothing strain,
By Nature form'd to please.
While Wood-Nymphs list'ning round him stood,
The Naiads left the oozy flood,
Caught by the heav'nly song.
Attention, to the Muse's aid,
Call'd *Silence* from her secret shade,
And *Rapture* join'd the throng.

³¹ C. Lennart Carlson, "Thomas Godfrey in England," *American Literature*, VII (1935), 302-304.

³² *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, No. 1776 (January 6, 1763).

After this pastoral introduction follow four quatrains, the last of which is repeated as the chorus:

Then let all join the chearful sound,
'Tis *Peace*, sweet *Peace* we sing!
And let the joyful groves around
With the loud *Chorus* ring.⁸³

One would not wish to call this great poetry, but it is surely pleasant and able versification.

Thomas Godfrey was not to have the advantage of a long life in which to mature his gifts. The *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which only seven months before had published "Victory," printed in its issue for September 29, 1763, an "Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Wilmington, North-Carolina" in which it was announced to Philadelphia that:

"It is with infinite Regret that I inform you that he, whom I esteemed one of the worthiest of Friends (Mr. THOMAS GODFREY, of your Place) is no more. Thursday, 25th July, he and myself set out on a small Journey into the Country; the Day being very warm, and he not much used to riding, I imagine over-heated him, for the succeeding Night he was seized with a most violent Fever and Vomiting, which desperately increasing, in seven Days hurried him out of this mortal Life."

The ingenious, though unfortunate, young Gentleman, here spoken of (Son of the famous THOMAS GODFREY, Mathematician of this Place) who is sincerely lamented by all Lovers of the Belles Lettres, bid likely to be a very permanent Honour to our City. The several poetical Pieces that were published here of his composing, perfectly amazed the Republic of Letters. His shining Talents were such that (if Providence had seen fit to lengthen his Days) it is past Dispute he would have been one of the first Sons of the Muses on this Side of the Atlantic. His Manner and Behaviour in private Life endeared him to all his Associates; his Innocence, Integrity, and laudable Thirst for Knowledge, produced him the Esteem and Affection of all who knew him, and his Writings, whether seen in Europe or America, gained him Admirers. The Pieces he has left

⁸³ Thomas Godfrey, *Juvenile Poems*, pp. 73, 74.

behind, which consist of several occasional Poems, and a Tragedy, Called "THE PRINCE OF PARTHIA," which has received his last Touches (and breathes all the Pathos of Otway) will be lasting Monuments of his literary Excellency. It is thought this Collection will make a handsome Octavo Volume, and the Public will be favoured with it as soon as those Pieces which remain in Carolina can be transmitted here.³⁴

The transmission of Godfrey's poems from North Carolina to Philadelphia must have been considerably delayed, for the promised edition did not appear until 1765, when Henry Miller printed *Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects*.³⁵ The poems were preceded by Nathaniel Evans' account of his friend, in which he said that Godfrey's fever

... at 10 o'Clock, A. M. on the third of August, 1763;
put a period to his life, in the 27th year of his age.³⁶

Evans and John Green each wrote an elegy to Godfrey's memory, and these poems also were included in the volume. Evans' contribution, dated October 1, 1763, contains manifestation of strong feeling for his lost friend as well as evidence of his own power as a poet. In the next to the last stanza Godfrey's verse is treated in appreciative terms:

How did we hope—alas! the hope how vain!
To hear thy future more enripen'd strain;
When fancy's fire with judgement had combin'd
To guide each effort of th' enraptur'd mind.
Yet are those youthful glowing lays of thine
The emanations of a soul divine;
Who heard thee sing but felt sweet music's dart
In thrilling transports pierce his captiv'd heart?³⁷

In the last stanza Evans allowed his muse to soar:

Stranger, who e'er thou art, by fortune's hand
Tost on the baleful *Carolinian* strand,

³⁴ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, No. 1814 (September 29, 1763).

³⁵ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, No. 1894 (April 11, 1765), carried an advertisement for the *Juvenile Poems*—"just published."

³⁶ Thomas Godfrey, *Juvenile Poems*, p. vi.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Oh! if thou seest perchance the POET'S grave
 The sacred spot with tears of sorrow lave;
 Oh! shade it, shade it, with ne'er fading bays.
 Hallow'd's the place where gentle GODFREY lays.
 (So may no sudden dart from death's dread bow
 Far from the friends thou lov'st e'er lay thee low),
 There may the weeping morn its tribute bring,
 And angels shield it with their golden wing,
 'Til the last trump shall burst the womb of night,
 And the purg'd atoms to their Soul unite!³⁸

As a postscript to his prefatory account Evans published a letter addressed to him, obviously by William Smith. Although the communication is unsigned, the description of its writer fits no one else.

The several Pieces in the Magazine [wrote Evans], passed to the Public thro' the hands of the Gentleman who has done the Publisher the honour to favour him with his comment on these Poems; and who drew up the Account of both the Father and Son in the Magazine.³⁹

The letter is for the most part an answer, in the negative, to Evans' question as to whether any attempt at correction or improvement of Godfrey's poems should be undertaken before their publication. Smith said that although Godfrey's poems were not flawless, he thought they should be allowed to stand as they were. The chief defect which he mentioned was in accentuation of words, particularly of proper names; yet he freely admitted that in several cases the poet had obtained desirable effects through the use of inaccurate accentuation.

Among the subscribers to the *Juvenile Poems* Smith was listed for four copies. Francis Hopkinson took one and Jacob Duché two. The total subscription was three hundred and seventy-six, including many names prominent in Philadelphia and some in North Carolina.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. ix. (The "Magazine" referred, of course, to Smith's *American Magazine*.)

⁴⁰ Archibald Henderson in his edition of *The Prince of Parthia* (Boston, 1917) has made an interesting conjecture that Godfrey had visited the North Carolina towns from which his subscribers came and was personally known to them.

In the volume appeared a number of poems which had not been published before. Various ones which can be definitely dated have been discussed above. If no specific dates can be given for the others, the improvement shown in their style seems to indicate that they were written after 1758. Furthermore, it is likely that many—indeed most—of these poems would have been published by William Smith in the *American Magazine* had they been written before October 1758 and known to the provost. Evans in his arrangement of the poems did not follow a strictly chronological sequence, partly because he did not know the order in which they were written and partly because he chose to make special groupings for pastorals and songs. With the exception of these there appears to have been an attempt on his part to approximate such a sequence, since the poems the dates of which are known are placed in at least a semblance of chronology.

Between “A Dithyrambic on Wine” and “A Night-Piece,” both of which had been published by Smith, Evans inserted “The Wish.” Though rather didactic and typical of eighteenth-century moralizing, this little poem breathes a genuine humility of spirit, framed in fitting modesty of expression.

I only ask a mod'rate fate,
And tho' not in obscurity,
I would not yet be plac'd too high;
Between the two extreames I'd be,
Not meanly low, nor yet too great,
From both contempt and envy free.

If no glitt'ring wealth I have,
Content of bounteous heav'n I crave,
For that is more,
Than all the India's shining store,
To be unto the dust a slave.
With heart, my little I will use,
Nor let pain my life devour,
Or for a griping heir refuse
Myself one pleasant hour.

No stately Edifice to rear,
My Wish would bound a small retreat,
In temp'rate air, and furnish'd neat;
No ornaments would I prepare,

No costly labours of the loom,
Should e'er adorn my humble room;
To gild my roof, I nought require
But the stern Winter's friendly fire.

Free from tumultuous cares and noise,
If gracious heav'n my Wish would give,
While sweet content augments my joys,
Thus, my remaining hours I'd live.
By arts ignoble never rise,
The Miser's ill-got wealth despise;
But blest my leisure hours I'd spend,
The Muse enjoying, and my Friend.⁴¹

Interpolated between "Victory" and the "Cantata on Peace" is "A Paraphrase on the first Psalm," an unfortunate attempt in which Godfrey dealt with something beyond the limits of his powers. After the "Cantata on Peace" Evans placed the songs, which show to greatest advantage Godfrey's abilities. The eighteenth century delighted in "large" subjects. Just as historical painting was its conception of the highest in pictorial art, so the sustained effort in poetry won its most enthusiastic approbation. In his use of the short lyric Godfrey returned to the inspiration of an earlier period and at the same time anticipated a later movement. Expressing himself often in the diction of the eighteenth century, he borrowed in several of his songs the manner of the Caroline poets. The first is typical of the group.

1.

The day was clos'd beneath the shade,
As pensive Celia sat,
For Damon mourn'd the lovely Maid,
And rail'd at envious fate.
Thus to the night she gave her woe,
While hush'd was all the wood,
Still were the winds, the streams ran slow,
And *Silence* list'ning stood.

2.

Ah! but in vain are tears and sighs,
In vain must Celia mourn.

⁴¹ Thomas Godfrey, *Juvenile Poems*, pp. 37-38.

From me the faithless Damon flies.
 And leaves me but his scorn.
 Why do the flatt'ring Shepherds say
 Who sees my beauty dies?
 Why rob the Sovereign of the Day,
 To deck those dreaded eyes?

3.

Nor are those arts to man confin'd,
 The limpid streams deceive,
 In the soft mirror charms I find,
 And what I wish believe.
 But what are all these boasted charms:
 They cannot Damon move?
 For glory now he leaves my arms,
 And slights my proffer'd love.⁴²

The fifth of the songs obviously was written by Godfrey while in North Carolina, for in its first stanza is actual mention of a Carolina locale.

O Come to *Masonborough's* grove,
 Ye Nymphs and Swains away,
 Where blooming Innocence and Love,
 And Pleasure crown the day.

A footnote explains that Masonborough was "a pleasant Retreat, nigh Cape Fear, in North Carolina."⁴³ This song takes on added interest and importance when one finds that it was set to music by Francis Hopkinson. It appears on page 163 of a manuscript volume of music by Hopkinson, the same volume which contains the first American musical composition, his setting for "My days have been so wondrous free." Since a song on page 180 of this book is dated 1760 and the poem was not published until 1765, it is highly probable that Godfrey, knowing the musical inclination of his friend, sent him a manuscript copy of the poem, asking or at least hoping that Hopkinson would give it a musical setting.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

A somewhat playful cynicism pervades the sixth song.

1.

For *Chloris* long I sigh'd in vain,
 Nor could her bosom move,
 She met my vows with cold disdain,
 And scorn return'd for Love.
 At length, grown weary of her pride,
 I left the haughty Maid,
Corinna's fetters now I try'd,
 Who love for love repaid.

2.

With her the pleasing hours I waste,
 With her such joys I prove,
 As kindred Souls alone can taste,
 When join'd in mutual Love.
 Ye Shepherds here, nor slight my strain,
 Fly, fly the scornful Fair,
 Kind Nymphs you'll find to ease your pain,
 And soften ev'ry care.⁴⁴

The use of "prove" in the second line of the second stanza and especially its rhyming with "love" suggest an acquaintance on Godfrey's part with Marlowe's "Passionate Shepheard." It is possible that the young poet actually knew this poem and that it thus found a verbal echo through recollection, even though the resemblance may be merely coincidental. What is certain is that Godfrey was able to catch here a feeling that had been too long absent from English verse. A light-hearted, bantering spirit combined with a very real passion of the deepest sort had not been the mode of the Restoration or of the eighteenth century. Again it was an earlier tradition that Godfrey revitalized for his day. The cavalier tradition had found a new and worthy continuer. The second song shows an even lighter touch and a greater command of the medium.

1.

When in *Celia's* heav'nly Eye
 Soft inviting Love I spy,
 Tho' you say 'tis all a cheat,
 I must clasp the dear deceit.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

2.

Why should I more knowledge gain,
 When it only gives me pain?
 If deceiv'd I'm still at rest,
 In the sweet Delusion blest.⁴⁵

One can hardly ask for a more facile display of this particular type of verse. Had Godfrey lived in a day when *vers de société* was more generally respected and respectable and when there would have been more encouragement to continue in that vein, he might very well have won a far greater name for himself in literature than that which he now enjoys. Naturally, a longer life too would have helped.

The last poem (preceding *The Prince of Parthia*) included by Evans in the *Juvenile Poems* was "The Assembly of Birds; from Chaucer." Its hundred and seventy-five lines were a free adaptation from *The Parlement of Foules*. Although an attempt at a modernization of Chaucer may be in better taste than of the King James version of the Psalms, neither betrays an excess of judgment. Unfortunately Godfrey lived at a time when it was more or less fashionable to do both. It must be claimed for Godfrey that his efforts are no worse than those of many of his contemporaries. One stanza may be quoted in support of this statement. Chaucer's

The wery hunttere, slepyng in his bed,
 To wode ayeyn his mynde goth anon;
 The juge dremeth how his plees been sped;
 The cartere dremeth how his cartes gon;
 The riche, of gold; the knyght fyght with his fon;
 The syke met he drynketh of the tonne;
 The lovee met he hath his lady wonne.

was turned by Godfrey into:

The Sportsman sleeping on the dewy ground,
 Pursues the Game, and cheers the eager hound:
 The Miser tells in dreams his hidden store,
 And warlike Knights fight all their battles o'er;
 While those who burn amid the fever's rage,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

In fancied Cups their parching thirst assuage.
Nor wonder then if I in dreams should stray,
Where Love inviting makes the fiction gay.⁴⁶

This is not bad poetry by any means. To be sure, it is not Chaucer, but it does represent a legitimate attempt to express the basic idea of his lines in more modern terms. Godfrey did not make a mere "translation"; still less did he try to "improve" Chaucer. As far as one can read his motives from the result achieved, he was not even endeavoring to show how Chaucer would write were he living in the mideighteenth century. Godfrey lacked entirely the presumptuousness of Dryden in his approach. All he wanted to do was to demonstrate how a modern poet could employ the ideas and the words of Chaucer to make a new poem in which he would say to his age essentially what Chaucer had said to his. Under these limitations Godfrey succeeded very well. The stanza quoted is sufficient to prove that he had a technical facility that was far from ordinary.

Well over half the bulk of the *Juvenile Poems* was devoted to the first printing of *The Prince of Parthia, A Tragedy*. In his introduction to the whole book Evans, after disclaiming any intention of passing a critical judgment on Godfrey's work, went on to say:

He would only beg leave, therefore, to remark of the Tragedy of the *Prince of Parthia*—That it is the first essay which our Province, or perhaps this Continent, has, as yet, publicly exhibited of Dramatic Composition—and, that there is possibly some merit even in endeavouring to overcome noble difficulties, though we should happen to aspire after a flight beyond our years.

"In great attempts 'tis glorious e'en to fall." The Author's youth, when this piece was composed, his disadvantages in respect of education, the desultory life he was compelled to lead—and, the arduous nature of the task—all conspire to cast a veil over every fault, and to heighten every grace and beauty, which the judicious reader may perceive in perusing it; and induce him to conclude that, even as it stands, it is no inconsiderable effort towards one of the sublimest species of Poetry, and no mean instance of the Author's strong inherent genius unaided as he was by the rules of instruction.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. viii-ix.

The historical importance of *The Prince of Parthia*, which was hinted at by Evans, increased considerably about two years later. On April 23, 1767, the *Pennsylvania Journal* carried this advertisement:

By Authority.

NEVER PERFORMED BEFORE.

By the AMERICAN COMPANY,

At the NEW THEATRE, in *Southwark*,

On *FRIDAY*, the *Twenty-Fourth* of *April*, will be presented, A TRAGEDY written by the late ingenious Mr. *Thomas Godfrey*, of this city, called the PRINCE of PARTHIA.

The PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS by Mr. HALLAM, Mr. DOUGLASS, Mr. WALL, Mr. MORRIS, Mr. ALLYN, Mr. TOMLINSON, Mr. BROADBELT, Mr. GREVILLE, Mrs. DOUGLASS, Mrs. MORRIS, Miss WAINWRIGHT, and Miss CHEER.

To which will be added, A *Ballad Opera* called
The CONTRIVANCES.

To begin exactly at *Seven o'Clock*.—*Vivant Rex & Regina*.⁴⁸

So far as existing records of any kind reveal, this performance was the first presentation of the product of a native American's pen on a professional stage by professional actors. While colleges, including most prominently the College of Philadelphia, had sponsored commencement exercises written by faculty members and students and performed by students, the production of Godfrey's play, on April 24, 1767, established the basis of a new American tradition and gave recognition to a native American as a serious and worthy practitioner of one of the fine arts. No actual record of the performance has been preserved. Since the Philadelphia newspapers of 1767 were not given to dramatic criticism, the information about plays which they afford comes for the most part from their advertisements and from occasional accounts of such special events as the opening and the closing of a theatrical season. The very fact that the only existing reference is the advertisement indicates that *The Prince of*

⁴⁸ *The Pennsylvania Journal*, No. 1272 (April 23, 1767). A similar advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of the same date (No. 2000) omitted the names of the actors but stressed that the play was "written in America."

Parthia was performed, for a change would have been more a matter for comment than the mere routine fulfillment of an advertised schedule.⁴⁹

Thus *The Prince of Parthia* acquired an importance and an assurance of fame and perpetuation which might not otherwise have come to it. But Godfrey's play is well worth attention for its intrinsic as well as for its historical merits. Although it was not reprinted from 1765 until 1917, it is readily accessible today, perhaps most conveniently in Arthur H. Quinn's *Representative American Plays*. For a brief summary of the action of the play one can not do better than turn to the account given by the same author in his *History of the American Drama*:

It is a romantic tragedy, laid in Parthia, in a time about the beginning of the Christian era. . . . Arsaces, the son of King Artabanus, is returning in triumph after his victory over the Arabians. His general favor incites envy in the heart of his brother, Vardanes, which is aggravated by the success of Arsaces in winning the love of Evanthe, a captive maiden, whom Vardanes loves and who excites the passion also of the King. Vardanes plots with his tool, Lysias, to inflame the King's mind against Arsaces by suggesting that the latter has designs upon his father's life. Artabanus is easily made suspicious, and when Arsaces asks as a reward for his labors that Evanthe become his bride, the King adds jealousy to his other emotions. The Queen, Thermusa, second wife of Artabanus, hates Arsaces because he has killed Vonones, her son, and she visits him in prison, where the jealousy of the King has sent him, with the intention of killing him. She is prevented from doing so by the apparition of the King, who has been murdered by Lysias out of revenge for insults, and also by a softer feeling, which suddenly comes to her, for Arsaces. Arsaces is freed by his youngest brother, Gotarzes, who with his troops enters the city and defeats Vardanes. Vardanes has been making violent love to Evanthe in the meanwhile and has been repulsed. By an ancient tragic device

⁴⁹ "The Disappointment; or The Force of Credulity" was advertised in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* on April 13, 1767, to be performed on the twentieth, but the *Gazette* and the *Journal* for April 16 announced that the performance would not be given because the play was deemed "unfit for the stage." *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, I, 12 (April 13, 1767); *Pennsylvania Gazette*, No. 1999 (April 16, 1767; *Pennsylvania Journal*, No. 1271 (April 16, 1767).

Evanthe does not view the battle scene herself, but depends on the word brought to her by her companion, Cleone. Cleone mistakes Arsaces for another, who is killed, and informs her mistress that Arsaces is dead. Evanthe takes poison and the lovers meet only to say good-by. Arsaces kills himself and Gotarzes reigns to restore order in the kingdom.⁵⁰

In Archibald Henderson's introduction to his edition of *The Prince of Parthia* is an exhaustive study of Parthian history from 37 B.C. to 51 A.D.

Thus it will be seen [concludes Mr. Henderson] that in this welter of parricide, fratricide, assassination, and incest, there is no motived dramatic story ready to the hand of Godfrey. From these barren materials he draws only the names, not the precise characters, of the historic personages; and utilizes only the relentless ambition of the brothers, Vardanes and Gotarzes, for their father's throne, having as one result the murder by Gotarzes of his second brother, Artabanus, whom Godfrey identifies with Arsaces.⁵¹

Godfrey himself (or, more probably, Evans on his behalf) did not try to claim absolute historical accuracy, since the play was preceded by an "Advertisement" reading:

Our Author has made Use of the *licentia poetica* in the Management of this Dramatic Piece; and deviates, in a particular or two, from what is agreed on by Historians: The Queen *Thermusa* being not the Wife of King *Artabanus*, but (according to *Tacitus*, *Strabo* and *Josephus*) of *Phraates*; *Artabanus* being the fourth King of *Parthia* after him. Such Lapses are not unprecedented among the Poets; and will the more readily admit of an Excuse, when the Voice of History is followed in the Description of Characters.⁵²

It is not surprising that Thomas Godfrey, friend and associate of William Smith and of those members of Smith's group (Hop-

⁵⁰ Arthur H. Quinn, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

⁵¹ Archibald Henderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

⁵² Thomas Godfrey, *Juvenile Poems*, p. 93.

kinson, Duché, and Evans) who were active in the dramatic affairs of the College of Philadelphia, should have written a play. That he should have written so creditable a play as *The Prince of Parthia* may well cause wonder. Godfrey's native ability was implemented by his acquaintance with the best traditions of English drama. These sources, intimately reflected as they were, certainly helped to give his play tone. Shakespeare's influence was by all means the greatest, both in number of instances apparent and in weight. Archibald Henderson and Arthur Hobson Quinn, who have both published somewhat lengthy discussions of Godfrey's indebtedness to Shakespeare, show that Godfrey borrowed in varying degrees from *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, *Measure for Measure*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It*, *Coriolanus*, and *Henry V*. They have not mentioned *King Lear*, but surely a resemblance to one of its passages is noticeable in the following dialogue between the captive Bethas and his daughter Evanthe (*Juvenile Poems*, pp. 141-142):

EVANTHE.

O! happy me, this place, which lately seem'd
 So fill'd with horror, now is pleasure's circle.
 Here will I fix my seat; my pleasing task
 Shall be to cherish thy remaining life.
 All night I'll keep a vigil o'er thy slumbers,
 And on my breast repose thee, mark thy dreams,
 And when thou wak'st invent some pleasing tale.
 Or with my songs the tedious hours beguile.

BETHAS.

Still let me gaze, still let me gaze upon thee,
 Let me strain ev'ry nerve with ravishment,
 And all my life be center'd in my vision.

Other English plays which influenced Godfrey include Rowe's *Tamerlane*, Ambrose Philips' *Distressed Mother*, Beaumont's *The Maid's Tragedy*, and Dryden's *Aurengsebe*.⁵³ While his debt to English drama was for the most part verbal, Godfrey owed definite

⁵³ Thomas Clark Pollock (in "Rowe's *Tamerlane* and *The Prince of Parthia*," *American Literature*, VI, 162 [1934]) has suggested that Godfrey's play "was strongly influenced, if not indeed originally inspired, by Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane*."

incidents to some of the plays. *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, for instance, were of great assistance to him in the management of the ghost of Artabanus. Mr. Henderson has suggested that Addison's *Cato* may well have helped Godfrey to determine his locale.⁵⁴

Probably as one result of having chosen so good a preceptor as Shakespeare, Godfrey rose in *The Prince of Parthia* to a command of blank verse far beyond anything evinced in his other poems. He displayed an ability to allow the thought and the phrasing to run on from line to line, something of a minor feat for a young man writing at a time when Popean couplets were the order of the day. One passage, in illustration, shows definite Shakespearean resemblances (to *Julius Caesar*):

Loudly he cry'd for help, *Arsaces* heard,
And thro' the swelling waves he rush'd to save
His drowning Brother, and gave him life,
And for the boon the Ingrate pays him hate.

In the speech of Gotarzes which follows Phraates' reply to the speech quoted above Godfrey reveals a vigor and a terseness of expression that are indeed commendable:

Ingratitude,
Thou hell-born fiend, how horrid is thy form!
The Gods sure let thee loose to scourge mankind,
And save them from an endless waste of thunder.⁵⁵

It must be admitted that Godfrey was a better poet than a dramatist and that his play, though intended for the stage (as he himself stated in his letter of November 17, 1759), does smell of the lamp. The last act, which he probably completed in something of a hurry in order to send the play off to Philadelphia for its contemplated production, is itself hurried in movement and smacks occasionally a little more of the melodramatic than of the truly tragic. Yet the piece as a whole has essential dramatic unity. It has been proved to be stageable by at least one modern production, that given by the Zelosophic Society of the University of Pennsylvania on March 26, 1915.⁵⁶ Certainly as a first at-

⁵⁴ Archibald Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁵⁵ Thomas Godfrey, *Juvenile Poems*, p. 100.

⁵⁶ Arthur H. Quinn, *op. cit.*, p. 17. Mr. Henderson (*op. cit.*, pp. 52-54) has suggested the possibility of a performance in North Carolina about 1847.

tempt, on the part both of Godfrey and of the American people, *The Prince of Parthia* was most distinctly more than a mere noble effort: it was a definite achievement of a high order for its time and place. Parts of its poetry are genuinely good, and Godfrey showed himself an able characterizer.

It is interesting to notice the stage directions for the first scene of the fifth act:

The Curtain rises, slowly to soft music, and discovers
Evanthe sleeping on a Sofa; after the music ceases,
Vardanes enters.

The chief purpose of the music is soon revealed, for it accompanies a song:

Tell me, Phillis, tell me why,
You appear so wond'rous coy,
When that glow, and sparkling eye,
Speak you want to taste the joy?
Prithee give this fooling o'er,
Nor torment your lover more.

While youth is warm within our veins,
And nature tempts us to be gay,
Give to pleasure loose the reins,
Love and youth fly swift away.
Youth in pleasure should be spent,
Age will come, we'll then repent.⁵⁷

If not quite so good as the best of Godfrey's songs, this lyric is still commendable. Besides, it is appropriately introduced into the action of the play, since Vardanes is about to make an attempt upon Evanthe and the song expresses something of his line of thought. Its additional purpose is to awaken Evanthe. One wonders whether Godfrey could have had in mind the idea that suggestions may be imparted to a sleeping person through music.

Godfrey's acquaintance with the dramatic literature of England must be regarded as due in a large measure to William Smith, who also probably introduced him to those Caroline lyrists who provided the impetus for the best of his lyric poetry and to

⁵⁷ Thomas Godfrey, *Juvenile Poems*, p. 203.

Chaucer, the inspiration for his two longest nondramatic pieces. The various dramatic exercises of the College of Philadelphia, under Smith's leadership, first called Godfrey's attention to the drama, while the Philadelphia productions of the Hallam company undoubtedly spurred his interest. To Smith, who had published his first poetic efforts, he sent the manuscript of *The Prince of Parthia* in 1759; it would therefore be natural to assume that the provost arranged for its posthumous production in 1767.

The career of Thomas Godfrey is in many ways as much a tribute to William Smith as it is to Godfrey himself. Smith recognized the flame of talent in the watchmaker's apprentice and set him on the high road to literary achievement. He did not allow his interest in Godfrey to cloud his critical faculties, for he closed his letter to Nathaniel Evans with a criticism that, if a little short of full justice, is nevertheless acute:

Upon the whole, I persuade myself that, the severest critic, looking over smaller matters, will allow these writings of Mr. Godfrey, to be aptly characteriz'd, in the following lines from the Court of Fancy—

“Bold Fancy's hand th' amazing pile uprears,

“In every part stupendous skill appears;

“In beautiful disorder, yet compleat,

“The structure shines irregularly great.”⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxii.