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Essays in Literary Criticism by George Santayana. Selected and Edited, with an Introduction, by Irving Singer. Charles Scribner's Sons, N. Y., 1956

Goethe's Faust

p. 53 If from Goethe we turn to Faust - and it is as the author of Faust only that we shall consider him - the situation is not less ambiguous. In the play, as the young Goethe first wrote it, philosophy appeared in the first line, - Hab nun ach die Philosophie; but it appeared there, and throughout the piece, merely as a human experience, a passion or an illusion, a fund of images or an ambitious art. Later, it is true, under the spell of fashion and of Schiller, Goethe surrounded his original scenes with others, like the prologue in heaven, or the apotheosis of Faust, in which a philosophy of life was indicated; namely, that he who strives strays, yet in that straying finds his salvation. This idea left standing all that satirical and Mephistophelian wisdom with which the whole poem abounds, the later parts no less than the earlier.

Cervantes

p. 112 Cervantes is known to the world as the author of Don Quixote . . . . it is as the author of Don Quixote alone that he deserves to be generally known or considered.

p. 116 Critics are agreed in blaming the exceptions which Cervantes allowed himself to make to the realism of his scenes, where he introduced romantic tales into the narrative of the first part. The tales are in themselves unworthy of their setting and contrary to the spirit of the whole book. Cervantes doubtless yielded here partly to his story-telling habits, partly to a fear of monotony in the uninterrupted description of Don Quixote's adventures. He avoided this mistake in the second part, and devised the visit to the Duke's palace, and the intentional sport there made of the hero, to give variety to the story.

p. 117 More variety and more unity may still, perhaps, seem desirable in the book. The episodes are strung together without much coherence, and without any attempt to develop either the plot or the characters. . . . . The whole book has, in fact, rather the quality of an improvisation. The episodes suggest themselves to the author's fancy as he proceeds; a fact which gives them the same unexpectedness and sometimes the same incompleteness which the events of a journey naturally have. It is the genius of this kind of narrative to be a sort of imaginary diary, without a general dramatic structure. The interest depends on the characters and on the incidents alone; on the fertility of the author's invention, on the ingenuity of the turns he gives to the story, and on the incidental scenes and figures he describes.

Cervantes' authorship unquestioned although evidence of dissimilarity abound in Don Quixote