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**TIRSO DE MOLINA,** the pseudonym of Gabriel Tellez (1571-1648), Spanish dramatist. Born at Madrid in October 1571, he studied at the Alcalá de Henares, joined the Order of Mercy on the 4th of November 1600, and made his religious profession in the Monastery of San Antolín at Guadalajara on the 21st of January 1601. He was a dramatist of ten years’ standing when he was sent by his superiors on a mission to the West Indies in 1615; returning to Europe in 1617, he resided at the Mercenarian monastery in Madrid, took part in the proceedings of the *Academia poélica de Madrid,* founded by Sebastián Francisco de Medrano, competed in the literary tournaments then in vogue, and wrote copiously for the stage. His first publication, the incomplete *Cigarrales de Toledo* (licensed in 1621, but apparently not published till 1624), is a miscellany, containing short tales, novels, verses and three plays; one of the novels, *Los Tres maridos burlados,* probably derived from Il Cieco da Ferrara’s *Mambriano,* and the play entitled *El Vergonzoso en palacio* are admirable examples of witty contrivance. The preface to the *Cigarrales de Toledo* (the second part of which was never printed) states that Tirso de Molina had already written three hundred plays, and at this period of his career he was second only to his friend Lope de Vega in popularity. He avowed himself hostile to *culteranismo* in the *Cigarrales de Toledo,* and made numerous enemies by his attacks on the new school in such pieces as *Amar por arle mayor* and *La Celosa de si misma.* The realistic character of some of his productions provided his unsuccessful rivals with an excuse for denouncing him as a corrupter of public morals to the council of Castile in 1625, and, though no legal action was taken against him, he appears to have been reprimanded privately. In 1626 it was deemed advisable to transfer him to Salamanca, and Tirso de Molina left Madrid determined to write no more for the stage. Though one of his plays, *La Huerta de San Juan,* is dated 1626, there is no proof that it was begun after his depar­ture from Madrid, and he seems to have kept to his resolution for eight years. But he had not lost his interest in the theatre, and felt justified in publishing twelve representative pieces as the first part of his dramatic works (1626). This may be taken as a formal protest against the weakness of those who had sacrificed him to hypocritical clamour. In other respects he was submissive, and worked zealously on behalf of his order in which he rose to important positions; he became superior of the monastery at Trujillo in 1626, was elected later to the posts of reader in theology and *definidor general,* and in May 1632 was appointed chronicler of the Order of Mercy. His *Deleitar aprovechado* (1635) is a devout counterpart of the *Cigarrales de Toledo,* much inferior to its predecessor in interest; a sequel was promised to this collection of pious tales, pious lyrics, and *autos,* but, as in the case of the *Cigarrales de Toledo,* the continuation never appeared. Twelve plays constitute the third part of his dramatic works which was published (before the second) in 1634 under the nominal editorship of the writer’s nephew Francisco Lucas de Ávila, but the existence of this nephew is doubtful. The second part (1635), the printing of which was paid for by the confraternity of St Jerome, contains four plays by Tirso de Molina, and eight written by him in collaboration with other dramatists; one of these collaborators was Ruiz de Alarcon (*q.v.*), but the internal evidence goes to show that Tirso de Molina was the predominant spirit in these literary partnerships. The fourth part of Tirso’s dramatic works (1635) and the fifth (1636) each contain twelve plays; the haste with which these five volumes were issued indicates the natural desire of a great author to save some part of his work from destruction, and the appearance of a supposititious nephew’s name on the title-pages of the last four volumes indicates the equally natural desire of a prominent monk to avoid conflict with the authorities. A sixth volume of dramatic pieces, consisting of light comedies, was announced; but the project was abandoned. That dramatic composition still entertained the scanty leisure of Tirso’s old age is shown by the fact that the fragmentary autograph copy of *Las Quinas de Portugal* is dated the 8th of March 1638; but his active career as a dramatist ended two years earlier. He was absorbed by other duties. As official chronicler of his order, he compiled the elaborate *Historia de la merced,* which occupied him till the 24th of December 1639, and still survives in manu­script. As a tribute to the count de Sástago, who had accepted the dedication of the fourth part of the plays, and who had probably helped to defray the publishing expenses, Tirso de Molina is said to have compiled the *Genealogîa de la casa de Sástago* (1640), but the ascription of this genealogical work is disputed. On the 29th of September 1645 Tirso de Molina became superior of the monastery at Soria, and died there on the 12th of March 1648.

It is only within the last few years that it has become possible to give an outline of his life; it will always be impossible for posterity to do justice to his genius, for but a fraction of his plays have been preserved. The earliest of his extant pieces is dated 1605 and bears no sign of immaturity; in 1624 he had written three hundred plays, and in 1634 he stated that he had composed four hundred within the previous twenty years; of this immense production not more than eighty plays are in existence. Tirso de Molina is univer­sally known as the author of *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra,* the piece in which Don Juan is first presented on the stage; but *El Burlador de Sevilla* represents only one aspect of his genius. No less remarkable than his represen­tation of perverse depravity in *El Burlador de Sevilla* is his dramatic treatment of a philosophical enigma in *El Condenado por desconfiado.* Though manifestly attracted by exceptional cases, by every kind of moral aberration, by the infamous and the terrible, his range is virtually unlimited. He reveals him­self as a master of historical interpretation in *La Prudencia de la mujer* and of tragical pathos in *La Venganza de Tamar;* his sympathetic, malicious wit finds dramatic expression in *El Vergonzoso en palacio* and *Don Gil de las colzas verdes,* and the fine divination of feminine character in *Averígüelo Vargas* and *La Villana de Vallecas* is incomparable. Tirso de Molina has neither Lope de Vega’s inventive resource, nor his infinite seduction; he has neither Calderón’s idealistic visions, nor his golden music; but he exceeds Lope in massive intellectual power and in artistic self-restraint, and he exceeds Calderón in humour, in creative faculty, and in dramatic intuition. That his reputa­tion extended beyond the Pyrenees in his own lifetime may be gathered from the fact that J. Shirley’s *Opportunily* is derived from *El Castigo del penséque;* but he was neglected in Spain itself during the long period of Calderón’s supremacy, and his name was almost forgotten till the end of the 18th century, when some of his pieces were timidly recast by Dionisio Solis and later by Juan Carretero. The renaissance of his fame, however, dates from 1839-1842, when an incomplete but serviceable edition of his plays was published by Hartzenbusch ; and he is now accepted as among the greatest dramatists of Spain.

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