

My blood is running up and down my veins;  
 A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle:  
 I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe; 165  
 My heart is beating with an expectation  
 Of horrid joy.

*Enter* LUCRETIA.

What? Speak!

*Lucretia.* She bids thee curse;  
 And if thy curses, as they cannot do,  
 Could kill her soul . . .

*Cenci.* She would not come. 'Tis well,  
 I can do both: first take what I demand, 170  
 And then extort concession. To thy chamber!  
 Fly ere I spurn thee: and beware this night  
 That thou cross not my footsteps. It were safer  
 To come between the tiger and his prey. [*Exit* LUCRETIA.  
 It must be late; mine eyes grow weary dim 175  
 With unaccustomed heaviness of sleep.

Conscience! Oh, thou most insolent of lies!  
 They say that sleep, that healing dew of Heaven,  
 Steeps not in balm the foldings of the brain  
 Which thinks thee an impostor. I will go 180

First to belie thee with an hour of rest,  
 Which will be deep and calm, I feel: and then . . .  
 O, multitudinous Hell, the fiends will shake  
 Thine arches with the laughter of their joy!  
 There shall be lamentation heard in Heaven 185

As o'er an angel fallen; and upon Earth  
 All good shall droop and sicken, and ill things  
 Shall with a spirit of unnatural life  
 Stir and be quickened . . . even as I am now. [*Exit.*

SCENE II.—*Before the Castle of Petrella. Enter* BEATRICE *and*  
 LUCRETIA *above on the Ramparts.*

*Beatrice.* They come not yet.

*Lucretia.* 'Tis scarce midnight.

*Beatrice.* How slow

Behind the course of thought, even sick with speed,  
 Lags leaden-footed time!

*Lucretia.* The minutes pass . . .

If he should wake before the deed is done?

*Beatrice.* O, mother! He must never wake again. 5

What thou hast said persuades me that our act

Will but dislodge a spirit of deep hell

Out of a human form.

*Lucretia.* 'Tis true he spoke

Of death and judgement with strange confidence  
 For one so wicked; as a man believing  
 In God, yet recking not of good or ill. 10  
 And yet to die without confession! . . .

*Beatrice.* Oh!  
 Believe that Heaven is merciful and just,  
 And will not add our dread necessity  
 To the amount of his offences.

*Enter OLIMPIO and MARZIO, below.*

*Lucretia.* See, 15  
 They come.

*Beatrice.* All mortal things must hasten thus  
 To their dark end. Let us go down.

*[Exeunt LUCRETIA and BEATRICE from above.]*

*Olimpio.* How feel you to this work?

*Marzio.* As one who thinks  
 A thousand crowns excellent market price  
 For an old murderer's life. Your cheeks are pale. 20

*Olimpio.* It is the white reflection of your own,  
 Which you call pale.

*Marzio.* Is that their natural hue?

*Olimpio.* Or 'tis my hate and the deferred desire  
 To wreak it, which extinguishes their blood.

*Marzio.* You are inclined then to this business?

*Olimpio.* Ay. 25  
 If one should bribe me with a thousand crowns  
 To kill a serpent which had stung my child,  
 I could not be more willing.

*Enter BEATRICE and LUCRETIA, below.*

Noble ladies!

*Beatrice.* Are ye resolved?

*Olimpio.* Is he asleep?

*Marzio.* Is all  
 Quiet?

*Lucretia.* I mixed an opiate with his drink: 30  
 He sleeps so soundly . . .

*Beatrice.* That his death will be  
 But as a change of sin-chastising dreams,  
 A dark continuance of the Hell within him,  
 Which God extinguish! But ye are resolved?  
 Ye know it is a high and holy deed? 35

*Olimpio.* We are resolved.

*Marzio.* As to the how this act  
 Be warranted, it rests with you.

*Beatrice.* Well, follow!

*Olimpio.* Hush! Hark! What noise is that?

*Marzio.* Ha! some one comes!

*Beatrice.* Ye conscience-stricken cravens, rock to rest  
Your baby hearts. It is the iron gate, 40  
Which ye left open, swinging to the wind,  
That enters whistling as in scorn. Come, follow!  
And be your steps like mine, light, quick and bold. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*An Apartment in the Castle. Enter BEATRICE and  
LUCRETIA.*

*Lucretia.* They are about it now.

*Beatrice.* Nay, it is done.

*Lucretia.* I have not heard him groan.

*Beatrice.* He will not groan.

*Lucretia.* What sound is that?

*Beatrice.* List! 'tis the tread of feet  
About his bed.

*Lucretia.* My God!  
If he be now a cold stiff corpse . . .

*Beatrice.* O, fear not 5  
What may be done, but what is left undone:  
The act seals all.

*Enter OLIMPIO and MARZIO.*

Is it accomplished?

*Marzio.* What?

*Olimpio.* Did you not call?

*Beatrice.* When?

*Olimpio.* Now.

*Beatrice.* I ask if all is over?

*Olimpio.* We dare not kill an old and sleeping man;  
His thin gray hair, his stern and reverend brow, 10  
His veined hands crossed on his heaving breast,  
And the calm innocent sleep in which he lay,  
Quelled me. Indeed, indeed, I cannot do it.

*Marzio.* But I was bolder; for I chid Olimpio,  
And bade him bear his wrongs to his own grave 15  
And leave me the reward. And now my knife  
Touched the loose wrinkled throat, when the old man  
Stirred in his sleep, and said, 'God! hear, O, hear,  
A father's curse! What, art Thou not our Father?'  
And then he laughed. I knew it was the ghost 20  
Of my dead father speaking through his lips,  
And could not kill him.

*Beatrice.* Miserable slaves!  
Where, if ye dare not kill a sleeping man,  
Found ye the boldness to return to me

10 reverend] reverent *all editions.*

With such a deed undone? Base palterers! 25  
 Cowards and traitors! Why, the very conscience  
 Which ye would sell for gold and for revenge  
 Is an equivocation: it sleeps over  
 A thousand daily acts disgracing men;  
 And when a deed where mercy insults Heaven . . . 30  
 Why do I talk?

[*Snatching a dagger from one of them and raising it.*

Hadst thou a tongue to say,  
 'She murdered her own father!'—I must do it!  
 But never dream ye shall outlive him long!

*Olimpio.* Stop, for God's sake!

*Marzio.* I will go back and kill him.

*Olimpio.* Give me the weapon, we must do thy will. 35

*Beatrice.* Take it! Depart! Return!

[*Exeunt OLIMPIO and MARZIO.*

How pale thou art!

We do but that which 'twere a deadly crime  
 To leave undone.

*Lucretia.* Would it were done!

*Beatrice.* Even whilst

That doubt is passing through your mind, the world  
 Is conscious of a change. Darkness and Hell 40  
 Have swallowed up the vapour they sent forth  
 To blacken the sweet light of life. My breath  
 Comes, methinks, lighter, and the jellied blood  
 Runs freely through my veins. Hark!

*Enter OLIMPIO and MARZIO.*

He is . . . Dead!

*Olimpio.*

*Marzio.* We strangled him that there might be no blood; 45  
 And then we threw his heavy corpse i' the garden  
 Under the balcony; 'twill seem it fell.

*Beatrice* (*giving them a bag of coin*). Here, take this gold, and  
 hasten to your homes.

And, Marzio, because thou wast only awed  
 By that which made me tremble, wear thou this! 50  
 [*Clothes him in a rich mantle.*

It was the mantle which my grandfather  
 Wore in his high prosperity, and men  
 Envied his state: so may they envy thine.  
 Thou wert a weapon in the hand of God  
 To a just use. Live long and thrive! And, mark, 55  
 If thou hast crimes, repent: this deed is none.

[*A horn is sounded.*

*Lucretia.* Hark, 'tis the castle horn; my God! it sounds  
 Like the last trump.

*Beatrice.* Some tedious guest is coming.

*Lucretia.* The drawbridge is let down; there is a tramp  
Of horses in the court; fly, hide yourselves! 60

[*Exeunt* OLIMPIO and MARZIO.

*Beatrice.* Let us retire to counterfeit deep rest;  
I scarcely need to counterfeit it now:  
The spirit which doth reign within these limbs  
Seems strangely undisturbed. I could even sleep 64  
Fearless and calm: all ill is surely past. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.—*Another Apartment in the Castle. Enter on one side the LEGATE SAVELLA, introduced by a Servant, and on the other LUCRETIA and BERNARDO.*

*Savella.* Lady, my duty to his Holiness  
Be my excuse that thus unseasonably  
I break upon your rest. I must speak with  
Count Cenci; doth he sleep?

*Lucretia (in a hurried and confused manner).* I think he  
sleeps;

Yet wake him not, I pray, spare me awhile, 5  
He is a wicked and a wrathful man;  
Should he be roused out of his sleep to-night,  
Which is, I know, a hell of angry dreams,  
It were not well; indeed it were not well.  
Wait till day break . . . (*aside*) O, I am deadly sick! 10

*Savella.* I grieve thus to distress you, but the Count  
Must answer charges of the gravest import,  
And suddenly; such my commission is.

*Lucretia (with increased agitation).* I dare not rouse him: I  
know none who dare . . .  
'Twere perilous; . . . you might as safely waken 15  
A serpent; or a corpse in which some fiend  
Were laid to sleep.

*Savella.* Lady, my moments here  
Are counted. I must rouse him from his sleep,  
Since none else dare.

*Lucretia (aside).* O, terror! O, despair!  
(*To BERNARDO.*) Bernardo, conduct you the Lord Legate to 20  
Your father's chamber. [*Exeunt* SAVELLA and BERNARDO.

*Enter* BEATRICE.

*Beatrice.* 'Tis a messenger  
Come to arrest the culprit who now stands  
Before the throne of unappealable God.  
Both Earth and Heaven, consenting arbiters,  
Acquit our deed.

*Lucretia.* Oh, agony of fear! 25  
 Would that he yet might live! Even now I heard  
 The Legate's followers whisper as they passed  
 They had a warrant for his instant death.  
 All was prepared by unforbidden means  
 Which we must pay so dearly, having done. 30  
 Even now they search the tower, and find the body;  
 Now they suspect the truth; now they consult  
 Before they come to tax us with the fact;  
 O, horrible, 'tis all discovered!

*Beatrice.* Mother, 35  
 What is done wisely, is done well. Be bold  
 As thou art just. 'Tis like a truant child  
 To fear that others know what thou hast done,  
 Even from thine own strong consciousness, and thus  
 Write on unsteady eyes and altered cheeks  
 All thou wouldst hide. Be faithful to thyself, 40  
 And fear no other witness but thy fear.  
 For if, as cannot be, some circumstance  
 Should rise in accusation, we can blind  
 Suspicion with such cheap astonishment,  
 Or overbear it with such guiltless pride, 45  
 As murderers cannot feign. The deed is done,  
 And what may follow now regards not me.  
 I am as universal as the light;  
 Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm  
 As the world's centre. Consequence, to me, 50  
 Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock  
 But shakes it not. [*A cry within and tumult.*

*Voices.* Murder! Murder! Murder!

*Enter BERNARDO and SAVELLA.*

*Savella (to his followers).* Go search the castle round;  
 sound the alarm;  
 Look to the gates that none escape!

*Beatrice.* What now? 54

*Bernardo.* I know not what to say . . . my father's dead.

*Beatrice.* How; dead! he only sleeps; you mistake, brother.  
 His sleep is very calm, very like death;  
 'Tis wonderful how well a tyrant sleeps.  
 He is not dead?

*Bernardo.* Dead; murdered.

*Lucretia (with extreme agitation).* Oh no, no  
 He is not murdered though he may be dead; 60  
 I have alone the keys of those apartments.

*Savella.* Ha! Is it so?

*Beatrice.* My Lord, I pray excuse us;  
 We will retire; my mother is not well;

She seems quite overcome with this strange horror.

[*Exeunt* LUCRETIA and BEATRICE.

*Savella.* Can you suspect who may have murdered him? 65

*Bernardo.* I know not what to think.

*Savella.* Can you name any  
Who had an interest in his death?

*Bernardo.* Alas!

I can name none who had not, and those most

Who most lament that such a deed is done;

My mother, and my sister, and myself. 70

*Savella.* 'Tis strange! There were clear marks of violence.

I found the old man's body in the moonlight

Hanging beneath the window of his chamber,

Among the branches of a pine: he could not

Have fallen there, for all his limbs lay heaped 75

And effortless; 'tis true there was no blood . . .

Favour me, Sir; it much imports your house

That all should be made clear; to tell the ladies

That I request their presence. [*Exit* BERNARDO.

*Enter* GUARDS bringing in MARZIO.

*Guard.* We have one.

*Officer.* My Lord, we found this ruffian and another 80

Lurking among the rocks; there is no doubt

But that they are the murderers of Count Cenci:

Each had a bag of coin; this fellow wore

A gold-inwoven robe, which shining bright

Under the dark rocks to the glimmering moon 85

Betrayed them to our notice: the other fell

Desperately fighting.

*Savella.* What does he confess?

*Officer.* He keeps firm silence; but these lines found on him  
May speak.

*Savella.* Their language is at least sincere. [*Reads.*

'*To the Lady Beatrice.* 90

'*That the atonement of what my nature sickens to conjecture may  
soon arrive, I send thee, at thy brother's desire, those who will speak  
and do more than I dare write. . . .*

'*Thy devoted servant, Orsino.*'

*Enter* LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, and BERNARDO.

Knowest thou this writing, Lady?

*Beatrice.* No.

*Savella.* Nor thou? 95

*Lucretia.* (*Her conduct throughout the scene is marked by extreme  
agitation.*) Where was it found? What is it? It should be  
Orsino's hand! It speaks of that strange horror  
Which never yet found utterance, but which made  
Between that hapless child and her dead father

A gulf of obscure hatred.

*Savella.* Is it so? 100

Is it true, Lady, that thy father did  
Such outrages as to awaken in thee  
Unfilial hate?

*Beatrice.* Not hate, 'twas more than hate:  
This is most true, yet wherefore question me?

*Savella.* There is a deed demanding question done; 105  
Thou hast a secret which will answer not.

*Beatrice.* What sayest? My Lord, your words are bold and  
rash.

*Savella.* I do arrest all present in the name  
Of the Pope's Holiness. You must to Rome.

*Lucretia.* O, not to Rome! Indeed we are not guilty. 110

*Beatrice.* Guilty! Who dares talk of guilt? My Lord,  
I am more innocent of parricide  
Than is a child born fatherless . . . Dear mother,  
Your gentleness and patience are no shield  
For this keen-judging world, this two-edged lie, 115  
Which seems, but is not. What! will human laws,  
Rather will ye who are their ministers,  
Bar all access to retribution first,  
And then, when Heaven doth interpose to do  
What ye neglect, arming familiar things 120  
To the redress of an unwonted crime,  
Make ye the victims who demanded it  
Culprits? 'Tis ye are culprits! That poor wretch  
Who stands so pale, and trembling, and amazed,  
If it be true he murdered Cenci, was 125  
A sword in the right hand of justest God.  
Wherefore should I have wielded it? Unless  
The crimes which mortal tongue dare never name  
God therefore scruples to avenge.

*Savella.* You own

That you desired his death?

*Beatrice.* It would have been 130

A crime no less than his, if for one moment  
That fierce desire had faded in my heart.

'Tis true I did believe, and hope, and pray,  
Ay, I even knew . . . for God is wise and just,  
That some strange sudden death hung over him. 135

'Tis true that this did happen, and most true  
There was no other rest for me on earth,  
No other hope in Heaven . . . now what of this?

*Savella.* Strange thoughts beget strange deeds; and here are  
both:

I judge thee not.

*Beatrice.* And yet, if you arrest me, 140



You are the judge and executioner  
 Of that which is the life of life: the breath  
 Of accusation kills an innocent name,  
 And leaves for lame acquittal the poor life  
 Which is a mask without it. 'Tis most false 145  
 That I am guilty of foul parricide;  
 Although I must rejoice, for justest cause,  
 That other hands have sent my father's soul  
 To ask the mercy he denied to me.  
 Now leave us free; stain not a noble house 150  
 With vague surmises of rejected crime;  
 Add to our sufferings and your own neglect  
 No heavier sum: let them have been enough:  
 Leave us the wreck we have.

*Savella.* I dare not, Lady.  
 I pray that you prepare yourselves for Rome: 155  
 There the Pope's further pleasure will be known.

*Lucretia.* O, not to Rome! O, take us not to Rome!

*Beatrice.* Why not to Rome, dear mother? There as here  
 Our innocence is as an armèd heel  
 To trample accusation. God is there 160  
 As here, and with His shadow ever clothes  
 The innocent, the injured and the weak;  
 And such are we. Cheer up, dear Lady, lean  
 On me; collect your wandering thoughts. My Lord,  
 As soon as you have taken some refreshment, 165  
 And had all such examinations made  
 Upon the spot, as may be necessary  
 To the full understanding of this matter,  
 We shall be ready. Mother; will you come?

*Lucretia.* Ha! they will bind us to the rack, and wrest  
 Self-accusation from our agony! 171  
 Will Giacomo be there? Orsino? Marzio?  
 All present; all confronted; all demanding  
 Each from the other's countenance the thing  
 Which is in every heart! O, misery! 175

[*She faints, and is borne out.*]

*Savella.* She faints: an ill appearance this.

*Beatrice.* My Lord,  
 She knows not yet the uses of the world.  
 She fears that power is as a beast which grasps  
 And loosens not: a snake whose look transmutes 180  
 All things to guilt which is its nutriment.  
 She cannot know how well the supine slaves  
 Of blind authority read the truth of things  
 When written on a brow of guilelessness:  
 She sees not yet triumphant Innocence  
 Stand at the judgement-seat of mortal man, 185

A judge and an accuser of the wrong  
Which drags it there. Prepare yourself, my Lord;  
Our suite will join yours in the court below. [*Exeunt.*]

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

ACT V

SCENE I.—*An Apartment in ORSINO'S Palace. Enter ORSINO and GIACOMO.*

*Giacomo.* Do evil deeds thus quickly come to end?  
O, that the vain remorse which must chastise  
Crimes done, had but as loud a voice to warn  
As its keen sting is mortal to avenge!  
O, that the hour when present had cast off 5  
The mantle of its mystery, and shown  
The ghastly form with which it now returns  
When its scared game is roused, cheering the hounds  
Of conscience to their prey! Alas! Alas!  
It was a wicked thought, a piteous deed, 10  
To kill an old and hoary-headed father.

*Orsino.* It has turned out unluckily, in truth.

*Giacomo.* To violate the sacred doors of sleep;  
To cheat kind Nature of the placid death  
Which she prepares for overwearied age; 15  
To drag from Heaven an unrepentant soul  
Which might have quenched in reconciling prayers  
A life of burning crimes . . .

*Orsino.* You cannot say  
I urged you to the deed.

*Giacomo.* O, had I never 20  
Found in thy smooth and ready countenance  
The mirror of my darkest thoughts; hadst thou  
Never with hints and questions made me look  
Upon the monster of my thought, until  
It grew familiar to desire . . .

*Orsino.* 'Tis thus 25  
Men cast the blame of their unprosperous acts  
Upon the abettors of their own resolve;  
Or anything but their weak, guilty selves.  
And yet, confess the truth, it is the peril  
In which you stand that gives you this pale sickness  
Of penitence; confess 'tis fear disguised 30  
From its own shame that takes the mantle now  
Of thin remorse. What if we yet were safe?

*Giacomo.* How can that be? Already Beatrice,

Lucretia and the murderer are in prison.  
I doubt not officers are, whilst we speak, 35  
Sent to arrest us.

*Orsino.* I have all prepared  
For instant flight. We can escape even now,  
So we take fleet occasion by the hair.

*Giacomo.* Rather expire in tortures, as I may.  
What! will you cast by self-accusing flight 40  
Assured conviction upon Beatrice?  
She, who alone in this unnatural work,  
Stands like God's angel ministered upon  
By fiends; avenging such a nameless wrong  
As turns black parricide to piety; 45  
Whilst we for basest ends . . . I fear, Orsino,  
While I consider all your words and looks,  
Comparing them with your proposal now,  
That you must be a villain. For what end  
Could you engage in such a perilous crime, 50  
Training me on with hints, and signs, and smiles,  
Even to this gulf? Thou art no liar? No,  
Thou art a lie! Traitor and murderer!  
Coward and slave! But, no, defend thyself; [*Drawing.*  
Let the sword speak what the indignant tongue 55  
Disdains to brand thee with.

*Orsino.* Put up your weapon.  
Is it the desperation of your fear  
Makes you thus rash and sudden with a friend,  
Now ruined for your sake? If honest anger  
Have moved you, know, that what I just proposed 60  
Was but to try you. As for me, I think,  
Thankless affection led me to this point,  
From which, if my firm temper could repent,  
I cannot now recede. Even whilst we speak  
The ministers of justice wait below: 65  
They grant me these brief moments. Now if you  
Have any word of melancholy comfort  
To speak to your pale wife, 'twere best to pass  
Out at the postern, and avoid them so.

*Giacomo.* O, generous friend! How canst thou pardon me?  
Would that my life could purchase thine!

*Orsino.* That wish 71  
Now comes a day too late. Haste; fare thee well!  
Hear'st thou not steps along the corridor? [*Exit GIACOMO.*  
I'm sorry for it; but the guards are waiting  
At his own gate, and such was my contrivance 75  
That I might rid me both of him and them.  
I thought to act a solemn comedy

Upon the painted scene of this new world,  
 And to attain my own peculiar ends  
 By some such plot of mingled good and ill 80  
 As others weave; but there arose a Power  
 Which grasped and snapped the threads of my device  
 And turned it to a net of ruin . . . Ha! [A shout is heard.  
 Is that my name I hear proclaimed abroad?  
 But I will pass, wrapped in a vile disguise; 85  
 Rags on my back, and a false innocence  
 Upon my face, through the misdeeming crowd  
 Which judges by what seems. 'Tis easy then  
 For a new name and for a country new,  
 And a new life, fashioned on old desires, 90  
 To change the honours of abandoned Rome.  
 And these must be the masks of that within,  
 Which must remain unaltered . . . Oh, I fear  
 That what is past will never let me rest!  
 Why, when none else is conscious, but myself, 95  
 Of my misdeeds, should my own heart's contempt  
 Trouble me? Have I not the power to fly  
 My own reproaches? Shall I be the slave  
 Of . . . what? A word? which those of this false world  
 Employ against each other, not themselves; 100  
 As men wear daggers not for self-offence.  
 But if I am mistaken, where shall I  
 Find the disguise to hide me from myself,  
 As now I skulk from every other eye? [Exit.

SCENE II.—*A Hall of Justice.* CAMILLO, JUDGES, &c., are discovered seated; MARZIO is led in.

*First Judge.* Accused, do you persist in your denial?  
 I ask you, are you innocent, or guilty?  
 I demand who were the participators  
 In your offence? Speak truth and the whole truth.  
*Marzio.* My God! I did not kill him; I know nothing; 5  
 Olimpio sold the robe to me from which  
 You would infer my guilt.  
*Second Judge.* Away with him!  
*First Judge.* Dare you, with lips yet white from the rack's kiss  
 Speak false? Is it so soft a questioner,  
 That you would bandy lover's talk with it 10  
 Till it wind out your life and soul? Away!  
*Marzio.* Spare me! O, spare! I will confess.  
*First Judge.* Then speak.  
*Marzio.* I strangled him in his sleep.  
*First Judge.* Who urged you to it?

*Marzio.* His own son Giacomo, and the young prelate  
Orsino sent me to Petrella; there 15  
The ladies Beatrice and Lucretia  
Tempted me with a thousand crowns, and I  
And my companion forthwith murdered him.  
Now let me die.

*First Judge.* This sounds as bad as truth. Guards, there,  
Lead forth the prisoner!

*Enter LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, and GIACOMO, guarded.*

Look upon this man; 20  
When did you see him last?

*Beatrice.* We never saw him.

*Marzio.* You know me too well, Lady Beatrice.

*Beatrice.* I know thee! How? where? when?

*Marzio.* You know 'twas I  
Whom you did urge with menaces and bribes  
To kill your father. When the thing was done 25  
You clothed me in a robe of woven gold  
And bade me thrive: how I have thriven, you see.  
You, my Lord Giacomo, Lady Lucretia,  
You know that what I speak is true.

[*BEATRICE advances towards him; he covers  
his face, and shrinks back.*

Oh, dart 30  
The terrible resentment of those eyes  
On the dead earth! Turn them away from me!  
They wound: 'twas torture forced the truth. My Lords,  
Having said this let me be led to death.

*Beatrice.* Poor wretch, I pity thee: yet stay awhile.

*Camillo.* Guards, lead him not away.

*Beatrice.* Cardinal Camillo, 35  
You have a good repute for gentleness  
And wisdom: can it be that you sit here  
To countenance a wicked farce like this?  
When some obscure and trembling slave is dragged  
From sufferings which might shake the sternest heart 40  
And bade to answer, not as he believes,  
But as those may suspect or do desire  
Whose questions thence suggest their own reply:  
And that in peril of such hideous torments  
As merciful God spares even the damned. Speak now 45  
The thing you surely know, which is that you,  
If your fine frame were stretched upon that wheel,  
And you were told: 'Confess that you did poison  
Your little nephew; that fair blue-eyed child  
Who was the lodestar of your life:'—and though 50  
All see, since his most swift and piteous death,  
That day and night, and heaven and earth, and time,

And all the things hoped for or done therein  
 Are changed to you, through your exceeding grief,  
 Yet you would say, 'I confess anything:' 55  
 And beg from your tormentors, like that slave,  
 The refuge of dishonourable death.  
 I pray thee, Cardinal, that thou assert  
 My innocence.

*Camillo (much moved).* What shall we think, my Lords?  
 Shame on these tears! I thought the heart was frozen 60  
 Which is their fountain. I would pledge my soul  
 That she is guiltless.

*Judge.* Yet she must be tortured.

*Camillo.* I would as soon have tortured mine own nephew  
 (If he now lived he would be just her age;  
 His hair, too, was her colour, and his eyes 65  
 Like hers in shape, but blue and not so deep)  
 As that most perfect image of God's love  
 That ever came sorrowing upon the earth.  
 She is as pure as speechless infancy!

*Judge.* Well, be her purity on your head, my Lord, 70  
 If you forbid the rack. His Holiness  
 Enjoined us to pursue this monstrous crime  
 By the severest forms of law; nay even  
 To stretch a point against the criminals.  
 The prisoners stand accused of parricide 75  
 Upon such evidence as justifies  
 Torture.

*Beatrice.* What evidence? This man's?

*Judge.* Even so.

*Beatrice (to MARZIO).* Come near. And who art thou thus  
 chosen forth  
 Out of the multitude of living men  
 To kill the innocent?

*Marzio.* I am Marzio, 80  
 Thy father's vassal.

*Beatrice.* Fix thine eyes on mine;  
 Answer to what I ask. [Turning to the JUDGES.

I prithee mark  
 His countenance: unlike bold calumny  
 Which sometimes dares not speak the thing it looks,  
 He dares not look the thing he speaks, but bends 85  
 His gaze on the blind earth.

(To MARZIO.) What! wilt thou say  
 That I did murder my own father?

*Marzio.* Oh!  
 Spare me! My brain swims round . . . I cannot speak . . .  
 It was that horrid torture forced the truth.  
 Take me away! Let her not look on me! 90

I am a guilty miserable wretch ;

I have said all I know ; now, let me die !

*Beatrice.* My Lords, if by my nature I had been  
So stern, as to have planned the crime alleged,  
Which your suspicions dictate to this slave, 95  
And the rack makes him utter, do you think  
I should have left this two-edged instrument  
Of my misdeed ; this man, this bloody knife  
With my own name engraven on the heft,  
Lying unsheathed amid a world of foes, 100  
For my own death ? That with such horrible need  
For deepest silence, I should have neglected  
So trivial a precaution, as the making  
His tomb the keeper of a secret written  
On a thief's memory ? What is his poor life ? 105  
What are a thousand lives ? A parricide  
Had trampled them like dust ; and, see, he lives !  
(*Turning to MARZIO.*) And thou . . .

*Marzio.* Oh, spare me ! Speak to me no more !  
That stern yet piteous look, those solemn tones,  
Wound worse than torture.

(*To the JUDGES.*) I have told it all ; 110  
For pity's sake lead me away to death.

*Camillo.* Guards, lead him nearer the Lady Beatrice,  
He shrinks from her regard like autumn's leaf  
From the keen breath of the serenest north.

*Beatrice.* O thou who tremblest on the giddy verge 115  
Of life and death, pause ere thou answerest me ;  
So mayst thou answer God with less dismay :  
What evil have we done thee ? I, alas !  
Have lived but on this earth a few sad years,  
And so my lot was ordered, that a father 120  
First turned the moments of awakening life  
To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet hope ; and then  
Stabbed with one blow my everlasting soul ;  
And my untainted fame ; and even that peace  
Which sleeps within the core of the heart's heart ; 125  
But the wound was not mortal ; so my hate  
Became the only worship I could lift  
To our great father, who in pity and love,  
Armed thee, as thou dost say, to cut him off ;  
And thus his wrong becomes my accusation ; 130  
And art thou the accuser ? If thou hopest  
Mercy in heaven, show justice upon earth :  
Worse than a bloody hand is a hard heart.  
If thou hast done murders, made thy life's path  
Over the trampled laws of God and man, 135  
Rush not before thy Judge, and say : ' My maker,

I have done this and more; for there was one  
 Who was most pure and innocent on earth;  
 And because she endured what never any  
 Guilty or innocent endured before: 140  
 Because her wrongs could not be told, not thought;  
 Because thy hand at length did rescue her;  
 I with my words killed her and all her kin.  
 'Think, I adjure you, what it is to slay  
 The reverence living in the minds of men 145  
 Towards our ancient house, and stainless fame!  
 Think what it is to strangle infant pity,  
 Cradled in the belief of guileless looks,  
 Till it become a crime to suffer. Think  
 What 'tis to blot with infamy and blood 150  
 All that which shows like innocence, and is,  
 Hear me, great God! I swear, most innocent,  
 So that the world lose all discrimination  
 Between the sly, fierce, wild regard of guilt,  
 And that which now compels thee to reply 155  
 To what I ask: Am I, or am I not  
 A parricide?

*Marzio.* Thou art not!

*Judge.* What is this?

*Marzio.* I here declare those whom I did accuse  
 Are innocent. 'Tis I alone am guilty.

*Judge.* Drag him away to torments; let them be 160  
 Subtle and long drawn out, to tear the folds  
 Of the heart's inmost cell. Unbind him not  
 Till he confess.

*Marzio.* Torture me as ye will:  
 A keener pang has wrung a higher truth  
 From my last breath. She is most innocent! 165  
 Bloodhounds, not men, glut yourselves well with me;  
 I will not give you that fine piece of nature  
 To rend and ruin.

[*Exit MARZIO, guarded.*]

*Camillo.* What say ye now, my Lords?

*Judge.* Let tortures strain the truth till it be white  
 As snow thrice sifted by the frozen wind. 170

*Camillo.* Yet stained with blood.

*Judge (to BEATRICE).* Know you this paper, Lady?

*Beatrice.* Entrap me not with questions. Who stands here  
 As my accuser? Ha! wilt thou be he,  
 Who art my judge? Accuser, witness, judge,  
 What, all in one? Here is Orsino's name; 175  
 Where is Orsino? Let his eye meet mine.  
 What means this scrawl? Alas! ye know not what,



And therefore on the chance that it may be  
Some evil, will ye kill us?

*Enter an Officer.*

*Officer.* Marzio's dead.

*Judge.* What did he say?

*Officer.* Nothing. As soon as we  
Had bound him on the wheel, he smiled on us, 181  
As one who baffles a deep adversary;  
And holding his breath, died.

*Judge.* There remains nothing  
But to apply the question to those prisoners,  
Who yet remain stubborn.

*Camillo.* I overrule 185  
Further proceedings, and in the behalf  
Of these most innocent and noble persons  
Will use my interest with the Holy Father.

*Judge.* Let the Pope's pleasure then be done. Meanwhile  
Conduct these culprits each to separate cells; 190  
And be the engines ready: for this night  
If the Pope's resolution be as grave,  
Pious, and just as once, I'll wring the truth  
Out of those nerves and sinews, groan by groan. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*The Cell of a Prison.* BEATRICE is discovered  
asleep on a couch. *Enter* BERNARDO.

*Bernardo.* How gently slumber rests upon her face,  
Like the last thoughts of some day sweetly spent  
Closing in night and dreams, and so prolonged.  
After such torments as she bore last night,  
How light and soft her breathing comes. Ay me! 5  
Methinks that I shall never sleep again.  
But I must shake the heavenly dew of rest  
From this sweet folded flower, thus . . . wake! awake!  
What, sister, canst thou sleep?

*Beatrice (awaking).* I was just dreaming  
That we were all in Paradise. Thou knowest 10  
This cell seems like a kind of Paradise  
After our father's presence.

*Bernardo.* Dear, dear sister,  
Would that thy dream were not a dream! O God!  
How shall I tell?

*Beatrice.* What wouldst thou tell, sweet brother?

*Bernardo.* Look not so calm and happy, or even whilst  
I stand considering what I have to say 16  
My heart will break.

*Beatrice.* See now, thou mak'st me weep:

How very friendless thou wouldst be, dear child,  
If I were dead. Say what thou hast to say.

*Bernardo.* They have confessed; they could endure no more  
The tortures . . .

*Beatrice.* Ha! What was there to confess? 21  
They must have told some weak and wicked lie  
To flatter their tormentors. Have they said  
That they were guilty? O white innocence,  
That thou shouldst wear the mask of guilt to hide 25  
Thine awful and serenest countenance  
From those who know thee not!

*Enter JUDGE with LUCRETIA and GIACOMO, guarded.*

Ignoble hearts!

For some brief spasms of pain, which are at least  
As mortal as the limbs through which they pass,  
Are centuries of high splendour laid in dust? 30  
And that eternal honour which should live  
Sunlike, above the reek of mortal fame,  
Changed to a mockery and a byword? What!  
Will you give up these bodies to be dragged  
At horses' heels, so that our hair should sweep 35  
The footsteps of the vain and senseless crowd,  
Who, that they may make our calamity  
Their worship and their spectacle, will leave  
The churches and the theatres as void  
As their own hearts? Shall the light multitude 40  
Fling, at their choice, curses or faded pity,  
Sad funeral flowers to deck a living corpse,  
Upon us as we pass to pass away,  
And leave . . . what memory of our having been?  
Infamy, blood, terror, despair? O thou, 45  
Who wert a mother to the parentless,  
Kill not thy child! Let not her wrongs kill thee!  
Brother, lie down with me upon the rack,  
And let us each be silent as a corpse;  
It soon will be as soft as any grave. 50  
'Tis but the falsehood it can wring from fear  
Makes the rack cruel.

*Giacomo.* They will tear the truth  
Even from thee at last, those cruel pains:  
For pity's sake say thou art guilty now.

*Lucretia.* Oh, speak the truth! Let us all quickly die; 55  
And after death, God is our judge, not they;  
He will have mercy on us.

*Bernardo.* If indeed  
It can be true, say so, dear sister mine;  
And then the Pope will surely pardon you,  
And all be well.

*Judge.* Confess, or I will warp  
Your limbs with such keen tortures . . . 60

*Beatrice.* Tortures! Turn  
The rack henceforth into a spinning-wheel!  
Torture your dog, that he may tell when last  
He lapped the blood his master shed . . . not me!  
My pangs are of the mind, and of the heart, 65  
And of the soul; ay, of the inmost soul,  
Which weeps within tears as of burning gall  
To see, in this ill world where none are true,  
My kindred false to their deserted selves.

And with considering all the wretched life 70  
Which I have lived, and its now wretched end,  
And the small justice shown by Heaven and Earth  
To me or mine; and what a tyrant thou art,  
And what slaves these; and what a world we make,  
The oppressor and the oppressed . . . such pangs compel  
My answer. What is it thou wouldst with me? 76

*Judge.* Art thou not guilty of thy father's death?

*Beatrice.* Or wilt thou rather tax high-judging God  
That He permitted such an act as that  
Which I have suffered, and which He beheld; 80  
Made it unutterable, and took from it  
All refuge, all revenge, all consequence,  
But that which thou hast called my father's death?  
Which is or is not what men call a crime,  
Which either I have done, or have not done; 85  
Say what ye will. I shall deny no more.  
If ye desire it thus, thus let it be,  
And so an end of all. Now do your will;  
No other pains shall force another word.

*Judge.* She is convicted, but has not confessed. 90  
Be it enough. Until their final sentence  
Let none have converse with them. You, young Lord,  
Linger not here!

*Beatrice.* Oh, tear him not away!

*Judge.* Guards, do your duty.

*Bernardo (embracing BEATRICE).* Oh! would ye divide  
Body from soul?

*Officer.* That is the headsman's business. 95

[*Exeunt all but LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, and GIACOMO.*]

*Giacomo.* Have I confessed? Is it all over now?  
No hope! No refuge! O weak, wicked tongue  
Which hast destroyed me, would that thou hadst been  
Cut out and thrown to dogs first! To have killed  
My father first, and then betrayed my sister; 100  
Ay, thee! the one thing innocent and pure  
In this black guilty world, to that which I

So well deserve! My wife! my little ones!  
 Destitute, helpless, and I . . . Father! God!  
 Canst Thou forgive even the unforgiving, 105  
 When their full hearts break thus, thus! . . .

[Covers his face and weeps.

*Lucretia.* O my child!  
 To what a dreadful end are we all come!  
 Why did I yield? Why did I not sustain  
 Those torments? Oh, that I were all dissolved  
 Into these fast and unavailing tears, 110  
 Which flow and feel not!

*Beatrice.* What 'twas weak to do,  
 'Tis weaker to lament, once being done;  
 Take cheer! The God who knew my wrong, and made  
 Our speedy act the angel of His wrath,  
 Seems, and but seems, to have abandoned us. 115  
 Let us not think that we shall die for this.  
 Brother, sit near me; give me your firm hand,  
 You had a manly heart. Bear up! Bear up!  
 O dearest Lady, put your gentle head  
 Upon my lap, and try to sleep awhile: 120  
 Your eyes look pale, hollow and overworn,  
 With heaviness of watching and slow grief.  
 Come, I will sing you some low, sleepy tune,  
 Not cheerful, nor yet sad; some dull old thing,  
 Some outworn and unused monotony, 125  
 Such as our country gossips sing and spin,  
 Till they almost forget they live: lie down!  
 So, that will do. Have I forgot the words?  
 Faith! They are sadder than I thought they were.

### SONG

False friend, wilt thou smile or weep 130  
 When my life is laid asleep?  
 Little cares for a smile or a tear,  
 The clay-cold corpse upon the bier!  
 Farewell! Heigho!  
 What is this whispers low? 135  
 There is a snake in thy smile, my dear;  
 And bitter poison within thy tear.  
 Sweet sleep, were death like to thee,  
 Or if thou couldst mortal be,  
 I would close these eyes of pain; 140  
 When to wake? Never again.  
 O World! Farewell!  
 Listen to the passing bell!  
 It says, thou and I must part, 144  
 With a light and a heavy heart. [The scene closes.

SCENE IV.—*A Hall of the Prison. Enter CAMILLO and BERNARDO.*

*Camillo.* The Pope is stern; not to be moved or bent.  
He looked as calm and keen as is the engine  
Which tortures and which kills, exempt itself  
From aught that it inflicts; a marble form,  
A rite, a law, a custom: not a man. 5  
He frowned, as if to frown had been the trick  
Of his machinery, on the advocates  
Presenting the defences, which he tore  
And threw behind, muttering with hoarse, harsh voice:  
'Which among ye defended their old father 10  
Killed in his sleep?' Then to another: 'Thou  
Dost this in virtue of thy place; 'tis well.'  
He turned to me then, looking deprecation,  
And said these three words, coldly: 'They must die.'

*Bernardo.* And yet you left him not?

*Camillo.* I urged him still;  
Pleading, as I could guess, the devilish wrong 16  
Which prompted your unnatural parent's death.  
And he replied: 'Paolo Santa Croce  
Murdered his mother yester evening,  
And he is fled. Parricide grows so rife 20  
That soon, for some just cause no doubt, the young  
Will strangle us all, dozing in our chairs.  
Authority, and power, and hoary hair  
Are grown crimes capital. You are my nephew,  
You come to ask their pardon; stay a moment; 25  
Here is their sentence; never see me more  
Till, to the letter, it be all fulfilled.'

*Bernardo.* O God, not so! I did believe indeed  
That all you said was but sad preparation  
For happy news. Oh, there are words and looks 30  
To bend the sternest purpose! Once I knew them,  
Now I forget them at my dearest need.  
What think you if I seek him out, and bathe  
His feet and robe with hot and bitter tears?  
Importune him with prayers, vexing his brain 35  
With my perpetual cries, until in rage  
He strike me with his pastoral cross, and trample  
Upon my prostrate head, so that my blood  
May stain the senseless dust on which he treads,  
And remorse waken mercy? I will do it! 40  
Oh, wait till I return! [*Rushes out.*]

*Camillo.* Alas! poor boy!  
A wreck-devoted seaman thus might pray  
To the deaf sea.

*Enter* LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, and GIACOMO, guarded.

*Beatrice.* I hardly dare to fear  
That thou bring'st other news than a just pardon.

*Camillo.* May God in heaven be less inexorable 45  
To the Pope's prayers, than he has been to mine.  
Here is the sentence and the warrant.

*Beatrice (wildly).* O  
My God! Can it be possible I have  
To die so suddenly? So young to go  
Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy ground! 50  
To be nailed down into a narrow place;  
To see no more sweet sunshine; hear no more  
Blithe voice of living thing; muse not again  
Upon familiar thoughts, sad, yet thus lost—  
How fearful! to be nothing! Or to be . . . 55  
What? Oh, where am I? Let me not go mad!  
Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If there should be  
No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void world;  
The wide, gray, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!  
If all things then should be . . . my father's spirit, 60  
His eye, his voice, his touch surrounding me;  
The atmosphere and breath of my dead life!  
If sometimes, as a shape more like himself,  
Even the form which tortured me on earth,  
Masked in gray hairs and wrinkles, he should come 65  
And wind me in his hellish arms, and fix  
His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down, down!  
For was he not alone omnipotent  
On Earth, and ever present? Even though dead,  
Does not his spirit live in all that breathe, 70  
And work for me and mine still the same ruin,  
Scorn, pain, despair? Who ever yet returned  
To teach the laws of Death's untrodden realm?  
Unjust perhaps as those which drive us now,  
Oh, whither, whither?

*Lucretia.* Trust in God's sweet love, 75  
The tender promises of Christ: ere night,  
Think, we shall be in Paradise.

*Beatrice.* 'Tis past!  
Whatever comes my heart shall sink no more.  
And yet, I know not why, your words strike chill:  
How tedious, false and cold seem all things. I 80  
Have met with much injustice in this world;  
No difference has been made by God or man,  
Or any power moulding my wretched lot,  
'Twixt good or evil, as regarded me.  
I am cut off from the only world I know, 85  
From light, and life, and love, in youth's sweet prime.

You do well telling me to trust in God,  
I hope I do trust in Him. In whom else  
Can any trust? And yet my heart is cold.

[*During the latter speeches GIACOMO has retired conversing  
with CAMILLO, who now goes out; GIACOMO advances.*

*Giacomo.* Know you not, Mother . . . Sister, know you not?  
Bernardo even now is gone to implore 91  
The Pope to grant our pardon.

*Lucretia.* Child, perhaps  
It will be granted. We may all then live  
To make these woes a tale for distant years:  
Oh, what a thought! It gushes to my heart 95  
Like the warm blood.

*Beatrice.* Yet both will soon be cold.  
Oh, trample out that thought! Worse than despair,  
Worse than the bitterness of death, is hope:  
It is the only ill which can find place  
Upon the giddy, sharp and narrow hour 100  
Tottering beneath us. Plead with the swift frost  
That it should spare the eldest flower of spring:  
Plead with awakening earthquake, o'er whose couch  
Even now a city stands, strong, fair, and free;  
Now stench and blackness yawn, like death. Oh, plead 105  
With famine, or wind-walking Pestilence,  
Blind lightning, or the deaf sea, not with man!  
Cruel, cold, formal man; righteous in words,  
In deeds a Cain. No, Mother, we must die:  
Since such is the reward of innocent lives; 110  
Such the alleviation of worst wrongs.  
And whilst our murderers live, and hard, cold men,  
Smiling and slow, walk through a world of tears  
To death as to life's sleep; 'twere just the grave  
Were some strange joy for us. Come, obscure Death, 115  
And wind me in thine all-embracing arms!  
Like a fond mother hide me in thy bosom,  
And rock me to the sleep from which none wake.  
Live ye, who live, subject to one another  
As we were once, who now . . .

*BERNARDO rushes in.*

*Bernardo.* Oh, horrible! 120  
That tears, that looks, that hope poured forth in prayer,  
Even till the heart is vacant and despairs,  
Should all be vain! The ministers of death  
Are waiting round the doors. I thought I saw  
Blood on the face of one . . . What if 'twere fancy? 125  
Soon the heart's blood of all I love on earth  
Will sprinkle him, and he will wipe it off

As if 'twere only rain. O life! O world!  
 Cover me! let me be no more! To see  
 That perfect mirror of pure innocence 130  
 Wherein I gazed, and grew happy and good,  
 Shivered to dust! To see thee, Beatrice,  
 Who made all lovely thou didst look upon . . .  
 Thee, light of life . . . dead, dark! while I say, sister,  
 To hear I have no sister; and thou, Mother, 135  
 Whose love was as a bond to all our loves . . .  
 Dead! The sweet bond broken!

*Enter CAMILLO and Guards.*

They come! Let me  
 Kiss those warm lips before their crimson leaves  
 Are blighted . . . white . . . cold. Say farewell, before  
 Death chokes that gentle voice! Oh, let me hear 140  
 You speak!

*Beatrice.* Farewell, my tender brother. Think  
 Of our sad fate with gentleness, as now:  
 And let mild, pitying thoughts lighten for thee  
 Thy sorrow's load. Err not in harsh despair,  
 But tears and patience. One thing more, my child: 145  
 For thine own sake be constant to the love  
 Thou bearest us; and to the faith that I,  
 Though wrapped in a strange cloud of crime and shame,  
 Lived ever holy and unstained. And though  
 Ill tongues shall wound me, and our common name 150  
 Be as a mark stamped on thine innocent brow  
 For men to point at as they pass, do thou  
 Forbear, and never think a thought unkind  
 Of those, who perhaps love thee in their graves.  
 So mayest thou die as I do; fear and pain 155  
 Being subdued. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!

*Bernardo.* I cannot say, farewell!

*Camillo.* Oh, Lady Beatrice!

*Beatrice.* Give yourself no unnecessary pain,  
 My dear Lord Cardinal. Here, Mother, tie  
 My girdle for me, and bind up this hair 160  
 In any simple knot; ay, that does well.  
 And yours I see is coming down. How often  
 Have we done this for one another; now  
 We shall not do it any more. My Lord,  
 We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well. 165

THE END.



## NOTE ON THE CENCI, BY MRS. SHELLEY

THE sort of mistake that Shelley made as to the extent of his own genius and powers, which led him deviously at first, but lastly into the direct track that enabled him fully to develop them, is a curious instance of his modesty of feeling, and of the methods which the human mind uses at once to deceive itself, and yet, in its very delusion, to make its way out of error into the path which Nature has marked out as its right one. He often incited me to attempt the writing a tragedy: he conceived that I possessed some dramatic talent, and he was always most earnest and energetic in his exhortations that I should cultivate any talent I possessed, to the utmost. I entertained a truer estimate of my powers; and above all (though at that time not exactly aware of the fact) I was far too young to have any chance of succeeding, even moderately, in a species of composition that requires a greater scope of experience in, and sympathy with, human passion than could then have fallen to my lot,—or than any perhaps, except Shelley, ever possessed, even at the age of twenty-six, at which he wrote *The Cenci*.

On the other hand, Shelley most erroneously conceived himself to be destitute of this talent. He believed that one of the first requisites was the capacity of forming and following-up a story or plot. He fancied himself to be defective in this portion of imagination: it was that which gave him least pleasure in the writings of others, though he laid great store by it as the proper

framework to support the sublimest efforts of poetry. He asserted that he was too metaphysical and abstract, too fond of the theoretical and the ideal, to succeed as a tragedian. It perhaps is not strange that I shared this opinion with himself; for he had hitherto shown no inclination for, nor given any specimen of his powers in framing and supporting the interest of a story, either in prose or verse. Once or twice, when he attempted such, he had speedily thrown it aside, as being even disagreeable to him as an occupation.

The subject he had suggested for a tragedy was Charles I: and he had written to me: 'Remember, remember Charles I. I have been already imagining how you would conduct some scenes. The second volume of *St. Leon* begins with this proud and true sentiment: "There is nothing which the human mind can conceive which it may not execute." Shakespeare was only a human being.' These words were written in 1818, while we were in Lombardy, when he little thought how soon a work of his own would prove a proud comment on the passage he quoted. When in Rome, in 1819, a friend put into our hands the old manuscript account of the story of the Cenci. We visited the Colonna and Doria palaces, where the portraits of Beatrice were to be found; and her beauty cast the reflection of its own grace over her appalling story. Shelley's imagination became strongly excited, and he urged the subject to me as one fitted for a tragedy. More than

ever I felt my incompetence ; but I entreated him to write it instead ; and he began, and proceeded swiftly, urged on by intense sympathy with the sufferings of the human beings whose passions, so long cold in the tomb, he revived, and gifted with poetic language. This tragedy is the only one of his works that he communicated to me during its progress. We talked over the arrangement of the scenes together. I speedily saw the great mistake we had made, and triumphed in the discovery of the new talent brought to light from that mine of wealth (never, alas, through his untimely death, worked to its depths)—his richly gifted mind.

We suffered a severe affliction in Rome by the loss of our eldest child, who was of such beauty and promise as to cause him deservedly to be the idol of our hearts. We left the capital of the world, anxious for a time to escape a spot associated too intimately with his presence and loss<sup>1</sup>. Some friends of ours were residing in the neighbourhood of Leghorn, and we took a small house, Villa Valsovano, about half-way between the town and Monte Nero,

<sup>1</sup> Such feelings haunted him when, in *The Cenci*, he makes Beatrice speak to Cardinal Camillo of  
 'that fair blue-eyed child  
 Who was the lodestar of your life:—  
 and say—

'All see, since his most swift and piteous death,  
 That day and night, and heaven  
 and earth, and time,  
 And all the things hoped for or  
 done therein  
 Are changed to you, through your  
 exceeding grief.'

where we remained during the summer. Our villa was situated in the midst of a *podere* ; the peasants sang as they worked beneath our windows, during the heats of a very hot season, and in the evening the water-wheel creaked as the process of irrigation went on, and the fireflies flashed from among the myrtle hedges : Nature was bright, sunshiny, and cheerful, or diversified by storms of a majestic terror, such as we had never before witnessed.

At the top of the house there was a sort of terrace. There is often such in Italy, generally roofed : this one was very small, yet not only roofed but glazed. This Shelley made his study ; it looked out on a wide prospect of fertile country, and commanded a view of the near sea. The storms that sometimes varied our day showed themselves most picturesquely as they were driven across the ocean ; sometimes the dark lurid clouds dipped towards the waves, and became water-spouts that churned up the waters beneath, as they were chased onward and scattered by the tempest. At other times the dazzling sunlight and heat made it almost intolerable to every other ; but Shelley basked in both, and his health and spirits revived under their influence. In this airy cell he wrote the principal part of *The Cenci*. He was making a study of Calderon at the time, reading his best tragedies with an accomplished lady living near us, to whom his letter from Leghorn was addressed during the following year. He admired Calderon, both for his poetry and his dramatic genius ; but it shows

his judgement and originality that, though greatly struck by his first acquaintance with the Spanish poet, none of his peculiarities crept into the composition of *The Cenci*; and there is no trace of his new studies, except in that passage to which he himself alludes as suggested by one in *El Purgatorio de San Patricio*.

Shelley wished *The Cenci* to be acted. He was not a playgoer, being of such fastidious taste that he was easily disgusted by the bad filling-up of the inferior parts. While preparing for our departure from England, however, he saw Miss O'Neil several times. She was then in the zenith of her glory; and Shelley was deeply moved by her impersonation of several parts, and by the graceful sweetness, the intense pathos, and sublime vehemence of passion she displayed. She was often in his thoughts as he wrote: and, when he had finished, he became anxious that his tragedy should be acted, and receive the advantage of having this accomplished actress to fill the part of the heroine. With this view he wrote the following letter to a friend in London:

'The object of the present letter is to ask a favour of you. I have written a tragedy on a story well known in Italy, and, in my conception, eminently dramatic. I have taken some pains to make my play fit for representation, and those who have already seen it judge favourably. It is written without any of the peculiar feelings and opinions which characterize my other compositions; I have attended simply to the impartial development of such

characters as it is probable the persons represented really were, together with the greatest degree of popular effect to be produced by such a development. I send you a translation of the Italian MS. on which my play is founded; the chief circumstance of which I have touched very delicately; for my principal doubt as to whether it would succeed as an acting play hangs entirely on the question as to whether any such a thing as incest in this shape, however treated, would be admitted on the stage. I think, however, it will form no objection; considering, first, that the facts are matter of history, and, secondly, the peculiar delicacy with which I have treated it<sup>1</sup>.

'I am exceedingly interested in the question of whether this attempt of mine will succeed or not. I am strongly inclined to the affirmative at present; founding my hopes on this—that, as a composition, it is certainly not inferior to any of the modern plays that have been acted, with the exception of *Remorse*; that the interest of the plot is incredibly greater and more real; and that there is nothing beyond what the multitude are contented to believe that they can understand, either

<sup>1</sup> In speaking of his mode of treating this main incident, Shelley said that it might be remarked that, in the course of the play, he had never mentioned expressly Cenci's worst crime. Every one knew what it must be, but it was never imaged in words—the nearest allusion to it being that portion of Cenci's curse beginning—

'That, if she have a child,' etc.

in imagery, opinion, or sentiment. I wish to preserve a complete incognito, and can trust to you that, whatever else you do, you will at least favour me on this point. Indeed, this is essential, deeply essential, to its success. After it had been acted, and successfully (could I hope for such a thing), I would own it if I pleased, and use the celebrity it might acquire to my own purposes.

‘What I want you to do is to procure for me its presentation at Covent Garden. The principal character, Beatrice, is precisely fitted for Miss O’Neil, and it might even seem to have been written for her (God forbid that I should see her play it—it would tear my nerves to pieces); and in all respects it is fitted only for Covent Garden. The chief male character I confess I should be very unwilling that any one but Kean should play. That is impossible, and I must be contented with an inferior actor.’

The play was accordingly sent to Mr. Harris. He pronounced the subject to be so objectionable that he could not even submit the part to Miss O’Neil for perusal, but expressed his desire that the author would write a tragedy on some other subject, which he would gladly accept. Shelley printed a small edition at Leghorn, to ensure its correctness; as he was much annoyed by the many mistakes that crept into his text when distance prevented him from correcting the press.

Universal approbation soon stamped *The Cenci* as the best tragedy of modern times. Writing concerning it, Shelley said:

‘I have been cautious to avoid the introducing faults of youthful composition; diffuseness, a profusion of inapplicable imagery, vagueness, generality, and, as Hamlet says, *words, words.*’ There is nothing that is not purely dramatic throughout; and the character of Beatrice, proceeding, from vehement struggle, to horror, to deadly resolution, and lastly to the elevated dignity of calm suffering, joined to passionate tenderness and pathos, is touched with hues so vivid and so beautiful that the poet seems to have read intimately the secrets of the noble heart imaged in the lovely countenance of the unfortunate girl. The Fifth Act is a masterpiece. It is the finest thing he ever wrote, and may claim proud comparison not only with any contemporary, but preceding, poet. The varying feelings of Beatrice are expressed with passionate, heart-reaching eloquence. Every character has a voice that echoes truth in its tones. It is curious, to one acquainted with the written story, to mark the success with which the poet has inwoven the real incidents of the tragedy into his scenes, and yet, through the power of poetry, has obliterated all that would otherwise have shown too harsh or too hideous in the picture. His success was a double triumph; and often after he was earnestly entreated to write again in a style that commanded popular favour, while it was not less instinct with truth and genius. But the bent of his mind went the other way; and, even when employed on subjects whose interest depended on character and incident, he would

start off in another direction, and leave the delineations of human passion, which he could depict in so able a manner, for fantastic creations of his fancy, or the ex-

pression of those opinions and sentiments, with regard to human nature and its destiny, a desire to diffuse which was the master passion of his soul.

## THE MASK OF ANARCHY

WRITTEN ON THE OCCASION OF THE MASSACRE  
AT MANCHESTER

[Composed at the Villa Valsovano near Leghorn—or possibly later, during Shelley's sojourn at Florence—in the autumn of 1819, shortly after the Peterloo riot at Manchester, August 16; edited with Preface by Leigh Hunt, and published under the poet's name by Edward Moxon, 1832 (Bradbury & Evans, printers). Two MSS. are extant: a transcript by Mrs. Shelley with Shelley's autograph corrections, known as the 'Hunt MS.'; and an earlier draft, not quite complete, in the poet's handwriting, presented by Mrs. Shelley to (Sir) John Bowring in 1826, and now in the possession of Mr. Thomas J. Wise (the 'Wise MS.'). Mrs. Shelley's copy was sent to Leigh Hunt in 1819 with a view to its publication in *The Examiner*; hence the name 'Hunt MS.' A facsimile of the Wise MS. was published by the Shelley Society in 1887. Sources of the text are (1) the Hunt MS.; (2) the Wise MS.; (3) the *editio princeps*, ed. Leigh Hunt, 1832; (4) Mrs. Shelley's two edd. (*Poetical Works*) of 1839. Of the two MSS. Mrs. Shelley's transcript is the later and more authoritative.]

### I

As I lay asleep in Italy  
There came a voice from over the Sea,  
And with great power it forth led me  
To walk in the visions of Poesy.

### II

I met Murder on the way—  
He had a mask like Castlereagh—  
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;  
Seven blood-hounds followed him:

### III

All were fat; and well they might  
Be in admirable plight,  
For one by one, and two by two,  
He tossed them human hearts to chew  
Which from his wide cloak he drew.

5

10

## IV

Next came Fraud, and he had on,  
 Like Eldon, an ermined gown ; 15  
 His big tears, for he wept well,  
 Turned to mill-stones as they fell.

## V

And the little children, who  
 Round his feet played to and fro,  
 Thinking every tear a gem, 20  
 Had their brains knocked out by them.

## VI

Clothed with the Bible, as with light,  
 And the shadows of the night,  
 Like Sidmouth, next, Hypocrisy  
 On a crocodile rode by. 25

## VII

And many more Destructions played  
 In this ghastly masquerade,  
 All disguised, even to the eyes,  
 Like Bishops, lawyers, peers, or spies.

## VIII

Last came Anarchy : he rode 30  
 On a white horse, splashed with blood ;  
 He was pale even to the lips,  
 Like Death in the Apocalypse.

## IX

And he wore a kingly crown ;  
 And in his grasp a sceptre shone ; 35  
 On his brow this mark I saw—  
 'I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW !'

## X

With a pace stately and fast,  
 Over English land he passed,  
 Trampling to a mire of blood 40  
 The adoring multitude.

## XI

And a mighty troop around,  
 With their trampling shook the ground,  
 Waving each a bloody sword,  
 For the service of their Lord. 45

15 Like Eldon *Hunt MS.* ; Like Lord Eldon *Wise MS.* ermined *Hunt MS.*, *Wise MS.*, ed. 1832 ; ermine *edd.* 1839. 23 shadows] shadow *edd.* 1839 only. 29 or] and *Wise MS.* only. 35 And in his grasp *Hunt MS.*, ed. 1832 ; In his hand *Wise MS.*, *Hunt MS.* cancelled, ed. 1839. 36 On his] And on his *ed.* 1832 only.

## XII

And with glorious triumph, they  
Rode through England proud and gay,  
Drunk as with intoxication  
Of the wine of desolation.

## XIII

O'er fields and towns, from sea to sea, 50  
Passed the Pageant swift and free,  
Tearing up, and trampling down;  
Till they came to London town.

## XIV

And each dweller, panic-stricken,  
Felt his heart with terror sicken 55  
Hearing the tempestuous cry  
Of the triumph of Anarchy.

## XV

For with pomp to meet him came,  
Clothed in arms like blood and flame,  
The hired murderers, who did sing 60  
'Thou art God, and Law, and King.

## XVI

'We have waited, weak and lone  
For thy coming, Mighty One!  
Our purses are empty, our swords are cold,  
Give us glory, and blood, and gold.' 65

## XVII

Lawyers and priests, a motley crowd,  
To the earth their pale brows bowed;  
Like a bad prayer not over loud,  
Whispering—'Thou art Law and God.'—

## XVIII

Then all cried with one accord, 70  
'Thou art King, and God, and Lord;  
Anarchy, to thee we bow,  
Be thy name made holy now!

## XIX

And Anarchy, the Skeleton,  
Bowed and grinned to every one, 75  
As well as if his education  
Had cost ten millions to the nation.

51 the *Hunt MS.*, ed. 1832; that *Wise MS.* 56 tempestuous] tremen-  
dous *edd.* 1839 only. 58 For with pomp] For from . . . *Hunt MS.*, *Wise*  
*MS.* 71 God] Law *edd.* 1839 only.

## XX

For he knew the Palaces  
 Of our Kings were rightly his;  
 His the sceptre, crown, and globe,  
 And the gold-inwoven robe. 80

## XXI

So he sent his slaves before  
 To seize upon the Bank and Tower,  
 And was proceeding with intent  
 To meet his pensioned Parliament 85

## XXII

When one fled past, a maniac maid,  
 And her name was Hope, she said:  
 But she looked more like Despair,  
 And she cried out in the air:

## XXIII

'My father Time is weak and gray  
 With waiting for a better day;  
 See how idiot-like he stands,  
 Fumbling with his palsied hands! 90

## XXIV

'He has had child after child,  
 And the dust of death is piled  
 Over every one but me—  
 Misery, oh, Misery!' 95

## XXV

Then she lay down in the street,  
 Right before the horses' feet,  
 Expecting, with a patient eye,  
 Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy. 100

## XXVI

When between her and her foes  
 A mist, a light, an image rose,  
 Small at first, and weak, and frail  
 Like the vapour of a vale: 105

## XXVII

Till as clouds grow on the blast,  
 Like tower-crowned giants striding fast,  
 And glare with lightnings as they fly,  
 And speak in thunder to the sky,

79 rightly *Wise MS.*; nightly *Hunt MS.*, *edd.* 1832, 1839. 93 Fumbling]  
 Trembling *edd.* 1839 only. 105 a vale *Hunt MS.*, *Wise MS.*; the vale *edd.*  
 1832, 1839.



## XXVIII

It grew—a Shape arrayed in mail 110  
Brighter than the viper's scale,  
And upborne on wings whose grain  
Was as the light of sunny rain.

## XXIX

On its helm, seen far away,  
A planet, like the Morning's, lay; 115  
And those plumes its light rained through  
Like a shower of crimson dew.

## XXX

With step as soft as wind it passed  
O'er the heads of men—so fast  
That they knew the presence there, 120  
And looked,—but all was empty air.

## XXXI

As flowers beneath May's footstep waken,  
As stars from Night's loose hair are shaken,  
As waves arise when loud winds call,  
Thoughts sprung where'er that step did fall. 125

## XXXII

And the prostrate multitude  
Looked—and ankle-deep in blood,  
Hope, that maiden most serene,  
Was walking with a quiet mien:

## XXXIII

And Anarchy, the ghastly birth, 130  
Lay dead earth upon the earth;  
The Horse of Death tameless as wind  
Fled, and with his hoofs did grind  
To dust the murderers thronged behind.

## XXXIV

A rushing light of clouds and splendour, 135  
A sense awakening and yet tender  
Was heard and felt—and at its close  
These words of joy and fear arose

## XXXV

As if their own indignant Earth  
Which gave the sons of England birth 140  
Had felt their blood upon her brow,  
And shuddering with a mother's throes

113 as] like *edd.* 1839 only. 116 its *Wise MS.*, *Hunt MS.*; it *edd.* 1832,  
1839. 121 but *Wise MS.*; and *Hunt MS.*, *edd.* 1832, 1839. 122 May's  
footstep *Wise MS.*, *Hunt MS.*; the footstep *ed.* 1832; May's footsteps *edd.*  
1839. 132-4 omit *Wise MS.*

## XXXVI

Had turnèd every drop of blood  
 By which her face had been bedewed  
 To an accent unwithstood,—  
 As if her heart had cried aloud: 145

## XXXVII

‘Men of England, heirs of Glory,  
 Heroes of unwritten story,  
 Nurslings of one mighty Mother,  
 Hopes of her, and one another; 150

## XXXVIII

‘Rise like Lions after slumber  
 In unvanquishable number,  
 Shake your chains to earth like dew  
 Which in sleep had fallen on you—  
 Ye are many—they are few. 155

## XXXIX

‘What is Freedom?—ye can tell  
 That which slavery is, too well—  
 For its very name has grown  
 To an echo of your own.

## XL

‘’Tis to work and have such pay 160  
 As just keeps life from day to day  
 In your limbs, as in a cell  
 For the tyrants’ use to dwell,

## XLI

‘So that ye for them are made 165  
 Loom, and plough, and sword, and spade,  
 With or without your own will bent  
 To their defence and nourishment.

## XLII

‘’Tis to see your children weak 170  
 With their mothers pine and peak,  
 When the winter winds are bleak,—  
 They are dying whilst I speak.

## XLIII

‘’Tis to hunger for such diet 175  
 As the rich man in his riot  
 Casts to the fat dogs that lie  
 Surfeiting beneath his eye;

146 had cried *Hunt MS.*, edd. 1832, 1839; cried out *Wise MS.* 155 omit  
 ed. 1832 only.

## XLIV

'Tis to let the Ghost of Gold  
Take from Toil a thousandfold  
More than e'er its substance could  
In the tyrannies of old.

## XLV

'Paper coin—that forgery  
Of the title-deeds, which ye  
Hold to something of the worth  
Of the inheritance of Earth.

180

## XLVI

'Tis to be a slave in soul  
And to hold no strong control  
Over your own wills, but be  
All that others make of ye.

185

## XLVII

'And at length when ye complain  
With a murmur weak and vain  
'Tis to see the Tyrant's crew  
Ride over your wives and you—  
Blood is on the grass like dew.

190

## XLVIII

'Then it is to feel revenge  
Fiercely thirsting to exchange  
Blood for blood—and wrong for wrong—  
Do not thus when ye are strong.

195

## XLIX

'Birds find rest, in narrow nest  
When weary of their wingèd quest;  
Beasts find fare, in woody lair  
When storm and snow are in the air<sup>1</sup>.

200

## L

'Asses, swine, have litter spread  
And with fitting food are fed;  
All things have a home but one—  
Thou, Oh, Englishman, hast none!

182 of] from *Wise MS. only.* 186 wills *Hunt MS., edd. 1832, 1839;*  
will *Wise MS.* 198 their *Wise MS., Hunt MS., edd. 1839; the ed. 1832.*

<sup>1</sup> The following stanza is found in the *Wise MS.* and in *edd. 1839,* but is wanting in the *Hunt MS.* and in *ed. 1832* :—

'Horses, oxen, have a home,  
When from daily toil they come;  
Household dogs, when the wind roars,  
Find a home within warm doors.'

## LI

'This is Slavery—savage men,  
Or wild beasts within a den  
Would endure not as ye do—  
But such ills they never knew. 205

## LII

'What art thou Freedom? O! could slaves  
Answer from their living graves  
This demand—tyrants would flee  
Like a dream's dim imagery: 210

## LIII

'Thou art not, as impostors say,  
A shadow soon to pass away,  
A superstition, and a name  
Echoing from the cave of Fame. 215

## LIV

'For the labourer thou art bread,  
And a comely table spread  
From his daily labour come  
In a neat and happy home. 220

## LV

'Thou art clothes, and fire, and food  
For the trampled multitude—  
No—in countries that are free  
Such starvation cannot be  
As in England now we see. 225

## LVI

'To the rich thou art a check,  
When his foot is on the neck  
Of his victim, thou dost make  
That he treads upon a snake.

## LVII

'Thou art Justice—ne'er for gold  
May thy righteous laws be sold  
As laws are in England—thou  
Shield'st alike the high and low. 230

## LVIII

'Thou art Wisdom—Freemen never  
Dream that God will damn for ever  
All who think those things untrue  
Of which Priests make such ado. 235

216 cave *Wise MS.*, *Hunt MS.*, *edd.* 1839; caves *ed.* 1832, *Hunt MS.* cancelled.  
220 In *Wise MS.*, *edd.* 1832, 1839; To *Hunt MS.* 233 the *Hunt MS.*, *edd.*  
1832, 1839; both *Wise MS.* 234 Freemen *Wise MS.*, *Hunt MS.*, *edd.* 1839;  
*Freedom ed.* 1832. 235 Dream *Wise MS.*, *Hunt MS.*, *edd.* 1839; Dreams  
*ed.* 1832. damn] doom *edd.* 1839 only.

## LIX

'Thou art Peace—never by thee  
 Would blood and treasure wasted be  
 As tyrants wasted them, when all  
 Leagued to quench thy flame in Gaul. 240

## LX

'What if English toil and blood  
 Was poured forth, even as a flood?  
 It availed, Oh, Liberty,  
 To dim, but not extinguish thee. 245

## LXI

'Thou art Love—the rich have kissed  
 Thy feet, and like him following Christ,  
 Give their substance to the free  
 And through the rough world follow thee,

## LXII

'Or turn their wealth to arms, and make  
 War for thy beloved sake 250  
 On wealth, and war, and fraud—whence they  
 Drew the power which is their prey.

## LXIII

'Science, Poetry, and Thought  
 Are thy lamps; they make the lot 255  
 Of the dwellers in a cot  
 So serene, they curse it not.

## LXIV

'Spirit, Patience, Gentleness,  
 All that can adorn and bless  
 Art thou—let deeds, not words, express 260  
 Thine exceeding loveliness.

## LXV

'Let a great Assembly be  
 Of the fearless and the free  
 On some spot of English ground  
 Where the plains stretch wide around. 265

## LXVI

'Let the blue sky overhead,  
 The green earth on which ye tread,  
 All that must eternal be  
 Witness the solemnity.

248 Give *Hunt MS.*, ed. 1832; Given *Wise MS.*, *Hunt MS.* cancelled, edd. 1839. 249 follow] followed edd. 1839 only. 250 Or *Wise MS.*, *Hunt MS.*; Oh edd. 1832, 1839. 254 Science, Poetry, *Wise MS.*, *Hunt MS.*; Science, and Poetry edd. 1832, 1839. 257 So *Hunt MS.*, ed. 1832; Such they curse their Maker not *Wise MS.*, edd. 1839. 263 and] of ed. 1832 only.

## LXVII

‘From the corners uttermost 270  
Of the bounds of English coast;  
From every hut, village, and town  
Where those who live and suffer moan  
For others’ misery or their own<sup>1</sup>,

## LXVIII

‘From the workhouse and the prison 275  
Where pale as corpses newly risen,  
Women, children, young and old  
Groan for pain, and weep for cold—

## LXIX

‘From the haunts of daily life  
Where is waged the daily strife 280  
With common wants and common cares  
Which sows the human heart with tares—

## LXX

‘Lastly from the palaces  
Where the murmur of distress  
Echoes, like the distant sound 285  
Of a wind alive around

## LXXI

‘Those prison halls of wealth and fashion,  
Where some few feel such compassion  
For those who groan, and toil, and wail  
As must make their brethren pale— 290

## LXXII

‘Ye who suffer woes untold,  
Or to feel, or to behold  
Your lost country bought and sold  
With a price of blood and gold—

## LXXIII

‘Let a vast assembly be, 295  
And with great solemnity  
Declare with measured words that ye  
Are, as God has made ye, free—

274 or] and *ed. 1832 only.* 282 sows *Wise MS., Hunt MS.;* sow *edd. 1832, 1839.* 297 measured *Wise MS., Hunt MS., ed. 1832;* ne'er-said *edd. 1839.*

<sup>1</sup> The following stanza is found (cancelled) at this place in the *Wise MS.:*—

‘From the cities where from caves,  
Like the dead from putrid graves,  
Troops of starvelings gliding come,  
Living Tenants of a tomb.’

## LXXIV

'Be your strong and simple words  
Keen to wound as sharpened swords, 300  
And wide as targes let them be,  
With their shade to cover ye.

## LXXV

'Let the tyrants pour around  
With a quick and startling sound,  
Like the loosening of a sea, 305  
Troops of armed emblazonry.

## LXXVI

'Let the charged artillery drive  
Till the dead air seems alive  
With the clash of clanging wheels,  
And the tramp of horses' heels. 310

## LXXVII

'Let the fixed bayonet  
Gleam with sharp desire to wet  
Its bright point in English blood  
Looking keen as one for food.

## LXXVIII

'Let the horsemen's scimitars 315  
Wheel and flash, like sphereless stars  
Thirsting to eclipse their burning  
In a sea of death and mourning.

## LXXIX

'Stand ye calm and resolute,  
Like a forest close and mute, 320  
With folded arms and looks which are  
Weapons of unvanquished war,

## LXXX

'And let Panic, who outspeeds  
The career of armed steeds  
Pass, a disregarded shade 325  
Through your phalanx undismayed.

## LXXXI

'Let the laws of your own land,  
Good or ill, between ye stand  
Hand to hand, and foot to foot,  
Arbiters of the dispute, 330

322 of unvanquished *Wise MS.*; of an unvanquished *Hunt MS.*, *edd.*  
1832, 1839.

## LXXXII

'The old laws of England—they  
Whose reverend heads with age are gray,  
Children of a wiser day;  
And whose solemn voice must be  
Thine own echo—Liberty!

335

## LXXXIII

'On those who first should violate  
Such sacred heralds in their state  
Rest the blood that must ensue,  
And it will not rest on you.

## LXXXIV

'And if then the tyrants dare  
Let them ride among you there,  
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew,—  
What they like, that let them do.

340

## LXXXV

'With folded arms and steady eyes,  
And little fear, and less surprise,  
Look upon them as they slay  
Till their rage has died away.

345

## LXXXVI

'Then they will return with shame  
To the place from which they came,  
And the blood thus shed will speak  
In hot blushes on their cheek.

350

## LXXXVII

'Every woman in the land  
Will point at them as they stand—  
They will hardly dare to greet  
Their acquaintance in the street.

355

## LXXXVIII

'And the bold, true warriors  
Who have hugged Danger in wars  
Will turn to those who would be free,  
Ashamed of such base company.

## LXXXIX

'And that slaughter to the Nation  
Shall steam up like inspiration,  
Eloquent, oracular;  
A volcano heard afar.

360

346 slay *Wise MS., Hunt MS., edd. 1839; stay ed. 1832.*  
*Wise MS., Hunt MS., ed. 1832; in the wars edd. 1839.*

357 in wars



## XC

‘And these words shall then become  
 Like Oppression’s thundered doom 365  
 Ringing through each heart and brain,  
 Heard again—again—again—

## XCI

‘Rise like Lions after slumber  
 In unvanquishable number—  
 Shake your chains to earth like dew 370  
 Which in sleep had fallen on you—  
 Ye are many—they are few.’

NOTE ON THE MASK OF ANARCHY, BY  
 MRS. SHELLEY

THOUGH Shelley’s first eager desire to excite his countrymen to resist openly the oppressions existent during ‘the good old times’ had faded with early youth, still his warmest sympathies were for the people. He was a republican, and loved a democracy. He looked on all human beings as inheriting an equal right to possess the dearest privileges of our nature; the necessaries of life when fairly earned by labour, and intellectual instruction. His hatred of any despotism that looked upon the people as not to be consulted, or protected from want and ignorance, was intense. He was residing near Leghorn, at Villa Valsovano, writing *The Cenci*, when the news of the Manchester Massacre reached us; it roused in him violent emotions of indignation and compassion. The great truth that the many, if accordant and resolute, could control the few, as was shown some years after, made him long to teach his injured countrymen how to resist. Inspired by these feelings, he wrote the *Mask of*

*Anarchy*, which he sent to his friend Leigh Hunt, to be inserted in the *Examiner*, of which he was then the Editor.

‘I did not insert it,’ Leigh Hunt writes in his valuable and interesting preface to this poem, when he printed it in 1832, ‘because I thought that the public at large had not become sufficiently discerning to do justice to the sincerity and kind-heartedness of the spirit that walked in this flaming robe of verse.’ Days of outrage have passed away, and with them the exasperation that would cause such an appeal to the many to be injurious. Without being aware of them, they at one time acted on his suggestions, and gained the day. But they rose when human life was respected by the Minister in power; such was not the case during the Administration which excited Shelley’s abhorrence.

The poem was written for the people, and is therefore in a more popular tone than usual: portions strike as abrupt and unpolished, but many stanzas are all his own.

I heard him repeat, and admired,  
those beginning

'My Father Time is old and gray,'

before I knew to what poem they  
were to belong. But the most

touching passage is that which  
describes the blessed effects of  
liberty; it might make a patriot  
of any man whose heart was not  
wholly closed against his humbler  
fellow-creatures.

## PETER BELL THE THIRD

BY MICHING MALLECHO, Esq.

Is it a party in a parlour,  
Crammed just as they on earth were crammed,  
Some sipping punch—some sipping tea;  
But, as you by their faces see,  
All silent, and all——damned!

*Peter Bell, by W. WORDSWORTH.*

OPHELIA.—What means this, my lord?

HAMLET.—Marry, this is Miching Mallecho; it means mischief.

SHAKESPEARE.

[Composed at Florence, October, 1819, and forwarded to Hunt (Nov. 2) to be published by C. & J. Ollier without the author's name; ultimately printed by Mrs. Shelley in the second edition of the *Poetical Works*, 1839. A skit by John Hamilton Reynolds, *Peter Bell, a Lyrical Ballad*, had already appeared (April, 1819), a few days before the publication of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell, a Tale*. These productions were reviewed in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* (April 26, May 3, 1819); and to the entertainment derived from his perusal of Hunt's criticisms the composition of Shelley's *Peter Bell the Third* is chiefly owing.]

### DEDICATION

TO THOMAS BROWN, ESQ., THE YOUNGER, H.F.

DEAR TOM—Allow me to request you to introduce Mr. Peter Bell to the respectable family of the Fudges. Although he may fall short of those very considerable personages in the more active properties which characterize the Rat and the Apostate, I suspect that even you, their historian, will confess that he surpasses them in the more peculiarly legitimate qualification of intolerable dullness.

You know Mr. Examiner Hunt; well—it was he who presented me to two of the Mr. Bells. My intimacy with the younger Mr. Bell naturally sprung from this introduction to his brothers. And in presenting him to you, I have the satisfaction of being able to assure you that he is considerably the dullest of the three.

There is this particular advantage in an acquaintance with any one of the Peter Bells, that if you

know one Peter Bell, you know three Peter Bells; they are not one, but three; not three, but one. An awful mystery, which, after having caused torrents of blood, and having been hymned by groans enough to deafen the music of the spheres, is at length illustrated to the satisfaction of all parties in the theological world, by the nature of Mr. Peter Bell.

Peter is a polyhedric Peter, or a Peter with many sides. He changes colours like a chameleon, and his coat like a snake. He is a Proteus of a Peter. He was at first sublime, pathetic, impressive, profound; then dull; then prosy and dull; and now dull—oh so very dull! it is an ultra-legitimate dulness.

You will perceive that it is not necessary to consider Hell and the Devil as supernatural machinery. The whole scene of my epic is in 'this world which is'—so Peter informed us before his conversion to *White Obi*—

'The world of all of us, and where  
We find our happiness, or not at all.'

Let me observe that I have spent six or seven days in composing this sublime piece; the orb of my moon-like genius has made the fourth part of its revolution round the dull earth which you inhabit, driving you mad, while it has retained its calmness and its splendour, and I have been fitting this its last phase 'to occupy a permanent station in the literature of my country.'

Your works, indeed, dear Tom, sell better; but mine are far superior. The public is no judge; posterity sets all to rights.

Allow me to observe that so much has been written of Peter Bell, that the present history can be considered only, like the *Iliad*, as a continuation of that series of cyclic poems, which have already been candidates for bestowing immortality upon, at the same time that they receive it from, his character and adventures. In this point of view I have violated no rule of syntax in beginning my composition with a conjunction; the full stop which closes the poem continued by me being, like the full stops at the end of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, a full stop of a very qualified import.

Hoping that the immortality which you have given to the Fudges, you will receive from them; and in the firm expectation, that when London shall be an habitation of bitterns; when St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey shall stand, shapeless and nameless ruins, in the midst of an unpeopled marsh; when the piers of Waterloo Bridge shall become the nuclei of islets of reeds and osiers, and cast the jagged shadows of their broken arches on the solitary stream, some transatlantic commentator will be weighing in the scales of some new and now unimagined system of criticism, the respective merits of the Bells and the Fudges, and their historians. I remain, dear Tom, yours sincerely,

MICHING MALLECHO.

December 1, 1819.

P.S.—Pray excuse the date of place; so soon as the profits of the publication come in, I mean to hire lodgings in a more respectable street.

## PROLOGUE

PETER BELLS, one, two and three,  
 O'er the wide world wandering be.—  
 First, the antenatal Peter,  
 Wrapped in weeds of the same metre,  
 The so-long-predestined raiment 5  
 Clothed in which to walk his way meant  
 The second Peter; whose ambition  
 Is to link the proposition,  
 As the mean of two extremes—  
 (This was learned from Aldric's themes) 10  
 Shielding from the guilt of schism  
 The orthodoxal syllogism;  
 The First Peter—he who was  
 Like the shadow in the glass  
 Of the second, yet unripe, 15  
 His substantial antitype.—  
 Then came Peter Bell the Second,  
 Who henceforward must be reckoned  
 The body of a double soul,  
 And that portion of the whole 20  
 Without which the rest would seem  
 Ends of a disjointed dream.—  
 And the Third is he who has  
 O'er the grave been forced to pass  
 To the other side, which is,— 25  
 Go and try else,—just like this.

Peter Bell the First was Peter  
 Smugger, milder, softer, neater,  
 Like the soul before it is  
 Born from *that* world into *this*. 30  
 The next Peter Bell was he,  
 Predevote, like you and me,  
 To good or evil as may come;  
 His was the severer doom,—  
 For he was an evil Cotter, 35  
 And a polygamic Potter.<sup>1</sup>  
 And the last is Peter Bell,  
 Damned since our first parents fell,  
 Damned eternally to Hell—  
 Surely he deserves it well! 40

10 Aldric's] *i. e.* Aldrich's—a spelling adopted here by Woodberry.

<sup>1</sup> The oldest scholiasts read—

A *dodecagamic* Potter.

This is at once more descriptive and more megalophonous,—but the alliteration of the text had captivated the vulgar ear of the herd of later commentators.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

## PART THE FIRST

## DEATH

## I

AND Peter Bell, when he had been  
 With fresh-imported Hell-fire warmed,  
 Grew serious—from his dress and mien  
 'Twas very plainly to be seen  
 Peter was quite reformed.

5

## II

His eyes turned up, his mouth turned down;  
 His accent caught a nasal twang;  
 He oiled his hair<sup>1</sup>; there might be heard  
 The grace of God in every word  
 Which Peter said or sang.

10

## III

But Peter now grew old, and had  
 An ill no doctor could unravel;  
 His torments almost drove him mad;—  
 Some said it was a fever bad—  
 Some swore it was the gravel.

15

## IV

His holy friends then came about,  
 And with long preaching and persuasion  
 Convinced the patient that, without  
 The smallest shadow of a doubt,  
 He was predestined to damnation.

20

## V

They said—'Thy name is Peter Bell;  
 Thy skin is of a brimstone hue;  
 Alive or dead—ay, sick or well—  
 The one God made to rhyme with hell;  
 The other, I think, rhymes with you.'

25

## VI

Then Peter set up such a yell!—  
 The nurse, who with some water gruel  
 Was climbing up the stairs, as well  
 As her old legs could climb them—fell,  
 And broke them both—the fall was cruel.

30

<sup>1</sup> To those who have not duly appreciated the distinction between *Whale* and *Russia* oil, this attribute might rather seem to belong to the Dandy than the Evangelic. The effect, when to the windward, is indeed so similar, that it requires a subtle naturalist to discriminate the animals. They belong, however, to distinct genera.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

## VII

The Parson from the casement leapt  
 Into the lake of Windermere—  
 And many an eel—though no adept  
 In God's right reason for it—kept  
 Gnawing his kidneys half a year.

35

## VIII

And all the rest rushed through the door,  
 And tumbled over one another,  
 And broke their skulls.—Upon the floor  
 Meanwhile sat Peter Bell, and swore,  
 And cursed his father and his mother;

40

## IX

And raved of God, and sin, and death,  
 Blaspheming like an infidel;  
 And said, that with his clenched teeth  
 He'd seize the earth from underneath,  
 And drag it with him down to hell.

45

## X

As he was speaking came a spasm,  
 And wrenched his gnashing teeth asunder;  
 Like one who sees a strange phantasm  
 He lay,—there was a silent chasm  
 Between his upper jaw and under.

50

## XI

And yellow death lay on his face;  
 And a fixed smile that was not human  
 Told, as I understand the case,  
 That he was gone to the wrong place:—  
 I heard all this from the old woman.

55

## XII

Then there came down from Langdale Pike  
 A cloud, with lightning, wind and hail;  
 It swept over the mountains like  
 An ocean,—and I heard it strike  
 The woods and crags of Grasmere vale.

60

## XIII

And I saw the black storm come  
 Nearer, minute after minute;  
 Its thunder made the cataracts dumb;  
 With hiss, and clash, and hollow hum,  
 It neared as if the Devil was in it.

65

## XIV

The Devil *was* in it:—he had bought  
 Peter for half-a-crown; and when

The storm which bore him vanished, nought  
That in the house that storm had caught  
Was ever seen again.

70

## XV

The gaping neighbours came next day—  
They found all vanished from the shore:  
The Bible, whence he used to pray,  
Half scorched under a hen-coop lay;  
Smashed glass—and nothing more!

75

## PART THE SECOND

## THE DEVIL

## I

THE DEVIL, I safely can aver,  
Has neither hoof, nor tail, nor sting;  
Nor is he, as some sages swear,  
A spirit, neither here nor there,  
In nothing—yet in everything.

80

## II

He is—what we are; for sometimes  
The Devil is a gentleman;  
At others a bard bartering rhymes  
For sack; a statesman spinning crimes;  
A swindler, living as he can;

85

## III

A thief, who cometh in the night,  
With whole boots and net pantaloons,  
Like some one whom it were not right  
To mention;—or the luckless wight  
From whom he steals nine silver spoons.

90

## IV

But in this case he did appear  
Like a slop-merchant from Wapping,  
And with smug face, and eye severe,  
On every side did perk and peer  
Till he saw Peter dead or napping.

95

## V

He had on an upper Benjamin  
(For he was of the driving schism)  
In the which he wrapped his skin  
From the storm he travelled in,  
For fear of rheumatism.

100

## VI

He called the ghost out of the corse;—  
 It was exceedingly like Peter,—  
 Only its voice was hollow and hoarse—  
 It had a queerish look of course—  
 Its dress too was a little neater.

105

## VII

The Devil knew not his name and lot;  
 Peter knew not that he was Bell:  
 Each had an upper stream of thought,  
 Which made all seem as it was not;  
 Fitting itself to all things well.

110

## VIII

Peter thought he had parents dear,  
 Brothers, sisters, cousins, cronies,  
 In the fens of Lincolnshire;  
 He perhaps had found them there  
 Had he gone and boldly shown his

115

## IX

Solemn phiz in his own village;  
 Where he thought oft when a boy  
 He'd clomb the orchard walls to pillage  
 The produce of his neighbour's tillage,  
 With marvellous pride and joy.

120

## X

And the Devil thought he had,  
 'Mid the misery and confusion  
 Of an unjust war, just made  
 A fortune by the gainful trade  
 Of giving soldiers rations bad—  
 The world is full of strange delusion—

125

## XI

That he had a mansion planned  
 In a square like Grosvenor Square,  
 That he was aping fashion, and  
 That he now came to Westmoreland  
 To see what was romantic there.

130

## XII

And all this, though quite ideal,—  
 Ready at a breath to vanish,—  
 Was a state not more unreal  
 Than the peace he could not feel,  
 Or the care he could not banish.

135



## XIII

After a little conversation,  
 The Devil told Peter, if he chose,  
 He'd bring him to the world of fashion  
 By giving him a situation 140  
 In his own service—and new clothes.

## XIV

And Peter bowed, quite pleased and proud,  
 And after waiting some few days  
 For a new livery—dirty yellow  
 Turned up with black—the wretched fellow 145  
 Was bowled to Hell in the Devil's chaise.

## PART THE THIRD

## HELL

## I

HELL is a city much like London—  
 A populous and a smoky city;  
 There are all sorts of people undone,  
 And there is little or no fun done; 150  
 Small justice shown, and still less pity.

## II

There is a Castles, and a Canning,  
 A Cobbett, and a Castlereagh;  
 All sorts of caitiff corpses planning  
 All sorts of cozening for trepanning 155  
 Corpses less corrupt than they.

## III

There is a \* \* \* , who has lost  
 His wits, or sold them, none knows which;  
 He walks about a double ghost,  
 And though as thin as Fraud almost— 160  
 Ever grows more grim and rich.

## IV

There is a Chancery Court; a King;  
 A manufacturing mob; a set  
 Of thieves who by themselves are sent  
 Similar thieves to represent; 165  
 An army; and a public debt.

## V

Which last is a scheme of paper money,  
 And means—being interpreted—  
 'Bees, keep your wax—give us the honey,  
 And we will plant, while skies are sunny, 170  
 Flowers, which in winter serve instead.'

## VI

There is a great talk of revolution—  
 And a great chance of despotism—  
 German soldiers—camps—confusion—  
 Tumults—lotteries—rage—delusion—  
 Gin—suicide—and methodism ;

175

## VII

Taxes too, on wine and bread,  
 And meat, and beer, and tea, and cheese,  
 From which those patriots pure are fed,  
 Who gorge before they reel to bed  
 The tenfold essence of all these.

180

## VIII

There are mincing women, mewing,  
 (Like cats, who *amant miserè*<sup>1</sup>),  
 Of their own virtue, and pursuing  
 Their gentler sisters to that ruin,  
 Without which—what were chastity?<sup>2</sup>

185

## IX

Lawyers—judges—old hobnobbers  
 Are there—bailiffs—chancellors—  
 Bishops—great and little robbers—  
 Rhymesters—pamphleteers—stock-jobbers—  
 Men of glory in the wars,—

190

## X

Things whose trade is, over ladies  
 To lean, and flirt, and stare, and simper,  
 Till all that is divine in woman  
 Grows cruel, courteous, smooth, inhuman,  
 Crucified 'twixt a smile and whimper.

195

## XI

Thrusting, toiling, wailing, moiling,  
 Frowning, preaching—such a riot!  
 Each with never-ceasing labour,  
 Whilst he thinks he cheats his neighbour,  
 Cheating his own heart of quiet.

200

<sup>1</sup> One of the attributes in Linnaeus's description of the Cat. To a similar cause the caterwauling of more than one species of this genus is to be referred ;—except, indeed, that the poor quadruped is compelled to quarrel with its own pleasures, whilst the biped is supposed only to quarrel with those of others.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

<sup>2</sup> What would this husk and excuse for a virtue be without its kernel prostitution, or the kernel prostitution without this husk of a virtue? I wonder the women of the town do not form an association, like the Society for the Suppression of Vice, for the support of what may be called the 'King, Church, and Constitution' of their order. But this subject is almost too horrible for a joke.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

## XII

And all these meet at levees ;—  
 Dinners convivial and political ;—  
 Suppers of epic poets ;—teas,  
 Where small talk dies in agonies ;— 205  
 Breakfasts professional and critical ;

## XIII

Lunches and snacks so aldermanic  
 That one would furnish forth ten dinners,  
 Where reigns a Cretan-tongued panic,  
 Lest news Russ, Dutch, or Alemannic 210  
 Should make some losers, and some winners ;—

## XIV

At conversazioni—balls—  
 Conventicles—and drawing-rooms—  
 Courts of law—committees—calls  
 Of a morning—clubs—book-stalls— 215  
 Churches—masquerades—and tombs.

## XV

And this is Hell—and in this smother  
 All are damnable and damned ;  
 Each one damning, damns the other  
 They are damned by one another, 220  
 By none other are they damned.

## XVI

'Tis a lie to say, 'God damns<sup>1</sup> !'  
 Where was Heaven's Attorney General  
 When they first gave out such flams ?  
 Let there be an end of shams, 225  
 They are mines of poisonous mineral.

## XVII

Statesmen damn themselves to be  
 Cursed ; and lawyers damn their souls  
 To the auction of a fee ;  
 Churchmen damn themselves to see 230  
 God's sweet love in burning coals.

## XVIII

The rich are damned, beyond all cure,  
 To taunt, and starve, and trample on  
 The weak and wretched ; and the poor  
 Damn their broken hearts to endure 235  
 Stripe on stripe, with groan on groan.

<sup>1</sup> This libel on our national oath, and this accusation of all our countrymen of being in the daily practice of solemnly asseverating the most enormous falsehood, I fear deserves the notice of a more active Attorney General than that here alluded to.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

## XIX

Sometimes the poor are damned indeed  
 To take,—not means for being blessed,—  
 But Cobbett's snuff, revenge; that weed  
 From which the worms that it doth feed  
 Squeeze less than they before possessed. 240

## XX

And some few, like we know who,  
 Damned—but God alone knows why—  
 To believe their minds are given  
 To make this ugly Hell a Heaven;  
 In which faith they live and die. 245

## XXI

Thus, as in a town, plague-stricken,  
 Each man be he sound or no  
 Must indifferently sicken;  
 As when day begins to thicken,  
 None knows a pigeon from a crow,— 250

## XXII

So good and bad, sane and mad,  
 The oppressor and the oppressed;  
 Those who weep to see what others  
 Smile to inflict upon their brothers;  
 Lovers, haters, worst and best; 255

## XXIII

All are damned—they breathe an air,  
 Thick, infected, joy-dispelling:  
 Each pursues what seems most fair,  
 Mining like moles, through mind, and there 260  
 Scoop palace-caverns vast, where Care  
 In thronèd state is ever dwelling.

## PART THE FOURTH

## SIN

## I

Lo, Peter in Hell's Grosvenor Square,  
 A footman in the Devil's service!  
 And the misjudging world would swear 265  
 That every man in service there  
 To virtue would prefer vice.

## II

But Peter, though now damned, was not  
 What Peter was before damnation.

Men oftentimes prepare a lot  
Which ere it finds them, is not what  
Suits with their genuine station. 270

## III

All things that Peter saw and felt  
Had a peculiar aspect to him;  
And when they came within the belt 275  
Of his own nature, seemed to melt,  
Like cloud to cloud, into him.

## IV

And so the outward world uniting  
To that within him, he became  
Considerably uninviting 280  
To those who, meditation slighting,  
Were moulded in a different frame.

## V

And he scorned them, and they scorned him;  
And he scorned all they did; and they  
Did all that men of their own trim 285  
Are wont to do to please their whim,  
Drinking, lying, swearing, play.

## VI

Such were his fellow-servants; thus  
His virtue, like our own, was built  
Too much on that indignant fuss 290  
Hypocrite Pride stirs up in us  
To bully one another's guilt.

## VII

He had a mind which was somehow  
At once circumference and centre  
Of all he might or feel or know; 295  
Nothing went ever out, although  
Something did ever enter.

## VIII

He had as much imagination  
As a pint-pot;—he never could  
Fancy another situation, 300  
From which to dart his contemplation,  
Than that wherein he stood.

## IX

Yet his was individual mind,  
And new created all he saw  
In a new manner, and refined 305  
Those new creations, and combined  
Them, by a master-spirit's law.

## X

Thus—though unimaginative—  
 An apprehension clear, intense,  
 Of his mind's work, had made alive  
 The things it wrought on; I believe  
 Wakening a sort of thought in sense. 310

## XI

But from the first 'twas Peter's drift  
 To be a kind of moral eunuch,  
 He touched the hem of Nature's shift,  
 Felt faint—and never dared uplift  
 The closest, all-concealing tunic. 315

## XII

She laughed the while, with an arch smile,  
 And kissed him with a sister's kiss,  
 And said—'My best Diogenes,  
 I love you well—but, if you please,  
 Tempt not again my deepest bliss. 320

## XIII

'Tis you are cold—for I, not coy,  
 Yield love for love, frank, warm, and true;  
 And Burns, a Scottish peasant boy—  
 His errors prove it—knew my joy  
 More, learnèd friend, than you. 325

## XIV

*'Bocca bacciata non perde ventura,  
 Anzi rinnuova come fa la luna:—* 329  
 So thought Boccaccio, whose sweet words might cure a  
 Male prude, like you, from what you now endure, a  
 Low-tide in soul, like a stagnant laguna.'

## XV

Then Peter rubbed his eyes severe,  
 And smoothed his spacious forehead down  
 With his broad palm;—'twixt love and fear, 335  
 He looked, as he no doubt felt, queer,  
 And in his dream sate down.

## XVI

The Devil was no uncommon creature;  
 A leaden-witted thief—just huddled  
 Out of the dross and scum of nature; 340  
 A toad-like lump of limb and feature,  
 With mind, and heart, and fancy muddled.

## XVII

He was that heavy, dull, cold thing,  
 The spirit of evil well may be:

A drone too base to have a sting; 345  
 Who gluts, and grimes his lazy wing,  
 And calls lust, luxury.

## XVIII

Now he was quite the kind of wight  
 Round whom collect, at a fixed aera,  
 Venison, turtle, hock, and claret,— 350  
 Good cheer—and those who come to share it—  
 And best East Indian madeira!

## XIX

It was his fancy to invite  
 Men of science, wit, and learning,  
 Who came to lend each other light; 355  
 He proudly thought that his gold's might  
 Had set those spirits burning.

## XX

And men of learning, science, wit,  
 Considered him as you and I  
 Think of some rotten tree, and sit 360  
 Lounging and dining under it,  
 Exposed to the wide sky.

## XXI

And all the while, with loose fat smile,  
 The willing wretch sat winking there,  
 Believing 'twas his power that made 365  
 That jovial scene—and that all paid  
 Homage to his unnoticed chair.

## XXII

Though to be sure this place was Hell;  
 He was the Devil—and all they—  
 What though the claret circled well, 370  
 And wit, like ocean, rose and fell?—  
 Were damned eternally.

## PART THE FIFTH

## GRACE

## I

AMONG the guests who often stayed  
 Till the Devil's petits-soupers,  
 A man there came, fair as a maid, 375  
 And Peter noted what he said,  
 Standing behind his master's chair.

## II

He was a mighty poet—and  
 A subtle-souled psychologist;  
 All things he seemed to understand,  
 Of old or new—of sea or land—  
 But his own mind—which was a mist.

## III

This was a man who might have turned  
 Hell into Heaven—and so in gladness  
 A Heaven unto himself have earned;  
 But he in shadows undiscerned  
 Trusted,—and damned himself to madness.

## IV

He spoke of poetry, and how  
 ‘Divine it was—a light—a love—  
 A spirit which like wind doth blow  
 As it listeth, to and fro;  
 A dew rained down from God above;

## V

‘A power which comes and goes like dream,  
 And which none can ever trace—  
 Heaven’s light on earth—Truth’s brightest beam.’  
 And when he ceased there lay the gleam  
 Of those words upon his face.

## VI

Now Peter, when he heard such talk,  
 Would, heedless of a broken pate,  
 Stand like a man asleep, or balk  
 Some wishing guest of knife or fork,  
 Or drop and break his master’s plate.

## VII

At night he oft would start and wake  
 Like a lover, and began  
 In a wild measure songs to make  
 On moor, and glen, and rocky lake,  
 And on the heart of man—

## VIII

And on the universal sky—  
 And the wide earth’s bosom green,—  
 And the sweet, strange mystery  
 Of what beyond these things may lie,  
 And yet remain unseen.

## IX

For in his thought he visited  
 The spots in which, ere dead and damned,



He his wayward life had led ; 415  
 Yet knew not whence the thoughts were fed  
 Which thus his fancy crammed.

## X

And these obscure remembrances  
 Stirred such harmony in Peter,  
 That, whensoever he should please, 420  
 He could speak of rocks and trees  
 In poetic metre.

## XI

For though it was without a sense  
 Of memory, yet he remembered well  
 Many a ditch and quick-set fence ; 425  
 Of lakes he had intelligence,  
 He knew something of heath and fell.

## XII

He had also dim recollections  
 Of pedlars tramping on their rounds ;  
 Milk-pans and pails ; and odd collections 430  
 Of saws, and proverbs ; and reflections  
 Old parsons make in burying-grounds.

## XIII

But Peter's verse was clear, and came  
 Announcing from the frozen hearth  
 Of a cold age, that none might tame 435  
 The soul of that diviner flame  
 It augured to the Earth :

## XIV

Like gentle rains, on the dry plains,  
 Making that green which late was gray,  
 Or like the sudden moon, that stains 440  
 Some gloomy chamber's window-panes  
 With a broad light like day.

## XV

For language was in Peter's hand  
 Like clay while he was yet a potter ;  
 And he made songs for all the land, 445  
 Sweet both to feel and understand,  
 As pipkins late to mountain Cotter.

## XVI

And Mr. —, the bookseller,  
 Gave twenty pounds for some ;—then scorning  
 A footman's yellow coat to wear, 450  
 Peter, too proud of heart, I fear,  
 Instantly gave the Devil warning.

## XVII

Whereat the Devil took offence,  
 And swore in his soul a great oath then,  
 'That for his damned impertinence  
 He'd bring him to a proper sense  
 Of what was due to gentlemen!'

## PART THE SIXTH

## DAMNATION

## I

'O THAT mine enemy had written  
 A book!'—cried Job:—a fearful curse,  
 If to the Arab, as the Briton,  
 'Twas galling to be critic-bitten:—  
 The Devil to Peter wished no worse.

## II

When Peter's next new book found vent,  
 The Devil to all the first Reviews  
 A copy of it slyly sent,  
 With five-pound note as compliment,  
 And this short notice—'Pray abuse.'

## III

Then *seriatim*, month and quarter,  
 Appeared such mad tirades.—One said—  
 'Peter seduced Mrs. Foy's daughter,  
 Then drowned the mother in Ullswater,  
 The last thing as he went to bed.'

## IV

Another—'Let him shave his head!  
 Where's Dr. Willis?—Or is he joking?  
 What does the rascal mean or hope,  
 No longer imitating Pope,  
 In that barbarian Shakespeare poking?'

## V

One more, 'Is incest not enough?  
 And must there be adultery too?  
 Grace after meat? Miscreant and Liar!  
 Thief! Blackguard! Scoundrel! Fool! Hell-fire  
 Is twenty times too good for you.'

## VI

'By that last book of yours WE think  
 You've double damned yourself to scorn;

We warned you whilst yet on the brink 485  
 You stood. From your black name will shrink  
 The babe that is unborn.'

## VII

All these Reviews the Devil made  
 Up in a parcel, which he had  
 Safely to Peter's house conveyed. 490  
 For carriage, tenpence Peter paid—  
 Untied them—read them—went half mad.

## VIII

'What!' cried he, 'this is my reward  
 For nights of thought, and days of toil?  
 Do poets, but to be abhorred 495  
 By men of whom they never heard,  
 Consume their spirits' oil?

## IX

'What have I done to them?—and who  
 Is Mrs. Foy? 'Tis very cruel  
 To speak of me and Betty so! 500  
 Adultery! God defend me! Oh!  
 I've half a mind to fight a duel.

## X

'Or,' cried he, a grave look collecting,  
 'Is it my genius, like the moon,  
 Sets those who stand her face inspecting, 505  
 That face within their brain reflecting,  
 Like a crazed bell-chime, out of tune?'

## XI

For Peter did not know the town,  
 But thought, as country readers do,  
 For half a guinea or a crown, 510  
 He bought oblivion or renown  
 From God's own voice<sup>1</sup> in a review.

## XII

All Peter did on this occasion  
 Was, writing some sad stuff in prose.  
 It is a dangerous invasion 515  
 When poets criticize; their station  
 Is to delight, not pose.

500 Betty] Emma 1839, 2nd ed. See letter from Shelley to Ollier, May 14, 1820 (Shelley Memorials, p. 139).

<sup>1</sup> *Vox populi, vox dei.* As Mr. Godwin truly observes of a more famous saying, of some merit as a popular maxim, but totally destitute of philosophical accuracy.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

## XIII

The Devil then sent to Leipsic fair  
 For Born's translation of Kant's book;  
 A world of words, tail foremost, where  
 Right—wrong—false—true—and foul—and fair 520  
 As in a lottery-wheel are shook.

## XIV

Five thousand crammed octavo pages  
 Of German psychologics,—he  
 Who his *furor verborum* assuages 525  
 Thereon, deserves just seven months' wages  
 More than will e'er be due to me.

## XV

I looked on them nine several days,  
 And then I saw that they were bad;  
 A friend, too, spoke in their dispraise,— 530  
 He never read them;—with amaze  
 I found Sir William Drummond had.

## XVI

When the book came, the Devil sent  
 It to P. Verbovale<sup>1</sup>, Esquire,  
 With a brief note of compliment, 535  
 By that night's Carlisle mail. It went,  
 And set his soul on fire.

## XVII

Fire, which *ex luce praebens fumum*,  
 Made him beyond the bottom see  
 Of truth's clear well—when I and you, Ma'am, 540  
 Go, as we shall do, *subter humum*,  
 We may know more than he.

## XVIII

Now Peter ran to seed in soul  
 Into a walking paradox;  
 For he was neither part nor whole, 545  
 Nor good, nor bad—nor knave nor fool;  
 —Among the woods and rocks

## XIX

Furious he rode, where late he ran,  
 Lashing and spurring his tame hobby;

<sup>1</sup> Quasi, *Qui valet verba*:—i. e. all the words which have been, are, or may be expended by, for, against, with, or on him. A sufficient proof of the utility of this history. Peter's progenitor who selected this name seems to have possessed a pure anticipated cognition of the nature and modesty of this ornament of his posterity.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

Turned to a formal puritan, 550  
 A solemn and unsexual man,—  
 He half believed *White Obi*.

## XX

This steed in vision he would ride,  
 High trotting over nine-inch bridges,  
 With Flibbertigibbet, imp of pride, 555  
 Mocking and mowing by his side—  
 A mad-brained goblin for a guide—  
 Over corn-fields, gates, and hedges.

## XXI

After these ghastly rides, he came  
 Home to his heart, and found from thence 560  
 Much stolen of its accustomed flame ;  
 His thoughts grew weak, drowsy, and lame  
 Of their intelligence.

## XXII

To Peter's view, all seemed one hue ;  
 He was no Whig, he was no Tory ; 565  
 No Deist and no Christian he ;—  
 He got so subtle, that to be  
 Nothing, was all his glory.

## XXIII

One single point in his belief  
 From his organization sprung, 570  
 The heart-enrooted faith, the chief  
 Ear in his doctrines' blighted sheaf,  
 That 'Happiness is wrong' ;

## XXIV

So thought Calvin and Dominic ;  
 So think their fierce successors, who 575  
 Even now would neither stint nor stick  
 Our flesh from off our bones to pick,  
 If they might 'do their do.'

## XXV

His morals thus were undermined :—  
 The old Peter—the hard, old Potter— 580  
 Was born anew within his mind ;  
 He grew dull, harsh, sly, unrefined,  
 As when he tramped beside the Otter<sup>1</sup>.

## XXVI

In the death hues of agony  
 Lambently flashing from a fish, 585

<sup>1</sup> A famous river in the new Atlantis of the Dynastophylic Panti-socratists.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

Now Peter felt amused to see  
 Shades like a rainbow's rise and flee,  
 Mixed with a certain hungry wish<sup>1</sup>.

## XXVII

So in his Country's dying face  
 He looked—and, lovely as she lay, 590  
 Seeking in vain his last embrace,  
 Wailing her own abandoned case,  
 With hardened sneer he turned away :

## XXVIII

And coolly to his own soul said ;—  
 'Do you not think that we might make 595  
 A poem on her when she's dead :—  
 Or, no—a thought is in my head—  
 Her shroud for a new sheet I'll take :

## XXIX

'My wife wants one.—Let who will bury  
 This mangled corpse! And I and you, 600  
 My dearest Soul, will then make merry,  
 As the Prince Regent did with Sherry,—  
 'Ay—and at last desert me too.'

## XXX

And so his Soul would not be gay,  
 But moaned within him; like a fawn 605  
 Moaning within a cave, it lay  
 Wounded and wasting, day by day,  
 Till all its life of life was gone.

## XXXI

As troubled skies stain waters clear,  
 The storm in Peter's heart and mind 610  
 Now made his verses dark and queer :  
 They were the ghosts of what they were,  
 Shaking dim grave-clothes in the wind.

602-3 See Editor's Note.

<sup>1</sup> See the description of the beautiful colours produced during the agonizing death of a number of trout, in the fourth part of a long poem in blank verse, published within a few years. [*The Excursion*, VIII. ll. 568-71.—ED.] That poem contains curious evidence of the gradual hardening of a strong but circumscribed sensibility, of the perversion of a penetrating but panic-stricken understanding. The author might have derived a lesson which he had probably forgotten from these sweet and sublime verses :—

'This lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,  
 Taught both by what she\* shows and what conceals,  
 Never to blend our pleasure or our pride  
 With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.'—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

\* Nature.

## XXXII

For he now raved enormous folly,  
 Of Baptisms, Sunday-schools, and Graves, 615  
 'Twould make George Colman melancholy  
 To have heard him, like a male Molly,  
 Chanting those stupid staves.

## XXXIII

Yet the Reviews, who heaped abuse  
 On Peter while he wrote for freedom, 620  
 So soon as in his song they spy  
 The folly which soothes tyranny,  
 Praise him, for those who feed 'em.

## XXXIV

'He was a man, too great to scan;—  
 A planet lost in truth's keen rays:— 625  
 His virtue, awful and prodigious;—  
 He was the most sublime, religious,  
 Pure-minded Poet of these days.'

## XXXV

As soon as he read that, cried Peter,  
 'Eureka! I have found the way 630  
 To make a better thing of metre  
 Than e'er was made by living creature  
 Up to this blessed day.'

## XXXVI

Then Peter wrote odes to the Devil;—  
 In one of which he meekly said: 635  
 'May Carnage and Slaughter,  
 Thy niece and thy daughter,  
 May Rapine and Famine,  
 Thy gorge ever cramming,  
 Glut thee with living and dead! 640

## XXXVII

'May Death and Damnation,  
 And Consternation,  
 Flit up from Hell with pure intent!  
 Slash them at Manchester,  
 Glasgow, Leeds, and Chester; 645  
 Drench all with blood from Avon to Trent.

## XXXVIII

'Let thy body-guard yeomen  
 Hew down babes and women,  
 And laugh with bold triumph till Heaven be rent!

When Moloch in Jewry  
 Munched children with fury,  
 It was thou, Devil, dining with pure intent<sup>1</sup>. 650

## PART THE SEVENTH

## DOUBLE DAMNATION

## I

THE Devil now knew his proper cue.—  
 Soon as he read the ode, he drove  
 To his friend Lord MacMurderhouse's, 655  
 A man of interest in both houses,  
 And said:—'For money or for love,

## II

'Pray find some cure or sinecure;  
 To feed from the superfluous taxes  
 A friend of ours—a poet—fewer 660  
 Have fluttered tamer to the lure  
 Than he.' His lordship stands and racks his

## III

Stupid brains, while one might count  
 As many beads as he had boroughs,—  
 At length replies; from his mean front, 665  
 Like one who rubs out an account,  
 Smoothing away the unmeaning furrows:

## IV

'It happens fortunately, dear Sir,  
 I can. I hope I need require  
 No pledge from you, that he will stir 670  
 In our affairs;—like Oliver,  
 That he'll be worthy of his hire.'

## V

These words exchanged, the news sent off  
 To Peter, home the Devil hied,—  
 Took to his bed; he had no cough, 675  
 No doctor,—meat and drink enough,—  
 Yet that same night he died.

<sup>1</sup> It is curious to observe how often extremes meet. Cobbett and Peter use the same language for a different purpose: Peter is indeed a sort of metrical Cobbett. Cobbett is, however, more mischievous than Peter, because he pollutes a holy and now unconquerable cause with the principles of legitimate murder; whilst the other only makes a bad one ridiculous and odious.

If either Peter or Cobbett should see this note, each will feel more indignation at being compared to the other than at any censure implied in the moral perversion laid to their charge.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]



## VI

The Devil's corpse was leaded down ;  
 His decent heirs enjoyed his pelf,  
 Mourning-coaches, many a one, 680  
 Followed his hearse along the town :—  
 Where was the Devil himself ?

## VII

When Peter heard of his promotion,  
 His eyes grew like two stars for bliss :  
 There was a bow of sleek devotion 685  
 Engendering in his back ; each motion  
 Seemed a Lord's shoe to kiss.

## VIII

He hired a house, bought plate, and made  
 A genteel drive up to his door,  
 With sifted gravel neatly laid,— 690  
 As if defying all who said,  
 Peter was ever poor.

## IX

But a disease soon struck into  
 The very life and soul of Peter—  
 He walked about—slept—had the hue 695  
 Of health upon his cheeks—and few  
 Dug better—none a heartier eater.

## X

And yet a strange and horrid curse  
 Clung upon Peter, night and day ;  
 Month after month the thing grew worse, 700  
 And deadlier than in this my verse  
 I can find strength to say.

## XI

Peter was dull—he was at first  
 Dull—oh, so dull—so very dull !  
 Whether he talked, wrote, or rehearsed— 705  
 Still with this dulness was he cursed—  
 Dull—beyond all conception—dull.

## XII

No one could read his books—no mortal,  
 But a few natural friends, would hear him ;  
 The parson came not near his portal ; 710  
 His state was like that of the immortal  
 Described by Swift—no man could bear him.

## XIII

His sister, wife, and children yawned,  
 With a long, slow, and drear ennui,

All human patience far beyond;  
 Their hopes of Heaven each would have pawned,  
 Anywhere else to be, 715

## XIV

But in his verse, and in his prose,  
 The essence of his dulness was  
 Concentred and compressed so close,  
 'Twould have made Guatimozin doze 720  
 On his red gridiron of brass.

## XV

A printer's boy, folding those pages,  
 Fell slumbrously upon one side;  
 Like those famed Seven who slept three ages. 725  
 To wakeful frenzy's vigil-rages,  
 As opiates, were the same applied.

## XVI

Even the Reviewers who were hired  
 To do the work of his reviewing,  
 With adamantine nerves, grew tired;— 730  
 Gaping and torpid they retired,  
 To dream of what they should be doing.

## XVII

And worse and worse, the drowsy curse  
 Yawned in him, till it grew a pest—  
 A wide contagious atmosphere, 735  
 Creeping like cold through all things near;  
 A power to infect and to infest.

## XVIII

His servant-maids and dogs grew dull;  
 His kitten, late a sportive elf;  
 The woods and lakes, so beautiful, 740  
 Of dim stupidity were full,  
 All grew dull as Peter's self.

## XIX

The earth under his feet—the springs,  
 Which lived within it a quick life,  
 The air, the winds of many wings, 745  
 That fan it with new murmurings,  
 Were dead to their harmonious strife.

## XX

The birds and beasts within the wood,  
 The insects, and each creeping thing,  
 Were now a silent multitude; 750  
 Love's work was left unwrought—no brood  
 Near Peter's house took wing.

## XXI

And every neighbouring cottager  
 Stupidly yawned upon the other:  
 No jackass brayed; no little cur  
 Cocked up his ears;—no man would stir  
 To save a dying mother.

755

## XXII

Yet all from that charmed district went  
 But some half-idiot and half-knave,  
 Who rather than pay any rent,  
 Would live with marvellous content,  
 Over his father's grave.

760

## XXIII

No bailiff dared within that space,  
 For fear of the dull charm, to enter;  
 A man would bear upon his face,  
 For fifteen months in any case,  
 The yawn of such a venture.

765

## XXIV

Seven miles above—below—around—  
 This pest of dulness holds its sway;  
 A ghastly life without a sound;  
 To Peter's soul the spell is bound—  
 How should it ever pass away?

770

NOTE ON PETER BELL THE THIRD, BY  
MRS. SHELLEY

IN this new edition I have added *Peter Bell the Third*. A critique on Wordsworth's *Peter Bell* reached us at Leghorn, which amused Shelley exceedingly, and suggested this poem.

I need scarcely observe that nothing personal to the author of *Peter Bell* is intended in this poem. No man ever admired Wordsworth's poetry more;—he read it perpetually, and taught others to appreciate its beauties. This poem is, like all others written by Shelley, ideal. He conceived the idealism of a poet—a man of lofty and creative genius—quitting the glorious calling of

discovering and announcing the beautiful and good, to support and propagate ignorant prejudices and pernicious errors; imparting to the unenlightened, not that ardour for truth and spirit of toleration which Shelley looked on as the sources of the moral improvement and happiness of mankind, but false and injurious opinions, that evil was good, and that ignorance and force were the best allies of purity and virtue. His idea was that a man gifted, even as transcendently as the author of *Peter Bell*, with the highest qualities of genius, must, if he fostered such errors, be in-

fectured with dulness. This poem was written as a warning—not as a narration of the reality. He was unacquainted personally with Wordsworth, or with Coleridge (to whom he alludes in the fifth part of the poem), and therefore, I repeat, his poem is purely ideal;—it contains something of criticism on the compositions of those great poets, but nothing injurious to the men themselves.

No poem contains more of Shelley's peculiar views with regard

to the errors into which many of the wisest have fallen, and the pernicious effects of certain opinions on society. Much of it is beautifully written: and, though, like the burlesque drama of *Swell-foot*, it must be looked on as a plaything, it has so much merit and poetry—so much of *himself* in it—that it cannot fail to interest greatly, and by right belongs to the world for whose instruction and benefit it was written.

## LETTER TO MARIA GISBORNE

[Composed during Shelley's occupation of the Gisbornes' house at Leghorn, July, 1820; published in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824. Sources of the text are (1) a draft in Shelley's hand, 'partly illegible' (Forman), amongst the Boscombe MSS.; (2) a transcript by Mrs. Shelley; (3) the *editio princeps*, 1824; the text in *Poetical Works*, 1839, 1st and 2nd edd. Our text is that of Mrs. Shelley's transcript, modified by the Boscombe MS. Here, as elsewhere in this edition, the readings of the *editio princeps* are preserved in the footnotes.]

LEGHORN, July 1, 1820.

THE spider spreads her webs, whether she be  
 In poet's tower, cellar, or barn, or tree;  
 The silk-worm in the dark green mulberry leaves  
 His winding sheet and cradle ever weaves;  
 So I, a thing whom moralists call worm, 5  
 Sit spinning still round this decaying form,  
 From the fine threads of rare and subtle thought—  
 No net of words in garish colours wrought  
 To catch the idle buzzers of the day—  
 But a soft cell, where when that fades away, 10  
 Memory may clothe in wings my living name  
 And feed it with the asphodels of fame,  
 Which in those hearts which must remember me  
 Grow, making love an immortality.

Whoever should behold me now, I wist, 15  
 Would think I were a mighty mechanist,  
 Bent with sublime Archimedean art  
 To breathe a soul into the iron heart  
 Of some machine portentous, or strange gin,

13 must *Bos. MS.*; most *ed.* 1824.

Which by the force of figured spells might win 20  
 Its way over the sea, and sport therein;  
 For round the walls are hung dread engines, such  
 As Vulcan never wrought for Jove to clutch  
 Ixion or the Titan:—or the quick  
 Wit of that man of God, St. Dominic, 25  
 To convince Atheist, Turk, or Heretic,  
 Or those in philanthropic council met,  
 Who thought to pay some interest for the debt  
 They owed to Jesus Christ for their salvation,  
 By giving a faint foretaste of damnation 30  
 To Shakespeare, Sidney, Spenser, and the rest  
 Who made our land an island of the blest,  
 When lamp-like Spain, who now relumes her fire  
 On Freedom's hearth, grew dim with Empire:—  
 With thumb-screws, wheels, with tooth and spike and jag,  
 Which fishers found under the utmost crag 36  
 Of Cornwall and the storm-encompassed isles,  
 Where to the sky the rude sea rarely smiles  
 Unless in treacherous wrath, as on the morn  
 When the exulting elements in scorn, 40  
 Satiated with destroyed destruction, lay  
 Sleeping in beauty on their mangled prey,  
 As panthers sleep;—and other strange and dread  
 Magical forms the brick floor overspread,—  
 Proteus transformed to metal did not make 45  
 More figures, or more strange; nor did he take  
 Such shapes of unintelligible brass,  
 Or heap himself in such a horrid mass  
 Of tin and iron not to be understood;  
 And forms of unimaginable wood, 50  
 To puzzle Tubal Cain and all his brood:  
 Great screws, and cones, and wheels, and grooved blocks,  
 The elements of what will stand the shocks  
 Of wave and wind and time.—Upon the table  
 More knacks and quips there be than I am able 55  
 To catalogize in this verse of mine:—  
 A pretty bowl of wood—not full of wine,  
 But quicksilver; that dew which the gnomes drink  
 When at their subterranean toil they swink,  
 Pledging the demons of the earthquake, who 60  
 Reply to them in lava—cry halloo!  
 And call out to the cities o'er their head,—

27 philanthropic *Bos. MS.*; philosophic *ed. 1824.* 29 so 1839, 2nd *ed.*;  
 They owed . . . . *ed. 1824.* 36 Which fishers *Bos. MS.*; Which fishes *ed.*  
 1824; With fishes *edd. 1839.* 38 rarely transcript; seldom *edd. 1824,*  
 1839. 61 lava—cry] lava-cry *edd. 1824, 1839.*

Roofs, towers, and shrines, the dying and the dead,  
 Crash through the chinks of earth—and then all quaff  
 Another rouse, and hold their sides and laugh. 65  
 This quicksilver no gnome has drunk—within  
 The walnut bowl it lies, veined and thin,  
 In colour like the wake of light that stains  
 The Tuscan deep, when from the moist moon rains  
 The inmost shower of its white fire—the breeze 70  
 Is still—blue Heaven smiles over the pale seas.  
 And in this bowl of quicksilver—for I  
 Yield to the impulse of an infancy  
 Outlasting manhood—I have made to float  
 A rude idealism of a paper boat:— 75  
 A hollow screw with cogs—Henry will know  
 The thing I mean and laugh at me,—if so  
 He fears not I should do more mischief.—Next  
 Lie bills and calculations much perplexed,  
 With steam-boats, frigates, and machinery quaint 80  
 Traced over them in blue and yellow paint.  
 Then comes a range of mathematical  
 Instruments, for plans nautical and statical;  
 A heap of rosin, a queer broken glass  
 With ink in it;—a china cup that was 85  
 What it will never be again, I think,—  
 A thing from which sweet lips were wont to drink  
 The liquor doctors rail at—and which I  
 Will quaff in spite of them—and when we die  
 We'll toss up who died first of drinking tea, 90  
 And cry out,—‘Heads or tails?’ where'er we be.  
 Near that a dusty paint-box, some odd hooks,  
 A half-burnt match, an ivory block, three books,  
 Where conic sections, spherics, logarithms,  
 To great Laplace, from Saunderson and Sims, 95  
 Lie heaped in their harmonious disarray  
 Of figures,—disentangle them who may.  
 Baron de Tott's Memoirs beside them lie,  
 And some odd volumes of old chemistry.  
 Near those a most inexplicable thing, 100  
 With lead in the middle—I'm conjecturing  
 How to make Henry understand; but no—  
 I'll leave, as Spenser says, with many mo,  
 This secret in the pregnant womb of time,  
 Too vast a matter for so weak a rhyme. 105

63 towers *transcript*; towns *edd.* 1824, 1839. 84 queer *Bos. MS.*; green  
*transcript, edd.* 1824, 1839. 92 odd hooks *transcript*; old books *edd.* 1839  
 (an evident misprint); old hooks *ed.* 1824. 93 A] An *ed.* 1824. 100  
 those *transcript*; them *edd.* 1824, 1839. 101 lead *Bos. MS.*; least *transcript,*  
*edd.* 1824, 1839.

And here like some weird Archimage sit I,  
 Plotting dark spells, and devilish enginery,  
 The self-impelling steam-wheels of the mind  
 Which pump up oaths from clergymen, and grind  
 The gentle spirit of our meek reviews 110  
 Into a powdery foam of salt abuse,  
 Ruffling the ocean of their self-content;—  
 I sit—and smile or sigh as is my bent,  
 But not for them—Libeccio rushes round  
 With an inconstant and an idle sound, 115  
 I heed him more than them—the thunder-smoke  
 Is gathering on the mountains, like a cloak  
 Folded athwart their shoulders broad and bare;  
 The ripe corn under the undulating air  
 Undulates like an ocean;—and the vines 120  
 Are trembling wide in all their trellised lines—  
 The murmur of the awakening sea doth fill  
 The empty pauses of the blast;—the hill  
 Looks hoary through the white electric rain,  
 And from the glens beyond, in sullen strain, 125  
 The interrupted thunder howls; above  
 One chasm of Heaven smiles, like the eye of Love  
 On the unquiet world;—while such things are,  
 How could one worth your friendship heed the war  
 Of worms? the shriek of the world's carrion jays, 130  
 Their censure, or their wonder, or their praise?

You are not here! the quaint witch Memory sees,  
 In vacant chairs, your absent images,  
 And points where once you sat, and now should be  
 But are not.—I demand if ever we 135  
 Shall meet as then we met;—and she replies,  
 Veiling in awe her second-sighted eyes;  
 'I know the past alone—but summon home  
 My sister Hope,—she speaks of all to come.'  
 But I, an old diviner, who knew well 140  
 Every false verse of that sweet oracle,  
 Turned to the sad enchantress once again,  
 And sought a respite from my gentle pain,  
 In citing every passage o'er and o'er  
 Of our communion—how on the sea-shore 145  
 We watched the ocean and the sky together,  
 Under the roof of blue Italian weather;  
 How I ran home through last year's thunder-storm,  
 And felt the transverse lightning linger warm

127 eye *Bos. MS., transcript, edd. 1839; age ed. 1824.* 140 knew *Bos.*  
*MS.; know transcript, edd. 1824, 1839.* 144 citing *Bos. MS.; acting*  
*transcript, edd. 1824, 1839.*

Upon my cheek—and how we often made 150  
 Feasts for each other, where good will outweighed  
 The frugal luxury of our country cheer,  
 As well it might, were it less firm and clear  
 Than ours must ever be;—and how we spun  
 A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun 155  
 Of this familiar life, which seems to be  
 But is not:—or is but quaint mockery  
 Of all we would believe, and sadly blame  
 The jarring and inexplicable frame  
 Of this wrong world:—and then anatomize 160  
 The purposes and thoughts of men whose eyes  
 Were closed in distant years;—or widely guess  
 The issue of the earth's great business,  
 When we shall be as we no longer are—  
 Like babbling gossips safe, who hear the war 165  
 Of winds, and sigh, but tremble not;—or how  
 You listened to some interrupted flow  
 Of visionary rhyme,—in joy and pain  
 Struck from the inmost fountains of my brain,  
 With little skill perhaps;—or how we sought 170  
 Those deepest wells of passion or of thought  
 Wrought by wise poets in the waste of years,  
 Staining their sacred waters with our tears;  
 Quenching a thirst ever to be renewed!  
 Or how I, wisest lady! then endued 175  
 The language of a land which now is free,  
 And, winged with thoughts of truth and majesty,  
 Flits round the tyrant's sceptre like a cloud,  
 And bursts the peopled prisons, and cries aloud,  
 'My name is Legion!'—that majestic tongue 180  
 Which Calderon over the desert flung  
 Of ages and of nations; and which found  
 An echo in our hearts, and with the sound  
 Startled oblivion;—thou wert then to me  
 As is a nurse—when inarticulately 185  
 A child would talk as its grown parents do.  
 If living winds the rapid clouds pursue,  
 If hawks chase doves through the aethereal way,  
 Huntsmen the innocent deer, and beasts their prey,  
 Why should not we rouse with the spirit's blast 190  
 Out of the forest of the pathless past  
 These recollected pleasures?

You are now

151 Feasts *transcript*; Treats *edd.* 1824, 1839. 153 As well it] As it  
 well *edd.* 1824, 1839. 158 believe, and] believe; or *edd.* 1824, 1839.  
 173 their *transcript*; the *edd.* 1824, 1839. 188 aethereal *transcript*;  
 aëreal *edd.* 1824, 1839.



In London, that great sea, whose ebb and flow  
 At once is deaf and loud, and on the shore  
 Vomits its wrecks, and still howls on for more. 195  
 Yet in its depth what treasures! You will see  
 That which was Godwin,—greater none than he  
 Though fallen—and fallen on evil times—to stand  
 Among the spirits of our age and land,  
 Before the dread tribunal of *to come* 200  
 The foremost,—while Rebuke cowers pale and dumb.  
 You will see Coleridge—he who sits obscure  
 In the exceeding lustre and the pure  
 Intense irradiation of a mind,  
 Which, with its own internal lightning blind, 205  
 Flags wearily through darkness and despair—  
 A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,  
 A hooded eagle among blinking owls.—  
 You will see Hunt—one of those happy souls  
 Which are the salt of the earth, and without whom 210  
 This world would smell like what it is—a tomb;  
 Who is, what others seem; his room no doubt  
 Is still adorned with many a cast from Shout,  
 With graceful flowers tastefully placed about;  
 And coronals of bay from ribbons hung, 215  
 And brighter wreaths in neat disorder flung;  
 The gifts of the most learned among some dozens  
 Of female friends, sisters-in-law, and cousins.  
 And there is he with his eternal puns,  
 Which beat the dullest brain for smiles, like duns 220  
 Thundering for money at a poet's door;  
 Alas! it is no use to say, 'I'm poor!'  
 Or oft in graver mood, when he will look  
 Things wiser than were ever read in book,  
 Except in Shakespeare's wisest tenderness.— 225  
 You will see Hogg,—and I cannot express  
 His virtues,—though I know that they are great,  
 Because he locks, then barricades the gate  
 Within which they inhabit;—of his wit  
 And wisdom, you'll cry out when you are bit. 230  
 He is a pearl within an oyster shell,  
 One of the richest of the deep;—and there  
 Is English Peacock, with his mountain Fair,  
 Turned into a Flamingo;—that shy bird  
 That gleams i' the Indian air—have you not heard 235  
 When a man marries, dies, or turns Hindoo,

197-201 See notes at end. 205 lightning *Bos. MS., transcript*; lustre  
*edd. 1824, 1839.* 202 Coleridge] C—*ed. 1824.* So too H—t l. 209;  
 H— l. 226; P— l. 233; H. S. l. 250; H — — and — — l. 296. 224  
 read *Bos. MS.*; said *transcript, edd. 1824, 1839.*

His best friends hear no more of him?—but you  
 Will see him, and will like him too, I hope,  
 With the milk-white Snowdonian Antelope  
 Matched with this cameleopard—his fine wit 240  
 Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it;  
 A strain too learned for a shallow age,  
 Too wise for selfish bigots; let his page,  
 Which charms the chosen spirits of the time,  
 Fold itself up for the serener clime 245  
 Of years to come, and find its recompense  
 In that just expectation.—Wit and sense,  
 Virtue and human knowledge; all that might  
 Make this dull world a business of delight,  
 Are all combined in Horace Smith.—And these, 250  
 With some exceptions, which I need not tease  
 Your patience by descanting on,—are all  
 You and I know in London.

I recall

My thoughts, and bid you look upon the night.  
 As water does a sponge, so the moonlight 255  
 Fills the void, hollow, universal air—  
 What see you?—unpavilioned Heaven is fair,  
 Whether the moon, into her chamber gone,  
 Leaves midnight to the golden stars, or wan  
 Climbs with diminished beams the azure steep; 260  
 Or whether clouds sail o'er the inverse deep,  
 Piloted by the many-wandering blast,  
 And the rare stars rush through them dim and fast:—  
 All this is beautiful in every land.—  
 But what see you beside?—a shabby stand 265  
 Of Hackney coaches—a brick house or wall  
 Fencing some lonely court, white with the scrawl  
 Of our unhappy politics;—or worse—  
 A wretched woman reeling by, whose curse  
 Mixed with the watchman's, partner of her trade, 270  
 You must accept in place of serenade—  
 Or yellow-haired Pollonia murmuring  
 To Henry, some unutterable thing.  
 I see a chaos of green leaves and fruit 275  
 Built round dark caverns, even to the root  
 Of the living stems that feed them—in whose bowers  
 There sleep in their dark dew the folded flowers;  
 Beyond, the surface of the unsickled corn

244 time *Bos. MS.*, transcript; age *edd.* 1824, 1839. 245 the transcript;  
 a *edd.* 1824, 1839. 272, 273 found in the 2nd ed. of *P. W.*, 1839; wanting in  
 transcript, ed. 1824 and 1839, 1st. ed. 276 that transcript; who *edd.* 1824,  
 1839.

Trembles not in the slumbering air, and borne  
 In circles quaint, and ever-changing dance, 280  
 Like wingèd stars the fire-flies flash and glance,  
 Pale in the open moonshine, but each one  
 Under the dark trees seems a little sun,  
 A meteor tamed; a fixed star gone astray  
 From the silver regions of the milky way;— 285  
 Afar the Contadino's song is heard,  
 Rude, but made sweet by distance—and a bird  
 Which cannot be the Nightingale, and yet  
 I know none else that sings so sweet as it  
 At this late hour;—and then all is still— 290  
 Now—Italy or London, which you will!

Next winter you must pass with me; I'll have  
 My house by that time turned into a grave  
 Of dead despondence and low-thoughted care,  
 And all the dreams which our tormentors are; 295  
 Oh! that Hunt, Hogg, Peacock, and Smith were there,  
 With everything belonging to them fair!—  
 We will have books, Spanish, Italian, Greek;  
 And ask one week to make another week  
 As like his father, as I'm unlike mine, 300  
 Which is not his fault, as you may divine.  
 Though we eat little flesh and drink no wine,  
 Yet let's be merry: we'll have tea and toast;  
 Custards for supper, and an endless host  
 Of syllabubs and jellies and mince-pies, 305  
 And other such lady-like luxuries,—  
 Feasting on which we will philosophize!  
 And we'll have fires out of the Grand Duke's wood,  
 To thaw the six weeks' winter in our blood.  
 And then we'll talk;—what shall we talk about? 310  
 Oh! there are themes enough for many a bout  
 Of thought-entangled descant;—as to nerves—  
 With cones and parallelograms and curves  
 I've sworn to strangle them if once they dare  
 To bother me—when you are with me there. 315  
 And they shall never more sip laudanum,  
 From Helicon or Himeros<sup>1</sup>;—well, come,  
 And in despite of God and of the devil,

288 the transcript; a edd. 1824, 1839. 296 See notes at end. 299, 300 So  
 1839, 2nd ed.; wanting in edd. 1824, 1839, 1st. 301 So transcript; wanting in  
 edd. 1824, 1839. 317 well, come 1839, 2nd ed.; we'll come edd. 1824,  
 1839, 1st. 318 despite of God] transcript; despite of . . . ed. 1824; spite  
 of . . . edd. 1839.

<sup>1</sup> *Ἴμερος*, from which the river Himera was named, is, with some slight  
 shade of difference, a synonym of Love.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

We'll make our friendly philosophic revel  
 Outlast the leafless time; till buds and flowers  
 Warn the obscure inevitable hours,  
 Sweet meeting by sad parting to renew;—  
 'To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new.'

320

## THE WITCH OF ATLAS

[Composed at the Baths of San Giuliano, near Pisa, August 14–16, 1820; published in *Posthumous Poems*, ed. Mrs. Shelley, 1824. The dedication *To Mary* first appeared in the *Poetical Works*, 1839, 1st ed. Sources of the text are (1) the *editio princeps*, 1824; (2) edd. 1839 (which agree, and, save in two instances, follow ed. 1824); (3) an early and incomplete MS. in Shelley's handwriting (now at the Bodleian, here, as throughout, cited as *B.*) carefully collated by Mr. C. D. Locock, who printed the results in his *Examination of the Shelley MSS.*, etc., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1903; (4) a later, yet intermediate, transcript by Mrs. Shelley, the variations of which are noted by Mr. H. Buxton Forman. The original text is modified in many places by variants from the MSS., but the readings of ed. 1824 are, in every instance, given in the footnotes.]

### TO MARY

(ON HER OBJECTING TO THE FOLLOWING POEM, UPON THE  
 SCORE OF ITS CONTAINING NO HUMAN INTEREST)

#### I

How, my dear Mary,—are you critic-bitten  
 (For vipers kill, though dead) by some review,  
 That you condemn these verses I have written,  
 Because they tell no story, false or true?  
 What, though no mice are caught by a young kitten, 5  
 May it not leap and play as grown cats do,  
 Till its claws come? Prithee, for this one time,  
 Content thee with a visionary rhyme.

#### II

What hand would crush the silken-wingèd fly,  
 The youngest of inconstant April's minions, 10  
 Because it cannot climb the purest sky,  
 Where the swan sings, amid the sun's dominions?  
 Not thine. Thou knowest 'tis its doom to die,  
 When Day shall hide within her twilight pinions  
 The lucent eyes, and the eternal smile, 15  
 Serene as thine, which lent it life awhile.

## III

To thy fair feet a wingèd Vision came,  
 Whose date should have been longer than a day,  
 And o'er thy head did beat its wings for fame,  
 And in thy sight its fading plumes display; 20  
 The watery bow burned in the evening flame,  
 But the shower fell, the swift Sun went his way—  
 And that is dead.—O, let me not believe  
 That anything of mine is fit to live!

## IV

Wordsworth informs us he was nineteen years 25  
 Considering and retouching Peter Bell;  
 Watering his laurels with the killing tears  
 Of slow, dull care, so that their roots to Hell  
 Might pierce, and their wide branches blot the spheres  
 Of Heaven, with dewy leaves and flowers; this well 30  
 May be, for Heaven and Earth conspire to foil  
 The over-busy gardener's blundering toil.

## V

My Witch indeed is not so sweet a creature  
 As Ruth or Lucy, whom his graceful praise  
 Clothes for our grandsons—but she matches Peter, 35  
 Though he took nineteen years, and she three days  
 In dressing. Light the vest of flowing metre  
 She wears; he, proud as dandy with his stays,  
 Has hung upon his wiry limbs a dress  
 Like King Lear's 'looped and windowed raggedness.' 40

## VI

If you strip Peter, you will see a fellow  
 Scorched by Hell's hyperequatorial climate  
 Into a kind of a sulphureous yellow:  
 A lean mark, hardly fit to fling a rhyme at;  
 In shape a Scaramouch, in hue Othello. 45  
 If you unveil my Witch, no priest nor primate  
 Can shrive you of that sin,—if sin there be  
 In love, when it becomes idolatry.

## THE WITCH OF ATLAS

## I

BEFORE those cruel Twins, whom at one birth 50  
 Incestuous Change bore to her father Time,  
 Error and Truth, had hunted from the Earth  
 All those bright natures which adorned its prime,  
 And left us nothing to believe in, worth  
 The pains of putting into learnèd rhyme,  
 A lady-witch there lived on Atlas' mountain 55  
 Within a cavern, by a secret fountain.

## II

Her mother was one of the Atlantides :

The all-beholding Sun had ne'er beholden  
In his wide voyage o'er continents and seas

So fair a creature, as she lay enfolden 60  
In the warm shadow of her loveliness ;—

He kissed her with his beams, and made all golden  
The chamber of gray rock in which she lay—  
She, in that dream of joy, dissolved away.

## III

'Tis said, she first was changed into a vapour, 65

And then into a cloud, such clouds as flit,  
Like splendour-wingèd moths about a taper,

Round the red west when the sun dies in it :  
And then into a meteor, such as caper

On hill-tops when the moon is in a fit : 70

Then, into one of those mysterious stars  
Which hide themselves between the Earth and Mars.

## IV

Ten times the Mother of the Months had bent

Her bow beside the folding-star, and bidden 75  
With that bright sign the billows to indent

The sea-deserted sand—like children chidden,  
At her command they ever came and went—

Since in that cave a dewy splendour hidden  
Took shape and motion : with the living form 80  
Of this embodied Power, the cave grew warm.

## V

A lovely lady garmented in light

From her own beauty—deep her eyes, as are  
Two openings of unfathomable night

Seen through a Temple's cloven roof—her hair 85  
Dark—the dim brain whirls dizzy with delight,

Picturing her form ; her soft smiles shone afar,  
And her low voice was heard like love, and drew  
All living things towards this wonder new.

## VI

And first the spotted cameleopard came, 90

And then the wise and fearless elephant ;

Then the sly serpent, in the golden flame

Of his own volumes intervolved ;—all gaunt

65 first was *transcript*, B. ; was first *ed.* 1824.  
B. ; *tempest's ed.* 1824.

84 Temple's *transcript*,

And sanguine beasts her gentle looks made tame.  
 They drank before her at her sacred fount ;  
 And every beast of beating heart grew bold,  
 Such gentleness and power even to behold.

95

## VII

The brinded lioness led forth her young,  
 That she might teach them how they should forego  
 Their inborn thirst of death ; the pard unstrung  
 His sinews at her feet, and sought to know  
 With looks whose motions spoke without a tongue  
 How he might be as gentle as the doe.  
 The magic circle of her voice and eyes  
 All savage natures did imparadise.

100

## VIII

And old Silenus, shaking a green stick  
 Of lilies, and the wood-gods in a crew  
 Came, blithe, as in the olive copses thick  
 Cicadae are, drunk with the noonday dew :  
 And Dryope and Faunus followed quick,  
 Teasing the God to sing them something new ;  
 Till in this cave they found the lady lone,  
 Sitting upon a seat of emerald stone.

105

110

## IX

And universal Pan, 'tis said, was there,  
 And though none saw him,—through the adamant  
 Of the deep mountains, through the trackless air,  
 And through those living spirits, like a want,  
 He passed out of his everlasting lair  
 Where the quick heart of the great world doth pant,  
 And felt that wondrous lady all alone,—  
 And she felt him, upon her emerald throne.

115

120

## X

And every nymph of stream and spreading tree,  
 And every shepherdess of Ocean's flocks,  
 Who drives her white waves over the green sea,  
 And Ocean with the brine on his gray locks,  
 And quaint Priapus with his company,  
 All came, much wondering how the enwombèd rocks  
 Could have brought forth so beautiful a birth ;—  
 Her love subdued their wonder and their mirth.

125

## XI

The herdsmen and the mountain maidens came,  
 And the rude kings of pastoral Garamant—  
 Their spirits shook within them, as a flame  
 Stirred by the air under a cavern gaunt :

130

Pigmies, and Polyphemes, by many a name,  
 Centaurs, and Satyrs, and such shapes as haunt  
 Wet clefts,—and lumps neither alive nor dead, 135  
 Dog-headed, bosom-eyed, and bird-footed.

## XII

For she was beautiful—her beauty made  
 The bright world dim, and everything beside  
 Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade:  
 No thought of living spirit could abide, 140  
 Which to her looks had ever been betrayed,  
 On any object in the world so wide,  
 On any hope within the circling skies,  
 But on her form, and in her inmost eyes.

## XIII

Which when the lady knew, she took her spindle 145  
 And twined three threads of fleecy mist, and three  
 Long lines of light, such as the dawn may kindle  
 The clouds and waves and mountains with; and she  
 As many star-beams, ere their lamps could dwindle  
 In the belated moon, wound skilfully; 150  
 And with these threads a subtle veil she wove—  
 A shadow for the splendour of her love.

## XIV

The deep recesses of her odorous dwelling  
 Were stored with magic treasures—sounds of air,  
 Which had the power all spirits of compelling, 155  
 Folded in cells of crystal silence there;  
 Such as we hear in youth, and think the feeling  
 Will never die—yet ere we are aware,  
 The feeling and the sound are fled and gone,  
 And the regret they leave remains alone. 160

## XV

And there lay Visions swift, and sweet, and quaint,  
 Each in its thin sheath, like a chrysalis,  
 Some eager to burst forth, some weak and faint  
 With the soft burthen of intensest bliss 165  
 It was its work to bear to many a saint  
 Whose heart adores the shrine which holiest is,  
 Even Love's:—and others white, green, gray, and black,  
 And of all shapes—and each was at her beck.

## XVI

And odours in a kind of aviary  
 Of ever-blooming Eden-trees she kept, 170  
 Clipped in a floating net, a love-sick Fairy  
 Had woven from dew-beams while the moon yet slept;



As bats at the wired window of a dairy,  
 They beat their vans; and each was an adept,  
 When loosed and missioned, making wings of winds, 175  
 To stir sweet thoughts or sad, in destined minds.

## XVII

And liquors clear and sweet, whose healthful might  
 Could medicine the sick soul to happy sleep,  
 And change eternal death into a night  
 Of glorious dreams—or if eyes needs must weep, 180  
 Could make their tears all wonder and delight,  
 She in her crystal vials did closely keep:  
 If men could drink of those clear vials, 'tis said  
 The living were not envied of the dead.

## XVIII

Her cave was stored with scrolls of strange device, 185  
 The works of some Saturnian Archimage,  
 Which taught the expiations at whose price  
 Men from the Gods might win that happy age  
 Too lightly lost, redeeming native vice;  
 And which might quench the Earth-consuming rage 190  
 Of gold and blood—till men should live and move  
 Harmonious as the sacred stars above;

## XIX

And how all things that seem untameable,  
 Not to be checked and not to be confined,  
 Obey the spells of Wisdom's wizard skill; 195  
 Time, earth, and fire—the ocean and the wind,  
 And all their shapes—and man's imperial will;  
 And other scrolls whose writings did unbind  
 The inmost lore of Love—let the profane  
 Tremble to ask what secrets they contain. 200

## XX

And wondrous works of substances unknown,  
 To which the enchantment of her father's power  
 Had changed those ragged blocks of savage stone,  
 Were heaped in the recesses of her bower;  
 Carved lamps and chalices, and vials which shone 205  
 In their own golden beams—each like a flower,  
 Out of whose depth a fire-fly shakes his light  
 Under a cypress in a starless night.

## XXI

At first she lived alone in this wild home,  
 And her own thoughts were each a minister, 210  
 Clothing themselves, or with the ocean foam,  
 Or with the wind, or with the speed of fire,

184 envied so all MSS. and edd. ; envious *cj.* James Thomson ('B. V.').

To work whatever purposes might come  
 Into her mind ; such power her mighty Sire  
 Had girt them with, whether to fly or run,  
 Through all the regions which he shines upon. 215

## XXII

The Ocean-nymphs and Hamadryades,  
 Oreads and Naiads, with long weedy locks,  
 Offered to do her bidding through the seas,  
 Under the earth, and in the hollow rocks, 220  
 And far beneath the matted roots of trees,  
 And in the gnarlèd heart of stubborn oaks,  
 So they might live for ever in the light  
 Of her sweet presence—each a satellite.

## XXIII

‘This may not be,’ the wizard maid replied ; 225  
 ‘The fountains where the Naiades bedew  
 Their shining hair, at length are drained and dried ;  
 The solid oaks forget their strength, and strew  
 Their latest leaf upon the mountains wide ;  
 The boundless ocean like a drop of dew 230  
 Will be consumed—the stubborn centre must  
 Be scattered, like a cloud of summer dust.

## XXIV

‘And ye with them will perish, one by one ;—  
 If I must sigh to think that this shall be,  
 If I must weep when the surviving Sun 235  
 Shall smile on your decay—oh, ask not me  
 To love you till your little race is run ;  
 I cannot die as ye must—over me  
 Your leaves shall glance—the streams in which ye dwell  
 Shall be my paths henceforth, and so—farewell!’— 240

## XXV

She spoke and wept :—the dark and azure well  
 Sparkled beneath the shower of her bright tears,  
 And every little circlet where they fell  
 Flung to the cavern-roof inconstant spheres 245  
 And intertangled lines of light :—a knell  
 Of sobbing voices came upon her ears  
 From those departing Forms, o’er the serene  
 Of the white streams and of the forest green.

## XXVI

All day the wizard lady sate aloof,  
 Spelling out scrolls of dread antiquity, 250  
 Under the cavern’s fountain-lighted roof ;  
 Or broidering the pictured poesy

Of some high tale upon her growing woof,  
 Which the sweet splendour of her smiles could dye  
 In hues outshining heaven—and ever she  
 Added some grace to the wrought poesy. 255

## XXVII

While on her hearth lay blazing many a piece  
 Of sandal wood, rare gums, and cinnamon;  
 Men scarcely know how beautiful fire is—  
 Each flame of it is as a precious stone 260  
 Dissolved in ever-moving light, and this  
 Belongs to each and all who gaze upon.  
 The Witch beheld it not, for in her hand  
 She held a woof that dimmed the burning brand.

## XXVIII

This lady never slept, but lay in trance 265  
 All night within the fountain—as in sleep.  
 Its emerald crags glowed in her beauty's glance;  
 Through the green splendour of the water deep  
 She saw the constellations reel and dance  
 Like fire-flies—and withal did ever keep 270  
 The tenour of her contemplations calm,  
 With open eyes, closed feet, and folded palm.

## XXIX

And when the whirlwinds and the clouds descended  
 From the white pinnacles of that cold hill,  
 She passed at dewfall to a space extended, 275  
 Where in a lawn of flowering asphodel  
 Amid a wood of pines and cedars blended,  
 There yawned an inextinguishable well  
 Of crimson fire—full even to the brim,  
 And overflowing all the margin trim. 280

## XXX

Within the which she lay when the fierce war  
 Of wintry winds shook that innocuous liquor  
 In many a mimic moon and bearded star  
 O'er woods and lawns;—the serpent heard it flicker 285  
 In sleep, and dreaming still, he crept afar—  
 And when the windless snow descended thicker  
 Than autumn leaves, she watched it as it came  
 Melt on the surface of the level flame.

## XXXI

She had a boat, which some say Vulcan wrought  
 For Venus, as the chariot of her star; 290  
 But it was found too feeble to be fraught  
 With all the ardours in that sphere which are,

And so she sold it, and Apollo bought  
 And gave it to this daughter: from a car  
 Changed to the fairest and the lightest boat  
 Which ever upon mortal stream did float. 295

## XXXII

And others say, that, when but three hours old,  
 The first-born Love out of his cradle lept,  
 And clove dun Chaos with his wings of gold,  
 And like an horticultural adept, 300  
 Stole a strange seed, and wrapped it up in mould,  
 And sowed it in his mother's star, and kept  
 Watering it all the summer with sweet dew,  
 And with his wings fanning it as it grew.

## XXXIII

The plant grew strong and green, the snowy flower 305  
 Fell, and the long and gourd-like fruit began  
 To turn the light and dew by inward power  
 To its own substance; woven tracery ran  
 Of light firm texture, ribbed and branching, o'er  
 The solid rind, like a leaf's veined fan— 310  
 Of which Love scooped this boat—and with soft motion  
 Piloted it round the circumfluous ocean.

## XXXIV

This boat she moored upon her fount, and lit  
 A living spirit within all its frame,  
 Breathing the soul of swiftmess into it. 315  
 Couched on the fountain like a panther tame,  
 One of the twain at Evan's feet that sit—  
 Or as on Vesta's sceptre a swift flame—  
 Or on blind Homer's heart a wingèd thought,—  
 In joyous expectation lay the boat. 320

## XXXV

Then by strange art she kneaded fire and snow  
 Together, tempering the repugnant mass  
 With liquid love—all things together grow  
 Through which the harmony of love can pass;  
 And a fair Shape out of her hands did flow— 325  
 A living Image, which did far surpass  
 In beauty that bright shape of vital stone  
 Which drew the heart out of Pygmalion.

## XXXVI

A sexless thing it was, and in its growth  
 It seemed to have developed no defect 330  
 Of either sex, yet all the grace of both,—  
 In gentleness and strength its limbs were decked;

The bosom swelled lightly with its full youth,  
 The countenance was such as might select  
 Some artist that his skill should never die, 335  
 Imaging forth such perfect purity.

## XXXVII

From its smooth shoulders hung two rapid wings,  
 Fit to have borne it to the seventh sphere,  
 Tipped with the speed of liquid lightnings,  
 Dyed in the ardours of the atmosphere: 340  
 She led her creature to the boiling springs  
 Where the light boat was moored, and said: 'Sit here!'  
 And pointed to the prow, and took her seat  
 Beside the rudder, with opposing feet.

## XXXVIII

And down the streams which clove those mountains vast,  
 Around their inland islets, and amid 346  
 The panther-peopled forests, whose shade cast  
 Darkness and odours, and a pleasure hid  
 In melancholy gloom, the pinnace passed;  
 By many a star-surrounded pyramid 350  
 Of icy crag cleaving the purple sky,  
 And caverns yawning round unfathomably.

## XXXIX

The silver noon into that winding dell,  
 With slanted gleam athwart the forest tops,  
 Tempered like golden evening, feebly fell; 355  
 A green and glowing light, like that which drops  
 From folded lilies in which glow-worms dwell,  
 When Earth over her face Night's mantle wraps;  
 Between the severed mountains lay on high,  
 Over the stream, a narrow rift of sky. 360

## XL

And ever as she went, the Image lay  
 With folded wings and unawakened eyes;  
 And o'er its gentle countenance did play  
 The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies, 365  
 Chasing the rapid smiles that would not stay,  
 And drinking the warm tears, and the sweet sighs  
 Inhaling, which, with busy murmur vain,  
 They had aroused from that full heart and brain.

333 swelled lightly *ed.* 1824, *B.*; lightly swelled *edd.* 1839; swelling  
 lightly with its full growth *transcript.* 339 lightnings *B.*, *edd.* 1839;  
 lightnings *ed.* 1824, *transcript.*

## XLI

And ever down the prone vale, like a cloud  
 Upon a stream of wind, the pinnacle went: 370  
 Now lingering on the pools, in which abode  
 The calm and darkness of the deep content  
 In which they paused; now o'er the shallow road  
 Of white and dancing waters, all besprent  
 With sand and polished pebbles:—mortal boat 375  
 In such a shallow rapid could not float.

## XLII

And down the earthquaking cataracts which shiver  
 Their snow-like waters into golden air,  
 Or under chasms unfathomable ever  
 Sepulchre them, till in their rage they tear 380  
 A subterranean portal for the river,  
 It fled—the circling sunbows did upbear  
 Its fall down the hoar precipice of spray,  
 Lighting it far upon its lampless way.

## XLIII

And when the wizard lady would ascend 385  
 The labyrinths of some many-winding vale,  
 Which to the inmost mountain upward tend—  
 She called 'Hermaphroditus!'—and the pale  
 And heavy hue which slumber could extend  
 Over its lips and eyes, as on the gale 390  
 A rapid shadow from a slope of grass,  
 Into the darkness of the stream did pass.

## XLIV

And it unfurled its heaven-coloured pinions,  
 With stars of fire spotting the stream below;  
 And from above into the Sun's dominions 395  
 Flinging a glory, like the golden glow  
 In which Spring clothes her emerald-wingèd minions,  
 All interwoven with fine feathery snow  
 And moonlight splendour of intensest rime,  
 With which frost paints the pines in winter time. 400

## XLV

And then it winnowed the Elysian air  
 Which ever hung about that lady bright,  
 With its aethereal vans—and speeding there,  
 Like a star up the torrent of the night,  
 Or a swift eagle in the morning glare 405  
 Breasting the whirlwind with impetuous flight,  
 The pinnacle, oared by those enchanted wings,  
 Clove the fierce streams towards their upper springs.

## XLVI

The water flashed, like sunlight by the prow  
 Of a noon-wandering meteor flung to Heaven; 410  
 The still air seemed as if its waves did flow  
 In tempest down the mountains; loosely driven  
 The lady's radiant hair streamed to and fro:  
 Beneath, the billows having vainly striven  
 Indignant and impetuous, roared to feel 415  
 The swift and steady motion of the keel.

## XLVII

Or, when the weary moon was in the wane,  
 Or in the noon of interlunar night,  
 The lady-witch in visions could not chain  
 Her spirit; but sailed forth under the light 420  
 Of shooting stars, and bade extend amain  
 Its storm-outspeeding wings, the Hermaphrodite;  
 She to the Austral waters took her way,  
 Beyond the fabulous Thamondocana,—

## XLVIII

Where, like a meadow which no scythe has shaven, 425  
 Which rain could never bend, or whirl-blast shake,  
 With the Antarctic constellations paven,  
 Canopus and his crew, lay the Austral lake—  
 There she would build herself a windless haven  
 Out of the clouds whose moving turrets make 430  
 The bastions of the storm, when through the sky  
 The spirits of the tempest thundered by:

## XLIX

A haven beneath whose translucent floor  
 The tremulous stars sparkled unfathomably,  
 And around which the solid vapours hoar, 435  
 Based on the level waters, to the sky  
 Lifted their dreadful crags, and like a shore  
 Of wintry mountains, inaccessibly  
 Hemmed in with rifts and precipices gray,  
 And hanging crags, many a cove and bay. 440

## L

And whilst the outer lake beneath the lash  
 Of the wind's scourge, foamed like a wounded thing,  
 And the incessant hail with stony clash  
 Ploughed up the waters, and the flagging wing

422 *Its transcript*; His *ed.* 1824, B.  
 B.; Thamondocona *ed.* 1824.  
*ed.* 1834.

424 Thamondocana *transcript*,  
 442 wind's *transcript*, B.; winds'  
*ed.* 1834.

Of the roused cormorant in the lightning flash 445  
 Looked like the wreck of some wind-wandering  
 Fragment of inky thunder-smoke—this haven  
 Was as a gem to copy Heaven engraven,—

## LI

On which that lady played her many pranks,  
 Circling the image of a shooting star, 450  
 Even as a tiger on Hydaspes' banks  
 Outspeeds the antelopes which speediest are,  
 In her light boat; and many quips and cranks  
 She played upon the water, till the car  
 Of the late moon, like a sick matron wan, 455  
 To journey from the misty east began.

## LII

And then she called out of the hollow turrets  
 Of those high clouds, white, golden and vermilion,  
 The armies of her ministering spirits—  
 In mighty legions, million after million, 460  
 They came, each troop emblazoning its merits  
 On meteor flags; and many a proud pavilion  
 Of the intertexture of the atmosphere  
 They pitched upon the plain of the calm mere.

## LIII

They framed the imperial tent of their great Queen 465  
 Of woven exhalations, underlaid  
 With lambent lightning-fire, as may be seen  
 A dome of thin and open ivory inlaid  
 With crimson silk—cressets from the serene  
 Hung there, and on the water for her tread 470  
 A tapestry of fleece-like mist was strewn,  
 Dyed in the beams of the ascending moon.

## LIV

And on a throne o'erlaid with starlight, caught  
 Upon those wandering isles of aëry dew,  
 Which highest shoals of mountain shipwreck not, 475  
 She sate, and heard all that had happened new  
 Between the earth and moon, since they had brought  
 The last intelligence—and now she grew  
 Pale as that moon, lost in the watery night—  
 And now she wept, and now she laughed outright. 480

## LV

These were tame pleasures; she would often climb  
 The steepest ladder of the crudded rack  
 Up to some beakèd cape of cloud sublime,  
 And like Arion on the dolphin's back



Ride singing through the shoreless air;—oft-time 485  
 Following the serpent lightning's winding track,  
 She ran upon the platforms of the wind,  
 And laughed to hear the fire-balls roar behind.

## LVI

And sometimes to those streams of upper air  
 Which whirl the earth in its diurnal round, 490  
 She would ascend, and win the spirits there  
 To let her join their chorus. Mortals found  
 That on those days the sky was calm and fair,  
 And mystic snatches of harmonious sound  
 Wandered upon the earth where'er she passed, 495  
 And happy thoughts of hope, too sweet to last.

## LVII

But her choice sport was, in the hours of sleep,  
 To glide adown old Nilus, where he threads  
 Egypt and Aethiopia, from the steep  
 Of utmost Axumè, until he spreads, 500  
 Like a calm flock of silver-fleeced sheep,  
 His waters on the plain: and crested heads  
 Of cities and proud temples gleam amid,  
 And many a vapour-belted pyramid.

## LVIII

By Moeris and the Mareotid lakes, 505  
 Strewn with faint blooms like bridal chamber floors,  
 Where naked boys bridling tame water-snakes,  
 Or charioteering ghastly alligators,  
 Had left on the sweet waters mighty wakes  
 Of those huge forms—within the brazen doors 510  
 Of the great Labyrinth slept both boy and beast,  
 Tired with the pomp of their Osirian feast.

## LIX

And where within the surface of the river  
 The shadows of the massy temples lie,  
 And never are erased—but tremble ever 515  
 Like things which every cloud can doom to die,  
 Through lotus-paven canals, and wheresoever  
 The works of man pierced that serenest sky  
 With tombs, and towers, and fanes, 'twas her delight  
 To wander in the shadow of the night. 520

## LX

With motion like the spirit of that wind  
 Whose soft step deepens slumber, her light feet  
 Passed through the peopled haunts of humankind,  
 Scattering sweet visions from her presence sweet,

Through fane, and palace-court, and labyrinth mined 525  
 With many a dark and subterranean street  
 Under the Nile, through chambers high and deep  
 She passed, observing mortals in their sleep.

## LXI

A pleasure sweet doubtless it was to see  
 Mortals subdued in all the shapes of sleep. 530  
 Here lay two sister twins in infancy;  
 There, a lone youth who in his dreams did weep;  
 Within, two lovers linkèd innocently  
 In their loose locks which over both did creep  
 Like ivy from one stem;—and there lay calm 535  
 Old age with snow-bright hair and folded palm.

## LXII

But other troubled forms of sleep she saw,  
 Not to be mirrored in a holy song—  
 Distortions foul of supernatural awe,  
 And pale imaginings of visioned wrong; 540  
 And all the code of Custom's lawless law  
 Written upon the brows of old and young:  
 'This,' said the wizard maiden, 'is the strife  
 Which stirs the liquid surface of man's life.'

## LXIII

And little did the sight disturb her soul.— 545  
 We, the weak mariners of that wide lake  
 Where'er its shores extend or billows roll,  
 Our course unpiloted and starless make  
 O'er its wild surface to an unknown goal:—  
 But she in the calm depths her way could take, 550  
 Where in bright bowers immortal forms abide  
 Beneath the weltering of the restless tide.

## LXIV

And she saw princes couched under the glow  
 Of sunlike gems; and round each temple-court  
 In dormitories ranged, row after row, 555  
 She saw the priests asleep—all of one sort—  
 For all were educated to be so.—  
 The peasants in their huts, and in the port  
 The sailors she saw cradled on the waves,  
 And the dead lulled within their dreamless graves. 560

## LXV

And all the forms in which those spirits lay  
 Were to her sight like the diaphanous  
 Veils, in which those sweet ladies oft array  
 Their delicate limbs, who would conceal from us

Only their scorn of all concealment: they 565  
 Move in the light of their own beauty thus.  
 But these and all now lay with sleep upon them,  
 And little thought a Witch was looking on them.

## LXVI

She, all those human figures breathing there,  
 Beheld as living spirits—to her eyes 570  
 The naked beauty of the soul lay bare,  
 And often through a rude and worn disguise  
 She saw the inner form most bright and fair—  
 And then she had a charm of strange device,  
 Which, murmured on mute lips with tender tone, 575  
 Could make that spirit mingle with her own.

## LXVII

Alas! Aurora, what wouldst thou have given  
 For such a charm when Tithon became gray?  
 Or how much, Venus, of thy silver heaven  
 Wouldst thou have yielded, ere Proserpina 580  
 Had half (oh! why not all?) the debt forgiven  
 Which dear Adonis had been doomed to pay,  
 To any witch who would have taught you it?  
 The Heliad doth not know its value yet.

## LXVIII

'Tis said in after times her spirit free 585  
 Knew what love was, and felt itself alone—  
 But holy Dian could not chaster be  
 Before she stooped to kiss Endymion,  
 Than now this lady—like a sexless bee  
 Tasting all blossoms, and confined to none, 590  
 Among those mortal forms, the wizard-maiden  
 Passed with an eye serene and heart unladen.

## LXIX

To those she saw most beautiful, she gave  
 Strange panacea in a crystal bowl:—  
 They drank in their deep sleep of that sweet wave, 595  
 And lived thenceforward as if some control,  
 Mightier than life, were in them; and the grave  
 Of such, when death oppressed the weary soul,  
 Was as a green and overarching bower  
 Lit by the gems of many a starry flower. 600

596 thenceforward *B.*; thence forth *ed.* 1824; henceforward *transcript.*  
 599 Was as a *B.*; Was a *ed.* 1824.

## LXX

For on the night when they were buried, she  
 Restored the embalmers' ruining, and shook  
 The light out of the funeral lamps, to be  
 A mimic day within that deathly nook;  
 And she unwound the woven imagery 605  
 Of second childhood's swaddling bands, and took  
 The coffin, its last cradle, from its niche,  
 And threw it with contempt into a ditch.

## LXXI

And there the body lay, age after age,  
 Mute, breathing, beating, warm, and undecaying, 610  
 Like one asleep in a green hermitage,  
 With gentle smiles about its eyelids playing,  
 And living in its dreams beyond the rage  
 Of death or life; while they were still arraying  
 In liveries ever new, the rapid, blind 615  
 And fleeting generations of mankind.

## LXXII

And she would write strange dreams upon the brain  
 Of those who were less beautiful, and make  
 All harsh and crooked purposes more vain  
 Than in the desert is the serpent's wake 620  
 Which the sand covers—all his evil gain  
 The miser in such dreams would rise and shake  
 Into a beggar's lap;—the lying scribe  
 Would his own lies betray without a bribe.

## LXXIII

The priests would write an explanation full, 625  
 Translating hieroglyphics into Greek,  
 How the God Apis really was a bull,  
 And nothing more; and bid the herald stick  
 The same against the temple doors, and pull  
 The old cant down; they licensed all to speak 630  
 What'er they thought of hawks, and cats, and geese,  
 By pastoral letters to each diocese.

## LXXIV

The king would dress an ape up in his crown  
 And robes, and seat him on his glorious seat, 635  
 And on the right hand of the sunlike throne  
 Would place a gaudy mock-bird to repeat  
 The chatterings of the monkey.—Every one  
 Of the prone courtiers crawled to kiss the feet  
 Of their great Emperor, when the morning came,  
 And kissed—alas, how many kiss the same! 640

601 night when *transcript*; night that *ed.* 1824, B.  
*transcript*, B.; sleep *ed.* 1824.

## LXXV

The soldiers dreamed that they were blacksmiths, and  
 Walked out of quarters in somnambulism ;  
 Round the red anvils you might see them stand  
 Like Cyclopes in Vulcan's sooty abysm,  
 Beating their swords to ploughshares ;—in a band 645  
 The gaolers sent those of the liberal schism  
 Free through the streets of Memphis, much, I wis,  
 To the annoyance of king Amasis.

## LXXVI

And timid lovers who had been so coy,  
 They hardly knew whether they loved or not, 650  
 Would rise out of their rest, and take sweet joy,  
 To the fulfilment of their inmost thought ;  
 And when next day the maiden and the boy  
 Met one another, both, like sinners caught,  
 Blushed at the thing which each believed was done 655  
 Only in fancy—till the tenth moon shone ;

## LXXVII

And then the Witch would let them take no ill :  
 Of many thousand schemes which lovers find,  
 The Witch found one,—and so they took their fill  
 Of happiness in marriage warm and kind. 660  
 Friends who, by practice of some envious skill,  
 Were torn apart—a wide wound, mind from mind!—  
 She did unite again with visions clear  
 Of deep affection and of truth sincere.

## LXXVIII

These were the pranks she played among the cities 665  
 Of mortal men, and what she did to Sprites  
 And Gods, entangling them in her sweet ditties  
 To do her will, and show their subtle sleights,  
 I will declare another time ; for it is  
 A tale more fit for the weird winter nights 670  
 Than for these garish summer days, when we  
 Scarcely believe much more than we can see.

## NOTE ON THE WITCH OF ATLAS, BY MRS. SHELLEY

WE spent the summer of 1820 at the Baths of San Giuliano, four miles from Pisa. These baths were of great use to Shelley in soothing his nervous irritability. We made several excursions in the neighbourhood. The country around is fertile, and diversi-

fied and rendered picturesque by ranges of near hills and more distant mountains. The peasantry are a handsome intelligent race ; and there was a gladsome sunny heaven spread over us, that rendered home and every scene we visited cheerful and

bright. During some of the hottest days of August, Shelley made a solitary journey on foot to the summit of Monte San Pellegrino—a mountain of some height, on the top of which there is a chapel, the object, during certain days of the year, of many pilgrimages. The excursion delighted him while it lasted; though he exerted himself too much, and the effect was considerable lassitude and weakness on his return. During the expedition he conceived the idea, and wrote, in the three days immediately succeeding to his return, the *Witch of Atlas*. This poem is peculiarly characteristic of his tastes—wildly fanciful, full of brilliant imagery, and discarding human interest and passion, to revel in the fantastic ideas that his imagination suggested.

The surpassing excellence of *The Cenci* had made me greatly desire that Shelley should increase his popularity by adopting subjects that would more suit the popular taste than a poem conceived in the abstract and dreamy spirit of the *Witch of Atlas*. It was not only that I wished him to acquire popularity as redounding to his fame; but I believed that he would obtain a greater mastery over his own powers, and greater happiness in his mind, if public applause crowned his endeavours. The few stanzas that precede the poem were addressed to me on my representing these ideas to him. Even now I believe that I was in the right. Shelley did not expect sympathy and approbation from the public; but the want of it took away a portion of the ardour that ought to have sustained him while writing. He was thrown

on his own resources, and on the inspiration of his own soul; and wrote because his mind overflowed, without the hope of being appreciated. I had not the most distant wish that he should truckle in opinion, or submit his lofty aspirations for the human race to the low ambition and pride of the many; but I felt sure that, if his poems were more addressed to the common feelings of men, his proper rank among the writers of the day would be acknowledged, and that popularity as a poet would enable his countrymen to do justice to his character and virtues, which in those days it was the mode to attack with the most flagitious calumnies and insulting abuse. That he felt these things deeply cannot be doubted, though he armed himself with the consciousness of acting from a lofty and heroic sense of right. The truth burst from his heart sometimes in solitude, and he would write a few unfinished verses that showed that he felt the sting; among such I find the following:—

‘Alas! this is not what I thought  
Life was.  
I knew that there were crimes  
and evil men,  
Misery and hate; nor did I hope  
to pass  
Untouched by suffering through  
the rugged glen.  
In mine own heart I saw as in a  
glass  
The hearts of others. . . . And,  
when  
I went among my kind, with triple  
brass  
Of calm endurance my weak  
breast I armed,  
To bear scorn, fear, and hate—a  
woful mass!’

I believed that all this morbid feeling would vanish if the chord of sympathy between him and his countrymen were touched. But my persuasions were vain, the mind could not be bent from its natural inclination. Shelley shrunk instinctively from portraying human passion, with its mixture of good and evil, of disappointment and disquiet. Such opened again the wounds of his own heart; and he loved to shelter himself rather in the airiest flights of fancy, forgetting love and hate, and regret and lost hope, in such imaginations as borrowed their

hues from sunrise or sunset, from the yellow moonshine or paly twilight, from the aspect of the far ocean or the shadows of the woods, —which celebrated the singing of the winds among the pines, the flow of a murmuring stream, and the thousand harmonious sounds which Nature creates in her solitudes. These are the materials which form the *Witch of Atlas*: it is a brilliant congregation of ideas such as his senses gathered, and his fancy coloured, during his rambles in the sunny land he so much loved.

## OEDIPUS TYRANNUS

OR

## SWELLFOOT THE TYRANT

A TRAGEDY IN TWO ACTS

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL DORIC

‘Choose Reform or Civil War,  
When through thy streets, instead of hare with dogs,  
A CONSORT-QUEEN shall hunt a KING with hogs,  
Riding on the IONIAN MINOTAUR.’

[Begun at the Baths of San Giuliano, near Pisa, August 24, 1819; published anonymously by J. Johnston, Cheapside (imprint C. F. Seyfang), 1820. On a threat of prosecution the publisher surrendered the whole impression, seven copies—the total number sold—excepted. *Oedipus* does not appear in the first edition of the *Poetical Works*, 1839, but it was included by Mrs. Shelley in the second edition of that year. Our text is that of the *editio princeps*, 1820, save in three places, where the reading of ed. 1820 will be found at the foot of the page.]

### ADVERTISEMENT

THIS Tragedy is one of a triad, or system of three Plays (an arrangement according to which the Greeks were accustomed to con-

nect their dramatic representations), elucidating the wonderful and appalling fortunes of the SWELLFOOT dynasty. It was evi-





(Nor with less toil were their foundations laid)<sup>1</sup>,  
 Sustain the cone of my untroubled brain,  
 That point, the emblem of a pointless nothing! 10  
 Thou to whom Kings and laurelled Emperors,  
 Radical-butchers, Paper-money-millers,  
 Bishops and Deacons, and the entire army  
 Of those fat martyrs to the persecution  
 Of stifling turtle-soup, and brandy-devils, 15  
 Offer their secret vows! Thou plenteous Ceres  
 Of their Eleusis, hail!

*The Swine.* Eigh! eigh! eigh! eigh!

*Swellfoot.* Ha! what are ye,  
 Who, crowned with leaves devoted to the Furies,  
 Cling round this sacred shrine?

*Swine.* Aigh! aigh! aigh!

*Swellfoot.* What! ye that are  
 The very beasts that, offered at her altar 20  
 With blood and groans, salt-cake, and fat, and inwards,  
 Ever propitiate her reluctant will  
 When taxes are withheld?

*Swine.* Ugh! ugh! ugh!

*Swellfoot.* What! ye who grub  
 With filthy snouts my red potatoes up  
 In Allan's rushy bog? Who eat the oats 25  
 Up, from my cavalry in the Hebrides?  
 Who swill the hog-wash soup my cooks digest  
 From bones, and rags, and scraps of shoe-leather,  
 Which should be given to cleaner Pigs than you?

*The Swine.—Semichorus I.*

The same, alas! the same; 30  
 Though only now the name  
 Of Pig remains to me.

*Semichorus II.*

If 'twere your kingly will  
 Us wretched Swine to kill,  
 What should we yield to thee? 35

*Swellfoot.* Why, skin and bones, and some few hairs for mortar.

*Chorus of Swine.*

I have heard your Laureate sing,  
 That pity was a royal thing;  
 Under your mighty ancestors, we Pigs  
 Were bless'd as nightingales on myrtle sprigs, 40

<sup>1</sup> See Universal History for an account of the number of people who died, and the immense consumption of garlic by the wretched Egyptians, who made a sepulchre for the name as well as the bodies of their tyrants.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

Or grasshoppers that live on noonday dew,  
And sung, old annals tell, as sweetly too;  
But now our sties are fallen in, we catch

The murrain and the mange, the scab and itch;  
Sometimes your royal dogs tear down our thatch,

And then we seek the shelter of a ditch;  
Hog-wash or grains, or ruta-baga, none  
Has yet been ours since your reign begun.

45

*First Sow.*

My Pigs, 'tis in vain to tug.

*Second Sow.*

I could almost eat my litter.

50

*First Pig.*

I suck, but no milk will come from the dug.

*Second Pig.*

Our skin and our bones would be bitter.

*The Boars.*

We fight for this rag of greasy rug,  
Though a trough of wash would be fitter.

*Semichorus.*

Happier Swine were they than we,  
Drowned in the Gadarean sea—

55

I wish that pity would drive out the devils,  
Which in your royal bosom hold their revels,  
And sink us in the waves of thy compassion!

Alas! the Pigs are an unhappy nation!

60

Now if your Majesty would have our bristles

To bind your mortar with, or fill our colons

With rich blood, or make brawn out of our gristles,

In policy—ask else your royal Solons—

You ought to give us hog-wash and clean straw,

65

And sties well thatched; besides it is the law!

*Swellfoot.* This is sedition, and rank blasphemy!

Ho! there, my guards!

*Enter a GUARD.*

*Guard.*

Your sacred Majesty.

*Swellfoot.* Call in the Jews, Solomon the court porkman,

Moses the sow-gelder, and Zephaniah

70

The hog-butcher.

*Guard.*

They are in waiting, Sire.

*Enter SOLOMON, MOSES, and ZEPHANIAH.*

*Swellfoot.* Out with your knife, old Moses, and spay those Sows

[*The Pigs run about in consternation.*]

That load the earth with Pigs; cut close and deep.

59 thy ed. 1820; your ed. 1839.

Moral restraint I see has no effect,  
 Nor prostitution, nor our own example, 75  
 Starvation, typhus-fever, war, nor prison—  
 This was the art which the arch-priest of Famine  
 Hinted at in his charge to the Theban clergy—  
 Cut close and deep, good Moses.

*Moses.* Let your Majesty  
 Keep the Boars quiet, else——

*Swellfoot.* Zephaniah, cut 80  
 That fat Hog's throat, the brute seems overfed;  
 Seditious hunks! to whine for want of grains.

*Zephaniah.* Your sacred Majesty, he has the dropsy;—  
 We shall find pints of hydatids in 's liver,  
 He has not half an inch of wholesome fat 85  
 Upon his carious ribs——

*Swellfoot.* 'Tis all the same,  
 He'll serve instead of riot money, when  
 Our murmuring troops bivouac in Thebes' streets;  
 And January winds, after a day  
 Of butchering, will make them relish carrion. 90  
 Now, Solomon, I'll sell you in a lump  
 The whole kit of them.

*Solomon.* Why, your Majesty,  
 I could not give——

*Swellfoot.* Kill them out of the way,  
 That shall be price enough, and let me hear  
 Their everlasting grunts and whines no more! 95

[*Exeunt, driving in the SWINE.*]

*Enter MAMMON, the Arch-Priest; and PURGANAX, Chief of the  
 Council of Wizards.*

*Purganax.* The future looks as black as death, a cloud,  
 Dark as the frown of Hell, hangs over it—  
 The troops grow mutinous—the revenue fails—  
 There's something rotten in us—for the level  
 Of the State slopes, its very bases topple, 100  
 The boldest turn their backs upon themselves!

*Mammon.* Why what's the matter, my dear fellow, now?  
 Do the troops mutiny?—decimate some regiments;  
 Does money fail?—come to my mint—coin paper,  
 Till gold be at a discount, and ashamed 105  
 To show his bilious face, go purge himself,  
 In emulation of her vestal whiteness.

*Purganax.* Oh, would that this were all! The oracle!!

*Mammon.* Why it was I who spoke that oracle,  
 And whether I was dead drunk or inspired, 110  
 I cannot well remember; nor, in truth,  
 The oracle itself!

*Purganax.* The words went thus:—  
 'Boeotia, choose reform or civil war!  
 When through the streets, instead of hare with dogs,  
 A Consort Queen shall hunt a King with Hogs, 115  
 Riding on the Ionian Minotaur.'

*Mammon.* Now if the oracle had ne'er foretold  
 This sad alternative, it must arrive,  
 Or not, and so it must now that it has;  
 And whether I was urged by grace divine 120  
 Or Lesbian liquor to declare these words,  
 Which must, as all words must, be false or true,  
 It matters not: for the same Power made all,  
 Oracle, wine, and me and you—or none—  
 'Tis the same thing. If you knew as much 125  
 Of oracles as I do—

*Purganax.* You arch-priests  
 Believe in nothing; if you were to dream  
 Of a particular number in the Lottery,  
 You would not buy the ticket?

*Mammon.* Yet our tickets  
 Are seldom blanks. But what steps have you taken? 130  
 For prophecies, when once they get abroad,  
 Like liars who tell the truth to serve their ends,  
 Or hypocrites who, from assuming virtue,  
 Do the same actions that the virtuous do,  
 Contrive their own fulfilment. This Iona— 135  
 Well—you know what the chaste Pasiphae did,  
 Wife to that most religious King of Crete,  
 And still how popular the tale is here;  
 And these dull Swine of Thebes boast their descent  
 From the free Minotaur. You know they still 140  
 Call themselves Bulls, though thus degenerate,  
 And everything relating to a Bull  
 Is popular and respectable in Thebes.  
 Their arms are seven Bulls in a field gules;  
 They think their strength consists in eating beef,— 145  
 Now there were danger in the precedent  
 If Queen Iona—

*Purganax.* I have taken good care  
 That shall not be. I struck the crust o' the earth  
 With this enchanted rod, and Hell lay bare!  
 And from a cavern full of ugly shapes 150  
 I chose a LEECH, a GADFLY, and a RAT.  
 The Gadfly was the same which Juno sent

114 the ed. 1820; thy *cj. Forman*; *cf. Motto below Title, and II. i. 153-6.* 129  
 ticket? *ed. 1820*; ticket! *ed. 1839.* 135 their own *Mrs. Shelley, later edd.*;  
 their *edd. 1820 and 1839.*

To agitate Io<sup>1</sup>, and which Ezekiel<sup>2</sup> mentions  
 That the Lord whistled for out of the mountains  
 Of utmost Aethiopia, to torment  
 Mesopotamian Babylon. The beast 155  
 Has a loud trumpet like the scarabee,  
 His crookèd tail is barbed with many stings,  
 Each able to make a thousand wounds, and each  
 Immedicable; from his convex eyes 160  
 He sees fair things in many hideous shapes,  
 And trumpets all his falsehood to the world.  
 Like other beetles he is fed on dung—  
 He has eleven feet with which he crawls,  
 Trailing a blistering slime, and this foul beast 165  
 Has tracked Iona from the Theban limits,  
 From isle to isle, from city unto city,  
 Urging her flight from the far Chersonese  
 To fabulous Solyma, and the Aetnean Isle,  
 Ortygia, Melite, and Calypso's Rock, 170  
 And the swart tribes of Garamant and Fez,  
 Aeolia and Elysium, and thy shores,  
 Parthenope, which now, alas! are free!  
 And through the fortunate Saturnian land,  
 Into the darkness of the West.

*Mammon.* But if 175

This Gadfly should drive Iona hither?

*Purganax.* Gods! what an *if!* but there is my gray RAT:  
 So thin with want, he can crawl in and out  
 Of any narrow chink and filthy hole,  
 And he shall creep into her dressing-room, 180  
 And—

*Mammon.* My dear friend, where are your wits? as if  
 She does not always toast a piece of cheese  
 And bait the trap? and rats, when lean enough  
 To crawl through *such* chinks—

*Purganax.* But my LEECH—a leech 185  
 Fit to suck blood, with lubricous round rings,  
 Capaciously expatiative, which make  
 His little body like a red balloon,  
 As full of blood as that of hydrogen,  
 Sucked from men's hearts; insatiably he sucks  
 And clings and pulls—a horse-leech, whose deep maw 190  
 The plethoric King Swellfoot could not fill,  
 And who, till full, will cling for ever.

*Mammon.* This

For Queen Iona would suffice, and less;

<sup>1</sup> The *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

<sup>2</sup> And the Lord whistled for the gadfly out of Aethiopia, and for the bee of Egypt, etc.—EZEKIEL.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]

But 'tis the Swinish multitude I fear,  
And in that fear I have——

*Purganax.*

Done what?

*Mammon.*

Disinherited 195

My eldest son Chrysaor, because he  
Attended public meetings, and would always  
Stand prating there of commerce, public faith,  
Economy, and unadulterate coin,  
And other topics, ultra-radical; 200  
And have entailed my estate, called the Fool's Paradise,  
And funds in fairy-money, bonds, and bills,  
Upon my accomplished daughter Banknotina,  
And married her to the gallows<sup>1</sup>.

*Purganax.*

A good match!

*Mammon.* A high connexion, Purganax. The bridegroom  
Is of a very ancient family, 206  
Of Hounslow Heath, Tyburn, and the New Drop,  
And has great influence in both Houses;—oh!  
He makes the fondest husband; nay, *too* fond,—  
New-married people should not kiss in public; 210  
But the poor souls love one another so!  
And then my little grandchildren, the gibbets,  
Promising children as you ever saw,—  
The young playing at hanging, the elder learning  
How to hold radicals. They are well taught too, 215  
For every gibbet says its catechism  
And reads a select chapter in the Bible  
Before it goes to play.

[A most tremendous humming is heard.]

*Purganax.*

Ha! what do I hear?

*Enter the GADFLY.*

*Mammon.* Your Gadfly, as it seems, is tired of gadding.

*Gadfly.*

Hum! hum! hum! 220  
From the lakes of the Alps, and the cold gray scalps  
Of the mountains, I come!  
Hum! hum! hum!  
From Morocco and Fez, and the high palaces  
Of golden Byzantium; 225  
From the temples divine of old Palestine,  
From Athens and Rome,  
With a ha! and a hum!  
I come! I come!  
All inn-doors and windows 230  
Were open to me:

<sup>1</sup> 'If one should marry a gallows, and beget young gibbets, I never saw one so prone.'—CYMBELINE.—[SHELLEY'S NOTE.]