

THE MYSTERIOUS MOTHER

By

Horace Walpole

A TRAGEDY

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Platform before the Castle.

Enter Florian.

WHAT awful silence! how these antique towers
And vacant courts dull the suspended soul,
Till expectation wears the cast of fear ;
And fear half-ready to become devotion,
Mumbles a kind of mental orison, v
It knows not wherefore: —
What a kind of being is circumstance!
I am a soldier, and were yonder battlements
Garnim'd with combatants, and cannon-mounted,
My daring breast would bound with exultation,
And glorious hopes enliven this drear scene.
Now dare not I scarce tread to my own hearing,
[Lest echo borrow Superstition's tongue,
And seem to answer me, like one departed. ,
I met a peasant, and inquir'd my way:
The carle, not rude of speech, but like the tenant
Of some night-haunted ruin, bore an aspect
Of horror, worn to habitude. He bade
God bless me; and pass'd on—I urg'd him farther
Good master, cried he, go not to the castle;
There sorrow ever dwells, and moping misery.
I press'd him yet—None there, said he, are welcome

But now and then a mass-priest, and the poor,
To whom the pious Countess deals her alms,
On covenant, that each revolving night
They beg of heav'n the health of her son's soul,
And of her jpwn: But often as returns
The twentieth of September, they are bound
Fast from the midnight watch to pray till morn.
More would he not disclose, or knew not more.
What precious mummary! Her son in exile,
She wastes on monk's and beggars his inheritance,
For his soul's health! I never knew a woman
But lov'd our bodies or our souls too well.
Each master-whim maintains its hour of empire,
And obstinately faithful to its dictates,
With equal ardor, equal importunity,
They tease us to be damn'd, or to be sav'd.
I hate to love or pray too long.)

SCENE II.

Enter Peter, the Porter of the Castle / and Florian.

Por. Methought

I heard a stranger's voice—What lack you, sir?

Flor. Good fellow, who inhabits here?

Por. I do.

Flor. Belike this castle is not thine:

Por. Belike so: But be it whose it may, this is no haunt For revellers
and gallants—pass your way.

Flor. Thou churl! Is this your *Gallic* hospitality? Thy lady, on my life,
would not thus rudely) Chide from her presence a bewilder'd knight.

Por. Thou know'st my lady then !—Thou know'st
her not.

Canst thou in hair-cloths vex those dainty limbs?
Canst thou on reeking pavements and cold marble,
In meditation pass the live-long night?
Canst mortify that flesh, my rosy minion,
And bid thy rebel appetite refrain
From goblets foaming wine, and costly viands?
These are the deeds, my youngster, must draw down
My lady's ever heav'n-directed eye.

Flor. In sooth, good friend, my knighthood is not
school'd

In voluntary rigours—I can fast, s

March supperless, and make cold earth my pillow,

When my companions know no choicer fare.

But seldom roost in churches, or reject

The ready banquet, or a willing fair-one.

Por. Angels defend us! What a reprobate!

Yon mould'ring porch, for sixteen years and more,

Has not been struck with such unhallow'd sounds.

v Hence to thy lewd companions!

Flor. Father grey-beard,

I cry you mercy \—nor was it my intention

To wound your Reverence's saint-like organs.

But come, thou hast known other days—canst tell Of banquettings
and dancings—'twas not always thus.

Por. No, no—time was—my lord, the Count of Nar bonne, A
prosp'rous gentleman; were he alive, We should not know these
moping melancholies. Heaven rest his soul! I marvel not my lady
Cherishes his remembrance, for he was Comely to sight, and wondrous
goodly built. They say his son Count Edmund's mainly like him. 'Would
these old arms, that serv'd his grand-father, Could once enfold him! I
should part in peace. *Flor.* What if I bring tidings of Count Edmund 1

Por. Mercy befall me!—Now my dream is out, Last night the raven
croak'd, and from the bars Of our fc>dge-fire flitted a messenger— I
knew no good would follow—Bring you ill tidings, Sir, gentleman?

Flor. (.This is a solemn fool, Or solemn knave) (*Aside*). Shoudst thou
indeed rejoice

To see Count Edmund? Would thy noble mistress Spring with a
mother's joy to clasp her son?

Por. Oh no, no, no.—He must not here alas!

He must not here set foot—But tell me, stranger,
prithce say, Does my old master's heir
Still breathe this vital air? Is he iterance?
Is he within some ten, or twenty leagues,

Or fifty? I am hearty yet, have all my limbs,
And I would make a weary pilgrimage
To kiss his gracious hand, and at his feet
Lay my old bones—for here Xse'er must see him.

[Weeps.

Flor. Thou good old man, forgive a soldier's mirth. But say, why
Narbonne's heir from Narbonne's lands Is banish'd, driven by a
ruthless mother?

Por. Ah! sir, 'tis hard indeed—but spare his mother;

Such virtue never dwelt in female form.
Count Edmund—but he was indeed a stripling,
A very lad—it was the trick of youth,
And we have all our sins, or we have had;
Yet still no pardon—Think'st thou not, my lord,
My late kind master, e'er he knew my lady,
Wist not what woman was?—I warrant him—

But so Count Edmund being not sixteen,

A lusty youth, his father's very image—
Oh! how he has play'd me many a trick—good sir,
Does my young master ever name old Peter?
Well I but I prate—you must forgive my age;
I come to th' point—Her name was Beatrice;

A roguish eye—she ne'er would look on me,
Or we had sav'd full many a woeful day.
Mark you me well?

Flor. I do ,

Por. This Beatrice—

But hark! my lady comes—retire a while
Beyond these yews—anon I'll tell you more.

Flor. May I not greet her?

Por. For myr.office, no:

'Twere forfeit of my badge to hold a parley
With one of near thy years.

[Florian withdraws.]

[The Countess in weeds, with a crucifix in her hand, issues from the castle, accompanied by two maidens, and passes over the stage. When she is gone, Florian returns.]

Por. (Continues) 'Tis ever thus.

At break of morn, she hies to yonder abbey,
And prostrate o'er some monumental stone,
Seems more to wait her doom, than ask to shun it.
The day is pass'd in minist'ring to wants
Of health or means; the closing eve beholds
New tears, new pray'rs, or haggard meditation.
But if cold moonshine, deep'ning ev'ry frown
Of these impending towers, invite her steps,
She issues forth.—Beshrew me, but I tremble,
When my own keys discharge the draw-bridge
chains,

And rattle thro' the castle's farmost vaults.
Then have I seen this sad, this sober mourner,
With frantic gesture and disorder'd step—
But hush—Who moves up yonder avenue?
It is—no—stay—i'faith! but it is he,
My lady's confessor, with Friar Martin,
Quick hie thee hence—should that same meddling
monk

Observe our conf'rence, there were fine work toward.

Flor. You will not leave your tale unfinish'd?
Por. Mass! but I will—a tak_willL_fay.-iio sti-
pend.

These fifty winters have I borne my staff,
And will not lose my porridge for my prating.
Flor. Well! but Count Edmund—Wo't not hear
of him?

Por. Aye, bless his name! at any leisure hour.
(This evening, 'ere the shutting of the gates,
Loiter about yon grange; I'll come to thee.
So now, begone—Away! [*Exeunts everally.*

SCENE III

Benedict and Martin.

Bened Ay! sift her, sift her—

As if I had not prob'd her very soul,
And wound me round her heart—I tell thee, brother,
This woman was not cast in human mould.
Ten such would foil a council, would unbuild
Our Roman church—In her devotion's real.
Our beads, our hymns, our saints, amuse her not:
Nay, not confession, not repeating o'er
Her darling sins, has any charms for her.
I have mark'd her praying: not one wand'ring
thought

Seems to steal meaning from her words —She prays,
Because she feels, and feels, because a sinner.

Mart. "What is this secret sin, this untold tale,
That artxannot extract, nor penance cleanse?
Loss of a husband, sixteen years enjoy'd,
And dead as many, could not stamp such sorrow.
Nor could she be his death's artificer,
And now affect to weep it—I have heard,
That chasing, as he homeward rode, a stag,
Chaf'd by the hounds, with sudden onset slew
Th' adventurous Count.

Bened. 'Twas so; and yet, my brother,
My mind has more than once imputed blood
To this incessant mourner. Beatrice,

The damsel for whose sake she holds in exile
Her only son, has never, since the night
Of his incontinence, been seen or heard of.

Mart. 'Tis clear, 'tis clear j nor will her prudent tongue Accuse its
owner.

Bened. Judge not rashly, brother. I oft have shifted my discourse to
murder: She notes it not. Her muscles hold their place. Nor
discojnpos'd, nor firm'd to steadiness. No sudden flushing, and no
fault'ring lip: Nor, tho' she pities, lifts me to her eyes j Her
handkerchief, to palliate her disorder. . There the wound rankles
not.—I've fix'd on love, The failure of the sex, and aptest cause Of each
attendant crime.—

Mart. Aye, brother, there We master all their craft. Touch but that
string—

Bened. Still, brother, do you err She own'd to me, That, tho' of
nature warm, the passion love Did ne'er anticipate her choice'. The
Count, Her husband, so ador'd and so lamented, Won not her fancy,
till the nuptial rites

Had with the sting of pleasure taught her passion..; his, with such
modestjruth, and that truth heights /' en'd

iBy conscious sense, that holds deceit_.a jzeakr.ess^
(She utter'd, I would pawn my order's credit
On her veracity.

Mart. Then whither turn
To worm her secret outjj

Bened. I know not that.' She will be silent, but she scorns a falshood,
And thus while frank on all things, but her secret, I know, I know it
not.

Mart. Till she disclose it, Deny her absolution

Bened. She will take none:
Offer'd, she scoffs it; and withheld, demands not,
Nay, vows she will not loa.i her sinking soul
With incantations

Mart This is heresy,
Rank heresy ; and holy church mould note it.

Bened. Be patient, brother—Tho' of adamant
Her reason, charity dissolves that rock,

-4And surely we have tasted of the stream.
Nay, one unguarded moment may disclose
This mystic tale—then, brother, what a harvest,
When masters of her bosom-guilt I_Age too

May numb her faculties — Or soon, or late,
A praying woman must become our spoil.

Mart. Her zeal may falter.

Bened. Not in solitude.

I nurse her in new horrors ; form her tenants
To fancy visions, phantoms; and report them.
She mocks their fond credulity—but trust me,
Her memory retains their colouring.
Oft times it paints her dreams; and ebon night
Is no logician. I have known her call
For lights, e'er she could combat its impressions.

too, tho' often scorn'd, relate my dreams,
And wond'rous voices heard; that she may think me
At least an honest bigot; nor remember
tried to practise on her fears, and foil'd,
ive o'er my purpose.

This is masterly.

Bened. For mastery i when I am more in awe
Of my own penitent than she of me.
My genius is command j art, but a tool,
My groveling fortune forces me to use.
Oh I were I seated high as my ambition,
I'd place this naked foot on necks of monarchs,
And make them bow to creeds myself would laugh
at*.

Mart. By humbler arts our mighty fabric rose.
Win power by craft; wear it with ostentation;
For confidence is half security.
Deluded men think boldness conscious strength;

* Alluding to S'xtus Quintus.

And grow the slaves of their own want[^]jiaubt.
Gain to the Holy See this fair domain;
A crimson bonnet may reward your toils,
And the rich harvest prove at last your own.

Bened. Never, while Edmund lives. This steady woman
Can ne[^],beT)iOTs[^]dxso many_y.irtues.

Justicgjs interwoven in her frame j

Nor will she wrong the son she will not see.

She loves him not; yet mistress of his fortunes,

His ample exhibition speaks her bounty.

She destines him whate'er his father's love

Gave blindly to her will. Her alms, her charities,

Usurp'd from her own wants, she sets apart

A scanty portion only for her ward,

Young Adeliza.

Mart. Say her son were dead, And Adeliza veil'd —

Bened. I press the latter With fruitless ardor. Often as I urge it, She pleads the maiden's flushing cheek, and nature; That speaks in characters of glowing rose Its modest appetites and timid wishes. [Her sex, she says, when gratified; When check'd, a hurricane of boundless passions. Then, with sweet irony and sad, she wills me Ask my own breast, if cowls and scapuhries Are charms all powerful to subdue desire?

Mart. 'Twere wiser school the maiden: lead the train.

Of young ideas to a fancied object.

A mental house may fill her hovering thoughts,

And bar their fixing on some earthly lover.

Bened. This is already done—but Edmund's death Were hopes more solid

Mart. First report him dead; His letters intercepted —

Bened. Greatly thought! Thou true son of the church !—and lo! where comes Our patroness—leave me; I will not lose An instant. I will sound her inmost soul, And mould it to the moment of projection.

'[Exit Martin. [Benedict retires within the castle.

SCENE IV.

Countess, two Maidens.

Coun. Haste thee, Maria, to the western tower, And learn if th' aged pilgrim dozes yet. You, Elinor, attend my little orphans, And when their task is done, prepare their breakfast. But scant th' allowance of the red-hair'd urchin, That maim'd the poor man's cur.—Ah! happy me!

[The damsels go in. If sentiment, untutor'd by affliction, triad taught my temperate blood to feel for others, Ere pity, perching on my mangled bosom, Like flies on wounded flesh, had made me shrink 'More with compunction than with sympathy i

Alas! must guilt then ground our very virtues!
Grow they on sin jalone, and not on grace?
While Narbonne liv'd, my fully-fated soul
Thought none unhappy—for it did not think!
In pleasures roll'd whole summer-suns away;
And if a pensive visage cross'd my path,
I deem'd the wearer envious or ill-natur'd.
What anguisli had I blessedly redress'd.
But that I was too bless'd !—Well! peace is fled,,
Ne'er to return! nor dare I snap theihread
Of life, while misery may want a friend.
Despair andi hell must wait, while pity needs
|My ministry—Eternity has scope
J^nough to punish me, tho' I should borrow
A few short hours to sacrifice to Charity.

SCENE V.

Benedict, Countess.

Bened. I sought you, lady.

Coun. Happily I'm found. Who needs the widow's mite?

Bened. None ask your aid. Your gracious foresight still prevents
occasion: And your poor beadsman joys to meet your presence,
Uncumber'd with a suit. It pains my soul, Oft as I tax your bounty,
lest: I seem Axxaving or immodest almoner.

Coun. 'No more of this, good father. I suspect not One of your holy
order of dilsemblin^:

suspect not me of loving flattery.

Pass a few years, and I shall be a corse—

Will flattery then new cloath my skeleton,

Fill out these hollow jaws? Wil't give me virtues?

Or at the solemn audit pass for truth,

And varnish o'er my stains?

Bened. The church could seal Your pardon—but you scorn it. In your
pride Consistsijrotir danger. Yours are Pagan virtues: As such I praise
them—but as such condemn them.

Coun. Father, my crimes are Pagan; my belief Too orthodox to trust
to erring man. What! shall I, foul with guilt, and self-condemn'd,
Presume to kneel, where angels kneel appal'd, And plead a priest's
certificate for pardon? While he, perchance, before my blasted eyes

Shall sink to woes, endless, unutterable, For having fool'd me into that presumption.

Bened. Is he to blame, trusting to what he grants?

Coun. Am I to blame, not trusting what he grants?

Bened. Yet faith—

Coun. I have it not—Why shakes my soul With nightly terrors?
Courage such as mine Would start at nought but guilt. 'Tis from within I tremble. Death would be felicity, [Were there no retrospect.
What joys have I? What pleasure softens, or what friendship soothes
My aching bosom?—I have lost my husband: My own decree has banisti'd my own son.

Bened. Last night I dreamt your son was with the blessed.

Coun. Would heav'n he were! *Bened.* Do you then wish his death?

Coun. Should I not wish him blest? *Bened.* Belike he is: • J never knew my Friday's dreams erroneous. *Coun.* Nor I knew superstition in the right. *Bened.* Madam, I must no longer hear this language.

You do abujsjxi^^atience. I have borne,

For your soul's health, and hoping your conversion,

Opinions most deprav'd. It ill beseems

My holy function to give countenance,

By lending ear, to such pernicious tenets.

The judgments hanging o'er your destin'd head

May reach ev'n me—I see it! I am wrapt

Beyond my bearing! my prophetic soul

Views the red falchion of eternal justice

Cut off your sentenc'd race—your son is dead!

Coun. Father, we no prophetic dæmon bear Within our breast, but conscience.. That has spoken Words more tremendous than this acted zeal, tshis poetry of fond enthusiasm , Can conjure up. It is the still small voice That breathes conviction. 'Tis that voice has told me, 'Twas my son's birth, not his mortality^.* Ifvlust drown my soul in woe. — Those tears are shed. *Bened.* Unjust, uncharitable as your words,

* On the death of the Comte de Vermar.dois, his mother, the Dixhess de la Valiere, said, Muft I weep for his death before I have done weeping for his birth i'

I pardon them. Illy of me you deem;

I know it, lady. Tis humiliation:

As such I bow to it—yet dear I tender

Your peace of mind. Dismiss your worthless servant:

His pray'rs shall still be yours.

Coun. Forgive me, Father:

Discretion does not guide my words. I meant

No insult on your holy character.

Bened. No, lady; chuse some other monitor,

Whose virtues may command your estimation.

Your useless beadsman shall behold with joy

A worthier man mediate your peace with heav'n.

Coun. Alas! 'till reconcil'd with my own breast, What peace is there for me!

Bened. In th' neighb'ring district
There lives a holy man, whose sanctity
Is mark'd with wondrous gifts. Grace smiles upon
him;

Conversion tracks his footsteps: miracles
Spring from his touch; his sacred casuistry
Pours balm into despair. Consult with him.
Unfold th' impenetrable mystery,
That sets your soul and you at endless discord.

Coun. Consult a holy man! inquire of him!
—Good father, wherefore? What should I inquire ?*
Must I be taught of him, that guilt is? woe?
\\That innocence alone is happiness \\
That martyrdom itself shall leave the villain

* Imitated from Cato's speech in Lucan, beginning, Qu'd quasri,
Labiene, jubes /

The villain that it found him ? Must I learn \
^That minutes stamp'd with crimes are past recall?
That joys are momentary, and remorse
Eternal? Shall he teach me charms and spells,
jTo make my sense believe against my sense ?/
Shall I think practices and penances
Will, if he say so, give the health of virtue

To gnawing self-reproach? I know they cannot.

Nor could one risen from the dead proclaim
This truth in deeper sounds to my conviction.

We want no preacher to distinguish vice
From virtue. At our birth jJie Gxid reveal'd
AU conscience needs to know. No codicil
To duty's ^ritJj^re^nd there was plac'd
In some saint's. casual.,,c.ustody. Weakminds
Want ^their soul's fortune told by oracles
And holy jugglers. Me, nor oracles,
Nor prophets, death alone can certify,
Whether, when justice's full dues exacted,
Mercy shall grant one drop to slake my torment.
—Here, father, break we off; you to your calling
I to my tears and mournful occupation.

End of the First Act.

A C T II.

The SCENE continues.

Count Edmund, Florian.

Edm. Doubt not, my friend; Time's pencil, hard? mips, war,

Some taste of pleasure too, have chas'd the bloom
Of ruddy comeliness, and stamp'd this face
With harsher lineaments, that well may mock
The prying of a mother's eye—A mother,
Thro' whose firm nerves tumultuous instinct's flood
Ne'er gush'd with eager eloquence, to tell her,
This is your son! your heart's own voice proclaims
him.

Flor. If not her love, my lord, suspect her hatred, Those jarring
passions spring from the same source: Hate is distempered love.

Edm. Why should she hate me?
For that my opening passion's' swelling ardour
Prompted congenial necessary joy,
Was that a cause?—Nor was she then so rigid.
No sanctified dissembler had possess'd
Her scar'd imagination, teaching her
That holiness begins where nature ends.
No, Florian; she herself was woman then,
A sensual woman. Nor satiety,
Sickness and age, and virtue's frowardness,
Had so obliterated pleasure's relish—

She might have pardon'd what she felt so well.

Flor. Forgive me, Edmund; nay, nor think I
preach.

If I, God wot, of morals loose enough,
Seem to condemn you You have often told me,
The night, the very night that to your arms
Gave pretty Beatrice's melting beauties,
"Was the same night on which your father died.
Edni: 'Tis true—and thou, sage monitor, dost
thou

Hold love a crime so irremissible?

Woudst thou have turn'd thee from a willing girl,
To sing a requieja to thy father's soul?

I thought my mother busied with her tears,
Her faintings, and her masses, while I stole
To Beatrice's chamber.—How my mother
Became appriz'd, I know not: but her heart,
Never too partial to me, grew estrang'd.

Estrang'd !—aversion in its fellest mood

Scowl'd from her eye, and drove me from her sight,
She call'd me impious: nam'd my honest lewdness
A profanation of my father's ashes.

I knelt and wept, and, like a puling boy,
For now my blood was cool, believ'd, confess'd
tyly father's hov'ring spirit incens'd against me.

This weak confession but inflam'd her wrath;

And when I would have bath'd her hand with tears,

She snatch'd it back with horror.

Flor. 'Twas the trick

Of over-acted sorrow. *Griefjattiques j*

And each collateral circumstance is seiz'd

To cheat th' uneasy feeling. Sable chambers,

The winking lamp, and pomp of midnight woe,

Are but a specious theatre, on which

Th' inconstant mind with decency forgets

Its inward tribute. Who can doubt the love

Which to a father's shade devotes the son?

[Ironically.]

Edm. Still must I doubt: still deem some mystery,

Beyond a widow's pious artifice,

Lies hid beneath aversion so relentless.

All my inheritance, my lordships, castles,

My father's lavish love bequeath'd my mother.

Chose she some second partner of her bed,

Or did she waste her wealth on begging saints,

And rogues that act contrition, it were proof

Of her hypocrisy, or lust of fame

In monkish annals. But to me her hand

Is bounteous, as her heart is cold. I tell thee, -

Bating enjoyment of my native soil,

(*Narbonne's* revenues are as fully mine,

As if I held them by the strength of charters.

Flor. Why set them - on the hazard then, whefr
she

(Who deals them may revoke? Your absence hence
The sole condition.

Edm. I am weary, Florian, Of such a vagrant life. Befits it me, Sprung
from a race of heroes, Narbonne's princey

To lend my casual arm's approved valour
To quarrels, nor my country's nor my own?
To stain my sword with random blood !—I fought
At Buda 'gainst the Turk—a holy war,
So was it deem'd—I smote the turban'd race:
Did zeal or did ambition nerve my blow?
Or matter'd it to me, on Buda's domes
Whether the cæscant or the cross. prevail'd?
Mean time on alien climes I dissipated
Wealth from my subjects wrung, the peasant's tri-
bute,

Earn'd by his toil. Mean time in ruin laid

My mould'ring castles—Yes, ye moss-grown walls!

Ye tow'rs defenceless! I revisit ye

Shame-stricken—Where are all your trophies now?

Your throng'd courts, revelry, the tumult,

That spoke the grandeur of my house, the homage

Of neighbouring barons? Thus did Thibalt, Raoul,

Or Clodomir, my brave progenitors,

Creep like a spy, and watch to thrid your gates

Unnotic'd? No; with martial attributes,

With waving banners and enlivening fifes,
/They bade your portal wide unfold its jaws,
And welcome them and triumph.

Flor. True, my lord:
They reign'd the monarchs of a score of miles j
Imperial lords of ev'ry trembling cottage
Within their cannon's mandate. Deadly feuds
For obsolete offences, now array'd
Their livery'd banditti, prompt to deal
On open vallies and unguarded herds,

On helpless virgins and unvrveapon'd boors, The vengeance of their
tribe. Sometimes they dar'd

To scowl defiance to the distant throne,

Imprison'd, canton'd inaccessibly

In their own rock-built dungeons—Are these glories

My Edmund's soul's ambition to revive?

Thus would he bless his vassals!

Edm. Thy reproof, My friend, is just. But had I not a cause, A tender
cause, that prompted my return? This cruel parent, whom I blame,
and mourn, "Whose harshness I resent, whose woes I pity, Has won
my love, by winning my respect. Her letters! Florian; such unstudied
strains Of virtuous eloquence! She bids me, yes, This praying
Magdalene enjoins my courage To emulate my great forefathers'
deeds: Tells me, that ssiam and guilt alone are mortal j That death
but bars the possibility Of frailty, and embalms untainted honour.
Then blots and tears efface some half-told woe Lab'ring in her full

bosom. I decypher'd In one her blessing granted, and eras'd. And yet
what follow'd mark'd anxiety For my soul's welfare. I must know this
riddle, I must, will comfort her. She cannot surely, After such perils,
wounds by her command Encounter'd, after sixteen exil'd years,
Spurn me, when kneeling—Think'st thou 'tis possible?

Flor. I would not think it j but a host of priests

Surround her. They, good men, are seldom found
To plead the cause of pity. Self-denial,
Whose dissonance from nature's kindest la
By contradicting wins on our perverseness
ts rank fanaticism's belov'd machine.
Oh! 'twill be heroism, a sacrifice,
To curb the torrent of maternal fondness?
You shall be beggar'd, that the saint your mother
May, by cowl'd sycophants and canting jugglers,
Be hail'd, be canoniz'd a new Teresa,
Pray be not seen here: let's again to th' wars.

Edm. No, Florian; my dull'd soul is sick of riot,
Sick of the thoughtless jollity of camps,
Where revelry subsists on desolation,
And shouts of joy contend with dying groans.
Our sports are fleeting ; snatch'd, perhaps not granted,
'Tis time to bid adieu to vagrant pleasure,
And fix the wanderer love. Domestic bliss—

Flor. Yes, your fair pensioner, young Adeliza, Has sober'd your
inconstancy. Her smiles

Were exqjLusite to rule a family! [*Ironically.*

So matron-like an air—She must be fruitful.

Edm. Pass we this levity—'Tis true, the maiden is beauty's type
renew'd. Like blooming Eve In nature's young simplicity, and blushing
jWith wonder at, creation's opening glow, She charms, unknowing
what it is to charm.

Flor. This is a lover's language—Is she kind?

Edm. Cold as the metal bars that part her from me;

She listens, but replies not to my purpose.

Flor. How gain'd you then admittance?

Edm. This whole month, While waiting your arrival, I have haunted
Her convent's parlour. 'Tis my mother's wifli To match her nobly.
Hence her godfardian abbess Admits such visitors as claim her notice By
worthy bearing, and convenient splendor. O Florian, union with that
favour'd maiden Might reconcile my mother—Hark! What foundry
chapel bell rings.

Flor. A summons to some office of devotion. My lord, weigh well what
you project—

[Singing within.

Edm. I hear
Voices that seem approaching—hush! they sing.
Listen!

Flor. No; let us hence: you will be known.

Edm. They cannot know me—fee!

SCENE II.

Florian, Edmund, Martin, Orphans.

A procession of children of both sexes, neatly cloathed in a white and blue uniform, issue from the castle, followed by friar Martin, and advance towards the stage door. They stop, and the children repeat the following hymn, part of which they should have sung within

. the castle.

I.

Throne of justice! lo! we bend,
Thither dare our hopes ascend,

Where seraphs, wrapt in light'ning rays,
Dissolve in merciful blaze.

U.

Hear us! harmless orphans hear!
For her who dries our falling tear.
Hush her sorrows : calm her breast:
Give her, what she gives us, rest.

III.

Guard our spotless souls from sin!
Grant us virtue's palm to win!
Cloath the penitent with grace;
And guilt's foul spots efface! efface!

Edm. I'll speak to them.

Sweet children—or thou sanctified conductor,
Give me to know what solemn pilgrimage,
What expiation of offences past,
Thus sadly ye perform? In whose behalf

To win a blessing, raise these little suppliants
Their artless hands to heav'n? Pray pardon too
A soldier's curiosity.

Mart. The dew Of grace and peace attend your steps. You seem A
stranger, or you could but know, sir knight, That Narbonne's pious
Countess dwells within: A lady most disconsolate. Her lord, Her best-
beloved, by untimely fate Was snatch'd away in lusty life's full
'vantage— But no account made up! no absolution! Hence scant the
distance of a mile he fell. /His weepng relict o'er his spot of doom 'A
goodly cross erected. Thither we,

D

At his year's mind, in sad and solemn guise, Proceed to chaunt our
holy dirge, and offer Due intercession for his soul's repose.

Edm. 'Tis fitly done. And dar'd a voice profane
Join in the chorus of your holy office,
Myself would kneel for Narbonne's peace.

Mart. Young sir,
It glads my soul to hear such pious breathings
From one, whose occupation rarely scans
The distance 'twixt enjftymment and the tomb.
Say, didst thou know the Count?

Edm. I knew his son.

Mart. Count Edmund? Where sojourns he?

Edm. In the grave.

Mart. Is Edmund dead? Say how.

Edm. He fell at Buda: And not to his dishonour.

Mart. (Welcome sounds! [*Aside.* I must know more of this)—Proceed,
my children j Short of the cross I'll overtake your steps.

Orphan Girl. Oh! father, but I dare not pass without you

By the church-porch. They say the Count sits there, "With clotted
locks, and eyes like burning stars. Indeed I dare not go.

Other Children. Nor I. Nor I.

Mart. My loves, he will not harm such innocents. !jBut wait me at the
bridge: I'll strait be with ye.

[*Children go out reluctantly,*

Flor. I marvel, father, gravity like your's Should yield assent to tales of
such complexion j

Permitting them in baby fantasy
To strike their dangerous root.

Mart. I marvel not
That levity like yours, unhallow'd boy,
Should spend its idle shaft on serious things.
Your comrade's bearing warrants no such licence.

Flor. Think'st thou, because my friend, with humble fervour, Kneels to
Omnipotence, each gossip's dream, Each village-fable domineers in
turn His' brain's distemper'd nerves? Think'st thou a soldier

Must by his calling be an impious braggart?

Or being not,– a superstitious slave?

True valour, owning no pre-eminence

In equals^dares not wag presumption's tongue

Against high heav'n.

Mart. In us respect heav'n'sihvants.

Flor. /Monks may reach heav'n, but never cam? 'from thence.

[Violent storm of thunder and lightning.

Mart. Will this convince thee? Where's the . gossip's dream? The village-sable now? Hear heav'n's own voice Condemn impiety!

Flor. Hear heav'n's own voice Condemn imposture!

Edm. Here end your dispute.

The storm comes on.

Mart. Yes, you do well to check

Your comrade's profanation: let swift justice

O'ertake his guilt, and stamp his doom in thunder. Flor. Father, art thou so read in languages

Thou canst interpret th' inarticulate

And quarreling elements? What says the storm?

Pronounces it for thee or me? Do none

Dispute within the compass of its bolt

But we? Is the same loud-voic'd oracle

Definitive for fifty various brawls?

Or but a shock of clouds to all but us?

"What if two drunkards at this instant hour V Contend for preference
of taste; one ranking j" The vines of Burgundy before the juice "That
dances in a foam of brilliant bubbles

"From Champagne's berries; think'st thou thunder "speaks y

"In favour of the white or ruby grape?"

, Mart. What mockery ! I resign thee to thy fate—

[Going.

[The orphan children run in terrified. First Orphan. O father, save us!
save us! holy father.

Mart. What means this panic?

First Orphan. Oh! a storm so dreadful! Some daemon rides in th' air.

Mart. Undoubtedly. Could you distinguish aught?

First Orph. I fell to earth, And said the pray'r you taught me against
spectres.

Mart. 'Twas well—but none of you, had none the courage

To face the fiend?

Second Orph. I wink'd, and saw the lightning
Burst on the monument. The shield of arms
Shiver'd to splinters. 'Ere I could repeat
An Ave-Mary, down with hideous crash
The cross came tumbling—then I fled—

Mart Retire;

This is unholy ground. Acquaint the Countess.

I will not tarry long.—[*Ex. Children.*] Thou mouth
accurst, [*To Florian.*

Repent, and tremble! Wherefore hast thou drawn
On Narbonne's plains, already visited
By long calamity, new storms of horror?
The seasons change their course; th' afflicted hind
Bewails his blasted harvest. Meteors ride
The troubled sky, and chase the darken'd sun..
Heav'n vindicates its altars: tongues licentious
Have scoff'd our holy rites, and hidden sins
Have forc'd th' offended elements to borrow
Tremendous organs! Sixteen fatal years
Has Narbonne's province groan'd beneath the hand
Of desolation—for what crimes we know not!
To edge suspended vengeance art thou come?

Edmund, preventing Florian.

My friend, reply not—Father, I lament
This casual jarring—let us crave your pardon.
I feel your country's woes: I lov'd Count Edmund:
Revere his father's ashes. I will visit
The ruin'd monument—and at your leisure
Could wish some conference with you.

Mart. (This is well: [*Aside, I **

I

I almost had forgotten)—Be it so.
Where is your haunt?

Edm. A mile without the town,
Hard by St Bridget's nunnery.

Mart. There expect me. *Aside.* ~\ (I must to Benedict)—Heav'n's peace
be with" you. [*Exeunt:*

SCENE III.

Countess, Porter.

Por. Return, my gracious lady. Tho' the storm Abates his clamours,
yonder angry clouds Are big with spouting fires—do not go forth.

Coun. Wretches like me, good Peter, dread no
storms,

'Tis delicate felicity that shrinks,
When rocking winds are loud, and wraps itself
.Insultingly in comfortable furs,
(Thinking how many naked objects want
Like shelter and security. Do thou
Return; I'll seek the monument alone.

Por. No, my good lady; never be it said
That faithful Peter his dear mistress left
Expos'd to tempests. These thin-sprinkled hairs
Cannot hold long. If in your service shed,
Twere a just debt—hark! sure I heard a groan!
Pray, let usn again.—

Coun. My honest servant,
Thy fear o'er-pow'rs thy love. I heard no groan y
JJor could it 'scape a sense so quick as mine

At catching misery's expressive note:

'Tis my soul's proper language —Injur'd shade!

Shade of my Narbonne! if thy scornful spirit

Rode in yon whirlwind, and impell'd its bolt

Implacable! indignant! 'gainst the cross

Rais'd by thy wretched wife—behold she comes

A voluntary victim! Re-assemble

Thy lightnings, and accept her destin'd head.

Por. For pity! gracious dame, what words are these!

In any mouth less. holy they would seem

A magic incantation. Goblins rise

At sounds less pow'rful. Last year's 'clipse fell out,

Because your maidens cross'd a gypsy's palm

To know what was become of Beatrice.

Coun. And didst thou dare inform them where she dwells?

Por. No, on my duty—true, they think I know;

And so thinks Benedict, your confessor.

He says, she could not pass the castle gates

Without my privity—Well! I had a task

To say him nay. The honour of my keys,

My office was at stake. No, father, said I,

*None pass the draw-bridge without Peter's know-
ledge.*

How then to beat him from his point?—I had it—

Who knows, quoth I, but sudden malady

Took off the damsel? She might, or might not,

Have sepulture within the castle-walls—

Com. Peace, fool—and thus thy shrewd equivocation

Has stain'd my name with murder's foul suspicion!

—O peace of virtue! thy true votaries

Quail not with ev'ry blast;! I cloak my guilt!

Things foreign rise and load me with their blackness.

Erroneous imputation must be borne;

Lest, while unravelling the knotty web,

I lend a clue may vibrate to my heart.

--But who comes here? retire we, and observe.

[They withdraw.]

SCENE IV.

Florian, Countess, Porter.

Flor. 'Tis not far off the time the porter will'd me Expect; him here.
My friend, indulging grief, Chose no companion of his pensive walk.
Yes, I must serve thee. May my prosp'rous care Restore thee to thy
state, and aid thy love To make the blooming Adeliza thine!

Countess, apart to the Porter. Methought he spoke of love and
Adeliza. Who may it be

Por. I never heard his name?

Countess approaching.

Stranger, did chance or purpose guide thy steps
To this lone dwelling?

[Porter makes signs to Florian not to discover their former interview.~]

Por. Pardon, gentle lady,
If curious to behold the pious matron

Whom Narbonne's plains obey, I sought this castle, And deem my wish
indulg'd in viewing thee.

Com. Me! stranger. Is affliction then so rare, It occupies the babblers. —
Eanae? — Oh! no. My sorrows are not new. Austerities And rigid
penance tempt no curious eyes. Nor speaks your air desire of searching
out The house of mourning. Rather would you seek Some unsunn'd
beauty, some unpractis'd fair one, Who thinks the first soft sounds she
hears are love. "There may be such a Narbonne: none dwell here, But
melancholy, sorrow, and contrition.

Flor Pleasure has charms; but so has virtue too. One skims the surface,
like the swallow's wing, *Ajad'* scuds away unnotic'd. T'other nymph,
Like spotless swans in solemn majesty, Breasts the full surge, and
leaves long light behind.

Coun. Your courtly phrase, young knight, bespeaks a birth Above the
vulgar. May I ask, how old Your residence in Narbonne? Whence your
race?

Flor. In Brabant was I born: my father's name The Baron of St. Orme.
I wait at Narbonne My letters of exchange, while passing homewards
To gather my late fire's no mean succession.

Coun. Dead is your father! and unwet your cheek!

Trust me, young sir, a father's guardian arm
Were well worth all the treasures it withheld.
A mother might be spar'd —

Flor. Mothers, like thee, Were blessings.

Coun. Curses!

Por. Lady, 'tis the hour
Of pray'r. Shall I ring out the chapel bell?

Coun. Stranger, I'm summon'd hence. Within
these walls

I may not speak v.7ith thee: my solemn purpose

Admits no converse with unsteady youth.

But at St. Bridget's nunnery, to-morrow,

If you can spare some moments from your pastime,

In presence of the abbess, I would talk with thee.

Flor. Madam, I shall not fail.

Coun. Good angels guard thee!

[Exeunt Countess and Porter.]

SCENE V.

Flor. alone. So, this is well, my introduction made,

It follows that I move her for her son. She seems of gentler mould
than fame bespoke her. Nor wears her eye the saucy superiority Of
bigot pride. Who knows but she may wish To shake the trammels of
enthusiasm off, and reconcile herself to easier paths Of simple
goodness? Women oft wear the mask -Of piety to draw respect,
hide The loss of it. When age dispels the train that waits on beauty,
then religion blows Her trumpet, and invites another circle j

Who full as false as the preceding crew,

Flatter her problematic mental charms:

While snuffing incense, and devoutly wanton. \.

The Pagan goddess grooves faust) / O!"

And keeps her patent of divinity.

Well ! Edmund, whatsoever thy mother be,

I'll put her virtue or hypocrisy

To the severest test.—Countess, expect me! *[Exit.*

End of the Second Act.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A small Garden within the Castle, terminated by a long Cloister, beyond which appear some Towers.

Coun. alone. The monument destroyed—Well i' what of that! Were ev'r y^hunderbolt address'd to me, Not one would miss me. Fate's unerring hand Darts not at random. Nor, as fractious children; Are chid by proxy, does it deal its wrath On stocks and stones to frighten, not chastise us, Omens and prodigies are but begotten By guilt on pride. We know the doom we merit j And self-importance makes us think all nature Busied to warn us when that doom approaches. Fie! fie! I blush to recollect my weakness. My Edmund may be dead: the house of Narbonne

May perish from this earth: poor Adeliza

May taste the cup of woe that I hayj^hdnigg'd:

But light'nings play not to announce our fate:

No whirlwinds rise to prophecy to mites:

Nor, like inquisitors, does heav'n dress up

In flames the victims it intends to punish; ,

Making a holiday for greater sinners.

—'Greater! oh! impious! Were the faggots plac'd

Around me, and the fatal torch applied,

What wretch could view the dreadful apparatus,

And be a blacker criminal than I am?

Perhaps my virtues but enhance my guilt.

Penance attracts respect, and not reproach.

How dare I be esteem'd / Be known my crimes?

Let shame anticipate the woes to come;

—Ha! monster ! would'st disclose the frightful sceni?*

Would'st teach the vicious world unheard of sins,

And be a new apostle of perdition?

—My Edmund too! has not a mother's hand

'Afflicted him enough? shall this curs'd tongue

Brand him with shame indelible, and sting

His honest bosom with his mother's scorpions?

Shall Adeliza hear the last of horrors,

'Ere her pure breast, that sighs for .sins it knows not,

Has learn'd the rudiments of human frailty?

No, hapless maid —

Enter a Servant.

Ser. Madam, young Adeliza

Intreats to speak with you, The lady abbess'

Sickens to death.

Com. Admit her.—Now, my soul,

*[Exit Servant. Recall thy calm; support alone the torments; And envy
not the peace thou ne'er must know.*

SCENE II.

Countess, Adeliza.

Coun. Approach, sweet maid. Thy melancholy mein
Speaks thy compassionate and feeling heart.

'Tis a grave lesson for thy blooming years,

A scene of dissolution! But when Death

Expands his pinions o'er a bed so holy, JJ"

Sure he's a welcome guest.

Adel. Oh! do not doubt it,

The pious matron meets him like a friend:

Expected long. And if a tender tear,

At leaving your poor ward, melts in her eye,

And downward sinks its fervent ecstasy;

Still does impatience to be gone betray

Her inward satisfaction.' Yesternight,

As weeping, praying, by her couch I knelt,

Behold, my Adeliza, mark, she said,

How happy the death-bed of innocences

Oh! lady, how those sounds affected me!

* Dr. Young relates that Mr. Addifon, on his death-bed, spoke in this manner to kispiipil Lord Warwick.

I wish'd to die with her—and oh! forgive me, | If in that moment I
forgot my patroness!

Coun. It was a wish devout. Can that want pardon?

But to confess it, speaks thy native candour.
Thy virtuous, thy ingenuous truth disdains
To hide a thought—

Adeliza, falling at her feet,
r Oh! can I hear this praise,
And not expire in blushes at thy feet?
Coun. What means this passion?
Ade. Ah! recall thy words:
Thy Adeliza merits no encomium.

Coun. Thou art too modest. Praise is due to
truth.

Thou shouldst not seek it; nor mould I withhold it. *Ade.* For pity,
spare me—No, my honour'd mistress,

I merit not—oh! no, my guilty heart
Deserves thy frowns—I cannot speak—

Coun. Be calm:
Thou know'st no guilt. Unfold thy lab'ring breast,
Say, am not I thy friend? Me canst thou fear?

Ade. Can I fear ought beside?—Fear ought but goodness?

Has not thy lavish bounty cloath'd me, fed me?
Hast thou not taught me virtue? Whom on earth,
But such a benefactress, such a friend,
Can Adeliza fear? Alas! stie knows
No other friend! and christian fortitude
Dreads not a foe. Methinks I would have said

That christian innocence—but shame restrain'd
My conscious tongue—I am *not* innocent.

Coun. Thou dearest orphan to my -bosom come,
And vent thy little sorrows. Purity
Like thine affrights itself with tuacial guilt,
/I'll be thy confessor; and trust me, love,
vThy penance will be light.

Adel. In vain you cheer me.

Say, what is guilt, but to have known a thought
I blush'd to tell thee? To have lent mine ear,
For three long weeks, to sounds I did not wish
My patroness mould hear! Ah! when till now
Have I not hop'd thy presence, thought it long,
If two whole days detain'd thee from our mass?
When have I wept, but when thou hast refus'd
To let thy Adeliza call thee mother?

I know I was not worthy of such honour,
Too splendid for a child of charity.
I now am most unworthy! I undone,
Have not desir'd thy presence; have not thought it
Long, if two days thou hast declin'd our mass.
Other discourse than thine has charm'd mine ear;
Nor dare I now presume to call thee mother!

Coun. My lovely innocence, restrain thy tears. I know thy secret;
know, why beats and throbs vThy little heart with unaccustom'd
tumult.

Adel. Impossible Oh! let me tell thee all—

Coun. No; I will tell it thee. Thou hast convers'd
With a young knight—,

Adel. Amazement! Who inform'd thee?
Pent in her chamber, sickness has detain'd

Our abbeſs from the parlour. There I ſaw hiſt,
Oft as he came alone.

Coun. He talk'd of love,
And woo'd thee for his bride.

Ade. He did.

Coun. (Tis well; _Aside This is the ſtranger I beheld this morning.) His
father dead, he haſtes to take poſſeſſion Of his paternal fortunes —
is't not ſo?

Ade. He ſorrows for a father— ſomething too He utter'd of a large
inheritance That mould be his—in truth I mark'd it not.

Coun But when he ſpoke of J&Y£*_Ijiy_yiÆ£ ibuj Hung on his lips.
Say, canſt thou not repeat Each word, each ſyllable? His accent too
Thou notedſt: ſtill it rings upon thine ear. And then his eyes—they
look'd ſuch.. wond'rous truth;

Art thou not ſure he cannot have deceiv'd thee?

Ade. Alas! my noble miſtreſs, thou doſt mock Poor Adeliza—what can
I reply?

Coun. The truth Thy words have ever— held its language.

Say, doſt thou love this ſtranger ? Haſt thou pledg'd Thy faith to
him?

Ade. Angels forbid! What faith have I to give? Can I diſpoſe of aught
without thy leave?

Coun. Inſinuating ſoftneſs !—ſtill thou turneſt Aside my queſtion.
Thou doſt love this ſtranger.

Ade. Yes, with such love as that I feel for thee. His virtues I revere: his earnest words Sound like the precepts of a tender parent: And next to thee, methinks I could obey him.

Coun. Ay,' as his wife.

Ade. Oh! never. What, to lose him j As thou thy Narbonne! .

Coun. ' Check not, Adeliza, Thy uridevelop'd passion. Should this stranger Prove what my wish has form'd, and what his words Report him, it would bless my woeful days To see thee plac'd above the reach of want, And distant from this residence of sorrow.

Ade. What! wouldst thou send, me from thee / oh! for pity-i--*'''''''''' I cannot, wilUjoLlea-ve- theg*, If thy goodness Withdraws its bounty, at thy castle-gate I'll wait and beg those alms thy gracious hand To none refuses. I shall see thee pass, And pass'd, will kiss thy footsteps— wilt thou spurn me?

Well then, I'll die, and bless thee—Oh! this stranger!

'Tis he has done this; he has drawn thy anger
On thy poor ward !—I'll never see him more.

Coun. Be calm, my lovely orphan ! hum thy fears.
Heav'n knows how fondly, anxiously I love thee!
The stranger's not to blame. Myself will task him,
And know if he deserves thee. Now retire,
Nor slack thy duty to th' expiring saint.
A lover must not weigh against a friend.' [*Ex. Ade,*

And lo! where comes the friar. 'Twere riot fit
He knew my purpose. Benedict, I fear,
Has views on this side heav'n.

SCENE III.

Countess, Benedict.

Bened. The dew of grace
Rest on this dwelling!

Coun. Thanks, my ghostly friend.
But sure, or I mistake, in your sad eye
I spell affliction's signature. What woes
Call for the scanty balm this hand can pour?

Bened. You, lady, and you only need that balm.

Coun. To tutor my unapt and ill-school'd nature You come then—
Good, my confessor, a truce "With doctrines and authority. If ought
Can medicate a soul unsound like mine, Good deeds must operate the
healthful change, And penance cleanse it to receive the blessing. Shall I
for faith, shall I, for but believing What 'tis my int'rest to believe,
efface The stains, which, tho' believing, I contracted?

Bened. Lady, your subtle wit, like daring infants, Sports with a weight
will crust it—but no more. It is not mine to argue, but pronounce.
The church, on rock of adamant establish'd, Now inch by inch disputes
not its domain. Heav'n's law promulg'd, it rests obedience follow. And
when supreme, it taxes that obedience,

Not at impracticable, vain perfection,
But rates its prodigality of blessings
At the slight credence of its pow'r to grant them 5
Shall man with stoic pride reject the boon,
And cry, we will do more, we will deserve it ?*
Coun. Deserve it!—oh! have all your sainted
hosts,

Your choirs of martyrs, or your clouds of cherubim,
Deserv'd to feel the transport but of hope \

Away; nor tell me of this holy juggle

'Twixt faith and conscience. Shall the latter roam,
Wasting and spoiling with a ruffian hand,
While her accomplice faith, wrapt up at home
In proud security of self-existence,
Thinks that existence shall absolve them both?

Bened. 'Twas not to war with words, so heav'n's my judge,
That your poor-rated servant sought your presence.
I came with charitable friendly purpose
To soothe—but wherefore mitigate your griefs?
Yoo mock my friendship, and miscall my zeal.
Since then to counsel, comfort, and reproof
Obdurate—learn the measure of your woes.
Learn, if the mother's fortitude can brave
The bolt the woman's arrogance defied.

Coun. The mother, said'st thou?

Bened. Yes, imperious dame:
Yes, 'twas no vision rais'd by dreams and fumes,
Begot 'twixt nightly fear and indigestion:

* << (We wiU'So more, Sempror.ii:s, we'll deserve it." Portius in *Catt.*

Nor was it artifice and pious fraud,

When but this morning I annouuc'd thy Edmund
Was number'd with the dead—

Coun. Priest, mock me not!
Nor dally with a mother's apprehension.
Lives, or lives not my son?

Bened. Woman, heav'n mocks thee (
On Buda's plain thy slaughter'd Edmund lies.
An unbeliever's weapon cleft his heart;
(But 'twas thy unbeliefclilSlrpois'd the shaft,
'And sped its aim.

Coun. To heav'n's high will I bow me.
Oh! may its joys be open to his soul,
Tho' clos'd to mine for ever!

Bened. Then you lov'd him!

Coun. Lov'd him !—oh! nature bleeding at my heart,
Hearest thou this? Lov'd him!—ha !—whither!— rage,

Be dumb—Now, listen, monk, nor dare reply
Beyond my purpose. In the grave, thou say'st,
My Edmund sleeps—how didst thou learn his fate?

Bened. No angel whisper'd it; no dæmon spoke
it.

Thou, by the self-same means I learn'd, may'st learn 'it.

Coun. Be brief.

Bened. Then—but what boots his life or death To a poor taunted friar—Benedict, Leave this proud mistress of the fleeting hour, 'Ere the destroying angel's kindling brand

Smoaks in the tow'rs of Narbonne—,

Coun. Hold ! presumptuous!

I am thy mistress yet: nor will I brook
Such insolent reproof. Produce thy warrant,
Assure my Edmund's death—or dread his vengeance!

Severely shall he question ev'ry throb

His agonizing mother now endures.

Bened. My warrant is at hand—

[Goes out and returns with Edmund.]

SCENE IV.

Countess, Benedict, Edmund.

Bened. This gentleman Beheld thy Edmund breathless on the ground.

Coun. Hah! is this sorcery? or is't my husband?

[Swoons.

Edm. Stand off, and let me clasp her in my arms! The flame of filial fondness shall revive The lamp of life, repay, the breath she gave, And waken all the mother in her soul.

Bened. Ha! who art thou then?

Edm. Do not my fears tell thee? Look up! O ever dear! behold thy son! It is thy Edmund's voice ; blest, if thy eyes Awake to bless him—Soft! her pulse returns; She breathes—oh! speak. Dear parent, mother, hear!

'Tis Edmund—Friar, wherefore is this horror?

Am I then dead to her eyes ?—Dumb still!
Speak, tho' it be to curse me—I have kill'd her!
My brain grows hot—

Bened. My lord, restrain your passion j
See! she revives—.

Edm. Oh! if these lips that quiver With dread of thy disdain, have force to move thee, With nature's, duty's, or affection's voice, Feel how I print thy hand with burning zeal, Tho' tortur'd at this awful interval! Art thou, or not, a mother?

Coun. Hah! where am I? Why do you hold me? Was it not my Narbonne? I saw him—on my soul I did—

Edm. Alas! She raves—recall thy wand'ring apprehension— It was no phantom: at thy feet behold—

Coun. Hah! whom! quick, answer—Narbonne, dost thou live? Or comest to transport me to perdition?

Bened. Madam, behold your son: he kneels for" pardon.

And I, I innocent, I ignorant
Of what he was, implore it too—

Coun. Distraction!

What means this complicated scene of horrors?
Why thus assail my splitting brain ?—be quick—
Art thou my husband wing'd from other orbs
To taunt my soul? What is this dubious form,
Impress'd with ev'ry feature I adore,
And every lineament I dread to look on!

Aft thou my dead or living son?

Edm. I am

Thy living Edmund. Let these scalding tears
Attest th' existence of thy suff'ring. son.

Coiin. Ah! touch me not—

Edm. How!—in that cruel breast
Revive then all sensations, but affection?
Why so ador'd the memory of the father,
And so abhorr'd the presence of the son?
But now, and to thy eyes I seem'd my father.
At least for that resemblance-sake embrace me.

Coun. Horror on horror! blasted be thy tongue! What sounds are these?

Betted. Lady, tho' I excuse not
This young lord's disobedience, his contrition
Bespeaks no rebel principle. I doubt not,
Your blessing first obtain'd and gracious pardon,
But soon as morning streaks the ruddy east,
He will obey your pleasure, and return
To stranger climes.

Edm. 'Tis false; I will not hence.
I have been fool'd – too long, too long been patient.
Nor are my years so green as to endure
The manacles of priests and nurseries.
Am I not – Narbonne's prince? who shall rule here
But Narbonne? Have I sapp'd my country's laws,
Or play'd the tyrant? Who shall banish me?
Am I recreant knight? Has cowardice
j Disgrac'd the line of heroes I am sprung from?
\\ Shall I then skulk, hide my inglorious head?

jOr does it please your worship's gravity
[Dispatch me on some sleeveless pilgrimage*
I Like other noble fools, to win yon empires j
1 While you at home mock our credulity,
The masters of our wealth, our states, and wives?
Coun. \\ *Aside.*'] (Brave youth! there spoke his sire.'
How my soul yearns
To own its genuine offspring f) —Edmund, hear me!
Thou art my son, and I will prove a mother.
But I'm thy sov'reign too. This state is mine.
Learn to command, by learning to obey.
Tho' frail my sex, I have a soul as masculine

As any of thy race. This very monk,
Lord as thou thinkest of my ductile conscience,
Quails—look if 'tis not true—when I command.
Retire thee to the village. 'Tis not ripe
As yet my purpose—Benedict, attend me.
To-morrow, Edmund, shalt thou learn my plea-
sure. *[Exit Countess and Benedict.]*

Edm. alone. "Why, this is majesty. Sounds of
such accent

Isle'er struck mine ear till now. Commanding sex!"

Strength, courage, all our boasted attributes,

Want estimation; ev'n the pre-eminence

We vaunt in wisdom, seems a borrow'd ray,

When virtue deigns to speak with female organs.

Yes, O my mother, I will learn t' obey:

I -will believe, that, harsh as thy decrees,

They wear the warrant of benign intention.

Make but the blooming Adeliza mine,

And bear, of me unquestion'd, Narbonne's sceptre -?

Till life's expiring lamp by intervals

Throws but a fainter and a fainter flash,

And then resumes its wasted oil no more. *[Exit.]*

End of the Third

ACT IV.

The SCENE continues.

Benedict, Martin.

Mart. I know thy spirit well; know how it labours,

When curb'd and driv'n to wear the mask of art.

But till this hour I have not seen thy passions

Boil o'er the bounds of prudence. So impetuous,

And so reserv'd!

Bened. Mistake me not, good brother:

I want no confidence : I know thy faith.

But can I to thy naked eye unfold,

What I dare scarce reveal to my own bosom ?

I would not know one half that I suspect,

Till I have acted as if not suspecting.

Mart. How, brother! thou a casuist! and apply

To thy own breast those damning subtleties,

Which cowards with half-winking consciences

Purchase of us, when they would sin secure,

And hope the penalty will all be ours!

Bened. Brother, this moment is too big with action

To waste on bootless curiosity.

When I try sins upon the touchstone conscience,

It is for others use, not for my own.

'Tis time enough to make up our account,

"When we confess and kneel for absolution.

*Mart. Still does thy genius soar above mankind
How many fathers of our holy church
In Benedict I view!*

*Bened. No flattery, brother.
'Tis true the church owes Benedict some thanks.
For her, I have forgot I am a man.
For her, each virtue from my breast I banish.
No laws I know but her prosperity;
No country, but her boundless acquisitions.
Who dares be true to country, king, or friend,
If enemies to Rome, are Benedict's foes.*

Mart. Has it then gone so far? Does she speak out?

Is Edmund too infected with like errors?

*Bened. Both, brother, both are thinking heretics. I could forgive them,
did some upstart sect With sharper rigours charm their headlong zeal.
But they, in sooth, must reason—curses light On the proud talent!
'twill at last undo us. When men are gorg'd with each absurdity Their
subtile wits can frame, or we adopt j For very novelty they'll fly to
sense, And we shall fall before that idol, fashion.*

*Mart. Fear not a reign so transient. Statesmen
too*

*Will join to stem the torrent : or new follies
Replace the old. Each chieftain that attacks us
Must grow the pope of his own heresy.
E'en stern philosophy, if once triumphant,
Shall frame some jargon, and exact: obedience
To metaphysic nonsense worse than ours.*

The church is but a specious name for empire,
And will exist wherever fools have fears.
Rome is no city; 'tis the human heart;
And there suffice it if we plant our banners.
Each priest cannot command—and thence come sects.
Obdurate Zeno and our great Augustine
Are of one faith, and differ but for power.

Bened. So be it—therefore interest bids us crush
This cockatrice and her egg: or we shall see
The singing saints of Savoy's neighb'ring vale
– Fly to the covert of her shadowy wings,
And foil us at our own dexterity.
Already to those vagrants she inclines;
As if the rogues, that preach reform to others,
Like idiots, minded to reform themselves.

Mart. Be cautious, brother: you may lose the
. lady.

Bened. She is already lost—or ne'er was ours.
I cannot dupe, and therefore must destroy her:
Involve her house in ruin so prodigious,
That neither she nor Edmund may survive it.

Mart. How may this be accomplished?

Baud. Ask me not.
From hints long treafur'd up, from broken phrase
In phrenzy drop'd, but vibrating from truth:
Nay from her caution to explain away
What the late tempest of her soul had utter'd,
I guess her fatal secret—or, no matter—
Say I do not—by what she has forbidden,

I know what should be done—then haste thee,
brother;

Facilitate Count Edmund's interview
With Adeliza; nourish their young passion—
Curse them—and if you can—why—join their,
hands.

Mart. I tremble!

Bened. Dastard, tremble, if we fail.

What can we fear, when we have ruined them?

(A deep-toned voice is heard.) Forbear 5

Bened. Ha! whence that found!

(Voice" again.) Forbear!

Bened. Again!

Comes it from heav'n or hell!

(Voice again.) Forbear!

Mart. Good angels,

Protect me !—Benedict, thy unholy purpose—

Benedict, Martin, Adeliza, Friars.

*[A procession of friars, chanting a funeral anthem, and followed by
Adeliza, advance slowly from a cloister at the end of the stage.~*

The anthem.

Forbear! forbear! forbear!

The pious are heav'n's care.

Lamentations ill become us,

When the good are ravisti'd from us.

The pangs of death but smoothe the way

To visions of eternal day.

Bened. [aside to Mart. Now, man of aspin conscience! lo! the gods,
That sentence Benedict's unholy purpose! Art thou a priest;? Wast
thou initiated In each fond mummerly that subdues the vulgar, And
standest thou appall'd at our own thunders? *Mart.* Who trembled
first? It was thy guilty conscience That gave th' alarm to mine.

Bened. Peace, dotard, peace! Nor when the lamb is nigh, must eagles
wrangle. Fair saint, give us to know why flow these tears;

[To Adeliza. Why sighs that gentle bosom j and why chant ye
That heav'n-invoking soul-dissolving dirge?

Ade. Ah! holy father, art thou then to learn
The pious abbess is at peace! We go
To bear her parting blessing to the Countess.

Bened. It must not be. Occasions of much im-
port

Engross her faculties. By me she wills you
Restrain your steps within the cloister's pale,
Nor grant access but to one stranger knight.

Ade. Is't possible? Can my dear mistress bar
Her faithful handmaid from her gracious presence?
Shall I not pour my sorrows in her bosom,
And moisten it with grief and gratitude?
Two friends were all poor Adeliza's wealth.
Lo! one is gone to plead the orphan's cause.

My patroness, like Tobit's guardian spirit*,

Confirms my steps, and points to realms of glory.

She will not quit me in this vale of bondage?

She must be good, who teaches what is goodness. Bened. (Indeed! my pretty prattler!—then am I

As sound a saint as e'er the rubric boasted.

—Ah! 'tis the Countess—now for my obedience.)

Young lady, much I marvel at these murmurs.

. [To Adeliza.

Just sense and sober piety still dictate

The Countess's commands. With truth I say it,

My sins diminish, as I copy her.

** Alluding to a picture of Salvator Rok, in which the story is thus told.*

SCENE in.

Countess, Adeliza, Benedict, and Martin.

Coun. What voices heard I? Does my rebel son

Attempt against my peace?—Hah! Adeliza!

I charg'd thee guard thy convent—wherefore then

This disobedience?

Bened. Madam, I was urging

The fitness of your orders; but vain youth

ScosPd my importunate rebuke—

Ade. Oh! no.

I am the thing you made me. Crush me, spurn me,

I will not murmur. Should you bid me die,
I know 'twere meant in kindness.

Coun. Bid thee die!
My own detested life but lingers round thee!
Ha! what a glance was there! it spoke resemblance
To all I hate, adore—My child, retire:
I am much discompos'd—the good old abbess
Claims thy attendance.

Ade. Mercy crown her soul!
She needs no duty we can pay her now!

Coun. How! art thou desolate? not a friend left
To guard thy innocence?—Oh! wretched maid!
Must thou be left to spoilers? or worse, worse,
To the fierce onset of thy own dire passions?
Oh! is it come to this?

Ade. My noble mistress,
Can Adeliza want a ministring angel,
When shelter'd by thy wing?—yet Benedict
Says, I must shun this hospitable roof.
Indeed I thought it hard.

Coun. Did Benedict,
Did he audacious dare forbid my child,
My little orphan to embrace her?—curses
Swell in my throat—hence—or they fall on thee;

Ade. Alas! for pity! how have I offended?

Bened. Madam, it is the pupil of your care, Your favour'd child---

Coun. Who told thee so? Be dumb For ever—What! art thou combin'd with Edmund, To dash me down the precipice? Churchman, I tell thee,

I view it with impatience. I could leap

And meet the furies—but must *she* fall with me!

Bened. (Yes, and thy Edmund too) [*aside*.— Be patient, lady: This fair domain, thou know'st, acknowledges The sovereignty of the church. Thy rebel son Dares not attempt—

Coun. Again I bid thee peace. There is no question of Lord Edmund. Leave us: I have to talk with her alone.

Bened. (Now tremble [*aside to Martin*.

At voices supernatural; and forfeit
The spoils the tempest throws into our lap.)

[*Exeunt Benedict and Martin** SCENE IV.

Countess, Adeliza.

Coun. Now, Adeliza, summon all thy courage, Retrace my precepts past; nor let a tear Profane a moment that's worth martyrdom. Remember patience is the christian's courage. Stoics have bled, and demigods have died. A christian's task is harder—'tis to suffer, j

Ade. Alas! have I not learnt the bitter lesson? Have I not borne *thy* woes? What is to come Can tax my patience with a ruder trial?

Coun. Oh—! yes, thou must do more. Adversity Has various arrows. When the soul is steel'd By meditation to encounter sorrow, The foe of man shifts his artillery, And drowns in luxury and careless softness The breast he could not storm. Canst thou bear' wealth,

And pleasure's melting couch? Thou hast known virtue

But at a scanty board. She has awak'd thee To chilling vapours in the
midnight vaults Arid beckon'd thee to hardships, tears, and penances
ilt thou acknowledge the divine instrudress, hen syren pleasures lap
thee in delights f Ade. If such the witchery that waits on guilt, Why
should I seek th' enchantress and her wiles? The virgin veil shall guard
my spotless hours^ ^ssure fny peace, and saint me for hereafter.
Coun. It cannot be—

To Narbonne thou must bid a last adieu!
And with the stranger knight depart a bride.

Ade. Unhappy me! too sure I have o'erburthen'd'
Thy charity, if thou would'st drive me from thee.
Restrain thy alms, dear lady. I have learnt
jFrom our kind sister-hood the needle's art.
/My needle and thy smiles will life supports
iPray let me bring my last embroidery;
'Tis all by my own hand. Indeed I meant it
For my kind lady's festival.

Coun. Great justice! Does this stroke pierce not deep enough? These
tears,; Wrung from my vital fondness, scald they not Worse than the
living coal that sears the limbs?

Ade. Alas! thou hearest not! What grief o'erwhelms thee? Why darts
thy eye into my inmost soul? Then vacant, motionless, arrests its
course, And seems not to perceive what it reads there.? My much-
lov'd patroness!

Coun. O Adeliza, Thy words now slake, and now augment my fever t
But oh! ere reason quits this lab'ring frame, While I dare weep these
tears of anguish o'er thee, (Unutterable, petrifying anguishy! Hear my
last breath. Avoid the scorpion pleasure. Death lurks beneath the

velvet of his lip, And but to think him over, is perdition I —O
retrospect of horror !—To the altar! Haste, Adeliza,—vow thou wilt be
wretched ✓

Ade. Dost thou then doom me to eternal sorrows? j^Hast thou
deceiv'd me? Is not virtue happiness? *Coun.* I know not that. I know
that guilts torture.

Ade. Sure pestilence has flapp'd hk baleful wing, And shed its poison
o'er thy saint-like reaso When thou so patient, holy, so resign'd,
Doubtest of virtue's health, of virtue's pea —But 'tis to try me—look
upon this relick: 'Twas the good abbess's bequest. 'Twill chase The fiend
that walks at twilight.

Coun. How she melts me! "What have I said ?—my lovely innocence,
Thou art my only thought—O! wast thou form'd The child of sin ?—
and dare I not embrace thee? Must I with eager ecstasy gaze on thee,
(*Yet curse the hour that stamp'd thee with a being!

Ade. Alas! was I then born the child of sin! Who were my parents? I
will pray for them.

Coun. Oh! if the bolt must come, here let it strike me! \Flinging
herself on the ground. Nature! these feelings were thy gift.
Thouknowest How ill I can resist thy forceful impulse. If these
emotions are imputed to me, I have one sin I cannot yet repent of!

Ade. Oh! raise thee from the earth. Shall I be—
hold thee

^Prostrate, embracing an unfriended beggar?
Or dost thou mock me still? What is my lot?
Wilt thou yet cherish me? Or do the great
Exalt us but in sport, lend us a taste,

A vision of enjoyment, and then dash us
To poverty, more poignant by comparison?
Sure I could never wanton with affliction!

Coun. Ah ! canst thou doubt this conflict of the soul!

Mock thee !—oh ! yes, there are such savage natures,
That will deride thy woes—and thou must bear it—
"With foul reproach will gall thy spotless soul,
And taunt thee with a crime past thy conceiving.
Oh! 'tis to shield thee from this world of sorrows,
That thou must fly, must wed, must never view
The tow'rs of Narbonne more; must never know
The doom reserv'd for thy sad patroness'.

Ade. Who threatens thy dear life! recall thy son.
His valiant arm will stem a host of foes,
Replace thy lord, and woo thee to be happy.

Coun. Hah! little imp of darkness! dost thou wear

That angel form to gird me with upbraidings!
Fly, 'ere my rage forget distinction, nature,
And make a medley of unheard-of crimes.
Fly, ere it be too late—

Ade. For pity!

Coun. Hence!

Pity would bid me stab thee, while the charm
Of ignorance locks thee in its happy slumbers.

Ade. Alas! she raves—I will call help. *[Exit.*

Countess alone. After a long pause, in which she looks tenderly after
Adeliza: She's gone.

s—That pang, great God, was my last sacrifice!

Now recollect thyself, my soul! consummate
The pomp of horror, with tremendous coolness.
'Tis fit that reason punish passion's crime.
—Reason !—alas! 'tis one of my convulsions!
Now it empow'rs me past myself: now leaves me
Exhausted, spiritless, eying with despair
The heights I cannot reach. Then madness comes,
Imperial fool! and promises to waft me
Beyond the grin of scorn—but who sits there,
Supereminent ?—'tis conscience !—>phrenzy— shield
me!

I know the foe—see! see! he points his lance!
He plunges it all flaming in my soul,
jAnd down I sink, lost in eternal anguish!

SCENE V.

Benedict, Adelines.

Adel. She is not here. Shall we not follow her?
Such agonies of passion! sure some dæmon
Assaults her. Thou shalt pray by her. Indeed
I tremble for her life.

Bened. Thou know'st her not.
Her transport is fictitious. 'Tis the coinage
Of avarice and caprice. Dost thou not see
Her bounty wearies? While thy babbling years

/ "Wore the trick of novelty, thou wast her play-thing.
The charity of the great must be amus'd.

~~\\$xt~~ Merit surfeits it j affliction kills it|

The sickjmujoyej^n^^ attract

Their pity—Come, I'll warrant thou hast wept,
And told her heav'n will register each ducat
Her piety had spar'd to cloath and feed thee.
Go to; thou hast estrang'd her; and she means
To drive thee hence, lest thou upbraid her change.

Ade. *Upbraid my patroness! I! I upbraid her,
Who see her now the angel that she'll be!
How knew I virtue, goodness, but from her!
Her lessons taught me heav'n; her life reveal'd it.
The wings of gratitude must bear me thither.
Or I deserve not Paradise.

. *Bened.* Thou art young.

iThy novice ear imbibes each silver found.

IAnd deems the music warbled all by truth. Gray hairs are not fool'd
thus. I know this Court(tess:

\An arrant heretic. She scoffs the church.
When did her piety adorn our altars?
What holy garments glisten with her gifts?
The fabric of our convent threatens ruin—
Does she repair it?—no. On lazy lepers,
On soldiers maim'd and swearing from the wars
She lavishes her wealth—but note it, young one {
Her days are number'd; and thou shalt do wisely
To quit her 'ere the measure is complete.

Ade. Alas! she bids me go. She bids me wed The stranger knight that
woo'd me at our parlour. *Bened.* And thou shalt take her at her word,
Myself

Will join your hands—and lo! in happy hour
Who comes to meet her boon.

SCENE VI.

Edmund, Benedict, Adeliza.

Edm. In tears !—that cowl
Shall not protect th' injurious tongue, that dares
Insult thy innocence—for sure, thou dear one,
Thou hast no sins to weep.

Bened. My gracious lord, Yourself and virgin coyness must be chidden,
If my fair scholar wears the mien of sadness, (^Tis but a blusli that
melts in modest mowers. "*Edm.* Unriddle, priest. My soul is too
impatient To wait th' impertinence of flow'ry dialect.

Bened. Then briefly thus. The countess wills me join
Your hand with this fair maiden's—now,, my lord,
Is my po; r language nauseous!

Edrirt. Is it possible?
Dost thou consent, sweet passion of my soul!
May I then clasp thee to my heart?

Ade. Forbear!
It must not be—Thou shalt not wed a beggar.

Edm. A beggar! Thou art riches, opulence,
\The flaming ruby and the dazzling di'mond,
Set in the world's first diadem, could not add

A ray to thy least charm—for pity, grant me
To breathe my warmth into this marble hand --

Ade. Never !— This orphan, — this abandon'd
wanderer,

Taunted with poverty, with shameful origin, Dower'd with no lot but
scorn, shall ne'er bestow' That, her sole portion, on a lordly husband.

Bened. My lord, the Countess is my gracious mistress:

My duty bade me to report her words.
It seems her charities circumscribe her wishes.'
This goodly maiden has full long experienc'd
Her amplest bounty. Other piteous objects
Call for her largess. — Lovely Adeliza
Plac'd in your arms can never feel affliction.
This the good Countess knows —

Edm. By my sire's soul
I will not thank her. Has she dar'd to scorn thee,
Thou beauteous excellence ?—then from this hour
Thou art her equal. In her very presence
I will espouse thee. Let us seek the proud one!
r—Nay, no resistance, love!

Bened. (By heav'n all's lost, [*aside*. Should they meet now])—My lord, a
word. Thff maiden [*aside to Edmund*.

Is tutor'd to such awe, she ne'er will yield
Consent, should but a frown dart from the Countess,
But now, and she enjoin'd your marriage. Better
Profit of that behest —

Edm. I tell thee, monk,
My haughty soul will not —

Bened. Pray be advis'd.
Heav'n knows how dear I tender your felicity³
The chapel is few paces hence — nay, lead her
With gentle wooings, nor alarm her fears.
Arriv'd there, I will speedily pronounce
The solemn words —

Edm. Well, be it so. My fair one,
This holy man advises well. To heaven
We will address our* vows, and ask its pleasure.
Come, come; I will not be refus'd —

Ade. Yes, heav'n 1
To thee I fly; thou art my only refuge. [*ExeunU*

End of the Fourth Ad,

ACT V.

The SCENE continues,

Enter Benedict.

The business is dispatch'd. Their hands are join'd.
The. puling moppet]ruggled with her wishes;
Invok'd each saint to witness her refusal:
Nor heeded, tho' I swore their golden harps
Were tun'd to greet her hymeneal hour.
Th' impetuous Count, fir'd with th' impure sugges-
ton,

As if descending clouds had spread their pillows
/To meet the pressure of his eager transports,

Would have forerun the rites. The maid affrighted
At such tumultuous unaccustom'd onset,

I

Sunk lifeless on the pavement. Hastily

I mumbled o'er the spell that binds them fast,

(Like an invenom'd robe, to scorch each other

"With mutual ruin Thus am I reveng'd.

Proud dame of Narbonne, lo! a bare-foot monk

Thus pays thy scorn, thus vindicates his altars.

Nor while this woolen frock shall wrap our order,

Shall e'en the lillied monarchs of our realm

Be plac'd so high, but a poor friar's knife *

Shall fell their tow'ring grandeur to the earth,

Oft as they scant obedience to the church.

S G E N E II.

Benedict, Porter.

Por. Ah! woe of woes! good father, haste thee
in,

And speak sweet words of comfort to our mistress,

Her brain is much disturb'd—I fear some spell,

Or naughty bev'rage—will you not in and pray by
her?

In sooth stie needs your pray'rs.

Bened. She scorns my pray'rs. [*Coldly. Por.* Oh ! no ; but now she
call'd for you. Pray seek her.

Bened. I can administer no comfort to her.

Por. Yes, yes, you can. They say the foul fiend
dreads

A scholar—Tut, your holy wit can poze him,
Or bind him to the red waves of the ocean.

* Alluding to the assassinations of Henry III. and IV.

Oh! he afflicts her gentle spirit, and vomits
Strange menaces and terrible from her mouth!
[Then he is sullen; gags her lab'ring lips,
And she replies not—

Bened. Good man exorcist,
Thy pains are unavailing. Her sins press her.

Par. Befliew thy heart,
Thou dost asperse her. I know those are paid
For being saints that—

Beried. Stop that tongue profane:
Thou art infected with her heresies.
"Judgments already have o'erta'en thy mistress.
u Thou at thy peril leave her to her fate."

Por. " Father, belike there is a different heaven "For learned clerks and
such poor men as I am. *' Me it behoves to have such humble virtues u.
As suit my simple calling. To my masters "For raiment, food, for
salary, and protection "My honest heart owes gratitude. They took me
*{ From drudgery to guard their honour'd persons. "Why am I call'd a
man of worship? Why, "As up the chancel I precede my lady, "Do th'
vassals of the castle, rang'd in rows, "Bow e'en to Peter!—why? but,
by the rood, "Because she plac'd this silver- garnish'd staff "In Peter's
hand. Why, but because this robe, "Floating with seemly tufts, was her

gift too. "For honours of such note owe I not thanks! ** Were my life much to sacrifice for hers?"

Bened. "Peace with thy saucy lecture, or ha-
"rangué

"Thy maudling fellows o'er the hall's dull embers
"With this thy gossiping morality."—
Now answer—mentions she her son?

Por. Ah me 1
I had forgotten—this old brain—'tis true,
'Tis very true—she raves upon her son,
And thinks he came in vision.

Bened. 'Twas no vision.

Por. How! heav'nly fathers!

Bened. He has spoken with her.

Por. ^And I not see him !—go to; it could not be.
How did he pass the gate?

Bened. I tell thee, Edmund,
Thy quondam master's son, has seen his mother -7
Is but few* paces hence.

Por. Oh! joyous sounds!
Where is my noble lord?

Bened. Here—and undone,

SCENE HI.

Florian, Be?iedict, Porter.

Flor. Sure the foul fogs, that hang in lazy clouds
O'er yonder moat, infect the moping air,
And steam with phrenzy's melancholy fumes.
But now and I met Edmund—with a voice
Appall'd and hollow like a parricide's, . He told me he was wedded. When I ask'd

To see his bride, he groan'd, and said his joys

Were blasted ere accomplish'd. As he urg'd

His suit, the maiden's tears and shrieks had struck

On his sick fancy like his mother's cries!

Th' idea writhing from his brain, had won

His eye-balls, and he thought he saw his mother!

—This ague of contagious bigotry

Has gain'd almost on me. Methinks you, monk,

Might fell me with a chaplet—Edmund left me

Abruptly—I must learn this mystery.

Health to your rev'rence—[*To Beriedic 7, ~*] Hah! my

new acquaintance! [*To Peter J*]

In tears, my good old friend! What! has the cricket

Chirp'd ominously—come, away with sorrow!

Joy marks this day its own,.

Por. A joyful day!

The twentieth of September!—note it, sir,

Note it for th' ugliest of the calendar,

Twas on this day—ay, this day sixteen years.

The noble Count came to his death I

Flor. No matter:

Th' arrival of a nobler younger Count
Shall mock prognostics past, and paint the year
With smiling white, fair fortune's favourite livery.
But tell me, father, tell me, has the Countess

[To Benedic't]. Pardon'd her son's return? Has she receiv'd him With th'
overflowings of a mother's joy? Smiles she upon his wishes?—As I
enter'd Methought I heard an hymeneal accent. And yet, it seems, the
favour of your countenance

Wears not the benediction of rejoicing.

Bened. The countess must unfold her book of fate. I am not skill'd to
read so dark a volume.

Flor. Oracular as the Delphic god!—good Peter j
Thy wit and mine are more upon a level.
Resolve me, has the Countess seen Lord Edmund?
Say, did she frown and chide? or bathe his cheek
[With tears as warm as leaping blood?]

Por. Oh! master, .

You seem too good to mock our misery.
A soldier causes woe, but seldom jeers it.
Or know'st thou not—and sure 'twill pity thee!
The gracious Countess, our kind lady—indeed
I trust they will return—is strangely chang'd!

Flor. By my good sword, thou shalt unriddle,
priest,

What means this tale? What mintage is at work
To coin delusion, that this fair domain

. May become holy patrimony? Thus
Teach you our matrons to defraud their issue
By artificial fits and acted ravings?
I have beheld your juggles, heard your dreams.
Th' imposture shall be known. These sixteen years
Has my friend Edmund pin'd in banishment:
While masses, mumblings, goblins and processions
t[^]surp'd his heritage, and made of Narbonne
A theatre of holy interludes

/ And sainted frauds. But day darts on your spells:."
Th' enlighten'd age eschews your vile deceits,
And truth shall do mankind and Edmund justice*

Bemd. Unhallow'd boy, I scorn thy contumely. In camps and trenches
vent thy lewd reproaches, /Blaspheming while ye tremble. Heav'n's
true soldiers,

j Endu'd with more than mortal courage, defy
Hosts numerous as the Pagan chivalry
Pour'd forth to crush the church's rising glories.
<—But this is an enlighten'd age !—Behold
The triumphs of your sect! to yonder plains
Bend thy illumin'd eye! The Vaudois there,
Writhing in flames, and quiv'ring at th' approach?
Of Rome's impending knife, attest the blessings /
Conferr'd on their instructed ignorance?

Flor. Monstrous! unparallel'd! Are cries and
groans

Of butcher'd conscientious men the hymns

With which you chant the victories of the church?

Do you afflict and laugh? stab and huzza?

—But I am dallying with my own impatience—

Where is this mother? I will tent her soul;

And warn thee, if I find suggestion's whisper

(Has practic'd to the detriment of my friend,

Thy caitiff life shall answer to my sword,

Tho' shrin'd within the pillars of the Vatican.

Bened. Judge heaven betwixt us! If e'er the dews of night shall fall,
thou seest not The cup of wrath pour'd out, and triple woes O'ertake
unheard-of crimes; call me false prophet, Renounce my gods, and join
thee to the impious! Thou in thy turn, if truth lives on my lips,
Tremble! npent!—behold !' the hour approaches?*SCENE IV.*

Countess, Florian, Benedict, and Porter. .

Coun. I dare not shoot the gulph—ha! Benedict! Thou art a priest, thy
mission should be holy, If thou beliest not heav'n—quick, do thy work!
If there is pow'r in pray'r, teach me some sounds To charm my senses,
lest my coward flesh Recoil, and win the mastery o'er my will. —r'Tis
not the wound; it is the consequence! See! see! my Narbonne stands
upon the brink, And snatches from the readiest fury there A blazing
torch! he whirls it round my head. And asks where are my children!

Por. Split, my heart, At this sad sight!

Flor. Stand off! thou'rt an accomplice—
Madam, it was your morning's gracious pleasure
I should attend you. May I hope your pardon,
If I anticipate— >.

Coun. Ha! Who art thou?

Flor. Have you forgot me, lady?

Coun. Memory

Is full. A head distract as mine can hold

Two only objects, guilt aftd eternity!

Flor. No more of this. 1 ime has abundant hours

For holy meditation. Nor have years

Trac'd such deep admonition on your cheek,

As call for sudden preparation—

Coun. Prayer [*Wildly.* Can do no more: its efficacy lost— What must
be, must be soon—He will return. *Flor.* He is return'd, your son—have
you not

seen him? *Coun.* Would I had never! *Flor.* Come, this is too much. This
villainous monk has stepp'd 'twixt you and nature i'

And misreported of the noblest gentleman

That treads on christian ground—Are you a mother?

Are legends dearer to you than your son?

Think you 'tis piety to gorge these miscreants,

And drive your child from your embrace—

Coun. Ye saints!

This was the d emon prompted it—avaunt!

He beckons me—I will not—lies my lord

Not bleeding in the porch? I'll tear my hair

And bathe his wounds—Where's Beatrice !—mon-

ster! monster!

She leads the dæmon—see! they spread the couch /

No,—1 will perish with my Narbonne—Oh 1

My strength, my reason fail—darkness surrounds me!

To morrow !—never will to-morrow come!
Let me die here! [*Sinks on a bench.*]

Flor. This is too much for art.
Chill damps sit on her brow: her pulse replies not.

Bened. No; 'tis fictitious all—'twas I inspir'd
The horrors she has been so kind to utter
At my suggestion.

K

Flor. That insulting sneer Speaks more the devil than if thy words
were serious.

Be her distraction counterfeit or real, Her sex demands compassion or
assistance. *J* But she revives!

Coun. Is death then past! my brain Beats not its wonted tempest—in
the grave There is peace then!

Flor. Her agony abates. Look up and view your friends.

Coun. Alas! I fear me, This is life still!—am I not in my castle? Sure I
should know this garden—good old Peter! My honest servant, thou I
fee wilt never Quit thy poor mistress !—kind old man, he weeps! *Por.*
Indeed it is for joy—how fares my lady? *Coun.* Exhausted, Peter, that
I have not strength To be distracted—hah! your looks betray
Tremendous inuendoes!—gracious heaven! Have I said ought—has
wildness—trust me, sirs, In these sad fits my unhing'd fancy wanders
Beyond the compass of things possible. Sometimes an angel of excelling
brightness, seem to whirl the orbs and launch the comet. Then hideous
wings with forked points array me, And I suggest strange crimes to
shuddering rna

trons— Sick fancy must be pardon'd.

Bened. (Artful woman! [*aside*. Thou subtle emblem of thy sex,
compos'd

Of madness and deceit—but since thy brain
Has lost its poize, I will send those shall shake it
Beyond recovery of its reeling bias.) [*Exit*.

[*Countess makes a sign to Peter to retire*.

SCENE V.

i ,

Countess, Florian.

Coun This interval is well—'tis thy last boon," Tremendous Providence!
and I will use it As 'twere th' elixir of descending mercy: No, not a
drop shall be waste—accept my thanks! Preserve my reason! and
preserve my child \ —Stranger, thy years are green; perhaps may
mock" A woman's words, a mother's woe !—but honour, If I believe
this garb, is thy profession. Hast thou not dealt in blood ?—then thou
hast heard; The dying groan, artd sin's despairing accent. Struck it
not on thy soul? Recall it, sir! (What then was thy sensation, feel for
me!

Flor. I shudder S listen, pity, and respect thee!

Coun. Resolve my anxious heart. Tho' vagrant pleasure,

Th' ebriety of youth, and worse than passion,
Example, lead thee to the strumpet vice;
Say, if beneath the waves of dissipation,
The germ of virtue blossoms in thy soul,

/Flor. A soldier's honour is his virtue. Gownmen, Wear it for show,
and barter it for gold,

And have it still. A soldier and his honour
Exist together, and together perish.

Coun. I do believe thee. Thus my Narbonne thought.

Then hear me, child of honour! Canst thou cherish
Unblemish'd innocence? wilt thou protect it?
"Wilt thou observe its wand'rings? call it back,
Confine it to the path that leads to happiness?
Hast thou that genuine heroism of soul
To hug the little fondling sufferer,
When nestling in thy bosom, drown'd in blushes,
Nor cast her from thee, while a grinning world
Reviles her with a mother's foul misdeeds?

Flor. My arm is sworn to innocence distress
Point out the lovely mourner.

Com. 'Tis enough.
Nor suffer th' ebbing moments more inquiry.
My orphan shall be thine—nay, start not, sir,
Your loves are known to me. Wealth past th'
ambition

Of Gallia's proudest baron shall endow her.
Within this casket is a monarch's ransom.
Ten thousand ducats more are lodg'd within.
All this is thine with Adeliza's hand.

Flor. With Adeliza!

Com. Ha! dost thou recoil?
Dost thou not love her? *

Flor. I love Adeliza!

Lady, recal thy wand'ring memory.

Com. Dost thou reject her? and has hope beguil'd me

In this sad only moment? Hast thou dar'd
With ruffian insolence gaze on her sweetness,
And mark it for an hour of wanton dalliance?
Oh! I will guard my child, tho' gaping dæmons
Howl with impatience!

Flor. Most rever'd of matrons!

Tho' youth and rosy joy flush on my cheek,
Tho' the licentious camp and rapine's holiday
Have been my school; deem not so reprobate
My morals, that my eye would note no distance ,
Between the harlot's glance and my friend's bride.

Coun. Thy friend! what friend!

Flor. Lord Edmund— . (

Coun. What of him?

Flor. Is Adeliza's lord; her wedded bridegroom. *Coun.* Confusion!
phrenzy! blast me, all ye furies!

Edmund and Adeliza! when! where! how I
Edmund wed Adeliza! quick, unsay
The monstrous tale—oh! prodigy of ruin!
Does my own son then boil with fiercer fires
Than scorch'd his impious mother's madding veins?
Did reason reassume its shatter'd throne,
But as spectatress of this last of horrors?
Oh! let my dagger drink my heart's black blood,

And then present my hell-born progeny
With drops of kindred sin !—*that were a torch—*
Fit to light up such loves! and fit to quench them!
Flor. What means this agony? dost thou not
grant

The maiden to his wishes?

Coun. Did I not couple
Distinctions horrible! plan unnatural rites
To grace my funeral pile, and meet the furies
More innocent than those I leave behind me!

Flor. Amazement!—I will hasten—grant, ye pow'rs!

My speed be not too late! [*Exit.*

Coun. Globe of the world, If thy frame split not with such crimes as
these, *It is immortal!*

SCENE VI.

Countess, Edmund, Adeliza.

*Edmund and Adeliza enter at the opposite door from which Florian
went out. They kneel to the Countess.*

Edm. Dear parent, look on us, and bless your children!

Coun. My children! horror! horror! yes, too sure

Ye are my children!—Edmund loose that hand; 'Tis poison to thy
soul!—hell has no venom Like a child's touch !—oh! agonizing thought!
—Who made – this marriage? whose unhallow'd breath

Pronounc'd th' incestuous sounds?

Edm. Incest! good heavens!

Coun. Yes, thou devoted victim! let thy blood" Curdle to stone!
perdition circumvents thee!"

Lo! where this monster stands! thy mother! mistress!

The mother of thy daughter, sister, wife!

The pillar of accumulated horrors!

Hear! tremble !—and then marry, if thou dar'st!

Edm. Yes, I do tremble, though thy words are
phrenzy.

So black must be the passions that inspir'd it,
I shudder for thee! pitying duty shudders!

Coun. For me !—O Edmund, I have burst the bond

Of every tie—when thou shalt know the crimes,

In which this fury did involve thy youth.

It will seem piety to curse me, Edmund!

Oh! impious night!—hah! is not that my lord?

He shakes the curtains of the nuptial couch,

And starts to find a son there! [*Wildly.*

Edm. Gracious heaven!

Grant that these shocking images be raving!

Adē. Sweet lady, be compos'd—indeed I thought This marriage was
thy will—but we will break it—Benedict shall discharge us from our
vows.

Coun. Thou gentle lamb, from a fell tyger sprung, Unknowing half the miseries that await thee! —Oh! they are innocent—Almighty pow'r!—

[Kneels, but rises again hastily. Ha! dare I pray! for others intercede! I pray for them, the cause of all their woe —But for a moment give me leave, despair For a short interval lend me that reason Thou gavest, heav'n, in vain \—it must be known

The fullness of my crime; or innocent these
May plunge them in new horrors. Not a word
Can 'scape me, but will do the work of thunder,
And blast these moments I regain from madness!

Ye know how fondly my luxurious fancy
Doated upon my lord. For eighteen months
An embassy detain'd him from my bed.
A harbinger announc'd his near return.
Love dress'd his image to my longing thoughts
In all its warmest colours—but the morn,
In which impatience grew almost to sickness,
Presented him a bloody corse before me.
I rav'd—the storm of disappointed passions
Assail'd my reason, fever'd all my blood—
Whether too warmly press'd, or too officious *
To turn the torrent of my grief aside,
A damsel, that attended me, disclos'd
Thy suit, unhappy boy!

Edm. What is to come!
Shield me, ye gracious pow'rs from my own thoughts!
My dreadful apprehension /
Coun. Give it scope!

Thou canst not harbour a foreboding thought

More dire, than I conceiv'd, I executed.

Guilt rush'd into my soul—my fancy saw thee

Thy father's image—

Edm. Swallow th' accursed sound!

Nor dare to say—

Coun. Yes, thou polluted son!

Grief, disappointment, opportunity,

fcais'd such a tumult in my madding blood.

*I took the damsel's place; and while thy arms Twin'd, to thy thinking,
round another's waist, Hear, hell, and tremble !—thou didst clasp thy
mother!*

Edm. Oh! execrable! [Adeliza faints.

Coun. Be that swoon eternal!

*Nor let her know the rest—she is thy daughter,
Fruit of that monstrous night!*

Edm. Infernal woman!

*[Draws his dagger. My dagger must repay a tale like this! Blood so
distemper'd—no—I must not strike—I dare not punish what you
dar'd commit.*

*Coun. [Seeing the dagger.] Give me the steel—• my arm will not
recoil. Thus, Edmund, I revenge thee! [Stabs herself.*

Edm. Help! ho! help!

For both I tremble, dare not succour either!

Coun. Peace! and conceal our stiaime—quick,
frame some legend—
They come!

SCENE VII.

Countess, Edmund, Adeliza, Florian, Benedict, Attendants.

Coun. Assist the maid—an accident—

*[They bear off Adeliza. By my own hand—ha! Benedict!—but no! I
must not turn accuser, .*

L

Bened. Mercy! heaven!

Who did this deed?

Coun. Myself.

Bened. What was the cause?

Coun. Follow me to yon gulph, and thou wilt

know.' I answer not to man.

Bened. Bethink thee, lady—

Coun. Thought ebbs apace—O Edmund, could a
blessing

Part from my lips, and not become a curse,
I would—poor Adeliza—'tis accomplifli'd! *[Dies.*

Bened. My lord, explain these horrors. Where—
fore fell

Your mother? and why faints your wife?

Edm. My wife? Thou damning priest! I have no wife—thou know'st it—

Thou gavest me indeed—no—rot my tongue
Ere the dread found escape it!—bear away
That hateful monk—
Bened. Who was the prophet now?

[As he goes out, to Florian.]

Remember me!

Edm. O Florian, we must haste
To where fell war assumes its ugliest form:
I burn to rush on death!

Flor. I dare not ask;
But stiffen'd with amazement I deplore—

Edm. O tender friend! I must not violate
Thy guiltless ear!—ha! 'tis my father calls!

I dare not see him! *[Wildly.]*

Flor. Be compos'd, my lord, We are all your friends—

Edm. Have I no kindred here?
They will confound all friendship! interweave
Such monstrous union—

Flor. Good my lord, resume
Your wonted reason. Let us in and comfort
Your gentle bride—

Edm. Forbid it, all ye pow'rs!

O Florian, bear her to the holy sisters.

Say, 'twas my mother's will she take the veil,

I never must behold her !—never more

– Review this theatre of monstrous guilt!

No; to th' embattled foe I will present

This hated form—and welcome be the sabre

That leaves no atom of it undefac'd!

FINIS.

THE AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT.

FROM the time that I first undertook the foregoing scenes, I never flattered myself that they would be proper to appear on the stage. — The ^subject is so horrid, that I thought it would shock, rather than give satisfaction to an audience. Still I found it so truly tragic in the essential springs of *terror* and *pity*, that I could not resist the impulse of adapting it to the scene, though it could never be practicable to produce it there.

I saw too, that it would admit of great situation, of lofty characters, and of those sudden and unforeseen strokes, which have singular effect in operating a revolution in the passions, and in interesting the spectator: it was capable of furnishing not only a contrast of Characters, but a contrast of Virtue and Vice in the same character; and by laying the scene in what age and country I pleased, pictures of ancient manners might be drawn, and, many allusions to historic events introduced, to bring the action nearer to the imagination of the spectator. The moral resulting from the calamity—ties attendant on unbounded passion, even to the! destruction of the criminal's race, was obviously suited to the purpose and object of tragedy.

The subject is more truly horrid than even that /of *Ædipus* : and yet I make no doubt but a Grecian poet would have made no scruple of

exhibiting it on the theatre. Revolting as it is, a son assassinating his mother, as Orestes—does;—exceeds the guilt that appears in the foregoing scenes. As murder is the highest crime that man can commit against his fellow-being, parricide is the deepest degree of murder. There is no age but has suffered such guilt to be represented on the stage; and yet I feel the disgust that must arise at the catastrophe of this piece—so much is our delicacy more apt to be shocked than our good nature: nor will it be an excuse that I thought the story founded on an event in real life.

I had heard when very young, that a gentlewoman, under uncommon agonies of mind, had waited on ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON, and besought his counsel. A damsel that had served her, had many years before acquainted her that she was importuned by the gentlewoman's son to grant him a private meeting. The mother ordered the maiden to make the assignation, when she said she would discover herself, and reprimand him for his criminal passion; but, being hurried away by a much more criminal passion herself, she kept the assignation without discovering herself. The "fruit of this horrid artifice was a daughter, whom the gentlewoman caused to be educated very privately in the country; but proving very lovely, and being accidentally met by her father-brother, who never had the slightest suspicion of the truth, he fell in love with, and actually married her. The wretched guilty mother learning what had happened, and distracted with the consequence of her crime, had now resorted to the Archbishop to know in what manner she should act. The Prelate charged her never to let her son and daughter know what had passed, as they were innocent of any criminal intention. For herself, he bade her almost despair!

Some time after I had finished the play on this ground work, a gentleman to whom I had communicated it, accidentally discovered the origin of the tradition in the Novels of the Quæen. of Navarre,

Vol. II. No. 30; and to my surprise I found a strange concurrence of circumstances between the story as there related, and as I had adapted it to my piece: for, though I believed it to have happened in the reign of King William, I had, for a purpose to be mentioned hereafter, thrown it back to the eve of the Reformation; and the Queen, it appears, dates the event in the reign of Louis XI. I had chosen Narbonne for the scene,—the Queen places it in Languedoc. The rencontres are of little importance, and, perhaps, curious to nobody but the author.

In order to make use of canvas so shocking, it was necessary as much as possible to palliate the crime.

To attain the former end, I imagined the moment in which she has lost a beloved husband, when grief and disappointment, and a conflict of passions might be supposed to have thrown her reason off its guard, and exposed her to the danger under which she fell. Strange as the moment may seem for vice to have seized on her, still it makes her less hateful than if she had coolly meditated so foul a crime. I have also endeavoured to make use of her very fondness for her husband in some measure the cause of her guilt.

But as the guilt could not be lessened without destroying the subject itself, I thought that her immediate horror and consequent repentance were essential to her being suffered on the stage. Still more was necessary. The audience must be prejudiced in her favour, or an uniform sentiment of disgust would have been raised against her through the whole piece. For this reason I suppressed the

story till the last scene, and bestowed every ornament of sense, unobscured piety, and interesting

contrition on the character that was at last to raise universal indignation; in hopes that some degree

i of pity would linger in the breast of the audience, and that a whole life of virtue and penance might in some measure atone for a moment—though a most odious moment—of depraved imagination.

Some of my friends have thought that I have pushed the sublimity of sense and reason in the character of the Countess to too great a height, considering the dark and superstitious age in which she lived. They are of opinion that the excess of her repentance would have been more likely to have thrown her into the arms of enthusiasm. Perhaps it might;—but I am willing to insinuate that virtue could and ought to leave more lasting stings on a mind conscious of having fallen; and that weak minds alone believe or feel, that conscience is to be lulled asleep by the incantations of bigotry!—However, to reconcile even the seeming inconsistency objected to, I here place my fable at the dawn of the Reformation; consequently the strength of mind in the Countess may be supposed to have been borrowed from other sources, beside those she found in her own understanding.—Her character is certainly new, and the cast of the whole play unlike any other that I am acquainted with. The incidents seem to me to flow naturally from the situation; and with all the defects in the writing, of many of which I am conscious, and many more will, no doubt, be discovered"; still I think, that as a tragedy, its greatest fault is the terror, which it must occasion in the audience, particularly the fairer, more tender, and less criminal part of it.

It will be observed, that after the discovery of her son, the Countess is for some moments in every scene disordered in her understanding, by the violent impression of that interview, and from the guilt that is ever uppermost in her mind—yet she is never quite mad; still less does she talk like *Behidera*, of

"Lutes, laurels, seas of milk, and ship's of amber

which is not being mad, but light-headed.^—When madness has taken possession of the person, such /Character ceases to be fit for the stage, or at least \ should appear there but for a short time; it be

firig the business of the theatre to exhibit passions, not distempers. The finest picture ever drawn of a head distempered by misfortune, is that of *King jLear*. His thoughts dwell on the ingratitude of is daughters, and every sentence that falls from is wildness excites reflection and pity. Had frenzy entirely seized him, our compassion would abate, as we should conclude that he no longer felt unhappiness.—Shakspeare wrote as a philosei' pher, Otway as a poet.

The villainy of Benedict was planned, to divide the indignation of the audience, and intercept some of it from the Countess. Nor will the blackness of his character appear extravagant, if we call to mind the crimes committed by Catholic churchmen, when the Reformation not only provoked their rage, but threatened them with total ruin.

I have said that Terror and Pity naturally arose from the subject, and that the moral is just. These are the merits of the story, and not of the author. It is true also, that the rules laid down by the criJ tics, are strictly inherent in the piece.—Remark I do not say *observed*, for I had written above three acts before I had thought of, or set myself down to observe those rules; and consequently it is no •vanity to say, that the three unities reign throughout the whole play.

The time necessary is not above two or three hours longer than the representation, or at most does not require more than half the four and twenty hours granted to poets by those their masters.—The unity of place is but or.ce shifted, and that merely from the platform without the castle to the garden within it, so that a single wall is the whole infringement of the second law.—And for the third unity of action, it is so entire, that not the smallest episode intervenes. Every scene tends to bring on the catastrophe, and the story is never

interrupted or diverted from its course*The return of Edmund, and his marriage, necessarily produce the *denouement*.

If the critics are pleased with this conformity to their laws, I shall be glad they have that satisfaction:—for my own part, I set little value on that merit which was accidental; it is at best but mechanic, and of a subordinate kind, and more apt to produce improbable situations than to remove them.

I wish I had no more to answer for the faults of the piece, than I had merit to boast in the mechanism. I was desirous of striking a little out of the common road, and of introducing some novelty on our stage. Our genius and cast of thinking are very different from the French; and yet our theatre, which should represent manners, depends almost entirely at present on translations and jcopies from our neighbours. Enslaved as they tare to rules and modes, still I do not doubt that many, both of their tragic and comic authors, would be glad they dared to use the liberties which are secured to our stage. They are so cramped by the rigorous forms of composition, that they would think themselves greatly indemnified by an ampler latitude of thought. I have chalked out some paths, which may be happily improved by better poets and men of more genius than I possess; and which may be introduced in subjects better calculated for action than the story I have chosen. The excellence of our dramatic writers is by no means equal to the great men we have produced in other works. Theatric genius lay dormant after *Shakspeare*; waked with some bold and glorious, but irregular, and often ridiculous flights in *Dry den*;—revived in *Otway*;—maintained a placid, pleasing kind of dignity in *Rowe*, and even shone in his *Jane Shore*.—It trode in sublime and classic fetters in *Cato*, but was void of nature, or the power of affecting the passions. In *Southerne*, it seemed a ray of Nature and *Shakspeare*,, but falling on an age still more *Hottentot*, was stifled in those gross and barbarous productions—Tragicomedies. It turned to

tuneful nonsense in the Mourning Bride j grew stark mad in *Lee*, whose cloak, a little the worse for wear, fell on *Young*, but with both was still a poet's cloak. It recovered its senses in *Hughes* and *Fenton*, who were afi aid it should relapse, and accordingly kept it down with a timid, but amiable hand; and then it languistied. —We have not mounted again above the two last.

Freeditorial 