

Havergal BRIAN

THE CENCI

OPERA IN EIGHT SCENES AFTER SHELLEY

FIRST RECORDING

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Cover: the Guido Reni painting thought by Shelley and countless other generations to be a portrait of Beatrice Cenci but now supposed to be a representation of one of the Sybils – cf. pp. 50–52.

HAVERGAL BRIAN

THE CENCI

Opera in Eight Scenes after Shelley

Live recording of the first performance, 12 December 1997,

Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank Centre, London

Cast

Beatrice Cenci

The Count Cenci

Lucretia

Cardinal Camillo/An Officer

Orsino/Bernardo

Giacomo/Savella/First Judge/Second Judge

Marzio/Third Guest/A Cardinal

Olimpio/Colonna/A Guest

First Guest/Second Guest

Andrea

Helen Field (soprano)

David Wilson-Johnson (baritone)

Ingveldur Ýr Jónsdóttir (contralto)

Stuart Kale (tenor)

Justin Lavender (tenor)

Jeffrey Carl (baritone)

Nicholas Buxton (tenor)

Devon Harrison (bass)

Serena Kay (soprano)

chorus part, spoken

The Millennium Sinfonia

James Kelleher, conductor

HAVERGAL BRIAN AND OPERA: A BRIEF PERFORMANCE HISTORY

by Martin Anderson

Towards the end of his long life (1876–1972), Havergal Brian began to acquire a reputation as ‘the most prolific symphonist since Haydn’, which wasn’t true then and is even less true now,¹ but that banner and the attention it brought drew attention away from him as a composer of opera. Robert Simpson’s efforts at the BBC meant that when Brian died, on 28 November 1972, at the age of 96, he was aware that the BBC was committed to broadcasting all 32 of his numbered symphonies; the final one to be professionally performed and broadcast was No. 2, in 1979. Without a similar champion in the operatic world, that was true of none of his five operas – a tally which, in other circumstances, would be enough for a composer to be thought of as chiefly operatic.

The first of those stage-works was *The Tigers*, written (to Brian’s own libretto) in 1917–29 – amazingly, its composition was interlaced with that of his monumental Symphony No. 1, *The Gothic*, another work that has skewed his reputation. A setting of Schiller’s *Turandot, Prinzessin von China* (in the original German) followed in 1950–51, with one of Shelley’s *The Cenci* close on its heels, in 1951–52. Another German setting, of Goethe’s *Faust*, occupied Brian in 1955–56, and his final opera, the one-act *Agamemnon*, emerged in 1957. An opera based on J. M. Synge’s *Deidre of the Sorrows* around 1947 went unfinished and some of the material was redeployed

¹ Among the composers whose lives extended beyond Haydn’s (1732–1809), two Bohemians had already outpaced Brian: Jan Křtitel Vanhal (1739–1813) composed around 100 symphonies and Adalbert Gyrowetz (1763–1850) over 60 – admittedly rather formulaic works. In 1977 the American Alan Hovhaness (1911–2000), of Scots-Armenian descent, overtook Brian and went on to compose 67 symphonies; whether any earlier efforts were among the huge number of manuscripts he threw out in 1942 is unknown. In Britain, Derek Bourgeois (1941–2017) reached a total of 116, and on 2 March 2024, in a concert to mark the 80th birthday of the Finnish composer-conductor Leif Segerstam, his Symphony No. 371 was given its first performance.



*Havergal Brian c. 50, at around the time
he was composing The Tigers
and the Gothic Symphony*

in the Sixth Symphony; twenty years later he toyed with the idea of an opera on *Oedipus at Colonus*, but there is no evidence that he began to write music for it.

The last to be composed, *Agamemnon*, was the first to be performed, and the only one to be heard in Brian's lifetime – in St John's, Smith Square, London, on 28 January 1971, conducted by Leslie Head; two years later Richard Armstrong conducted a BBC performance in Manchester. *The Tigers* was apparently out of reach: only the vocal score seemed to have survived. The Havergal Brian Society therefore offered a reward for the rediscovery of the full score, which then, to a chorus of surprise and delight, turned up in the basement of a London music-publisher in 1977, with the corners chewed away by mice. On behalf of the HBS, I organised a meeting with Elaine Padmore, then Chief Producer, Opera, at BBC Radio 3, to see if we might jointly put on a concert performance, and to our astonishment she went one better and decided on a studio recording. It duly took place on 3–8 January 1983, conducted by Lionel Friend, and the broadcast went out on 3 May of the same year.²

² It was released on a three-CD set from Testament (sbt3 1496) in 2014.

That left three Brian operas unheard. With *Faust* and *Turandot* both requiring large forces, *The Cenci* offered a path of less resistance, and so, on 12 December 1997, to mark the 25th anniversary of the death of its eponymous composer, the HBS presented a concert performance in the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre, London.³ This recording was made on that occasion.⁴ As an archival record of a live performance, it obviously can't offer the full sonic panoply of a modern studio recording, and it can't be denied that in a concert presentation there are problems of balance: Brian's orchestra plainly ought to be in an operatic pit – and one imagines that if Brian had ever heard *The Cenci* in rehearsal, he would have done something to reduce the rapidity with which he often requires Shelley's text to be delivered. Even so, the HBS takes the view that, warts and all, this unique record of the combination of Shelley's 'fearful and monstrous' Gothic horror-story and Brian's dark and freewheeling music-drama deserves to be heard.

Martin Anderson founded Toccata Classics in 2005 and publishes books on classical music at Toccata Press; he also writes on music for various publications in Britain and abroad. His degree (from the University of St Andrews, in 1977) was in mediaeval French and German, and thereafter he worked in economics for twenty years, in London and Paris.

³ By a strange coincidence, in 1949–50, at almost the same time that Brian was working on *The Cenci*, another British composer, the German-born Berthold Goldschmidt (1903–96), wrote the first of his two operas, *Beatrice Cenci*, to a text by Martin Esslin based on Shelley. It won first prize in the 1951 Festival of Britain opera competition, but was not performed until 16 April 1988 -- in the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

⁴ Since then, in 2021, the HBS has sponsored a recording of *Faust*, released on Dutton Epoch 2CDLX 7385 and, in 2023, one of *Agamemnon*, now in preparation from Hyperion. That leaves *Turandot* as the only Brian opera that has yet to be performed.

THE CENCI: SHELLEY AND BRIAN

by Kate Baxter and David J. Brown

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) was born, and lived, in a time of much upheaval and change. The Napoleonic Wars culminated in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Robert Stewart (Viscount Castlereagh) became infamous for his treatment of the Irish as Chief Secretary for Ireland. Farm-workers begged to be deported to Australia as they could not survive on the Speenhamland system of dole, and the Luddite uprising started in the Midlands in 1812. Repression of the common man was obvious to Shelley throughout his young life on the family estate, at Eton and later at Oxford.

Much of Shelley's work contains common threads as a result of the experiences he had as a child and young man. These youthful observations spawned the republicanism evident in his writing, augmented by his portrayal of nobility as tyrannical. In his early poem *Queen Mab* (1812), the King appears like a presentiment of Count Cenci:

[...] he smiles
At the deep curses which the destitute
Mutter in secret, and a sullen joy
Pervades his bloodless heart when thousands groan.¹

The Cenci (1819) also acts as a vehicle for displaying Shelley's disgust at the hypocrisy of the Christian church,² which, in the drama, absolves the Count's many crimes, as well as his abhorrence of torture, and his contempt for judges and the judicial system. Although based on true events that took place in 1599, the play includes

¹ *Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem*, Part III, stanza 2, lines 13–17.

² When in Act 5, sScene 4, of *The Cenci*, Shelley has Count Camillo say that "The Pope is stern; not to be moved or bent. [...] And said these three words, coldly – "They must die", he may have been enjoying a private joke: the pope from 1592 to 1605 was Clement VIII.



Percy Bysshe Shelley, painted by Alfred Clint (1807-83) in 1819

all the elements of Shelley's own experience which made him a republican and anti-militarist. It was in May 1818, while staying at Livorno in Italy, that he first encountered the story of the evil Renaissance nobleman who committed incest with his daughter Beatrice and was murdered by her. A year later in Rome, the twin triggers of a visit to the gloomy Cenci Palace and sight of the portrait by Guido Reni supposedly of the condemned Beatrice precipitated him into composing the only stage drama he ever completed. *The Cenci* was begun in Rome in May 1819 and completed less than three months later at Livorno.

Shelley's atheistic conviction is not obvious in *The Cenci*. The characters have strong Christian beliefs and Shelley only hints at his own ideals by allowing Beatrice to question the existence of God and Heaven while at the same time seeing God as the final judge on the actions that have taken place. Can there be anyone more powerful than her father?

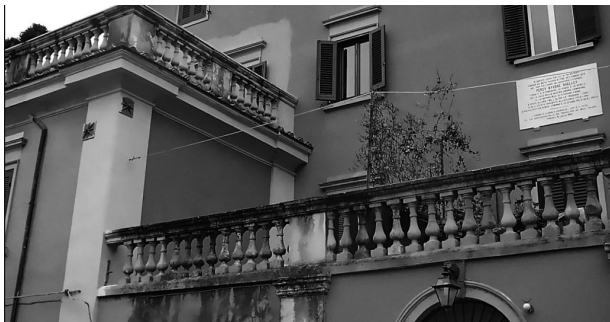
For was he not alone omnipotent
On earth, and ever present[?]³

One of the most important of Shelley's ideals explored in *The Cenci* is that of the place of women and the matriarch in society. Beatrice is a strongly independent character, strong enough to bring about her father's murder. She exerts a power that makes it appear that the assassins are unable to do anything else except comply with her will. Like Cythna in *The Revolt of Islam* (1817), Beatrice also 'is not interested in a society where women dominate men. She wants a society of free and equal men and women'.⁴ The overall concept of *The Cenci* is of a powerful play that confronts some of the archetypal traits of small societies and the people that live in them.

Brian's treatment of Shelley's play was the second of his four late music-dramas. Decades separate them from *The Tigers*, and the satire and humour of that early opera have no place in these later works, all four of which share the common theme of fate and destiny – 'man in his cosmic loneliness', as Brian referred to it in the earlier context

³ Act 5, Scene 4, lines 68–69.

⁴ Paul Foot, *Red Shelley*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1980, p. 123.



Shelley completed The Cenci in the Villa Valsovano in Livorno in summer 1819 – then a complex of buildings surrounded by fields, as a contemporary map testifies. Now on the via Filippo Venuti, it is surrounded by apartment blocks, with a plaque on the first floor recording the brief presence of its illustrious tenant.

of his Second Symphony.⁵ This theme also permeates some of the symphonies, the composition of which was interspersed with the music-dramas, as well as underlying the other large dramatic work which has points of contact with them: *Prometheus Unbound* – a conjunction which has particular force and relevance to *The Cenci*. Shelley wrote *Prometheus Unbound* immediately before *The Cenci*, from which the latter ‘was a complete change of scale and style. From cosmic drama, with its intricate meshing of symbolic levels, he turned to domestic melodrama, with a bold, simple plot of outrage and revenge, and a language almost entirely bare of imagery’.⁶ It was, in Shelley’s own words, ‘written for the multitude’.⁷

⁵ Letter to Lewis Foreman, dated 25 July 1972, reproduced in facsimile at https://www.duttonvocalion.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/HB_letter_v1.jpg.

⁶ Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, Flamingo, London, 1995, p. 514.

⁷ Letter to Charles Ollier, Shelley’s publisher, dated 6 March 1820, published in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, Oxford University Press, Oxford and London, 1964, two vols., Vol. 2, p. 174.

Brian's treatments, too, could hardly be more different. He devotedly set every word of the first two Acts of Shelley's *Prometheus*, producing an epic – the longest of all his works – perhaps better suited to 'the concert-halls of the mind' than any real-life auditorium. (At this point he stopped, feeling, as others have, that the second half of the poem was not of the same creative standard as the first.) Brian's approach to *The Cenci* was wholly different: here the numerous elisions, ranging from the wholesale omission of Acts 2 and 3 to judicious trimmings of words in many places elsewhere, have the effect of paring the drama to its essentials and drawing it tightly together. Clearly he saw his *Cenci* as a work into which audiences could be drawn, in very real opera houses – and with the principal characters of Cenci and Beatrice vividly etched in musical terms, with their own clearly identifiable thematic identities.

Apart from the cuts, Brian introduces a few changes to Shelley's words. Some of them may have been simply errors of transcription, others doubtless instances where a slight adjustment made syllables marry more harmoniously with the line of the music; but there are notable cases where a word that almost sounds the same carries a quite different meaning, as when Shelley's 'erring soul which might repent and live' (Colonna, Act I, Scene 1) in Brian's opera 'might resent and live'.

The late Kate Baxter first came to attention as a choral conductor when she won the mixed-voice category of the BBC choral competition 'Let the People Sing' with the Fenland Singers in the Royal Festival Hall in 1959, going on to conduct The Sitwell Singers and a number of other choirs in the East Midlands. In 1997 an analysis of Brian's one-act opera Agamemnon formed part of her BA Joint Honours degree at Keele University and was followed by a PhD thesis, also at Keele, on Brian's operas more generally.

David J. Brown was Secretary and then Chairman of The Havergal Brian Society, and is now an honorary Vice-President. In professional life, for many years he edited The Arup Journal, the flagship client magazine of the multi-national engineering design consultancy Arup, until his retirement in December 2014. He is the author of How They Were Built (Kingfisher Books, 1991), and Bridges: 3000 Years of Defying Nature (Mitchell Beazley, 1993; second edition, 2005). He lives in Southern California and as a retirement hobby reviews local concerts for www.laopus.com.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION OF *THE CENCI*, 1819

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

A manuscript was communicated to me during my travels in Italy, which was copied from the archives of the Cenci Palace at Rome and contains a detailed account of the horrors which ended in the extinction of one of the noblest and richest families of that city, during the Pontificate of Clement VIII, in the year 1599. The story is that an old man, having spent his life in debauchery and wickedness, conceived at length an implacable hatred towards his children; which showed itself towards one daughter under the form of an incestuous passion, aggravated by every circumstance of cruelty and violence. This daughter, after long and vain attempts to escape from what she considered a perpetual contamination both of body and mind, at length plotted with her mother-in-law and brother to murder their common tyrant. The young maiden who was urged to this tremendous deed by an impulse which overpowered its horror was evidently a most gentle and amiable being, a creature formed to adorn and be admired, and thus violently thwarted from her nature by the necessity of circumstance and opinion. The deed was quickly discovered, and, in spite of the most earnest prayers made to the Pope by the highest persons in Rome, the criminals were put to death. The old man had during his life repeatedly bought his pardon from the Pope for capital crimes of the most enormous and unspeakable kind at the price of a hundred thousand crowns; the death therefore of his victims can scarcely be accounted for by the love of justice. The Pope, among other motives for severity, probably felt that whoever killed the Count Cenci deprived his treasury of a certain and copious source of revenue.¹ Such a story, if told so as to present to the reader all the feelings of those who once acted it, their hopes and fears, their

¹ The Papal Government formerly took the most extraordinary precautions against the publicity of facts which offer so tragical a demonstration of its own wickedness and weakness; so that communication of the MS. had become, until very lately, a matter of some difficulty. —Shelley's footnote

confidences and misgivings, their various interests, passions and opinions, acting upon and with each other yet all conspiring to one tremendous end, would be as a light to make apparent some of the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart.

On my arrival at Rome² I found that the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest; and that the feelings of the company never failed to incline to a romantic pity for the wrongs and a passionate exculpation of the horrible deed to which they urged her who has been mingled two centuries with the common dust. All ranks of people knew the outlines of this history and participated in the overwhelming interest which it seems to have the magic of exciting in the human heart. I had a copy of Guido's picture of Beatrice which is preserved in the Colonna Palace, and my servant instantly recognized it as the portrait of *La Cenci*.

This national and universal interest which the story produces and has produced for two centuries and among all ranks of people in a great City, where the imagination is kept forever active and awake, first suggested to me the conception of its fitness for a dramatic purpose. In fact it is a tragedy which has already received, from its capacity of awakening and sustaining the sympathy of men, approbation and success. Nothing remained as I imagined but to clothe it to the apprehensions of my countrymen in such language and action as would bring it home to their hearts. The deepest and the sublimest tragic compositions, *King Lear* and the two plays in which the tale of Oedipus is told, were stories which already existed in tradition, as matters of popular belief and interest, before Shakespeare and Sophocles made them familiar to the sympathy of all succeeding generations of mankind.

This story of the Cenci is indeed eminently fearful and monstrous; anything like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal and diminish the actual horror of the events, so that the pleasure which arises from the poetry which exists in these tempestuous sufferings and crimes may mitigate the pain of the contemplation of the moral deformity from which

² In spring 1819.

they spring. There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose. The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character. The few whom such an exhibition would have interested could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in their interest among the mass who surround them. It is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, – that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered, consists.

I have endeavoured as nearly as possible to represent the characters as they probably were, and have sought to avoid the error of making them actuated by my own conceptions of right or wrong, false or true: thus under a thin veil converting names and actions of the sixteenth century into cold impersonations of my own mind. They are represented as Catholics, and as Catholics deeply tinged with religion. To a Protestant apprehension there will appear something unnatural in the earnest and perpetual sentiment of the relations between God and men which pervade the tragedy of the Cenci. It will especially be startled at the combination of an undoubting persuasion of the truth of the popular religion with a cool and determined perseverance in enormous guilt. But religion in Italy is not, as in Protestant countries, a cloak to be worn on particular days; or a passport which those who do not wish to be railed at carry with them to exhibit; or a gloomy passion for penetrating the impenetrable mysteries of our being, which terrifies its possessor at the darkness of the abyss to the brink of which it

has conducted him. Religion coexists, as it were, in the mind of an Italian Catholic, with a faith in that of which all men have the most certain knowledge. It is interwoven with the whole fabric of life. It is adoration, faith, submission, penitence, blind admiration; not a rule for moral conduct. It has no necessary connection with any one virtue. The most atrocious villain may be rigidly devout, and without any shock to established faith confess himself to be so. Religion pervades intensely the whole frame of society, and is, according to the temper of the mind which it inhabits, a passion, a persuasion, an excuse, a refuge; never a check. Cenci himself built a chapel in the court of his Palace, and dedicated it to St. Thomas the Apostle, and established masses for the peace of his soul. Thus in the first scene of the fourth act Lucretia's design in exposing herself to the consequences of an expostulation with Cenci after having administered the opiate was to induce him by a feigned tale to confess himself before death, this being esteemed by Catholics as essential to salvation; and she only relinquishes her purpose when she perceives that her perseverance would expose Beatrice to new outrages.

I have avoided with great care in writing this play the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry, and I imagine there will scarcely be found a detached simile or a single isolated description, unless Beatrice's description of the chasm appointed for her father's murder should be judged to be of that nature.

In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being reserved simply for the full development and illustration of the latter. Imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion. It is thus that the most remote and the most familiar imagery may alike be fit for dramatic purposes when employed in the illustration of strong feeling, which raises what is low and levels to the apprehension that which is lofty, casting over all the shadow of its own greatness. In other respects I have written more carelessly; that is, without an overfastidious and learned choice of words. In this respect I entirely agree with those modern critics who assert that in order to move men to true sympathy we must use the familiar language of men, and that our great ancestors the ancient English poets are the writers, a study of whom might incite us to do that for our own age which they have done for theirs. But it must be the real language of men

in general and not that of any particular class to whose society the writer happens to belong. So much for what I have attempted; I need not be assured that success is a very different matter; particularly for one whose attention has but newly been awakened to the study of dramatic literature.

I endeavoured whilst at Rome to observe such monuments of this story as might be accessible to a stranger. The portrait of Beatrice at the Colonna Palace is admirable as a work of art; it was taken by Guido during her confinement in prison. But it is most interesting as a just representation of one of the loveliest specimens of the workmanship of Nature. There is a fixed and pale composure upon the features; she seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness. Her head is bound with folds of white drapery from which the yellow strings of her golden hair escape and fall about her neck. The moulding of her face is exquisitely delicate; the eyebrows are distinct and arched; the lips have that permanent meaning of imagination and sensibility which suffering has not repressed and which it seems as if death scarcely could extinguish. Her forehead is large and clear; her eyes, which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beautifully tender and serene. In the whole mien there is a simplicity and dignity which, united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow, are inexpressibly pathetic. Beatrice Cenci appears to have been one of those rare persons in whom energy and gentleness dwell together without destroying one another; her nature was simple and profound. The crimes and miseries in which she was an actor and a sufferer are as the mask and the mantle in which circumstances clothed her for her impersonation on the scene of the world.

The Cenci Palace is of great extent; and, though in part modernized, there yet remains a vast and gloomy pile of feudal architecture in the same state as during the dreadful scenes which are the subject of this tragedy. The Palace is situated in an obscure corner of Rome, near the quarter of the Jews, and from the upper windows you see the immense ruins of Mount Palatine half hidden under their profuse overgrowth of trees. There is a court in one part of the Palace (perhaps that in which Cenci built the Chapel to St. Thomas), supported by granite columns and adorned with antique friezes of fine

workmanship, and built up, according to the ancient Italian fashion, with balcony over balcony of openwork. One of the gates of the Palace formed of immense stones and leading through a passage, dark and lofty and opening into gloomy subterranean chambers, struck me particularly.

Of the Castle of Petrella,³ I could obtain no further information than that which is to be found in the manuscript.

³ Shelley's stage-directions for Act 4, Scene 1, locate the Castle of Petrella 'among the Apulian Apennines', but there appears to be no historical record of a castle of that name in Apulia (Puglia, in modern Italy), the 'heel' of the 'boot of Italy'. The closest candidate in what might at a push be called the 'Apulian Apennines' is a *palazzo baronale* in the hillside settlement of Petrella Tiferina, in the region of Molise, to the west of the current border with Apulia. Charles Nicholls (pp. 41–42, below) locates the murder 'in the precipitous little village of La Petrella del Salto, in the foothills of the Abruzzi mountains a hundred kilometres north-east of Rome'. Other sources call the village Petrella Salto and place it only 60 kilometres from Rome, but it does indeed boast the hilltop ruins of a castle on the 'Rocca di Beatrice Cenci' or 'Rocca dei Cenci'.

THE ACTION OF THE DRAMA

by James Kelleher

Overture [*Preludio Tragico*]

[1] The heart and substance of *The Cenci* is confrontation between evil and good. Good resorts to the most desperate of measures to destroy evil, in doing so is tainted and edges towards falsehood, but is redeemed in its hour of extinction. Brian's substantial overture virtually adumbrates the entire action – a little like Beethoven's *Leonora* No. 3, except that the direction is reversed, a descent into loss and darkness. Thematic identification of the opposing forces could hardly be clearer or more contrasting: a rumbling, restless, rising semiquaver motion for the Count, and an eloquent descending melody for Beatrice – one of Brian's finest and most immediately memorable, heard at its clearest on solo oboe near the opening of the overture.

Scene 1

[2] Camillo and Cenci enter, and immediately the corruption of the Papal court is apparent as the Cardinal dictates the terms – relinquishing a third of his lands to the church – under which the Count's latest outrage will be concealed. Cenci revels in his crimes, Camillo leaves, and the Count then curses the Pope's order to make provision for his four sons. His servant Andrea enters and they 'converse mysteriously'. (In Shelley's conclusion to the scene, Cenci orders Andrea to bid Beatrice attend him 'at midnight, and alone'.)

Scene 2

[3] Beatrice and Orsino, walking in the garden of the Cenci Palace, recall their former love and its impossibility now: for Orsino because he is a priest, for Beatrice because she cannot leave her brother and stepmother in Cenci's evil hands. At a banquet that

evening, Beatrice is to give Orsino a petition to present to the Pope, complaining of her father's ill-treatment. After she leaves, Orsino reveals his duplicity. The petition will not be seen by the Pope; priest or not, he, Orsino, will have Beatrice.

Scene 3

[4] At a banquet in a Hall in the Cenci Palace, the Count welcomes 'friends and kinsmen'. Before the assembled company, Cenci triumphantly brandishes 'letters brought from Salamanca' which recounts the deaths of his sons Rocco and Cristofano [*Shelley makes clear, in lines omitted by Brian, that Cenci himself was not responsible*]. The guests depart in disgust, despite Beatrice's entreaties that they stay. Cenci vows vengeance on her for her defiance.

[The first three Scenes of the opera set with some cuts the three scenes of Shelley's Act I. Brian omits entirely the next two Acts, in which more of the Count's malevolence towards his family becomes apparent. In Act 2, Scene 2, Giacomo, his third son, laments to Cardinal Camillo the poverty to which Cenci's appropriation of his wife's dowry has reduced him. Orsino enters, and contemplates Cenci's murder so that he can gain Beatrice. At the beginning of Act 3, Scene 1, Beatrice enters distraught and half-mad, at first blaming herself for an unstated and unspeakable evil which has befallen her at the hands of her father. Later, she, Orsino, Lucretia and Giacomo vow that Cenci shall pay with his life in an apparent accident on the way to his castle, Petrella, in the Apulian Apennines, but in Act 3, Scene 2, Orsino tells the waiting Giacomo that the Count has escaped. However, he has sent Olimpio and Marzio, two men with good reason to hate Cenci, to 'talk with Beatrice and Lucretia'.]

Scene 4 [*Shelley's Act 4, Scene 1*]

[5] In the Castle of Petrella Cenci tells Lucretia to bid Beatrice come to him, but she will not do so. Cenci warns Lucretia to 'beware this night [...]. It were safer to come between a tiger and his prey'. After sleeping, he will destroy her spirit as well as possess her. [*Shelley's concern for contemporary sensibility – and doubtless for the stageability of his drama – made him never spell out the fact of the Count's incest, and Brian's treatment*



Photograph: Minh Tran

The monumental travertine spiral staircase in the Cenci Palace in Rome is said to have been designed in such a way that Count Cenci could ride his horse up it.

is yet more ambiguous. With his omission of the preceding Acts, the deed might well not yet have taken place. Amidst much merciful cutting of Cenci's rantings, however, Brian leaves one clear pointer in the line: 'That she have a child'.]

Scene 5 [Brian runs together the remaining three scenes of Shelley's fourth Act.]

[6] Beatrice and Lucretia, on the ramparts above Petrella, await Marzio and Olimpio. They appear, depart to do the deed, but return having lost their nerve. Beatrice drives them back, and when they again return it is to relate that they have strangled Cenci and thrown his body into the garden. Beatrice gives them gold, and to Marzio a rich mantle. Bernardo, Cenci's youngest son, and Savella, the Papal Legate now enter. [*In a passage omitted by Brian Shelley explains the latter's presence to make the Count 'answer charges of the gravest import'.*] The body has been found, Marzio and Olimpio discovered hiding, and the latter killed in the fight to capture them. Marzio is brought in. He has kept silence; he is incriminated by the gold and the mantle, and a letter found on him from Orsino to Beatrice spells out that the two had been sent 'to do more than

I dare write'. Beatrice keeps her head; she acknowledges that she hated her father but maintains the innocence of herself and Lucretia. Lucretia collapses, and Savella orders that they be taken to Rome.

Scene 6 [*Shelley: Act 5, Scene 1*]

[7] Orsino and Giacomo enter an apartment in the former's palace. Orsino has prepared for their flight, but Giacomo rounds on him for abandoning Beatrice. Orsino placates him, and tells him how to avoid the guards. Giacomo leaves, and Orsino again reveals his duplicity. He has contrived for them to lie in wait for Giacomo, and with them temporarily out of the way, he will disappear in disguise, having abandoned Beatrice to her fate.

Scene 7 [*Shelley: Act 5, Scene 2*]

[8] In a Hall of Justice, Marzio is led in. He has withstood torture without confessing, but the threat of more is too much. He blurts out how Giacomo and Orsino sent him to Petrella and that Beatrice and Lucretia paid him to murder the Count. Beatrice, however, manages by sheer force of will to make Marzio recant the accusation. He is led away to be tortured further until he confesses, but soon an officer returns to say that he managed to hold his breath until he died. Beatrice and Lucretia are taken away: it is their turn to be tested on the rack.

Scene 8 [*Brian omits Scene 3 of Act 5. Beatrice, Lucretia and Giacomo have all been tortured. Stepmother and brother have both confessed, but Beatrice has maintained her innocence, and she berates them for their weakness.*]

[9] In a Hall of the Prison, Camillo and Bernardo enter. The Cardinal has tried to intercede for the family with the Pope, but he is unbending. Bernardo departs to try again. Beatrice and Lucretia are brought in, Beatrice inveighing against her fate. Giacomo tries to comfort her with the hope that Bernardo will be successful in his pleas, but the latter rushes in to say that there is no hope. Beatrice bids Bernardo farewell in a final mood of stoic acceptance, and the three are led out to their execution.

THE MUSIC OF THE OPERA

by John Pickard

Brian composed *The Cenci* in 1951 and 1952, between his Ninth and Tenth Symphonies. If the glittering sound world of his previous opera, *Turandot* (1950–51), is partly reflected in the celebratory finale of the Ninth, it is to the impacted, fractured Tenth that one must look for symphonic correspondences to *The Cenci*. They can certainly be found in the turbulent argument and moments of tense stasis which abound in the opera, as well as in the trudging marches and dogged, anapestic rhythms that dominate the whole of Brian's music from the Second Symphony onwards.

The most direct symphonic outcome of *The Cenci*, though, is its purely orchestral overture [1]. Brian's operatic preludes make an interesting study: only two of the five completed operas have them, the other being *Turandot*. But the *Turandot* prelude is a relatively brief piece of scene-setting, whereas the *Cenci* overture is an ambitious and wide-ranging movement of almost fifteen minutes' duration. Brian seems to have considered the overture as an independent work and, after completing the opera, he copied it out separately, giving it the title *Preludio Tragico*. In this sense, the overture is closer in spirit to a work like the Twelfth Symphony (1957), which Brian suggested as an appropriate prelude to his final opera, *Agamemnon* (1957) – indeed, the overture is slightly longer than the Twelfth Symphony. As it happens, the *Sinfonia Tragica* (Symphony No. 6) (1948) was originally conceived as the prelude to an opera on J. M. Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, a project which Brian abandoned, and so there is a history of operatic preludes doing double service as symphonies and vice-versa. Whether the overture to *The Cenci* encapsulates the plot is a matter of personal interpretation; it certainly contains two contrasting themes that Brian associated with Count Cenci and with his daughter Beatrice, the latter returning in the final scene. But in its concision, its wide range of moods and tempi, and its

ultimate sense of overall unity, it may be argued that the overture satisfies the necessary conditions for a single-movement Brian symphony, of which there are several examples in his late output, notably No. 10 (1953–54), and Nos. 12 through to 17 (1957–61). In terms of duration, it is entirely comparable with most of these works.

From the opening of Scene 1 [2], the listener is immediately plunged into the challenging, but consistent, musical world of Brian's four late operas. In addition to the three already mentioned, there is the monumental *Faust* (1955–56), and all the late operas share the same idiosyncratic approach to the musical setting of text. The vocal lines are mainly declamatory, rather like a heightened recitative, only occasionally blossoming into *arioso* and often compressing a colossal number of words into a short musical space. The vocal lines never overlap one another and they sit atop an orchestral texture that is predominantly polyphonic – in other words, a texture very much like that of a Havergal Brian symphony.

Although Brian's manuscript score describes *The Cenci* as an 'opera', his approach has much in common with the music-dramas of Wagner, especially *Das Rheingold* and the early stretches of *Die Walküre*, composed at a time when Wagner was committed to the revolutionary principles of music-drama that he had worked out in his theoretical writings of the 1840s.¹ At that time, Wagner viewed the orchestra as being – at least in theory – subordinate to the declamation of the text. It was only in the later music-dramas that he modified his stated position to the point where he described his works as 'deeds of music made visible'.

Brian was a profound, though not uncritical, admirer of Wagner. His comments on *Tristan und Isolde*, a work he passionately loved, are especially revealing: 'the vocal outline is only one of a number of contrapuntal themes' (1910); 'what an experience it would be to hear this work for once without the singers!' (1932).²

¹ Brian's descriptions of his other dramatic works are varied. *The Tigers* is 'an Opera' in the published vocal score and a 'Burlesque Opera' in the manuscript full orchestral score; *Prometheus Unbound* is 'a Lyric Drama'; *Turandot* is 'ein tragikomisches Märchen'; *Faust* is marked 'Tragödie'; *Agamemnon* is 'a Tragedy'.

² *The Staffordshire Sentinel*, 14 February 1910; *Musical Opinion*, April 1932, p. 590; both quoted in Malcolm MacDonald, *The Symphonies of Havergal Brian*, Vol. 3, Kahn & Averil, London, 1983, p. 137.

For Brian, as for the mature Wagner, it is the orchestra that generates and propels the drama. Unlike Wagner, Brian often keeps his orchestral argument aloof from the onstage drama, as though it were concurrently pursuing its own independent narrative. That does not mean, however, that the music contradicts the drama – although, as will be seen, in at least one case it does. In Scene 1 there is a clear delineation of characters through the orchestral sonority: Count Cenci – a Scarpia-like villain, possessed of no redeeming qualities whatsoever – is frequently associated with low, dark colours, whereas Camillo’s reference to the gentleness of Beatrice is accompanied by an eloquent violin solo.

In Scene 2 [3], in which Beatrice herself is introduced, the orchestration is restrained and often delicate. For most of the time, the scene uses a reduced orchestra, with heavy brass and percussion limited to only four bars of music. In contrast, Scene 3 [4] uses the full orchestral forces to depict the banquet at the court of Count Cenci. The scene opens with a virtuosic fanfare for four trumpets. Brian’s works are full of fanfares, sometimes brilliant, sometimes mysterious. He is especially fond of writing off-stage fanfares, and the one opening Scene 3 is marked to be played ‘in the distance – far away’. In this case, the fanfare has a special function, summoning the guests, establishing the grandeur and formality of the occasion, and yet simultaneously undermining the spectacle. The dissonance and strenuousness of the writing suggest that something is distinctly ‘off’ about this banquet, where Cenci brazenly gloats over the death of two of his four sons and Beatrice openly defies him, with ultimately catastrophic consequences.

Musically, Scene 4 [5] falls into three distinct parts. A short, atmospheric prelude for divided cellos and basses with timpani sets the gloomy scene in the apartment of the castle at Petrella. In the main part of the scene, the music drives forward with fierce energy in what is essentially a symphonic allegro, with occasional slower interludes providing respite. Throughout the whole extended passage, Cenci (almost literally) breathlessly maintains a barrage of words, suggesting, appropriately if uncomfortably, an unhinged mind, as he reveals the full depths of his depravity. It is only towards the end of the scene, in the third and final section that the music changes character. As Cenci is ‘overpowered by sleep’, Brian’s score directs that ‘the tempo becomes gradually slower and the music decreases to vanishing point’.

Scene 5 (6) is the fastest-moving and most eventful in the opera. The assassination of Count Cenci takes place (as in ancient Greek drama, the deed is reported but not shown onstage) and is discovered almost immediately, with Beatrice and her stepmother arrested in short order. The musical setting is vivid and engaging, the onward rush of orchestral invention characterising Beatrice as a formidable agent of change when the courage of the hired assassins initially fails. In this unremittingly dark opera, Brian even permits a moment of ghoulish humour, as Beatrice pays off the murderers to the bizarre accompaniment of a solo tuba and a shrieking clarinet. With the arrival of Bernardo and Savella, there comes a change of pace, first to an extended passage of almost traditional accompanied recitative, then, as Beatrice maintains her innocence of the murder, something close to an *arioso* that builds in power to a sustained and dignified climax.

The brief Scene 6 (7), focussing on the duplicity of Beatrice's former lover Orsino, provides a striking example of Brian's willingness to allow the orchestral argument to run a separate course from the onstage drama. Curiously, the scene centres on an earlier sub-plot in Shelley's drama (the failed assassination of Cenci by Orsino and Cenci's son Giacomo) which Brian cut in the libretto he fashioned. The music creates its own dramatic disjunction, since it contains some wonderfully lyrical invention around the opening flute theme (which itself bears a striking resemblance to an important theme in Brian's Eighth Symphony (1949)). The purpose of this musical-dramatic contradiction becomes clear at the end of the scene, where Orsino reveals something of his own inner conflict as he prepares to disguise himself and flee; unlike Count Cenci, Orsino appears to have a conscience: 'where shall I / find the disguise to hide from myself, / as now I skulk from every eye?'

As the opera continues its grim course, Scene 7 (8) offers a clear example of Brian's fundamental approach to musical drama, and indeed music in general: his objectivity. At his core, Brian is a Classical, not a Romantic composer. His early works bear the unmistakable influence of Romanticism, but it was an influence of which he gradually divested himself throughout his long career. By the time he came to write *The Cenci*, most of the elements of Romantic subjectivity had been overthrown in his work,

though he still had further to go in this respect during the astonishing final outburst of symphonic writing, which saw him produce 21 symphonies between the ages of 80 and 92. This preoccupation is apparent even in the smallest details of musical technique: Brian's fondness for the interval of the bare fifth – the fundamental building-block of his harmony – precludes major or minor thirds, the traditional signifiers of emotion in music, whether joyous or sad. Time and again, Brian commits himself to neither, opening up a space at once ambiguous and charged with possibilities.

This penultimate scene centres on the torture of Marzio and anticipates that of Beatrice and Lucretia, all mercifully unseen but conveyed with blood-curdling force in Shelley's text. Brian resists all temptation to lurid musical illustration. The solemnity of the setting – the Hall of Justice in Rome – is established by the magnificent ceremonial music that begins and ends the scene; what happens in between firmly refuses to manipulate the listener's sympathies. Conflict and tension abound, but the music always maintains its emotional distance.

Emotional restraint ultimately pays dividends in the climactic final scene [9], in which Beatrice and Lucretia await the outcome of their appeal against the sentence of execution for conspiring to murder Count Cenci. Beatrice moves from lamenting the extinguishing of her young life to consoling her young brother when he comes to convey the Pope's implacable refusal to grant clemency. From this point, Beatrice becomes stoic, reconciled to the inevitable. Only then does Brian unleash the emotional outpouring that has been held back for so long. Recalling the music associated with her in the overture, Beatrice sings a glorious and radiant farewell. The effect is all the more shattering for its brevity – a mere seven bars of perhaps the most heartbreaking music Brian ever wrote – and for the fact that Beatrice's remaining words are not sung but spoken against an accompaniment of solo oboe and timpani rolls played by four performers. It is an effect that is as dramatically compelling as it is economical.

John Pickard is a composer and an academic, with a special interest in the music of Havergal Brian. He is currently Professor of Composition at the University of Bristol, UK. As a composer, he has written much orchestral, chamber and vocal music, some of which is available on Toccata Classics.

THOUGHTS ON PERFORMING *THE CENCI*

by James Kelleher

It is always hard to know where to begin when tackling the issues involved with performing Havergal Brian's music. However, I hope my experience as a conductor with some experience of Brian's orchestral music enable me to offer some coherent views on the subject.

The Cenci being an opera, the first thing I looked at was how Brian structured the drama and how he dealt with and set the text. His decision to cut the text heavily and arrange it into eight relatively short scenes is dramatically compelling, but still allows each scene to develop a flavour of its own and each character to develop within the scenes.

The setting of the text caused me a few problems. For a start, the style of vocal writing that Brian adopts is unremittingly *parlando*, almost recitative. Often the pattern outlines a melodic shape, but with so many syllables to one pitch that it takes quite an assured singer to bring out the line. The dramatic recitative nature of the writing means that Brian's word-setting can at times seem a little odd. For example, the stress sometimes lies on unexpected syllables, as when Lucretia, in Scene 5, sings: 'a gulf of *obscure* hatred' (compounded by a dotted rhythm). Brian sets the word 'obscure' twice with this emphasis, ruling out a mistake (of which, of course, there are inevitably several in the handwritten score). The solution to this problem is to ask the singers to give the text the dramatic (spoken) emphasis where it conflicts with the musical (written) one.

The tempos are another feature of Brian that give pause for thought, and again there are inconsistencies that would have been ruled out if the score had been through an editor for publishing. The range Brian uses is modest – the majority of the metronome marks fall between 60 and 100. Within these points, of course, there are wide-ranging *rubati*. However, having had the job of tackling Brian's tempos before,

I feel I am safe in taking the tempo descriptions (*Allegro agitato*, *Adagio pomposo*) as representing a wider range of tempos than the metronome marks, which I always feel were put in as an afterthought by Brian. This issue is easier to judge in a vocal work, because the guiding force is of course the vocal line and dramatic situation, and so I let them do the pacing for me, and hope that it provides a close representation of Brian's intentions.

The orchestration is one of the strongest features of the opera. As I have witnessed before with Brian, the orchestral accompaniment contains the most lyrical elements; and *The Cenci* is almost completely devoid of the problems of over-orchestration that occur in some of his other works. The orchestra required is large (full symphony with, in some cases, quadruple wind) but Brian employs it sparingly throughout most of the work, using instead a very wide variety of orchestral colours. *The Cenci* is easily the most interesting of his scores on which I have worked, and some touches are pure genius, and show a penchant for music-theatre which I feel would easily warrant a full stage-production of this opera. As a lone example, and perhaps one of the most telling moments: at the very end, Beatrice sings a glorious farewell, to her brother, which he is unable to answer. Then Beatrice calmly asks Lucretia to bind her hair up, ready for her execution, but she does this spoken, over an extended recap of her farewell music, which in a most haunting *coup de théâtre* is given to oboe solo accompanied by four timpani (with four timpanists!), playing simultaneous rolls. As Beatrice leaves, the oboe dies away leaving strings to complete the sombre music to the sound of a tolling bell. It is one of the most moving culminations of an opera I have seen.

THE PERFORMERS

James Kelleher studied at the Vienna Conservatoire and at Cambridge University (1987–90), before winning a scholarship to study at Tanglewood, the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. His professional conducting career began in 1988 with the UK premiere of Leonard Bernstein's opera *A Quiet Place* (in the presence of the composer) in the Corn Exchange Theatre, Cambridge, after which he worked with such soloists as the cellist Stephen Isserlis and the pianist Martin Roscoe and ensembles that have included the Sinfonia of Cambridge, British Youth Opera and groups from Trinity College of Music, London. He founded the London Orchestra of St Cecilia, with which in August 1994 he gave the first public performance of Havergal Brian's Symphony No. 16; a month earlier he had directed the orchestra in another Bernstein work, the *Serenade* for violin and orchestra, with Aantje Weithaas as soloist.

From 1993 to 1997 he was the conductor of the Watford Philharmonic Orchestra, where his programmes included a number of large-scale choral works, among them the Bach Mass in B minor, Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia*, Brahms' *Deutsches Requiem* and *Nänie*, Bruckner's *Psalm 150*, Elgar's *The Music Makers*, Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Mass in Time of War* and *The Creation*, Honegger's *Le roi David*, the Mozart C minor Mass, Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky*, Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music* and the Verdi Requiem.

In 1998 he put his conducting career on hold to found and develop the data-management company Generis, of which he remains CEO, though he is now formulating plans to return to conducting.



Helen Field remains one of the most versatile and distinguished artists of her generation. Her most recent roles include Marcellina in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* at La Monnaie and the title role in Strauss' *Salome* for Welsh National Opera. Other highlights include the Countess in Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* in David Poutney's acclaimed production for the Ruhr Triennale, the Kostelnička in Janáček's *Jenůfa* in Osnabrück and Denise in Sir Michael Tippett's *The Knot Garden* on tour in the UK. Her diverse international appearances have included the role of the Governess in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Cologne, Dresden, Montpellier and Schwetzingen; Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto* at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York; Cio-Cio San in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin; Aspasia in Mozart's *Mitridate* in Monte Carlo, Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello* in Brussels; and Janáček's *Jenůfa* in Düsseldorf, Liège and Toronto.



Born in North Wales, Helen Field studied at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and the Royal College of Music in London. Her many awards have included the Dame Eva Turner Prize for Opera, the Royal Society of Arts Scholarship and the Young Welsh singers Competition. She made her debut as a BBC young recitalist at the Wigmore Hall and Purcell Room in London and Brangwyn Hall in Swansea, and her operatic debut came at Welsh National Opera, where her repertoire included Gilda, Mařenka in Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, Janáček's Vixen and Jenůfa and Katerina in Martinů's *The Greek Passion*. She made her English National Opera debut as Gilda in *Rigoletto*, going on to appear as Jenifer in Tippett's *Midsummer Marriage*, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, Nedda in *Pagliacci*, Violetta in *La traviata*, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*, the Duchess of Parma in Busoni's *Doktor Faust*, and in 2003, the role of Aunt Lydia in Poul Ruders' *The Handmaid's Tale*. For Scottish Opera she sang the roles of the Vixen, Káťa in Janáček's *Káta Kabanová*, James McMillan's *Ines de Castro* (its world premiere) and the title-role in Strauss' *Salome*.

The Lawrence Olivier Awards nominated her as 'the most outstanding newcomer to opera' for her performance of the Vixen, and 'outstanding operatic achievement of the year' for her performance as Marguerite. She was also nominated for the Dora Moore Award for

her performance in the role of *Salome* in Toronto. She enjoyed both public and critical success as Aithra in Strauss' *Die aegyptische Helena* at the Avery Fisher Hall in New York, reviving the role in Cagliari, for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and in Germany. In the title role of *Salome* her appearances have included Brussels, Glasgow (Scottish Opera), Frankfurt Hamburg, Hong Kong, London (Covent Garden), Los Angeles, Nuremberg, Santa Fe and the Netherlands.

A strong supporter of contemporary music, she has been involved in many important first performances, among them Tippett's *New Year*, Birtwistle's *The Second Mrs Kong* for Glyndebourne, James McMillan's *Ines De Castro* and Ruders' *The Handmaid's Tale*. Elsewhere on the concert platform, she has appeared with many major orchestras, including Strauss' *Vier letzte Lieder* with the BBC at the Proms in London, Mahler Symphony No. 4 at the opening of the Schauspielhaus in Berlin, a Leipzig Gewandhaus concert with Kurt Masur and the *Vier letzte Lieder* with Günter Wand in Hamburg.

The British baritone **David Wilson-Johnson**, born in Northampton, studied French and Italian at Cambridge, and Organ and Singing at the Royal Academy of Music. He learnt his trade in the choirs of St Margaret's Westminster, The London Oratory, the BBC Singers and the Monteverdi Choir.

His operatic debut in 1976 – in Henze's *We Come to the River* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, under David Atherton – led to an invitation to 'jump in' at the Opéra Comique for Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, and he rapidly gained a reputation as an unflappable and versatile baritone who could make sense of the most daunting of contemporary scores.

In his fifty-year career 'Jumbo' has enjoyed happy and long-lasting collaborations with the finest orchestras of the age and its most outstanding conductors, among them David Atherton, Pierre Boulez, Frans Brüggen, Charles Dutoit, Carlo Maria Giulini, Neeme Järvi, André Previn, Simon Rattle, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky and Evgeny Svetlanov.



His most memorable concerts were Mahler's Eighth Symphony with the National Youth Orchestra under Rattle, Tippett's *King Priam* under Atherton at the BBC Proms, Henze's *Elegy for Young Lovers* under Oliver Knussen at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, the Brahms *Deutsches Requiem* under Previn in Carnegie Hall, Britten's *Death in Venice* under Kenneth Montgomery and Enescu's *Œdipe* at the Holland Festival.

From student days he worked with the pianist David Owen Norris and together they recorded many recitals, including Schubert's *Winterreise*, songs by Finzi and Quilter and many first performances of works written for them (Michael Berkeley, Edward Cowie, Trevor Hold, Lutosławski, Tippett) and Stravinsky.

In 2006 he decided to retire from the operatic stage and his last performances were the title roles in Tippett's *King Priam* (Nationale Reisopera and BBC Proms), Albeniz's *Merlin* (Teatro Real Madrid), Shostakovitch's *The Nose* under Gennadi Rozhdestvensky (Netherlands Opera) and Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise* (Edinburgh Festival).

In 2020 he sang his last Don Iñigo Gomez (in Ravel's *L'heure espagnole*) in concert with Charles Dutoit and the Orchestre Symphonique de Monte Carlo and now devotes his time and energy to running 'Ferrandou Musique', a concert series for gifted young musicians at his home in the Dordogne Valley.

Ingvaldur Ýr Jónsdóttir, mezzo-soprano, is a native of Reykjavík. Her singing career has taken her around Europe and North America, performing in various genres, including opera and concerts. She studied at the Manhattan School of Music and the Vienna Conservatoire. She enjoyed a contract with the Opéra National de Lyon, singing various leading roles such as Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*), Orlovsky (*Die Fledermaus*), Mother Goose in *The Rake's Progress*, Second Lady (*Zauberflöte*) and Mercedes (*Carmen*), all with Kent Nagano; Mozart's C minor Mass with Sir Neville Marriner and the one-woman opera *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot* by Peter Maxwell Davies. She sang the Witch in *Hansel and Gretel* at the Bastille



in Paris and at Tanglewood she sang Mrs Sedley in the 50th anniversary production of *Peter Grimes*, with Seiji Ozawa conducting.

Engagements in Iceland include Mrs Lovett (*Sweeney Todd*), Baba the Turk (*The Rake's Progress*), Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*), Olga (*Eugene Onegin*), Dido (*Dido and Aeneas*) Preziosilla (*La forza del destino*) Badessa (*Suor Angelica*), various roles in Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen*, Mrs Sedley (*Peter Grimes*), Mercedes (*Carmen*) and Anna in *Klakahöllin* ('The Ice Palace'; 1993) by the Icelandic composer Áskell Másson. She has frequently performed with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, and toured with concerts and recitals both in Iceland and abroad. She appears on numerous albums, including the works of the Icelandic composer Jón Leifs in the Iceland Symphony Orchestra recording *Hafis* (BIS). She released a solo album, *Portrett – Ingvaldur Ýr*, portraying her wide variety of repertoire.

Along with her singing career, she has extensive experience as a voice-teacher and choral conducting. She founded the Spectrum Vocal Group, a renowned choir in Iceland, which recently performed with Eric Whitacre in Harpa, the new concert hall and conference centre in Reykjavík; it works regularly with Michael McGlynn, the director of Anuna, and Paul Phoenix, a former member of The King's Singers.

Stuart Kale was born in South Wales and studied in London at Guildhall, where he won the Peter Stuyvesant Scholarship at the London Opera Centre. On graduation he joined Welsh National Opera and then English National Opera, where he remained eight years, with such successes as Nanki-Poo in Jonathan Miller's production of *The Mikado*. Other engagements included the title role of *Siegfried* in Bucharest and Aeneas in *Les Troyens* for the BBC. After leaving ENO in 1987, he began a flourishing freelance career. He returned as a guest to ENO as Herod in Strauss' *Salome* and sang Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins* with the London Symphony Orchestra for a CBS recording. He then went to Australia to perform in Prokofiev's *The Fiery Angel* with the State Opera of South Australia. In 1988–89, as well as several important debut performances, he sang in Janáček's *Osud* for WNO, which was recorded by EMI.



Since then he has sung in *Peter Grimes* and *Idomeneo* at Covent Garden, as the Captain in *Wozzeck* in San Francisco and Toronto, Shuisky (*Boris Godunov*) in Strasbourg and Bordeaux, Quint (*The Turn of the Screw*) for the ENO summer tour of Russia in 1990, Truffaldino (*The Love of Three Oranges*) for ENO, Zinoviev (*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*) in Toulouse and Marseille, *Idomeneo* at Drottningholm, *Lulu* (the three tenor roles) at the Châtelet, Captain Vere (*Billy Budd*) in Cologne, Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*) at Strasbourg, *Jonny Spielt Auf* for Radio France, and Gregor (*The Makropoulos Case*) and Herod (*Salome*) in new productions in Strasbourg. Further important roles have followed, including the title part in *Peter Grimes* in Regensburg, Arbace (*Idomeneo*) in Montpellier for Radio France, and Tito (*La clemenza di Tito*) in Rennes. He recorded Mr Upfold (*Albert Herring*) for Collins Classics and Shuisky (*Boris Godunov*) for Chandos. His concert performances include Giovanni Bracca (*Violanta*) for Opera North and at the 1997 London Proms.

Justin Lavender was persuaded by Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten to abandon nuclear engineering for music. His international debut was as Nadir in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* at Sydney Opera House. This success led to engagements with opera companies and orchestras throughout the world. In 1990 he made debuts at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, singing the leading role of Arnold in Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, and at the Wiener Staatsoper as Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*. His debut at La Scala, Milan, in the title role of Rossini's *Le Comte Ory* came the following year, along with Demodokos in Dallapiccola's *Ulisse* at the Salzburg Festival. His operatic experience ranges throughout the repertoire, from Baroque to Wagner.

He has worked on the concert platform with legendary conductors such as Claudio Abbado, Carlo Maria Giulini, Bernard Haitink and Sir Georg Solti, and he is particularly associated with Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and Verdi's Requiem which he sang for the tercentenary celebrations of the rebuilding of



St Paul's Cathedral. In 2006 he made a highly acclaimed recording of *Gerontius* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo, also singing it at the Berlin Festival. His many other recordings include solo albums with the Bournemouth Symphony of Mozart, Rossini and Donizetti arias, three Britten song-cycles; and many leading roles on complete operatic recordings. For eight years he wrote a regular column for *The Irish Examiner*, and he has contributed articles and book reviews to newspapers and professional journals. He has given lectures and master-classes all over the world, particularly in Chinese-speaking countries. A student of Mandarin, he is one of few western singers able to sing in Chinese, and has been made an honorary professor of the Confucius Institute of Pfeiffer University, North Carolina; he has sung Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* in Vienna and, in the original Tang Dynasty Chinese, in Hong Kong. Before the pandemic he sang the tenor solo in Verdi's Requiem in the final concert of the 300th-anniversary season of the Three Choirs Festival at Hereford Cathedral.

Justin Lavender's vast experience, combined with a vocal technique which has so often attracted praise, is now turned towards teaching, which he combines with his continuing performing career. Students at the Royal College of Music he has taught since joining the staff there have gone on to successful careers. Having already directed a number of choral societies as a guest conductor, from 2013 to 2015 he was the musical director of Opera at Bearwood in Berkshire. For Bearwood he conducted *Le Villi*, *Carmen*, *Orpheus in the Underworld*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Bartered Bride*. RCM students figured prominently in the casts of these productions. Having moved to Buckinghamshire, he co-founded Arcadian Opera, based at Stowe, where he has conducted full-scale productions of *La bohème*, *L'Elisir d'amore*, *Roméo et Juliette*, Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers*, *Dido and Aeneas* and *Die Zauberflöte*, often with RCM students included in the cast. He also conducts the Phoenix Singers in Oxfordshire, with regular performances of major oratorios collaborating with the Trinity Camerata Orchestra of Oxford. He is the Director of Music of the Benefice of SS Simon and Jude, Castlethorpe, and St James, Hanslope, both in Buckinghamshire.

The Toronto-born Canadian-British baritone – now tenor – **Jeffrey Carl**, winner of a Canada Council award, has performed over 35 lead roles in Europe and North and South America, also appearing in oratorio and song recitals across the world. As a recitalist, his passion for foreign cultures has enabled him to have sung so far in nineteen different languages. Earlier baritone lead roles have included those in Bizet's *Carmen*, Donizetti's *Caterina Cornaro* (London and Cyprus), Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, Massenet's *Hérodiade*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Puccini's *La bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Tosca* and *Turandot* (Teatro Municipal, Rio de Janeiro), Thomas' *Hamlet*, Verdi's *Aida*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Falstaff* (Ford), *Macbeth*, *Nabucco*, *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, *Otello*, *La traviata* and *I vespri siciliani*, Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (live for RAI 2 Modena, Reggio Emilia, Pesaro) and in a Verdi gala in the Megaron in Athens.



He recently reprised Germont (*La traviata*) and *Rigoletto* with the new Southern Ontario Lyric Opera, receiving high praise from Opera Canada. In Canada, he created roles in two world-premiere operas: *La Serinette* by Harry Somers (CBC) and *In Search of Zoroaster* by R. Murray Schafer. The conductors with whom he has recorded include Richard Bonyng and Sir Antonio Pappano.

He recently made two débuts: in Maison Symphonique in Montréal and in Cadogan Hall in London as a guest artist with Aprile Millo. He made his role debut in Verdi's *Il Corsaro* in Italy in the summer of 2019, where he said farewell to his baritone repertoire.

His first tenor appearance was in the new opera *Conan and the Stone of Kelior* by Kyle McDonald, voicing the villainous and demanding role of Kelior, and his first concert-hall appearance was in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. His new repertoire includes Cavaradossi, Riccardo, Don Carlo, Manrico and other roles in the Verdi and Puccini canon. He still performs his favourite concert work, *Carmina Burana*, now singing both roles.

Nicholas Buxton, tenor, studied at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester (1979–84) and the National Opera Studio in London (1985–86). He made his professional debut after only one year at college, performing the role of Pasquale in Haydn's *Orlando Paladino*, at the Cannon Hill Arts Centre in Birmingham. He has sung over forty roles and performed as a soloist in many concerts in over twenty countries. Perhaps his most outstanding achievement to date is the notoriously long and heavy role of Mascagni's Guglielmo Ratcliff, with which he made his Italian debut in 1995 at the Teatro della Gran Guardia in Livorno and the Teatro Sociale in Mantua. It was an immediate success, as he was engaged subsequently for Verdi's *Don Carlos* in Mantua, and the leading role in Gershwin's *Blue Monday* in Livorno, Pisa and Iesi.

Other notable performances include Enzo (*La Gioconda*) for Opera North, Bacchus (Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos*) at the Augsburg Stadttheater, Don José (Bizet's *Carmen*) for Scottish Opera, Otello for Folkoperan in Stockholm, Valzacchi (*Der Rosenkavalier*) for ENO, Richard Scrop (Marschner's *Der Vampyr*) for Wexford Festival Opera, Turiddu (*Cavalleria rusticana*) in Osaka, Siegmund (*Die Walküre*) for Fulham Opera, Manrico (*Il trovatore*) for English Festival Opera, Cavaradossi (*Tosca*) for Opera Players, Florestan (*Fidelio*) for Cambridge University Opera, Calaf (*Turandot*) for Glasgow Grand Opera and Andonis (Martinů's *The Greek Passion*) in Brno, with a cast from Covent Garden. He has covered several roles at Covent Garden, including Bob Boles (*Peter Grimes*), Ringmaster (*The Bartered Bride*) and Tichon (Janáček's *Káta Kabanová*).

The bass-baritone **Devon Harrison** was born in Kingston, Jamaica, and educated in London. Initially he studied privately and made his operatic singing debut in the title role of Don Giovanni in concert for the 'Voices Theatre Co.', for which he also sang the lead in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. He later went on to study at Trinity College of Music, first under the late Morag Noble and then John Wakefield. At Trinity he appeared as 'Le Chat noir' in Ravel's *Lenfant et les sortilèges* and the Compère in the British premiere of Virgil Thompson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*, and was highly commended in the Elisabeth Schumann Prize for Lieder adjudicated by Ilse Wolf. He graduated with the Performers' Diploma with Merit, and later studied with Iris Dell'Acqua.



He has gone on to build a strong and varied body of work which includes not only opera but oratorio, art-song, music-theatre and jazz. His work as a soloist has seen him debut roles in several world, European and UK premiere productions, earning glowing reviews for his performances – among them Mark in Errollynn Wallen's *The Silent Twins* (Almeida Opera). Other roles include Frazier and Jim in *Porgy and Bess* (Pegasus Opera,) the title role in Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* and Tonio in Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* (Surrey Opera), Osmin in Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Don Alfonso in his *Così fan tutte* (Pavilion Opera), Joe in Jerome Kern's *Showboat* (Raymond Gubbay), Banquo in Verdi's *Macbeth*, Mephistopheles in Gounod's *Faust*, Fabrizio in Rossini's *The Thieving Magpie*, Dr Miracle in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* (Midland Opera,) Apollo in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (Kent Opera), Frank in Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* (Tête-à-Tête), Hermann Augustus in Bernstein's *Candide* (Birmingham Opera) and Cacambo, also in *Candide* (Buxton Opera Festival). Other firsts include a solo role in the European premiere of *The Gates of Justice*, a cantata for baritone and tenor cantor by Dave Brubeck.



Serena Kay, soprano, graduated from Royal Holloway College where she was a Choral Scholar and won a scholarship to study at the International Opera School of the Royal College of Music. She made her Opera North debut as Second Lady in *The Magic Flute*, her English National Opera debut as Nancy T'Ang in John Adams' *Nixon in China* and her Welsh National Opera debut as Tisbe in Rossini's *La cenerentola*. She has performed Hermia in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Sara in Jonathan Dove's *Tobias and the Angel* and Smeaton in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, all for English Touring Opera. She has performed the title role of Cenerentola over 50 times, for both Mid Wales Opera and Garden Opera, including a tour of Kenya. Other roles include Hansel in Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, Dorabella in *Così*



fan tutte and five roles for Bampton Classical Opera. Her solo concert work includes Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder* with the Metropolitan Orchestra in Lisbon, Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été* for the Kew and Oxford Sinfonias and the Berlioz Society, Bach's B Minor Mass for the Singapore Choral Society, Handel's *Messiah* with the Huddersfield Choral Society, concerts with the BBC Concert Orchestra and with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the South Bank Centre in London and oratorios throughout the UK. She is currently Music Director of Spotlights Musical Theatre, Ascot, and has worked as both MD and director with West End Operatic Society in Newcastle upon Tyne, Park Opera in Bracknell and Opera at Bearwood, both in Berkshire. She is also very much in demand as a singing teacher.

The Millennium Sinfonia

Violins

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 Andrew Bentley
 Gerry Drought
 Sarah Drury
 Martin Gill
 Rosie Henbest
 Bob Higgs
 Tina Longford
 David Lyons
 Peter McGowan
 Liz Partridge
 Julian Saxl
 Peter Stevens
 Scott Taggar
 Martin Turnland
 Shelley van Lowen
 Tim Warburton
 Greg Warren Wilson

Violas

Adrian Smith
 Fay Sweet
 Lynne Baker
 Vince Green
 Graham McKeen
 Liz Sharpe

Cellos

Emma Vidgeon
 Nicky Baxter
 Ben Chappell
 Helen Edgar
 Zoe Martlew
 Sheena McKenzie

Basses

Tony Husson
 Peter Hodges
 Burt Downs
 Lucy Hare

Flutes

Judith Hall
 Christine Messetta
 John Bowler

Flute/piccolo

Chris Bain

Oboes

Richard Weigel
 Max Spears

Cor anglais

Debbie Boyd

Clarinets

Ian Herbert
 David Ricks

Bass clarinet

Stuart Allan

Bassoons

Tamsin Rowlinson
Rachel Edmunds
Suzanner Chappell

Bassoon/contrabassoon

Peter Harrison

Horns

Marcus Bates
Jane Hannah
Donald Clist
Peter Merry

Trumpets

Richard Jones
Joanne Turner
John Shaddock
Alex Cromwell

Trombones

John Edny
Gary Davies
Richard Wall

Tuba

John Eliot

Timpani

Jackie Kendal

Percussion

Jeremy Corns
Fiona Ritchie
John Rockliffe

Harp

Carys Hughes

SCREAMING IN THE CASTLE: THE CASE OF BEATRICE CENCI

by Charles Nicholl

Beatrice Cenci was – to take a sample of soundbites over the centuries – a ‘goddess of beauty’, a ‘fallen angel’, a ‘most pure damsel’. She was also a convicted murderer. This is a charismatic combination, not least in Italy, and her name has lived on, especially in Rome, where she was born and where she was executed in 1599.

The story as it comes down to us has the compactness of legend. It tells of a beautiful teenage girl who kills her brutal father to protect her virtue from his incestuous advances; who resists interrogation and torture with unswerving courage; and who goes to her execution unrepentant and borne along on a wave of popular sympathy. There have been many literary treatments of the story, the most famous of which is Shelley’s verse-drama, *The Cenci*, written in 1819. Other writers drawn to the subject include Stendhal, Dickens, Artaud and Alberto Moravia. The appeal of the story is partly lurid – a pungent mix of Renaissance sex and violence; a sense of dark deeds behind the closed doors of a prominent Roman family. It affords a glimpse, in Shelley’s words, of ‘the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart’. There is also the ethical conundrum it poses, its puzzle of legal guilt *v.* moral innocence. At the end of Moravia’s play, *Beatrice Cenci* (1958), she tells her prosecutors:

Accuse me if you wish, but I am innocent ... According to your justice you will certainly be able to prove that I am guilty of my father’s death. But you will never be able to prove that I am not at the same time innocent according to another justice – a justice which you cannot know, still less administer.

The beautiful murderer, the innocent sinner: La Cenci has cast her spell on the imagination – especially on a certain kind of male imagination – and it is with some difficulty that one digs back through the silt of literary sentiment to the event itself, which took place four hundred years ago in the precipitous little village of La Petrella



An early postcard showing the ruins of the castle atop the Rocca dei Cenci above Petrella Salto.

del Salto, in the foothills of the Abruzzi mountains a hundred kilometres north-east of Rome.

Sometime after seven o'clock on the morning of 9 September 1598, a woman called Plautilla Calvetti was combing flax in her house at La Petrella. She heard a confused clamour outside – 'shouted words that I could not understand'. She hurried out into the street. Someone she knew called to her: 'Plautilla, Plautilla, they are screaming in the castle!'

The castle stood up on a steep crag above the village. It was known as La Rocca, and certainly today its stubby ruins, overgrown with broom and elder, look more like an outcrop of rock than the remains of a building. It was then the kind of rough-hewn, strategically placed fortress-cum-country-house that a very wealthy and very dodgy Roman nobleman might choose to hole up in when things got a bit hot – both climatically and figuratively – down in Rome. This was broadly the case with the current tenants of the building: Count Francesco Cenci, a 52-year-old Roman around whom accusations of corruption and violence clustered like summer flies; his second wife, Lucrezia; and his youngest daughter, Beatrice. The two women were essentially prisoners in the castle, slaves to the Count's brutality, paranoia, and – if the rumours were to be believed – sexual abuse.

Plautilla knew the castle, and its secrets, rather better than most in the village. Her husband, Olimpio, was the *castellano*, or manager of the castle, and she, too, worked there as a housekeeper. This was why the villagers were here at her house, shouting that something was wrong – even wronger than usual – up at La Rocca. Olimpio was absent, however.

Plautilla ran straight away up the steep track to the castle, 'with one slipper on and one slipper off'. She saw Beatrice Cenci looking down at her from one of the windows. She called up to her: 'Signora, what is the matter?' Beatrice did not answer. She was clearly distraught but 'strangely silent', unlike her stepmother, Lucrezia, who could be heard screaming inside the castle.

Some men came hurrying down the track. As they passed Plautilla they told her: 'Signor Francesco è morto'. The infamous Count Cenci was dead. His body was lying in



*An imagined reconstruction by a nineteenth-century Italian artist
of the Cenci castle above Petrella Salto.*

what was called the ‘warren’, a dense patch of scrub below the castle rock which was used as a refuse tip. It appeared he had fallen from the wooden balcony that ran around the upper storey of the castle. There was a drop of six *canne* (about thirteen metres) into the warren. Part of the balcony had collapsed: one could see splintered wood, though the gap looked small for the bulky Count to have fallen through.

Ladders were fetched. Three or four of the men climbed down the ‘wilderness wall’ and into the warren. They confirmed that Cenci was dead – despite his fall having been broken by the branches of an elder tree. Indeed, the body was already cold to the touch, suggesting death had occurred some hours before. It was hauled up with great difficulty, roped to one of the ladders, and on this improvised stretcher it was carried to the castle pool, down below the outer gate. A crowd of villagers had gathered, among them three priests. They stared at the mortal remains of the great Count Cenci. His face and head were matted with blood; his costly *casacca* or gown of camel’s hair was torn and befouled with the rubbish of the warren: a ‘miserable rag’.

It was during the washing of the body, at the castle pool, that questions started to be raised. As they rinsed the blood off the Count’s raddled face, they found three wounds on the side of his head. Two were on the right temple, the larger one ‘a finger long’. The deepest and ugliest wound was near the right eye. One of the women deputed to wash the body, whose name was Dorotea, made irreverent comments about the dead man. She thrust her forefinger into the wound with grisly relish. One of the priests, Don Scossa, later said: ‘I could not look at it any longer’. Porzia Catalano, another onlooker, said: ‘I turned my eyes aside so I didn’t have to look, because it frightened me’.

It was not the ghoulish jesting of Dorotea that struck the priests, however, so much as the nature of the wounds. How far their statements were shaped by later knowledge we do not know, but the priests who witnessed the washing of the body all claimed to have recognised instantly that the wounds on Cenci’s head had been made not by a fall from the balcony but by a violent blow with a sharp instrument. They thought they had been ‘made with a cutting tool like a hatchet’ or with a ‘pointed iron’, or possibly with a stiletto. One of the priests, Don Tomassini, also noted a deep bruise on the Count’s arm, above the left wrist. Thus, even before the dead man’s eyes had been closed (or

rather, as Don Scosso pedantically noted, ‘the left eye, for the right eye was completely destroyed by the wound’), even before the body, clad in a fresh shirt and laid on sheets and cushions from the castle linen chest, had been carried down the twisting lane to the village church of Santa Maria which was to be its resting place, it was already suspected that Count Cenci’s death was not an accident but a case of murder.

Standing on the site of the castle pool four centuries later, assisted by the conventions of the Hammer horror movie which this story often resembles, one envisages that moment of dawning recognition, when the assembled villagers fall silent and their eyes slowly turn back up to the forbidding silhouette of La Rocca, to the ‘strangely silent’ figure of Beatrice at the window.

This brief account, based on statements by witnesses, catches at least something of the reality of the Cenci murder. It is a local event, as all historical events are to begin with; a sudden noisy intrusion into the routines of a late summer morning in La Petrella. This is the event before the dust has settled. Thereafter it becomes progressively distorted by various kinds of partisanship – the police investigation, the extraction of confessions, the hectorings of the trial, the blanket cruelties of the verdict – and then by the obscuring draperies of legend.

The investigation – by the Neapolitan authorities, who controlled the province of Abruzzo Ulteriore – was thorough and even ardent defenders of Beatrice do not dispute its basic findings. Count Cenci had indeed been murdered, horribly. While he slept, drugged by a sleeping draught prepared by Lucrezia, two men had entered his bedroom. Despite the drug it seems he awoke. One of the men held him down – the bruise on the wrist which Don Tomassino spotted – while the other placed an iron spike against his head and drove it in with a hammer. The two slighter wounds on the Count’s head were probably botched blows before the *coup de grâce* smashed home. They then dressed the body, humped it to the edge of the balcony and threw it down into the warren. Leaving a half-hearted hole in the balcony floor to make it look like an accident, and a mass of ‘scene of the crime’ evidence – blood-soaked sheets and the rest – to show that it wasn’t, they rode off into the night.

The two men were Olimpio Calvetti – the trusted *castellano* of La Rocca, the husband of Plautilla and, it later transpired, the lover of Beatrice – and a hired accomplice, Marzio Catalano, a.k.a. Marzio da Fiorani. These were the murderers of Count Cenci, but they were really only hitmen. The true architects of the murder were the Count's immediate family: Lucrezia and Beatrice, his long-suffering wife and daughter, and his eldest surviving son, Giacomo. The latter was actually in Rome when it happened, but his extensive confessions provided the bulk of the case against them. Beatrice was said to have been the most implacable of the conspirators, the one who urged the assassins on when they balked at the last moment. She, however, refused to confess, even under torture.

The judicial process lasted exactly a year, during which time both of the murderers died. Olimpio Calvetti, on the run in the Abruzzi hills – we shift from Hammer Horror to Spaghetti Western here – had his head sliced off with a hatchet by a bounty hunter. Marzio Catalano died under torture in the interrogation rooms of the Tordinona Prison in Rome. On 10 September 1599, Giacomo, Beatrice and Lucrezia Cenci were executed outside the Castel Sant'Angelo on the banks of the Tiber. Giacomo's death was protracted – he was drawn through the streets on a cart, his flesh mutilated with heated pincers, his head smashed with a sledgehammer, his body quartered – but the two women walked to their death 'unbound and in mourning garments' and were 'cleanly' beheaded. A not entirely trustworthy account of the execution adds that Lucrezia had difficulty settling at the block because of the largeness of her breasts. A fourth Cenci, Bernardo, too young to be actively involved, was forced to watch the killing of his kin and was despatched to the galleys thereafter.

The affair was a *cause célèbre*, which echoed briefly through the newsletters of the day: 'The death of the young girl, who was of very beautiful presence and of most beautiful life, has moved all Rome to compassion'; 'She was 17 and very beautiful'; 'She was very valorous' at her death, unlike her stepmother, who was a 'rag'.

The bald facts of the case do not go very far in explaining the passionate interest it has aroused, which has little to do with the actual murder of Count Cenci: on that, posterity's verdict is a simple 'good riddance'. It is rather the particular quality – real or



The decapitation of the Cenci, as visualised in an Italian lithograph of c. 1850: the corpse of Lucrezia lies on the floor while the executioner displays Beatrice's head to the crowd; to the left, her brother Giacomo faints in horror.

imagined – of the person who has become the protagonist, the star, of the story: Beatrice Cenci. Though there was undoubtedly a continuous knowledge of the case from the late sixteenth century onwards, the legend of Beatrice Cenci is essentially a Romantic construct whose origin can be found in a long and highly-coloured account by the historian, Ludovico Antonio Muratori, in his twelve-volume chronicle, *Annali d'Italia*, published in the 1740s. This popular book brought the case to a new generation of Italian readers, and when Shelley arrived in Rome in 1819, he found that 'the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest'. For Beatrice herself, he added, 'the company never failed to incline to a romantic pity' and a 'passionate exculpation' for the crime she had committed.

Shelley almost certainly knew Muratori's version and may also have known an early dramatisation by the obscure and prolific Florentine playwright Vincenzo Pieracci (1760–1824), but the only source he mentions in the Introduction to his play is a mysterious 'old manuscript', which he describes as 'copied from the archives of the Cenci Palace in Rome' and 'communicated' to him by a friend. Mary Shelley also mentions this manuscript in her later notes on the play, though exactly what it was, and how much Shelley's historical errors or reworkings were taken from it, is unclear. His version of the murder itself, for instance, is strangely sanitised: the Count is strangled by Olimpio, 'that there might be no blood'. This accords rather better with his idealisation of Beatrice than the messy reality of the murder.

Shelley's poetic heroine, agonising between the impossible alternatives of incest and parricide in tones that sometimes recall Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, is the exemplar of the Romantic Beatrice and ushers in a parade of doomed heroines in prose works by Stendhal (*Les Cenci*, 1839), Niccolini (*Beatrice Cenci*, 1844), Guerrazzi (*Beatrice Cenci*, 1853) – this last a work of almost unbearable treaciness – together with shorter essays or treatments by the elder Dumas and Swinburne. In the twentieth century the legend has persisted – a film (*Beatrice Cenci*, 1909) directed by the Italian Expressionist director Mario Caserini; a 'Theatre of Cruelty' version, *Les Cenci*, by Antonin Artaud, first performed in Paris in 1934, with Artaud in the role of the wicked Count; and Alberto Moravia's wordy, Anouilh-esque play, *Beatrice Cenci* (1958).

Then there is oral tradition. A typical synoptic version of the story runs: ‘her father dishonoured her, and in revenge she killed him by stabbing a silver pin into his ear’ (Carlo Merkel, *Due Leggende intorno a Beatrice Cenci*, 1893). Another, recorded in La Petrella in the 1920s by Corrado Ricci, describes her torture: ‘they hung her up by her yellow hair, which reached to her knees’. This finds its way into Artaud’s play: ‘From the ceiling of the stage a wheel is revolving on its invisible axis. Beatrice, attached to the wheel by her hair, is urged on by a guard who grips her wrists behind her back’.

These literary or anecdotal aspects of the legend are closely connected with a visual aspect: the supposed portrait of Beatrice by Guido Reni, which shows a beautiful young girl with brown hair and wide, lustrous eyes. According to tradition – scrupulously nurtured by all the nineteenth-century writers on the subject – the portrait was taken from the life during Beatrice’s imprisonment, in late 1598 or 1599. An alternative tradition, taking into account the unlikeliness of the unknown Guido being able to visit her in the Corte Savella prison, says it was based on a glimpse the artist had of her in the street as she went to her death. Shelley saw it in 1818, in the Palazzo Colonna in Rome, and described the face as ‘one of the loveliest specimens of the workmanship of Nature’:

There is a fixed and pale composure upon the features; she seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness [...]. The lips have that permanent meaning of imagination and sensibility which her suffering has not repressed [...]. Her eyes, which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beautifully tender and serene. In the whole mien there is a simplicity and dignity which, united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow, are inexpressibly pathetic.

The portrait was, in Mary Shelley’s view, the spark which ignited the poet’s interest – Beatrice’s ‘beauty cast the reflection of its own grace over her appalling story; Shelley’s imagination became strangely excited’.

A few years later, the expatriate French novelist and *flâneur* Henri Beyle, better known as Stendhal, was similarly moved, seeing in the portrait ‘a poor girl of 16 who has only just surrendered to despair. The face is sweet and beautiful, the expression very gentle, the eyes extremely large; they have the astonished air of a person who has just

been surprised at the very moment of shedding scalding tears.' Dickens found it 'a picture almost impossible to be forgotten', full of 'transcendent sweetness' and 'beautiful sorrow'. In her face 'there is a something shining out, that haunts me. I see it now, as I see this paper, or my pen' (*Pictures from Italy*, 1846). Nathaniel Hawthorne, meanwhile, found the picture 'the very saddest ever painted or conceived: it involves an unfathomable depth of sorrow.' It is 'infinitely heartbreaking to meet her glance [...]. She is a fallen angel – fallen and yet sinless' (*Transformations*, 1858).

Despite these plangent and heavyweight endorsements, it is almost certain that the face in the portrait has nothing at all to do with Beatrice Cenci. Guido Reni, a Bolognese by birth, is not known to have painted in Rome before 1608, nine years after her death. In its visual imagery – particularly the turban-like drapery – the portrait is more likely to be a representation of one of the Sibyls. (There is a turbanned Cumaean Sibyl by Guido Reni at the Uffizi.) The girl's extreme youth suggests she is the Samian Sybil, sometimes referred to in classical sources as a *puella*.

The earliest connection of the portrait with Beatrice appears to be in a catalogue of paintings owned by the Colonna family, compiled in 1783 – 'Item 847. Picture of a head. Portrait believed to be of the Cenci girl. Artist unknown.' In documentary terms this identification, itself tentative, belongs to the late eighteenth century, to the time of the upsurge of interest in La Cenci arising from the account in Muratori's *Annales*. It is not too cynical to suggest that her name was appended to the picture to lend it a spurious glamour. This seems to have been the result, for when Shelley showed a copy of it to his Roman servant, he 'instantly recognised it as the portrait of La Cenci'.

The painting now hangs in the gloomy corridors of the Palazzo Barberini; it was purchased in 1934 by the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica. The label below it has a question mark after both the artist and the subject, and adds an apologetic note that the painting is of 'poor quality' and is famous only because of its supposed connection with Beatrice. A couple of rooms away hangs the gallery's masterwork: Caravaggio's breathtaking 'Judith Cutting off the Head of Holofernes'. In the expression of Judith, resolute but disgusted by the sheer messiness of the operation; in the fountains of blood spurting over the bed-sheets; in the scarcely veiled eroticism – her hardened nipple

is painted with great specificity beneath the white gown – one might see an entirely different reading of Beatrice Cenci: not sweet and mournful like the young Sybil, but steeled to a necessary, or perhaps merely expedient, act of butchery. There is no provable connection between Caravaggio's Judith and Beatrice, but it is by no means impossible. Caravaggio was working in Rome at the time of the trial and execution and the painting is broadly datable to this period. Perhaps it contains a vein of comment on the Cenci case; it is rather more likely to do so than the dubious Reni portrait, which caused so many flutters beneath the frock-coats of the literati.

In the later nineteenth century, the case became the object of more serious historical investigation. In some instances, the findings contradicted the received pseudo-facts of the legend, though they did little to diminish its popularity. Even sober scholars found it hard to resist the peculiar allure of La Cenci. When a Victorian antiquarian, Edward Cheney, discovered an autograph letter of Beatrice's in a Roman archive, he duly published the text in a learned periodical (*Philobiblon*, Vol. 6, 1861). Halfway through his transcription, however, he signals an omission, with a note that states: 'Here the manuscript is illegible from tears having blotted it'. I have seen a photograph of the original document. There is some deterioration of the paper, but no sign whatever that this was caused by La Cenci's teardrops. The bibliophile has suffered that characteristic rush of blood to the head which Beatrice excites in all the historians, particularly male ones.

The most challenging documentary discoveries were made by a tenacious archival ferret, Dr Antonio Bertoletti. In 1879 he published his findings in a slim, refreshingly dry volume, *Francesco Cenci e la sua Famiglia*. His first discovery was a manuscript volume in the Vittorio Emmanuele library in Rome, headed 'Memorie dei Cenci'. In it he found, in the surprisingly well-formed hand of Count Cenci, a precise register of the births and deaths of his many children. Among these, Bertoletti was surprised by the following entry: 'Beatrice Cenci mia figlia. Naque alla 6 di febraio 1577 di giorno di mercoledì alla ore 23, et e nata nella nostra casa'. So we learn that the beautiful teenage girl of legend, invariably described as sixteen or seventeen, was actually 22 years and seven months old when she died. Her birthplace – 'our house' – was the rambling Palazzo Cenci, on the

edge of Rome's Jewish ghetto. It is still standing, though split into apartments and offices: one may imagine her passing under its dark archways, lingering by the small fountain in the courtyard, walking up the marble stairs. From the top floors she could see the broad sweep of the Tiber, and on the far bank the drum-like shape of the Castel Sant'Angelo, where she would meet her death. The topography suggests the narrowly circumscribed ambit of her life.

Bertoletti also made a remarkable discovery in his examination of Beatrice's will, or rather – crucially – wills. (The fact that she was allowed to write a will at all puts a question mark over the received view that Pope Clement VIII hounded the Cenci to death in order to swell his coffers with confiscated revenues.) In her first and fullest will, notarised on 27 August 1599, Beatrice left a great deal of money – about 20,000 *scudi* in all – to charitable and religious causes. She made particular provision, in the form of trusts, for the dowries 'of poor girls in marriage'. She also made a number of smaller bequests, typically 100 *scudi*, to individual relatives and retainers. What caught Bertoletti's eye, however, was the following clause, and the rather more secretive trust fund it alluded to:

Item. I bequeath to Madonna Catarina de Santis, widow, 300 scudi in money, to be placed at interest, and the interest to be given in alms according to the instructions I have given her. If the said Madonna Catarina should die, this legacy is to be transferred to others, on condition that they use it for the same purpose, according to my intention, as long as the person to whom these alms are to be given remains alive.

Beatrice's friend Catarina de Santis is obscurely traceable: a respectable widow with three unmarried daughters (also remembered in Beatrice's will). But who is the unnamed person who is to be the beneficiary of the legacy, according to the 'instructions' given to Catarina verbally but not revealed in the will? The probable answer was discovered by Bertoletti in a hitherto unknown codicil to the will, added by Beatrice on 7 September 1599, witnessed by her brother, Giacomo, and lodged with a different notary. In this codicil, written two days before her execution, she increases the sum allotted to Catarina to 1000 *scudi* and specifies the purpose of the bequest as being 'the support of a certain poor boy [*povero fanciullo*], according to the instructions I have verbally given her'. She

also adds that, if the boy attains the age of twenty, he should be granted 'free possession' of the capital. It cannot be proved, but it seems very likely that this 'poor boy' for whom she made such generous and secret provision was her son. If so, there is not much doubt that the father of the boy was Olimpio Calvetti, whose intimacy with Beatrice is noted by many witnesses. The hushing-up of a pregnancy may have been one of the reasons for the 'imprisonment' of Beatrice at La Rocca.

From these documents a different Beatrice emerges. The angelic Beatrice of legend, the sweet and mournful girl of the Guido Reni portrait, the spotless damsel (or sublimated Lolita) of the nineteenth-century romancers, proves to have been a tough young woman in her twenties, probably the mother of an illegitimate child, probably the lover of her father's murderer. This does not, of course, lessen the awfulness of her situation or the tyranny of her father. Nor does it lessen the evils of the sexual abuse she suffered, even if her vaunted chastity is no longer part of that equation. But how much of this is fact? Did her father really violate her, or attempt to do so?

Throughout her interrogation Beatrice maintained that she was entirely innocent of the murder. Her defence was simply that she had no motive for killing her father. It was only later, during the long and crucial summing-up by her lawyer, Prospero Farinacci, that the question of incest arose, as a compelling mitigation of her crime. Corrado Ricci notes sternly: 'in all the trial records from November 1598 until August of the following year – in more than fifty examinations – there is not the slightest hint of any such deed.' There is plenty of evidence of her father's violent temper – it is certain that on one occasion he attacked her with a whip – but no mention of incest.

Then, in her last examination, on 19 August 1599, Beatrice reports her stepmother, Lucrezia, urging her with these words to kill her father: 'he will abuse you and rob you of your honour'. This seems to suggest that sexual violence was threatened, though the phrasing does not prove that any sexual violence had yet taken place. Ten days later, a former servant at La Petrella, Calidonia Lorenzini, appeared before the prosecutor. (She did so voluntarily, at the request of certain friends of Beatrice's.) In her deposition she stated that a few days before Christmas 1597, she was in bed at 'the third hour of the

night, when Lucrezia came in, having been sent out of the bedroom by the Count. A few minutes later, she relates,

I heard a voice, which seemed to me that of Beatrice, saying: 'I do not want to be burned!' I heard nothing else afterwards. The following morning I asked Signora Beatrice what had ailed her when she uttered those words ... She told me that her father had come into her bed, and she had told him she did not wish him to sleep there.

In terms of statements by witnesses, this is as near as we get to first-hand evidence of the bruited incest. The prosecutor was not impressed: he was particularly sceptical that the chattering Calidonia could have kept all this secret from her fellow maid, Girolama, who knew nothing of it.

Girolama herself gives a vivid glimpse of the brutishness of domestic life in the Cenci household. It was the Count's custom, she said, to have his skin 'scratched and scraped' with a damp cloth – he suffered from a form of mange. This duty often fell to Beatrice. She told Girolama 'that sometimes she scratched her father's testicles; and she said also that she used to dream that I, too, was scratching them, and I said to her: "That will I never do!"' Girolama also reported that 'Signor Francesco used to go about the house in just a shirt and doublet and a pair of drawers, and when he urinated it was necessary to hold the urinal for him under his shirt, and sometimes [Beatrice] was obliged to hold it; and it was also necessary sometimes to hold the close-stool'. These observations tell us something about life inside La Rocca, but they do not constitute proof that Cenci had raped his daughter.

It may be that the certainty of Beatrice's violation at the hands of her father is the hardest part of the legend for us to surrender, but the truth of the Cenci case, as with many cases of sexual abuse in the family today, will never be known. There are too many untrustworthy sources: suborned and frightened witnesses (witnesses were routinely tortured – hoisted on ropes or stretched on a kind of rack known as *la veglia* – to make them agree with others); documents that may not after all mean what we think they mean; a profusion of folklore and fantasy and poetic wish-fulfilment that has worked its way too deep into the story to be separated out. Francesco Cenci was an arrogant,



A view of one end of the Palazzo Cenci from the courtyard in the 1950s gives an indication of the scale of the building.

greedy, lecherous and violent man. There are many reasons why he might have had his head stoved in on a dark night in the badlands of the Abruzzi. Lust for his daughter, credible but unproven, may have been one of them. At least five people were involved in the killing. Each had motives of some sort, but only one (the hitman, Marcio, who was in it for the money) had a motive that can be defined with any certainty.

The ethereal legend of Beatrice does not itself contain the complexities and untidiness of the truth: it is a memory device that serves to remind us of the intense repressions and vulnerabilities suffered by a well-born young woman in late Renaissance Italy. In this sense, as a representative, as an individual woman who speaks for countless others, Beatrice is a heroine. But to the other questions we want to ask – What was she really like? What really happened and why? – she gives no answer. There was ‘screaming in the castle’; there were ‘shouted words.’ They were audible for a moment above the white noise of history but are no longer decipherable.

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Charles Nicholl is an English author specialising in works of history, biography, literary detection and travel. He has been active as a writer since the 1970s and has been publishing books since 1980. His subjects have included Christopher Marlowe, Arthur Rimbaud, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Nashe and William Shakespeare. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He was educated at King's College, Cambridge. In 1972, early in his career, he won the Daily Telegraph 'Young Writer Award', which gave him tickets to the Caribbean, as a result of which he visited Colombia. Since his early work he has shown an interest in counterculture. Besides his literary output, he has also presented documentary programmes on television. He has lectured in Britain, Italy and the United States, and also lectures on Martin Randall Travel tours. In the 1990s he moved to Italy, living near Lucca with his wife and children.



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THE CENCI.

A TRAGEDY,

IN FIVE ACTS.

By PERCY B. SHELLEY.

Havergal BRIAN

THE CENCI

OPERA IN EIGHT SCENES AFTER SHELLEY

LIBRETTO

Front cover: the first edition of The Cenci, from 1819 -- Shelley had 250 copies printed in Livorno and shipped to London

HAVERGAL BRIAN

THE CENCI

Music-Drama in Eight Scenes after Shelley

Dramatis personae

Count Francesco Cenci (baritone)

Giacomo, Bernardo (his sons) (tenor, baritone)

Cardinal Camillo (tenor)

Prince Colonna (bass)

Orsino (a prelate) (tenor)

Savella (the Pope's legate) (baritone)

Lucretia (wife of Cenci and stepmother to his children) (alto)

Olimpio, Marzio (assassins) (tenor, bass)

Andrea (servant to Cenci) (spoken)

Beatrice (Cenci's daughter) (soprano)

Guests at the feast

Judges at the court

In this libretto words in parentheses () are Brian's few additions to Shelley's text; italicised words in square brackets are Shelley's, omitted or substituted by Brian. He also made some minor changes to Shelley's stage-directions. Pairs of brackets [] indicates longer omissions from Shelley's original. The original Act/Scene from the play is indicated throughout.

CD1

1 Overture [*Preludio Tragico*]

2 Scene 1 [*Shelley: Act 1, Scene 1*] An apartment in the Cenci palace, Rome

Enter Count Cenci and Cardinal Camillo

Camillo

That matter of the murder is hushed up
if you consent to yield his Holiness
Your fief that lies beyond the Pincian gate.
It needed all my interest in the conclave
To bend him to this point: he said that
you
Bought perilous impunity with your gold;
[That] crimes like yours if once or twice
compounded,
Enriched the Church, and respited from
hell
An erring soul which might resent/
[*repent*] and live;
But that the glow and the interest
Of the high throne he fills, little consist
With making it a daily mart of guilt
As manifold and hideous as the deeds
Which you scarce hide from men's
revolted eyes.

Cenci *musings*

The third of my possessions – let it go!
Aye, I once heard the nephew of the Pope
Had sent his architect to view the ground,
Meaning to build a villa on my vines
The next time I compounded with his
uncle.

I little thought he should outwit me so!
Henceforth no witness – not the lamp –
shall see

That which the vassal threatened
to divulge,

Whose throat is choked with dust for his
reward.

The deed he saw could not have rated
higher

Than his worthless life – it angers me!
Respited me from Hell! So may the Devil
Respite their souls from Heaven.

No doubt Pope Clement,
And his most charitable nephews, pray
That the Apostle Peter and the saints
Will grant for their sakes that I long enjoy
Strength, wealth, and pride, and lust, and
length of days

Wherein to act the deeds which are the
stewards
Of their revenue. []

Camillo

Oh, Count Cenci!

So much that thou mightest honourably
live

And reconcile thyself with thine own
heart

And with thy God and with the offended
world.

How hideously look deeds of lust and
blood

Through those snow white and venerable
hairs! []

Where is your gentle daughter?

Methinks her gentle [*sweet*] looks which
make all things else

Beauteous and glad, might kill the fiend
within you.

[]

Talk with me, Count – you know I mean
you well.

I stood beside your dark and fiery youth,
Watching its bold and bad career, as men
Watch meteors, but it vanished not;

I marked

Your desperate and remorseless
manhood; now

Do I behold you in dishonoured age,
Charged with a thousand unrepented
crimes.

Yet I have ever hoped you would amend,
And in that hope have saved your life
three times.

[]

Cenci

[] As to my character for what men call
crime,

Seeing I please my senses as I list,
And vindicate that right with force or
guile,

It is a public matter and I care not
If I discuss it with you. []

True, I was happier than I am, []

While lust was sweeter than revenge; and
now

Invention palls. Aye, we must all grow
old.

And but that there (yet) remains a deed
to act

Whose horror might make sharp an
appetite

Duller than mine – I'd do – I know not
what.

When I was young, I thought of nothing
else

But pleasure, and I fed on honey sweets.
Men, by St. Thomas! cannot live like bees,
And I grew tired; yet till I killed a foe
And heard his [] children's groans,

Knew I not what delight was else on
earth,
which now delights me little. I the rather
Look on such (pomp) [*pangs*] as terror ill
conceals
[] the pale quivering lip,
Which tell me that the Spirit weeps
within
Tears bitterer than the bloody sweat of
Christ. []

Camillo

Hell's most abandoned fiend
Did never, in the drunkenness of guilt,
Speak to his heart as now you speak to
me;
I thank my God that I believe you not. []
Farewell! and I will pray
Almighty God that thy false, impious
words
Tempt not his spirit to abandon thee.

Exit Camillo

Cenci

The third of my possessions! I must use
Close husbandry, or gold, the old man's
sword,
Falls from my withered hand. But
yesterday

There came an order from the Pope to
make
Fourfold provision for my (ac)curSED
sons,
whom I had sent from Rome to
Salamanca
Hoping some accident might cut them
off,
And meaning, if I could, to starve them
there.
I pray thee, God, send some quick death
upon
them (there)! []
looking around [him] suspiciously
I think they cannot hear me at that door.
What if they should? And yet I need not
speak
Though the heart triumphs with itself
(with)/[*in*] words.
O, thou most silent air, that shalt not hear
What now I think! Thou pavement which
I tread
Towards her chamber, – let your echoes
talk
Of my imperious step scorning surprise –
But not of my intent!
gazing about suspiciously
Andrea!

Enter Andrea

Andrea *spoken*

My Lord

They converse mysteriously and retreat slowly. []

**[3] Scene 2 [Shelley: Act 1, Scene 2]
A garden of the Cenci palace, Rome**

Enter Beatrice and Orsino

Beatrice

Pervert not truth,

Orsino. You remember where we held
That conversation. Nay, we see the spot
[*Even*] from this cypress; two long years
are passed

Since, on an April midnight, underneath
The moonlight ruins of Mount Palatine
I did confess to you my secret mind.

Orsino

You said you loved me then.

Beatrice

You are a priest.
Speak to me not of love.

Orsino

I may obtain

The dispensation of the Pope to marry.

Because I am a priest do you believe

Your image []

Follows me not whether I wake or sleep?

Beatrice

As I have said, speak to me not of love.

Had you a dispensation I have not;

Nor will I leave this home of misery

Whilst my poor Bernard and that gentle
lady

To whom I owe life and these virtuous
thoughts

Must suffer what I still have strength to
share.

Alas, Orsino! All the love that once
I felt for you is turned to bitter pain. []

Orsino

All will be well.

Is the petition yet prepared? []

I will use my utmost skill

So that the Pope attend to your
complaint.

Beatrice

[] This night my father gives a
sumptuous feast

[] And all (my)/[*our*] kin, the Cenci, will
be there,
And all the chief nobility of Rome.
[And] he has bidden me and my [*pale*]
mother
Attire ourselves in festival array.
[] At supper I will give you the petition.
Till when – farewell!

Orsino

Farewell.

Exit Beatrice

I know the Pope
Will ne'er absolve me from my priestly
vow.
[] I shall be well content if on my
conscience
There rest no heavier sin than what they
suffer
From (my)/[*the*] devices of my love –
a net
From which she shall escape not. Yet
I fear
Her subtle mind, her awe-inspiring gaze,
Whose beams anatomize me, nerve [*by*
nerve
And lay] me bare and make me blush
to see

My hidden thoughts. Ah, no! A friendless
girl
Who clings to me as to her only hope:
(as to her only hope).
I were a fool not less than if a panther
Were panic-stricken by the antelope's
eye, if she escapes me.

Exit Orsino

[4] Scene 3 [*Shelley: Act 1, Scene 3*]
A magnificent hall in the Cenci palace,
in Rome:
A banquet.

In the distance – far away: [a fanfare]

Enter Lucretia, Beatrice, Orsino, Camillo,
Nobles

Enter Cenci

Cenci

Welcome, my friends and kinsmen!
Welcome ye,
Princes and cardinals, pillars of the
Church,
Whose presence honours our festivity.
I have (lived too long)/[*too long lived*] like
an anchorite,

And in my (too long) absence from your
merry meetings,
An evil word is gone abroad of me;
But I do hope that you, my noble friends,
When you have shared the entertainment
here,
And heard the pious cause for which 'tis
given,
And we have pledged a health or two
together,
Will think me flesh and blood as well as
you;
Sinful indeed, for Adam made all so,
But tender hearted, meek, and pitiful. []
Here are the letters [*brought*] from
Salamanca.

Beatrice, read them to your mother. God!
I thank thee! In one night didst thou
perform,
By ways inscrutable, the thing I sought.
My disobedient and rebellious sons are
dead.

[] The Pope I think will not
Expect I (shall)/[*should*] maintain them
in their coffins.

Rejoice with me, my heart is wondrous
glad.

*Lucretia sinks, half fainting; Beatrice
supports her*

Beatrice

It is not true! dear lady, pray look up.
Had it been true – there is a God in
heaven –
He would not live to boast of such a boon.
Unnatural man, thou knowest that it is
false.

Cenci

Ay, as the word of God: whom here I call
To witness that I speak the sober truth,
And whose most favouring providence
was shown
Even in the manner of their deaths. []
I beg those friends who love me that they
mark
The day a feast upon their calendars. []

Guests rise; assembly confused

1st Guest

Oh horrible! I will depart.

2nd Guest

And I.

3rd Guest

No, stay!

I do believe it is some jest, though faith!
'Tis mocking us somewhat too solemnly.
I think his son has married the Infanta,
Or found a mine of gold in El Dorado.

'Tis but to season some such news: stay,
stay!

I see 'tis only raillery by his smile.

Cenci *holding a bowl of wine*

Oh – thou bright wine whose purple
splendour leaps

And bubbles gaily in (the)/[*this*] golden
bowl

Under the lamp-light, as my spirits do,
To hear the death of my accursed sons. []
Bear the bowl round.

A guest *rising*

Thou wretch!

Will none among this noble company
Check the abandoned villain?

Camillo

For God's sake,
Let me dismiss the guests! You are insane.
Some ill will come of this.

2nd Guest

Seize, silence him.

1st Guest

I will.

3rd Guest

And I.

Cenci *with threatening gesture*

Who moves? Who speaks'?

'Tis nothing,

Enjoy yourselves. Beware! for my revenge
Is as the sealed commission of a king
That kills and none dare name the
murderer.

*The banquet is broken up; several of the
guests depart*

Beatrice

I do entreat you, go not, noble guests.
What although tyranny and impious hate
Stand sheltered by a father's hoary hair?

[]

I have kneltdown through the long
sleepless nights
And lifted up to God, the father of all,
Passionate prayers, and when these were
not heard

I have still borne – until I meet you here.
Princes and Kinsmen, at this hideous
feast,

Given at my brothers' deaths. []

O Prince Colonna, Thou art our near
Kinsman.

Cardinal, thou art the Pope's
chamberlain.

Camillo, thou art chief justiciary

Take us away.

Cenci has been conversing with Camillo during Beatrice's speech – he hears the conclusion and now advances.

Cenci

I hope my good friends here
Will think of their own daughters –
or perhaps
Of their own throats – before they lend
an ear
To this wild girl.

Beatrice

Dare no one look on me?
None answer? Can one tyrant overbear
The sense of many best and wisest men?
[] O God! that I were buried with my
brothers!
[] and that my father
Were celebrating now one feast for all.

Camillo

A bitter wish for one so young and gentle.
Can we do nothing?

Colonna

Nothing that I see.
Count Cenci were a dangerous enemy;
Yet I would second anyone.

A cardinal

And I.

Cenci

Retire to your chamber, insolent girl.

Beatrice

Retire thou, impious man! Ay, hide
thyself
Where never eye can look upon thee
more!
[] Frown not (on)/[upon] me!
Haste, hide thyself, lest with avenging
looks
My brothers' ghosts should hurl thee
from thy seat!
Cover thy face from every living eye,
And start if thou but hear a human step.
Seek out some dark (or)/[and] silent
corner – there
Bow thy white head before (the) offended
God,
And we will kneel around and fervently
Pray that He pity both ourselves and thee.
[]

Exeunt all but Cenci and Beatrice

Cenci

My brain is swimming around.
Give me a bowl of wine!

To Beatrice

Thou painted viper!

Beast (as)/[that] thou art. Fair and yet terrible!

I know a charm shall make thee meek and tame,

Now get thee from my sight!

Exit Beatrice

Here, Andrea,

Fill up this goblet with Greek wine. I said I would not drink this evening, but I must;

For, strange to say, I feel my spirits fail With thinking what I have decreed to do.

Drinking the wine

Be thou the resolution of quick youth Within my veins, and manhood's purpose (firm)/[stern],

And age's firm, cold, subtle villainy;

As if thou wert indeed my children's blood

Which I did thirst to drink! The charm works well.

[*It must be done;*] It shall be done, I swear!

5 Scene 4 [*Shelley: Act 4, Scene 1*]

An apartment in the Castle of Petrella (among the Apulian Apennines)

Enter Cenci

Cenci

She come[s] not; yet I left her even now Vanquished and faint. She knows the penalty

Of her delay; yet what if threats are vain?

Am I not now within Petrella's moat?

Or fear I still the eyes and ears of Rome?

Might I not drag her by (her)/[the] golden hair?

Stamp on her? keep her sleepless till her brain

Be overworn? tame her with chains and famine?

Less would suffice. Yet so to leave undone (That)/[What] I most seek! No, (to)/['tis]

her stubborn will,

Which, by its own consent, shall stoop as low

As that which drags it down.

Enter Lucretia

Thou loathed wretch!

Hide thee from my abhorrence; fly, begone!

Yet stay! Bid Beatrice come hither.

Lucretia

Oh Husband! I pray, for thine own
wretched sake,
Heed what thou dost. A man who walks
like thee
Through crimes, and through the danger
of his crimes,
Each hour may stumble o'er a sudden
grave.
And thou art old; thy hairs are hoary
gray;
As thou wouldst save thyself from death
(from)/[and] hell,
Pity thy daughter; give her to some friend
In marriage; so that she may tempt thee
not
To hatred, or worse thoughts, if worse
there be. []
She sent me to thee, husband. At thy
presence
She fell into a trance, as thou dost know;
And in that trance she heard a voice
which said,
'Cenci must die! Let him confess himself!
Even now the accusing Angel waits to
hear
If God, to punish his enormous crimes,
Harden his dying heart!'

Cenci

Why – such things are.
No doubt divine revealing(s) may be
made.
'Tis plain I have been favoured from
above,
For when I cursed my sons, they died –
Ay – so.
As to the right or wrong, that's talk.
Repentance?
Repentance is an easy moment's work,
And more depends on God than me.
Well – well –
I must give up the greater point, which
was
To poison and corrupt her soul.
*A pause; Lucretia approaches anxiously,
and then shrinks back as he speaks*
One, two;
Ay – Rocco and Cristofano my curse
Strangled; and Giacomo, I think, will find
Life a worse Hell than that beyond the
grave;
Beatrice shall, if there be skill in hate,
Die in despair, blaspheming; to Bernardo,
He is so innocent, I will bequeath
The memory of these deeds, and make his
youth

The sepulchre of hope, where evil
thoughts
Shall grow like weeds on a neglected
tomb.
When all is done, out in the (wild)/[wide]
Campagna

I will pile up my silver and my gold;
My costly robes, paintings, and tapestries;
My parchments, and all records of my
wealth;

And make a bonfire in my joy, and leave
Of my possessions nothing but my name;
Which shall be an inheritance to strip
Its wearer bare as infamy. That done,
My soul, which is a scourge, will I resign
Into the hands of Him who wielded it;

[] Yet,
Lest death outspeed my purpose, let me
make
Short work and sure...
going

Lucretia *stops him*

Oh, stay! it was a feint;
She had no vision, and she heard no
voice.
I said it but to awe thee.

Cenci

That is well.

Vile palterer with the sacred truth of god,
Be thy soul choked with that
(blasphemous) [*blaspheming*] lie!
For Beatrice worse terrors are in store
To bend her to my will.

Lucretia

Oh, to what will?
What cruel sufferings more than she has
known
Canst thou inflict? []

Cenci

Go thou quick, Lucretia,
Tell her to come; [] and say []
That if she come not I will curse her,

Exit Lucretia

Ha!

With what but with a father's curse doth
God
Panic-strike armèd victory, and make
pale
Cities in their prosperity? The world's
Father
Must grant a parent's prayer against his
child,
Be he who asks even what men call me.
Will not the deaths of her rebellious
brothers

Awe her before I speak? for I on them
Did imprecate quick ruin, and it came.

Enter Lucretia

Well; what? Speak, wretch!

Lucretia

She said, 'I cannot come;
Go tell my father that I see a torrent
Of his own blood raging between us'.

Cenci

God,
Hear me! if this most specious mass of
flesh,
Which thou hast made my daughter; this
my blood,
This particle of my divided being;
Or rather, this my bane and my disease,
Whose sight infects and poisons me; this
devil
Which sprung from me as from a hell,
was meant

To aught good use; if her bright loveliness
Was kindled to illumine this dark world;

[]

I pray thee for my sake
[] reverse that doom!
Earth, in the name of god, let her food be
Poison, until she be encrusted round

With leprous stains! []
All-beholding sun,
Strike in thine envy those life-darting eyes
With thine own blinding beams!

Lucretia

Peace, peace!
For thine own sake unsay those dreadful
words.
When high God grants, he punishes such
prayer[s].

Cenci *Leaping up, and throwing his right
hand towards Heaven*

He does his will, I mine! This in addition,
That [if] she have a child. []

Lucretia

Horrible thought!

Cenci

Go, bid her come,
Before my words are chronicled in
heaven.

Exit Lucretia

I do not feel as if I were a man,
But like a fiend appointed to chastise
The offences of some unremembered
world.

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

Enter Lucretia

What? speak!

Lucretia

She bids thee curse. []

Cenci

She would not come. 'Tis well
I can do both; first take what I demand,
And then extort (confession)/
[*concession*]. To thy
chamber!
Fly ere I spurn thee; and beware this night
That thou cross not my footsteps. It were
safer
To come between the tiger and his prey.

Exit Lucretia

it must be late; mine eyes grow weary dim
With unaccustomed heaviness of sleep.

Conscience! O thou most insolent of lies!
They say that sleep, that healing dew of
heaven,
Steeps not in balm the folding of the brain
Which thinks thee an imposter.

*From this point Cenci is very gradually
overpowered by sleep*

I will go,
First to belie thee with an hour of rest,
Which will be deep and calm, I feel; and
then –
O multitudinous Hell, the fiends will
shake
Thine arches with the laughter of their
joy!
There shall be lamentation heard in
Heaven
As o'er an angel fallen; and upon Earth
All good shall droop and sicken, and ill
things
Shall, with a spirit of unnatural life,
Stir and be quickened – even as I am now.

Exit

6 Scene 5 [*Shelley: Act 4, Scene 2*]

Before the Castle of Petrella

Beatrice and Lucretia appear above on the ramparts

Beatrice

They come not yet.

Lucretia

'Tis scarce midnight.

Beatrice

How slow

Behind the course of thought []

Lags leaden-footed time!

Lucretia

The minutes pass...

If he should wake before the deed is done?

Beatrice

O mother! he must never wake again.

[] Oh!

Believe that Heaven is merciful and just,

And will not add our dread necessity

To the amount of his offences.

Enter Olimpio and Marzio below

Lucretia

See, they come.

Beatrice

[] Let us go down.

Olimpio

How feel you to this work?

Marzio

As one who thinks

A thousand crowns excellent market price

For an old murderer's life. Your cheeks are pale. []

You are inclined then to (the)/[*this*] business?

Olimpio

Ay, if one should bribe me with a thousand crowns

To kill a serpent which had stung my child,

I could not be more willing.

Enter Beatrice and Lucretia below

Noble ladies!

Beatrice

Are ye resolved?

Olimpio

Is all quiet?

Marzio

Is he asleep?

Lucretia

I mixed an opiate with his drink;
he sleeps so soundly.

Olimpio

Hush! Hark! what noise is that?

Marzio

Ha! some one comes!

Beatrice

Ye conscience-stricken (cowards)/
[*cravens*], rock to rest
Your baby hearts. It is the iron gate,
Which ye left open. []
Come, follow! []

Exeunt

[*Shelley: Act 4, Scene 3*]

Enter Beatrice and Lucretia (below)

Lucretia

They are about it now.

Beatrice

Nay, it is done.

Lucretia

I have not heard him groan.

Beatrice

He won't [*will not*] groan.

Lucretia

What sound is that?

Beatrice

List (to)/[*'tis*] the tread of feet about his
bed.

Lucretia

My God!

If he be now a cold, stiff corpse.

Beatrice

Oh fear not
What may be done, but what is left
undone;
(This)/[*The*] act seals all.

Enter Olimpio and Marzio

Is it accomplished?

Marzio

What?

Olimpio

Did you not call?

Beatrice

When?

Olimpio

Now.

Beatrice

I ask if all is over?

Olimpio

We dare not kill an old and sleeping man;
His thin grey hair, his stern and reverent
brow,

His veined hand[s] crossed on his
heaving breast,

And the calm innocent sleep in which he
lay,

Quelled me. Indeed, indeed, I cannot do
it.

Marzio

But I was bolder; for I chid Olimpio,
And bade him bear his wrongs to his own
grave,

And leave me the reward. And now my
knife

Touched the loose wrinkled throat, when
the old man

Stirred in his sleep, and said, 'God! hear,
oh, hear

A father's curse! What, art thou not our
father?'

And then he laughed. I knew it was the
ghost

Of my dead father speaking through his
lips,

And could not kill him.

Beatrice

Miserable slaves!

Where, if ye not dare to kill a sleeping
man,

Found ye the boldness to return to me
With such a deed undone? []

Why do I talk?

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

Hadst thou a tongue to say,
She murdered her own father, I must
do it! []

Olimpio

Stop, for God's sake!

Marzio

I will go back and kill him.

Olimpio

We must do thy will.

Beatrice

Take it! Depart! Return!

Exeunt Olimpio and Marzio

to Lucretia

How pale thou art.

We do but that which 'twere a deadly
crime

To leave undone.

Lucretia

Would it were done.

Beatrice

Even whilst

That doubt is passing through your mind,
the world

Is conscious of a change. Darkness and
hell

Have swallowed up the vapour they sent
forth

To blacken the sweet light of life. My
breath

Comes, methinks, lighter, and the jellied
blood

Runs freely through my veins. Hush!/
[Hark!]

Enter Olimpio and Marzio

He is –

Olimpio

Dead!

Marzio

We strangled him, that there might be no
blood;

And then we threw his heavy corpse i' the
garden

Under the balcony; 'twill seem it fell.

Beatrice giving them a bag of coin

Here take this gold and hasten to your
homes.

And Marzio, because thou wast only
awed

By that which made me tremble, wear
thou this!

Clothes him in a rich mantle

It was the mantle which my grandfather

Wore in his high prosperity, and men
Envied his state; so may they envy thine.

Thou wert a weapon in the hand of God
To a just use. Live long and thrive! And,

mark,
If thou hast crimes, repent; this deed is
none.

A horn is sounded

Lucretia

Hark (to)/[*'tis*] the castle horn: my God!
 it sounds
 Like the last trump.

Beatrice

Some tedious guest is coming.

Lucretia

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

Exeunt Olimpio and Marzio

Beatrice

The spirit [] within these limbs
 Seems [] undisturbed, I could [] sleep
 [] calm; all ill is [] past. []

[*Shelley: Act 4, Scene 4*]

[]

*Enter the Papal Legate and his followers
 and Bernardo*

Savella to his followers

Go search the castle round; sound the
 alarm;
 Look to the gates, (see) that none escape!

Beatrice

What now?

Bernardo

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

Beatrice

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

Bernardo

Dead; murdered!

Lucretia with extreme agitation

Oh no, no!
 He is not murdered, though he may be
 dead;
 I have alone the keys of those apartments.

Savella

Ha! Is it so?

Beatrice

My Lord, I pray excuse us;
 We will retire; my mother is not well;
 She seems quite overcome with this
 strange horror.

Exeunt Lucretia and Beatrice

[]

Bernardo

I know not what to think.

Savella

'Tis strange! There were clear marks
of violence,

I found the old man's body in the
moonlight,
Hanging beneath the window of his
chamber

Among the branches of a pine; 'tis true
there was no blood.

Favour me, sir – it much imports your
house

That all should be made clear – to tell the
ladies

That I require their presence.

Exit Bernardo

Enter Guards bringing in Marzio

[]

Officer

My Lord, we found this ruffian and
another

Lurking among the rocks; there is no
doubt

But that they are the murderers of Count
Cenci;

Each had a bag of coin; this fellow wore
A gold [in]woven robe, which, shining
bright

Under the dark rocks to the glimmering
moon,

Betrayed them to our notice; the other fell
Desperately fighting.

Savella

What does he confess?

Officer

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

Savella

Their language is at least sincere.

Reads

'To the Lady Beatrice.

That the atonement of what my nature
sickens to

conjecture may soon arrive, I send thee,
at thy

brother's desire, those who will speak and
do more

than I dare write.

'Thy devoted servant, Orsino.'

Enter Lucretia, Beatrice, and Bernardo

Knowest thou this writing, lady?

Beatrice

No.

Savella

Nor thou?

Lucretia *Her conduct throughout the scene is marked by extreme agitation*

Where was it found? What is it? It
(must)/[*should*] be

Orsino's hand! It speaks of that strange
horror

Which never yet found utterance,
but which made

Between that hapless child and her dead
father

A gulf of obscure hatred.

Savella

Is it so,

Is it true, Lady, that thy father did

Such outrages as to awaken []

Unfilial hate?

Beatrice

Not hate, 'twas more than hate;

This is most true, yet wherefore question
me?

Savella

There is a deed demanding question
done;

Thou hast a secret which will answer not.

Beatrice

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

Savella

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

Lucretia

Oh, not to Rome! Indeed we are not
guilty. []

Beatrice

Why not to Rome, dear mother?

There as here

Our innocence is as an armèd heel
To trample accusation. God is there,
As here, and with his shadow ever clothes
The innocent, the injured and the weak;
And such we []. Mother, will you come?

Lucretia

Ha! They [] bind us to the rack, and wrest
Self-accusation from our agony!
Will Giacomo be there? Orsino? Marzio?

All present; all (confounded)/
[*confronted*]; all demanding
Each from the other's countenance the
thing
Which is in every heart! Oh, misery!
She faints, and is borne out.

Savella

She faints: an ill appearance this.

Beatrice

My Lord,
She knows not yet the uses of the world.
She fears that power is as a beast which
grasps
And loosens not; a snake whose look
transmutes
All things to guilt which is its nutriment.
She cannot know how well the
(supreme)/[*supine*] slaves
Of blind authority read the truth of things
When written on a brow of guilelessness;
She sees not yet triumphant Innocence
Stand at the judgment-seat of mortal man,
A judge and an accuser of the wrong
Which drags it (here)/[*there*]. Prepare
yourself, my Lord.
Our suite will join yours in the court
below.

Exeunt

[7] **Scene 6** [*Shelley: Act 5, Scene 1*]
An apartment in Orsino's palace, Rome

Enter Orsino and Giacomo

Orsino

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

Giacomo

[] What! will you cast by self-accusing
flight
Assured conviction upon Beatrice?
She who alone, in this unnatural (world)/
[*work*]
Stands like (an)/[*God's*] angel ministered
upon by (friends)/[*fiends*];
[] Traitor and murderer!
Coward and slave! defend thyself;
drawing his sword

Orsino

Put up your weapon.
Is it the desperation of your fear
Makes you thus rash and sudden with a
friend,
Now ruined for your sake? []
Even (while)/[*whilst*] we speak,
The ministers of justice wait below; []

If you [] (wish to see) [] your [*pale*] wife,
'twere best to pass
Out at the postern, and avoid them [*so*].

Giacomo

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

Orsino

That wish
Now comes [*a day*] too late. Haste; fare
thee well!
Hear'st thou not (the) steps along the
corridor?

Exit Giacomo

I'm sorry for it; but the guards are waiting
At his own gate, and such was my
contrivance
That I might rid me both of him and
them.
I thought to act a solemn comedy
Upon the painted scene of this new
world,
And to attain my own peculiar ends
By some such plot of mingled good and ill
(That)/[As] others weave; but there [*a*]
rose a power

Which grasped and snapped the threads
of my device,
And turned it to a net of ruin – Ha!

A shout is heard

Is that my name I hear proclaimed
abroad?
But I will pass, wrapped in a vile disguise,
Rags on my back and a false innocence
Upon my face, through the misdeeming
crowd,
Which judges by what it seems. 'Tis easy
then,
For a new name and for a country new,
And a new life fashioned on old desires,
To change the honours of abandoned
Rome.
[] Oh, [*I*] fear
That what is past will never let me rest!
Why, when none else is conscious, but
myself,
Of my misdeeds, should my own heart's
contempt
Trouble me? Have I not the power to fly
My own reproaches? Shall I be the slave
Of – what? A word? which those of (the)/
[*this*] false (word)/[*world*]
(would) employ against each other, not
themselves,

As men wear daggers not for self-
(defence)/[*offence*].
But if I am mistaken, where shall I
Find the disguise to hide me from myself,
As now I skulk from every [*other*] eye?

Exit

[8] **Scene 7 [Shelley: Act 5, Scene 2]**

The Hall of Justice, Rome

*Camillo, Judges, etc., are discovered seated.
Marzio is led in.*

First Judge

Accused, do you persist in your denial?
I ask you, are you innocent or guilty?
I demand who were the participators
In your offence. Speak truth, and the
whole truth.

Marzio

My God! I did not kill him; I know
nothing;
Olimpio sold the robe to me from which
You would infer my guilt.

Second Judge

Away with him!

First Judge

Dare you, with lips yet white from the
rack's kiss,
Speak false? []

Marzio

Spare me! Oh, spare! I will confess.

First Judge

Then speak.

Marzio

I strangled him in his sleep.

First Judge

Who urged you to it?

Marzio

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

First Judge

This sounds as bad as truth.
Guards, there, lead forth the prisoners.

*Enter Beatrice and Lucretia [and
Giacomo] guarded*

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

Beatrice
We never saw him.

Marzio
You know me too well, Lady Beatrice.

Beatrice
I know thee! how? when?

Marzio
You know 'twas I
Whom you did urge with menaces and
bribes
To kill your father. When the thing was
done,
You clothed me in a robe of woven gold,
And bade me thrive; how I have thriven,
you see.
You, my Lord Giacomo, Lady Lucretia,
You know [] I speak (the truth).

*Beatrice advances towards him; he covers
his face, and shrinks back*

Oh, dart
The resentment of those eyes
On the dead earth!

They wound; 'twas torture forced the
truth. My Lords,
Having said this, let me be led to death. []

Beatrice
O thou who tremblest on the giddy verge
Of life and death, pause ere thou
answerest me;
So may [st] thou answer God with less
dismay.

What evil have we done thee? I, alas!
Have lived but on this earth a few sad
years,

And so my lot was ordered that a father
First turned the moments of awakening
life

To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet
hope; and then
Stabbed with one blow my everlasting
soul. []

Think, I adjure (thee)/[you], what it is to
slay

The reverence living in the minds of men
Towards our ancient house and stainless
fame!

Think what it is to strangle infant pity,
Cradled in the belief of guileless looks,
Till it become a crime to suffer. Think
What 'tis to blot with infamy and blood

All that which shows like innocence, and
is –

Hear me, great God! – I swear, most
innocent;
So that the world lose all discrimination
between the sly, fierce, wild regard of
guilt,
And that which now compels thee to
reply
To what I ask: Am I, or am I not
A parricide?

Marzio
Thou art not.

Judge
What is this?

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

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

Marzio
Torture me as ye will;

A keener pang has wrung a higher truth
From my last breath. She is most
innocent!
Bloodhounds, not men,
I will not give you that fine piece of
nature
To rend and ruin.

Exit Marzio

Camillo
What say ye now, my Lords?

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

Camillo
Yet stained with blood.

Judge to Beatrice
Know you this paper, Lady?

Beatrice
Entrap me not with questions. Who
stands here
As my accuser? Ha! wilt thou be he,
Who art my judge? Here is Orsino's
name;
Where is Orsino? Alas ye know not what
And therefore on the chance that it may
be

Some evil, will ye kill us?

Enter an officer

Officer

Marzio is dead.

Judge

What did he say?

Officer

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

Judge

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

Camillo

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

Judge

Let the Pope's pleasure then be done.
Meanwhile

Conduct these culprits each to separate
cells,
And be the engines ready; for this night,
If the Pope's resolution be as grave, (and)
Pious, and just as once, I'll wring the
truth
Out of those nerves and sinews, groan
by groan.

Exeunt

**[9] Scene 8 [Shelley: Act 5 Scene 4]
A hall of the prison**

Enter Camillo and Bernardo

Camillo

The Pope is stern; not to be moved or
bent.
He looked as calm and keen as is the
engine
Which tortures and which kills, exempt
itself
From aught that it inflicts; a marble form,
A rite, a law, a custom; not a man.
He frowned, as if to frown had been the
trick
Of his machinery, on the advocates
Presenting the defences, which he tore

And threw behind, muttering with
hoarse, harsh voice
‘Which among ye defended their old
father
Killed in his sleep?’ []
And said these three words, (wildly)/
[*coldly*] – ‘They must die’.

Bernardo

And yet you left him not?

Camillo

I urged him still;
Pleading, as I could guess, the devilish
wrong
Which prompted your unnatural parent’s
death.
[*And*] he replied – []
‘Here is their sentence; never see me more
Till, to the letter, it be all fulfilled’.

Bernardo

Oh God, not so I did believe [*indeed*]
That all you said was but sad preparation
For happy news.
[] What think you if I seek him out, and
bathe
His feet and robe with hot and bitter
tears?
Impertune him with prayers, vexing his
brain

With my perpetual cries, until in rage
he strike me with his pastoral cross, and
trample
Upon my prostrate head? [] I will do it!
Oh, wait till I return!

Bernardo rushes out

Camillo

Alas poor boy!

*Enter Beatrice and Lucretia [and
Giacomo] guarded*

Beatrice

I hardly (hoped)/[*dare*] to fear
That thou bring’st other news than a just
pardon

Camillo

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

Beatrice *wildly*

Oh, My God! Can it be possible I have
To die so suddenly? so young to go
Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy
ground!
To be nailed down in a narrow place;

To see no more sweet sunshine; hear no
more
Blithe voice of living thing[s];
[] How fearful! To be nothing! Or to be –
What? Oh, where am I? Let me not go
mad! []
If all things then should be – my father’s
spirit, []
Does not his spirit live in all that breathe,
And work for me and mine still the same
ruin? []

Lucretia

Trust in God’s sweet love,
The tender promises of Christ; ere night,
Think we shall be in Paradise.

Beatrice

’Tis past!
Whatever comes, my heart shall sink no
more,
And yet, I know not why, your words
strike chill;
How tedious, false, and cold seem all
things! I
Have met with much injustice in (the)/
[*this*] world
no difference has been made by God or
man,
Or any power moulding my wretched lot,

’Twixt good or evil, as regarded me.
I am cut off from the only world I know,
From light, and life, and love, in youth’s
sweet prime.
You do well telling me to trust in God;
I hope I do trust in him. In whom else
Can any trust? And yet my heart is cold.

Exit Camillo

Giacomo

Know you not, mother – sister, know you
not?
Bernardo even now is gone to implore
The Pope to grant our pardon.

Lucretia

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

Beatrice

Yet both will soon be cold.
Oh, trample out that thought! Worse
than despair,
Worse than the bitterness of death, is
hope;
It is the only ill which can find place

Upon the giddy, sharp and narrow hour
Tottering beneath us. Plead with the swift
frost
That it should spare the eldest flower of
spring;
Plead with awakening earthquake, o'er
whose couch
Even now a city stands, strong, fair and
free;
Now stench and blackness yawn, like
death. Oh, plead
With famine, or wind-walking pestilence,
Blind lightning, or the deaf sea, not with
man –
Cruel, cold, formal man; righteous in
words,
In deeds a Cain. no, mother, we must die;
Since such is the reward of innocent lives,
[]
Come, obscure Death,
And wind me in thine all-embracing
arms!
Like a fond mother hide me in thy bosom,
And rock me to the sleep from which
none wake.
Live ye, who live, subject to one another
As we were once, who now

Bernardo rushes in

Bernardo

Oh, horrible!
That tears, that looks, that hope poured
forth in prayer,
Even till the heart is vacant and despairs,
(Shall)/[*should*] all be in vain! The
ministers of death,
Are waiting round the doors. I thought
I saw
Blood on the face of one – what it it were
fancy?
[] O life! O world!
Cover me! let me (*see*)/[*be*] no more!
To see
That perfect mirror of pure innocence
Wherein I gazed, and grew happy and
good,
Shivered to dust! To see thee, Beatrice,
Who did make all lovely thou didst look
upon –
Thee, light of life – dead, dark! while I say,
sister,
To hear I have no sister; and thou,
mother,
Whose love was as a bond to all our
lives –
Dead! the sweet bond broken!

Enter Camillo and Guards with Executioner; the latter a tall figure in black armour with long shining silver axe

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

Beatrice

Farewell, my tender brother. Think
Of our sad fate with gentleness, as now;
And let mild, pitying thoughts lighten for
thee
Thy sorrow's load. Err not in harsh
despair,
But tears and patience. One thing more,
my child,
For thine own sake be constant to the love
Thou bearest us; and to the faith that I,
Though wrapped in a strange cloud of
crime and shame,
Lived ever holy and unstained. And
though
Ill tongues shall wound me, and our
common name

Be as a mark stamped on thine innocent
brow
For men to point at as they pass, do thou
Forbear, and never think a thought
unkind
Of those who perhaps love thee in their
graves.
So mayest thou die as I do; fear and pain
Being subdued. Farewell! Farewell!
Farewell!
(Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!)

Bernardo *spoken*

I cannot say farewell.

Camillo *spoken*

O Lady Beatrice!

Beatrice *spoken*

Give yourself no unnecessary pain,
My dear Lord Cardinal. Here, mother, tie
My girdle for me, and bind up this hair
in any simple knot; ay, that does well.
[] How often
Have we done this for one another; []
We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
We are quite ready. Well – 'tis very well.

They move slowly in single column towards the rear exit of the Prison Hall led by Camillo, the Headsman in the rear.

Percy B Shelley,

THE CENCI
A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS

BY

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

GIVEN FROM THE POET'S OWN EDITIONS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ALFRED FORMAN AND H BUXTON FORMAN

AND A

PROLOGUE BY JOHN TODHUNTER

C.

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