

William Congreve



The Mourning Bride

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Preface

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TO

Her Royal Highness

THE

PRINCESS-

MADAM,

THAT high Station, which by Your Birth You hold above the People, exacts from every one, as a Duty, whatever Honours they are capable of paying to Your Royal Highness: But that more exalted Place, to which Your Vertues have rais'd You, above the rest of Princes, makes the Tribute of our Admiration and Praise, rather a Choice more immediately preventing that Duty.

The Publick Gratitude is ever founded on a Publick Benefit; and what is universally bless'd, is always an universal Blessing. Thus from Your self we derive the Offerings which we bring; and the Incense which arises to Your Name, only returns to its Original, and but naturally requires the Parent of its Being.

From hence it is that this Poem, constituted on a Moral, whose End is to recommend and to encourage Vertue, of consequence has recourse to Your Royal Highness's Patronage; aspiring to cast it self beneath Your Feet, and declining Approbation, till You shall condescend to own it, and vouchsafe to shine upon it as on a Creature of Your Influence.

'Tis from the Example of Princes that Vertue becomes a Fashion in the People, for even they who are averse to Instruction, will yet be fond of Imitation.

But there are Multitudes, who never can have Means nor Opportunities of so near an Access, as to partake of the Benefit of such Examples. And to these, Tragedy, which distinguishes it self from the Vulgar Poetry by the Dignity of its Characters, may be of Use and Information. For they who are at that distance from Original Greatness, as to be depriv'd of the Happiness of Contemplating the Perfections and real Excellencies of Your Royal Highness's Person in Your Court, may yet behold some small Sketches and Imagings of the Vertues of Your Mind, abstracted, and represented in the Theatre.

Thus Poets are instructed, and instruct; not alone by Precepts which persuade, but also by Examples which illustrate. Thus is Delight interwoven with Instruction; when not only Vertue is prescrib'd, but also represented.

But if we are delighted with the Liveliness of a feign'd Representation of Great and Good Persons and their Actions, how must we be charm'd with beholding the Persons themselves? If one or two excelling Qualities, barely touch'd in the single Action and small Compass of a Play, can warm an Audience, with a Concern and Regard even for the seeming Success and Prosperity of the Actor: With what Zeal must the Hearts of all be fill'd, for the continued and encreasing Happiness of those, who are the true and living Instances of Elevated and Persisting Vertue? Even the Vicious themselves must have a secret Veneration for those peculiar Graces and Endowments, which are daily so

eminently conspicuous in Your Royal Highness; and though repining, feel a Pleasure which in spite of Envy they perforce approve.

If in this piece, humbly offer'd to Your Royal Highness, there shall appear the Resemblance of any one of those many Excellencies which You so promiscuously possess, to be drawn so as to merit Your least Approbation, it has the End and Accomplishment of its Design. And however imperfect it may be in the Whole, through the Inexperience or Incapacity of the Author, yet, if there is so much as to convince Your Royal Highness, that a Play may be with Industry so dispos'd (in spight of the licentious Practice of the Modern Theatre) as to become sometimes an innocent, and not unprofitable Entertainment; it will abundantly gratifie the Ambition, and Recompence the Endeavours of,

Your Royal Highness's
Most Obedient, and
most humbly Devoted Servant,
WILLIAM CONGREVE. (1697).

Prologue

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THE Time has been when Plays were not so plenty,
And a less Number New would well content ye.
New Plays did then like Almanacks appear;
And One was thought sufficient for a Year:
Tho' they are more like Almanacks of late;
For in one Year, I think, they're out of Date.
Nor were they without Reason join'd together;
For just as one prognosticates the Weather,
How plentiful the Crop, or scarce the Grain,
What Peals of Thunder, and what Show'rs of Rain;
So t'other can foretel, by certain Rules,
What Crops of Coxcombs, or what Floods of Fools.
In such like Prophecies were Poets skill'd,
Which now they find in their own Tribe fulfill'd:
The Dearth of Wit they did so long presage,
Is fall'n on us, and almost starves the Stage.
Were you not griev'd, as often as you saw
Poor Actors thresh such empty Sheafs of Straw?
Toiling and lab'ring, at their Lungs Expence,
To start a Jest, or force a little Sence.
Hard Fate for us! still harder in th' Event;
Our Authors Sin, but we alone Repent.
Still they proceed, and, at our Charge, write worse;
'Twere some Amends if they could reimburse:
But there's the Devil, tho' their Cause is lost,
There's no recovering Damages or Cost.

Good Wits, forgive this Liberty we take,
Since Custom gives the Losers leave to speak.
But if provok'd, your dreadful Wrath remains,
Take your Revenge upon the coming Scenes:
For that damn'd Poet's spar'd who Damns a Brother,
As one Thief 'scapes, that Executes another.
Thus far alone does to the Wits relate;
But from the rest we hope a better Fate.
To please and move has been our Poet's Theme,
Art may direct, but Nature is his aim;
And Nature miss'd, in vain he boasts his Art,
For only Nature can affect the Heart.
Then freely judge the Scenes that shall ensue,
But as with Freedom, judge with Candour too.
He wou'd not lose thro Prejudice his Cause;
Nor wou'd obtain precariously Applause.
Impartial Censure he requests from all,
Prepar'd, by just Decrees to stand, or fall.

Personæ Dramatis

Men

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- MANUEL, the King of Granada.
- GONSALEZ, his Favourite.
- GARCIA, Son to Gonsalez.
- PEREZ, Captain of the Guards.
- ALONZO, an Officer, Creature to Gonsalez.
- OSMYN, a Noble Prisoner.
- HELI, a Prisoner, his Friend.
- SELIM, an Eunuch -

Women

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- ALMERIA, the Princess of Granada.
- ZARA, a Captive Queen.
- LEONORA, chief Attendant on the Princess.
- Women, Eunuchs, and Mutes attending Zara. Guards, etc...

The Scene GRANADA.

Act I

Act I, Scene 1

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A Room of State. -

*The Curtain rising slowly to soft Musick, discovers
ALMERIA in Mourning, LEONORA waiting in Mourning.*

-

*After the Musick ALMERIA rises from her Chair, and
comes forward. -*

ALM. Musick has Charms to sooth a savage Breast,
To soften Rocks, or bend a knotted Oak.
I've read, that things inanimate have mov'd,
And, as with living Souls, have been inform'd,
By Magick Numbers and persuasive Sound.
What then am I? Am I more senseless grown
Than Trees, or Flint? O force of constant Woe!
'Tis not in Harmony to calm my Griefs.
Anselmo sleeps, and is at Peace; last Night
The silent Tomb receiv'd the good Old King;
He and his Sorrows now are safely lodg'd
Within its cold, but hospitable Bosom.
Why am not I at Peace? [*Weeps.*]

LEO. For Heaven's sake, dear Madam, moderate

Your Griefs, there is no Cause-

ALM. Peace- No Cause! yes, there is Eternal Cause,
And Misery Eternal will succeed.

Thou canst not tell- thou hast indeed no Cause.

LEO. Believe me, Madam, I lament Anselmo,
And always did compassionate his Fortune;
Have often wept, to see how cruelly
Your Father kept in Chains, his Fellow-King:
And oft at Night, when all have been retir'd,
Have stoln from Bed, and to his Prison crept;
Where, while his Goaler slept, I thro' the Grate
Have softly whisper'd, and enquir'd his Health;
Sent in my Sighs and Pray'rs for his Deliv'rance;
For Sighs and Pray'rs were all that I could offer.

ALM. Indeed thou hast a soft and gentle Nature,
That thus couldst melt to see a Stranger's Wrongs.
O Leonora, hadst thou known Anselmo,
How would thy Heart have bled to see his Suff'rings.
Thou hadst no Cause, but general Compassion.

LEO. My Love of you, my Royal Mistress, gave me
Cause,
My Love of you begot my Grief for him;
For I had heard, that when the Chance of War
Had bless'd Anselmo's Arms with Victory,
And the rich Spoil of all the Field, and you,
The Glory of the Whole, were made the Prey