

We want no preacher to distinguish vice
From virtue. At our birth the god reveal'd
All conscience needs to know.

As Mr. Cumberland chose a slighter degree of *incest* for the subject of his play, I wish he had not written it in prose, and that with the dexterity of Walpole, he had thrown the occurrence back a few centuries. In hearing or reading the vices of another and distant age, we have a twofold consolation: an involuntary suspicion that the facts may never have been true; and a voluntary belief, that our own times exhibit nothing like them. . . .

To use the language of the late Dr. Parr, when speaking of Warburton, on the 2nd of February, 1785, – ‘from her towering and distant heights she rushed down upon her prey, and disdainful of the ostentatious prodigalities of cruelty, destroyed it at a blow.’ She [Mrs. Siddons] acted Lady Macbeth on that night, and criticism, and envy, and rivalry sunk at once before her. The subject was as fortunate to her as to the GREAT POET himself, and from that hour her dominion over the passions was undisputed, her genius pronounced to be at least equal to her art, and Sir Joshua’s happy thought of identifying her person with the muse of tragedy confirmed by the immutable decree of the public. . . .

When Mrs. Siddons came on with the letter from Macbeth (the first time we saw her,) such was the impression from her form, her face, her deportment – the distinction of sex was only external – ‘her spirits’ informed their tenement with the apathy of a demon. The commencement of this letter is left to the reader’s imagination. ‘They met me in the day of success,’ shews that he had previously mentioned the witches. Her first novelty was a little suspension of the voice, ‘they made themselves – *air*.’ that is, less astonished at it as a miracle of nature, than attentive to it as a manifestation of the reliance to be built upon their assurances. She read the whole letter with the greatest skill, and, after an instant of reflection, exclaimed –

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor – and SHALT BE
What thou art *promised*.

The amazing burst of energy upon the words *shalt be*, perfectly electrified the house. The determination seemed as uncontrollable as *fate* itself. The searching analysis of Macbeth, which she makes, was full of meaning – the eye and the hand confirmed the logic. Ambition is the soul of her very phrase: –

Thou’dst have, *great* Glamis.

means before me – how is such a nature to be worked up to such *unholy* objects? . . .

The murmured mysteriousness of the address to the spirits ‘that tend on mortal thoughts,’ became stronger as she proceeded: –

Come to my WOMAN’S BREASTS,
And take my *milk* for GALL, you murd’ring ministers.

A beautiful thought, be it observed; as if these sources of infant nourishment could not even *consent* to mature destruction, without some loathsome change in the very stream itself which flowed from them.

When the actress, invoking the destroying ministers, came to the passage –

Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature’s mischief,

the elegant of her *brows*, the full *orbs* of sight, the raised shoulders, and the hollowed hands, seemed all to endeavour to explore what yet were pronounced no possible objects of vision. Till then, I am quite sure, a figure so terrible had never bent over the pit of a theatre; that night crowded with intelligence and beauty in its seven front rows. . . .