



The Cenci

Percy Bysshe Shelley

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Cenci

Percy Bysshe Shelley

The Cenci Percy Bysshe Shelley

The Cenci was a verse drama written in the summer of 1819 by Percy Bysshe Shelley. It was inspired by a real Italian family, the Cencis (especially Beatrice Cenci). Due to its theme of incest the play was considered unperformable in its day, and it was not performed in London until 1922. Later it was included in the Harvard Classics as one of the most important and representative works of the western canon

The Cenci Details

Date : Published March 15th 2007 by Book Jungle (first published 1819)

ISBN : 9781594625312

Author : Percy Bysshe Shelley

Format : Paperback 200 pages

Genre : Plays, Drama, Classics, Fiction, Theatre, Medievalism, Romanticism, Literature, 19th Century

 [Download The Cenci ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Cenci ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Cenci Percy Bysshe Shelley

From Reader Review The Cenci for online ebook

Sarah says

Out of the two plays I have read by Shelley, this is the better one. *The Cenci* is actually a pretty interesting and spicy tragedy about a daughter who is raped by her father, then is part of a scheme to have him murdered. Of course, this is just the bare bones of the plot, as Shelley clearly fills out the rest with language that I think is not exactly suited for a drama. Now, it is not as obvious as it is in *Prometheus Unbound* by any means, but it is still a little clunky to read amidst the action that is frankly quite interesting, if not controversial.

Other than that, I am at a loss for words with this one. Not exactly remarkable, but also not a bad play.

Buck Plankchest says

The Catholic church covering up child rape? Who could have foreseen such tragedy?

Farzane says

????????: (??????) ??? ??? ! ??? ?? ??? ?????????????????? ??? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ??? ? ??? ?? ??
?????????? ?? ?? ?? ! ?? ?? ??? ?? ? ?????????????????? ?? ??? ?????????? ?? ?????????? ??
?????????? ?? ?? ?????????? ?? ??? ?? ?????????? ?? ??? ?????????????????? ?????????????????? ?? ?? ?? ?? ??? ?? ?? ??
????! ?? ?????????? ?? ?? ??? ?????????? ?? ?????????... ??? ??? ?? ?????????????????? ?????????????? ?? ?? ??? ?????????? ??
???? ?? ??? ?????????????????? ?????????! ?? ?? ?????????? ?? ?????????? ?? ?????????? ?? ?? ??? ?????????? ?? ??
????????? ?????????? ?? ?????????? ? ?????????! ?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ??... ?????????? ?? ?????????????????? ?????????? ?? ??????????
?? ?????????? ?????????? ? ?? ??? ? ?????????? ! ?? ?? ??? ?? ?????????? ?????????????????? ?????????????? ?? ?????????? ??
?? ?? ?? ?????????? ?????????? ?? ?????????? ?????????? ? ?????????????????? ? ?? ?? ?????????? ?????????? ?? ?? ??????????
?? ?? ?? ?? ?????????? ? ?? ?? ?????????? ?? ?????????????????? ?????????????????? ?????????! ?? ?? ??? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?????????? ??
???? ?????? ? ?? ?? ?????????????????? ?????????? ?? ?? ?? ?????????? ?? ?????????? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?????????? ? ?????? ??
?? ?? ? ?????????? ?? ?????????????????? ?????????? ? ?????????????????? ?? ?????????? ?? ?????????? ?? ?????????? ?? ??????????
???? ?????????????????? ?? ?? ?? ?????????????????? ?? ?????????? ? ?????????????????? ?? ?? ?? ?????????? ?? ?????????? ?????????? ??
?? ??????? ?? ??? ?????????? ????

Anand says

When I first started on this, I knew that I'd be reading something deeply searing, uncomfortable, yet engrossing. *The Cenci* deals with incest, parental abuse, rape, murder, religious authoritarianism, torture, nature, Catholicism, and more. In five acts Percy Shelley follows his predecessors Sophocles and Shakespeare by taking a story from the deep past and reanimating it with his own poetic imagination and creating something that's excellent in both language and dramatic force. Shelley does well to conceal the rape and the murder of Cenci offstage, leaving us with the evocative power of the devastating effects of all

this violence. He also follows Greek drama in its general abstinence from displaying on-screen violence, while he is almost very Shakespearean in his own Shelleyan way through the way poetry is interwoven into speech so that I cannot isolate a specific line so much as take passages as wholes. I am impressed also by Shelley's grasp of metaphors, similes, figurative language, and while it can get a bit thick at times (this is the Romantic era), it generally feels right for this sort of elevated drama that has not only an important lesson to teach (authoritarianism is devastating and can, unchecked, lead to both violence and to enabling) but also pity to evoke. Beatrice's speech after the rape has a mad cadence in which all nature is wrecked.

The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood!
The sunshine on the floor is black! The air
Is changed to vapours such as the dead breathe
In charnel pits!

Interestingly, Shelley has a particular feel for the religious setting, for an Italian Catholic world that is "alien" to us Anglo-Americans but which is just as real as anything within our Protestant-influenced world. He also has an excellent grasp of the motivations and desperation that drives an essentially saintly and brave woman like Beatrice Cenci to commit this murder, a deceitful Orsino to do what he does at the expense of those around him, and the madness of the tyrannical Cenci himself to wreck damage on his family through deceit and violence.

I would recommend everyone read *The Cenci* at least once in their lifetime. It's one of Shelley's most engrossing dramatic works both in poetry and in drama, though *Prometheus Unbound* is perhaps his most successful and sublime, and its focus on rape, the culture of authoritarianism, and revenge, make it feel very timely in an era of #MeToo and attention to sexual abuse and rape and violence.

Shelley was right to see the deep past as a reservoir of stories and images. Like Yeats after him in "Leda and the Swan", and Shakespeare before him in *King Lear* (which Shelley considered the greatest drama of all time), and Keats alongside him in his various odes, Shelley believed in the power of myth to enchant, terrify, teach, exhort, and empower readers to be free and to imagine and to come through their readings to a kind of emotional, intellectual, philosophical, and ultimately sensual enlightenment.

Dominic says

Yet another disturbing Romantic drama that leaves the reader with a ton of ethical questions. This was particularly gruesome (Count Cenci is a nasty human being), but it's provocative and meaningful. Shelley does a nice job with both pacing and stylizing the prose. Yet if I had to choose, though, I'd read Hemans' *The Siege of Valencia* again, for the musicality of Hemans' prose and the intricacies of character.

Giulia says

Interesting read.

Zara says

I was not expecting this play to be so disturbing. I read the preface and was intrigued to discover that Shelley had been inspired by a beautiful portrait to discover the mysterious true story of the Cenci family, a wicked father killed by his wife and daughter, who were later imprisoned for his murder. There is not a single let-up in the play. Cenci is a brutal, repulsive old man, who opens the play with a celebration feast given for the clergy of Rome, who are shocked to learn that the occasion they are celebrating is the death of Cenci's two sons in Pisa, a death for which Cenci had repeatedly prayed. He goes on to beat his wife, shun and abuse his sons, and attempts to rape his own daughter while simultaneously cursing her. Cenci's family is portrayed as innocence and perfection, apart from the vital point that they try to kill him. Shelley clearly presents them as the good characters, interestingly suggesting that murder, parricide even, is a lesser crime if the the crimes of the father were so great.

The play is written in blank verse. Shelley writes in the introduction that he has attempted to write as real men speak, avoiding imagery as much as possible, although the language does veer into the melodramatic at times. However he does give the protagonists some incredible speeches, Beatrice most of all, who at times feels like she is made from the same mould as Shakespeare's Portia.

The play feels like a strong attack on the Catholic Church: the Pope is corrupt, sponsoring Cenci and pressing for the harshest treatment of his murderers; Shelley suggests that Cenci has bought so many pardons to atone for his crimes that it's in the Pope's interest to keep him alive and sinning. We are repeatedly told that Cenci has prayed to God for disasters, such as the deaths of his sons and the ruin of his remaining family, and indeed these do occur. Meanwhile the prayers of his 'innocent' (i.e. blameless) daughter and wife are left unanswered. Justice does not come to the just.

I feel like it would have been more interesting if worked into a longer play, with more comic relief. Events happened very rapidly, making this a quick read but not really a believable scenario. Even Beatrice's lover (a priest!) turns out to have dodgy motives, and I would have appreciated a touch of humour or happiness. Instead, it's evil upon evil, and a thoroughly depressing play.

Somya says

Shelley's poetry is definitely way better and well written than his plays. It's based on a true incident that took place in the late 16th century, Italy, in which one of the noblest and richest families of that city had been destroyed. It indeed is a tragedy.

Beatrice's death at the end, I think is one of the saddest deaths I've ever read of and to think it actually happened, in reality, breaks my heart.

Helen says

If you aren't the biggest fan of Shelley's sometimes flowery and self-indulgent poetry, you will be glad to know that this blank-verse play has a much simpler style and is, for that reason, a much more gratifying read. Despite the Gothic setting and characters, Shelley's play has that rare ring of truth to it that shines through the best tragedies, and it is, in fact, based off of a true historical event. The tragic heroine Beatrice is given

touching inner strength and dignity despite her awful circumstances. The other characters, though not as perfectly drawn, are compelling. Shelley's distrust of religious and political authority is woven well into the text, enhancing rather than distracting from the story. Trigger Warnings for: the worst father and the most mustache-twirling-villain you are ever likely to encounter in a Gothic play.

Moira Russell says

Yet another book I'm not going to be reading on the bus. ("And what's that about, dear?")

Danny says

Shelley's adaptation of the one of the most infamous murder plots in renaissance Italy--the story of a family who plotted the murder of its own leader and patriarch, Francesco Cenci--is a powerful dramatic work and a blistering indictment of the Catholic church. Cenci is your typical sadistic libertine--remorseless, filled with hatred, and devoid of pity--straight from the pages of a Sade novel. He commits countless atrocities, raping his daughter Beatrice and gloating over the death of his two sons. About to drink some wine, he says of his two sons with a villainy almost implausible: "Could I believe thou [his wine] wert their mingled blood, / Then would I taste thee like a sacrament" (I.iii.81-83). Everyone in Italy loathes the count, but he's managed to avoid legal retribution by bribing the Catholic church (with the villainous Clement VIII at its head) with money. The church emerges, throughout the drama, as deeply ruthless and corrupt institution. Beatrice, Lucretia, Giacomo, and Orsino (Beatrice's would-be lover) conspire to have the count killed, and eventually succeed in doing so, but one of the pope's messengers arrives just after the fact, and the Cenci's are sent to Rome to be "tried" and subjected to inquisitional torture. The real heroine of "The Cenci," of course, is Beatrice, who stands up to her abusive father and the crooked tribunal with remarkable--indeed heroic--grace and poise. Like Antigone, she defends, in powerful and persuasive terms, a higher law than that of her corrupt country. Just before the Cencis are hanged, Beatrice tells her mother and brother to remain calm and embrace their death with dignified composure.

Peter Heavenheld says

Even the greatest good can be corrupted into its inverse by the greatest evil. Cenci is a monster, who fears nor God nor man. He destroys because it is in his nature. When he rapes Beatrice, his forgiving daughter, a priest and his banished son convince her to be an accessory to his murder.

Shelley was certainly no great dramatist, but this is a fitting tribute to Shakespeare, redeemed by his rich, varied and inventive language. At times, he achieves that rare theatrical perfection of scene, character and language, for example in the chilling trial/torture scene or Beatrice's lullaby towards the end of the play.

David Sarkies says

When justice favours the elite

16 April 2013

This is actually a proper play as opposed to a lyrical drama but, in what seems to be the story of Shelley's life, the play so offended people that it was never performed until 1922. Once again Shelley is pushing the boundaries of his society by demonstrating things that are so shocking that people really do not want to see them. In a way people are willingly keeping themselves blindfolded because what Shelley is revealing to us is so shocking that it can shake the foundations of our own subjective reality.

The Cenci is set in 1599, when the Reformation had reached its height and the glory days of the Catholic Church were far behind them. However it is not necessarily a religious play, but rather it is a political play with uses events in the past to criticise the political reality of the day. What was shocking about the play was that it dealt with incestual rape and how the whole event was covered over by the powers that be. This forced the children of the antagonist, Francesco Cenci, to take the law into their own hands and then have the full force of the law come down upon them.

The play is a tragedy, but it is a tragedy not because of some aspect of a fatal flaw but rather that the perpetrator of the crime was never going to be punished for his crime, and in the end it was the victim that was punished for the act of another. This is something that, sadly, we still see today, and not a week goes by when we hear of some woman in some conservative country being punished because she was raped.

What the play shows is how the legal system is heavily weighed in favour of the powers that be. Francesco Cenci was a powerful noble in Italy, and in a way he was above the world. However we still see aspects of familial support, because when he rapes his daughter, his sons crowd around his daughter to seek to restore her honour. However the arbitrator of justice, at that time the church, found itself going against those who had been wounded. Okay, there is also revenge in this play, but much of it has to do with the fact that nobody else would make a move against Cenci. There is also the idea that justice cannot be taken into one's own hands because when people start taking justice into their own hands then the rule of law breaks down (if it ever existed, as at times it seems to apply to one group of people and not to another).

While the rule of law did not theoretically exist in sixteenth century Rome, there was still very much a law: ecclesiastical law. However, at the time, and even for centuries beforehand, this law was abused, mostly to keep the church in power, which meant that nobody could actually question the church. Even Cenci would not have been immune to the power of the ecclesiastical courts, however it is the nature of the hypocrisy because those who were guilty only of thinking for themselves were punished while the real monsters would be free to roam the land, simply because nobody could bring any charges against them.

Carissa says

Absolutely fascinated by this story after doing a descriptive bibliography project on a copy of the 1819 first edition. It's Shelley's only attempt to tackle a historical subject, packed full of Gothic tropes, and a rare example (for the time) of a rape survivor who retaliates against her aggressor.

Ana says

3? Idk I guess, but I do know I want to use this gif.
