

Rice Cale Young

Porzia



Cale Rice

Porzia

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Cale Young Rice
Porzia

To

GILBERT MURRAY

Poet, Dramatist, and Master-Interpreter of a great literature

PREFACE

Some years ago while writing "A Night In Avignon" the thought came to me of framing two other plays that should deal respectively with the Renaissance spirit at its height and decadence, as that play had dealt with it at its beginning. For the great human upheaval that came intoxicatingly to Italy during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is so full of æsthetic contrast and glamor as to be peculiarly suitable for the doubly exacting purposes of poetic drama.

"Giorgione," the second of these plays to be written, was published in 1911 with three other plays in a volume entitled "The Immortal Lure," and like "A Night In Avignon" was received with such kindness as to encourage me to write the third, here presented under the name of "Porzia."

This last play, whose period is that of "decadent Humanism," or as Symonds prefers to call it, of "The Catholic Reaction," is laid in Naples, where the passions of men, more than freed from the long domination of the Church and the Hereafter, seemed to reach in their grasp at this life almost incredible heights and depths of excess. And yet from amid this excess, as from a rank and unweeded garden, were springing into flower many seeds of modern intellectual enfranchisement, as the achievements of Bruno and his contemporaries witness.

I need only add that I have sought to use materials that would be true to the time of this final portrayal, and that I therefore trust it may be understood as an organic member of the group to which it belongs.

C. Y. R.

Louisville, Kentucky, June, 1912.

ACT I

CHARACTERS

RIZZIO DI ROSSI *A young Leader of the Literati at Naples, suspected of heresy*

OSIO *His Brother*

PORZIA *His Wife*

ALOYSIUS *Her Uncle, a Physician*

BIANCA *Her Cousin, a Florentine, once betrothed to Osio*

GIORDANO BRUNO *A young Dominican, also heretical*

MONSIGNOR QUERIO *An Officer of the Inquisition*

TASSO *A Poet*

MARINA *A Sicilian serving Porzia*

MATTEO *Serving Rizzio, later Osio*

Dancers from Capri, Musicians, Guards of the Inquisition, etc.

TIME —*About 1570*

PORZIA

Scene: A portion of the house, terrace and garden of Rizzio on his wedding day at Naples. It is so situated as to command a view of the city, the blue Bay with Capri set like a topaz in it, the Vesuvian coast, and the Mountain itself – rising like a calm though unappeasable monitor against the land's too sensual enchantment.

The house, a white corner of which is visible along the right, has large doors toward the back giving upon the terrace. A vine-clad terrace wall, several feet above the level of the terrace, but much above that of the street without, runs across the rear to a cypress-set gate in the centre, and on into the lustrous Spring foliage of ilex, myrtle and orange.

A pedestaled image of the Virgin against the house, a statue of Pan before a bower opposite, and several stone seats forward, are decked with orange blossoms that glow in the light of late afternoon.

Music, reveling, and laughter are heard, muffled, within. Then amid a louder burst of them Osio strides angrily forth. He is followed in argumentative elation by Rizzio – clothed in Greek raiment, a book in his hand – and by Bruno.

Osio (as they come down).

Proof from the teeth of aliens and fools

And infidels that follow their own reason?

I want no proof! your books should burn in Hell!

Rizzio (gaily).

Because they glorify the stars in heaven?

Osio.

I say they are heresy!

Rizzio.

And I say truth!

[Uplifts volume.

That were your ears not stopped with sophistries
And Jesuitry you would adjudge divine!

[Tosses it down.

Bruno.

Ai, Signor Osio, there's no denying!

[Porzia appears anxiously at the door.

We need but look,
To learn that stars are worlds
Swung out upon infinitudes of space.
And as for earth —
Tho Christ shed blood upon it —
'Tis but a pilgrim flame among them all.

[Porzia leaves door.

Osio (turning upon him).

And you, a monk, will say so to the Church
And to the Holy Office?

Bruno (in humorous alarm).

God forbid!

Osio.

And you, Rizzio, who on your wedding-day,
Mid rites of Venus
And revels to Apollo,
Wear pagan robes – and prink others in them —

Rizzio.

Ho, others! meaning Porzia?

Osio.

I say —

[Mirth within.

Rizzio (laughing at him).

What, what, my merry raging brother, more?
That Pan is not your god, whom I but now

Besought for inward beauty and truth of soul?
No, no, he is not, by Vesuvius!

Osio.
I say —

Rizzio.
That Plato and the ancients are
A plague which only the Pope can purge from earth?

[Again laughing.

Ai! to the flames with them, and with all fairness!

Osio.
I say that you —

Rizzio.
Hey, yea! that I who fall
Not on my knees to mitred villainy —
Or cringe to crosiered craft —
And yet whose life is lit for truth and freedom —
Am viler far than you
Who take your pleasure and pay it with confession?
Who think the Devil with faith would be no Devil?

[Porzia again appears with Bianca.

You hear it, Bruno?

Osio.
I say there is one thing
You shall not do!

Rizzio.
So-ho! my lordly brother,
My breaker of betrothals – if not creeds —
And that is what?

Osio.
I will protect her from it!

Rizzio.
Her?

Osio.
Porzia! from the passion of your lies!

[Astonishment.

Rizzio (stung, staring).
By ... all the saints
and fiends and incubi
That ever infested night and nunneries!
What frenzy now is biting at your brain!

[Before him.

Is she your wife, so to concern your care?

[They face, pale.

Porzia (who sees, and with Bianca comes quickly, winningly down).
Heresy! heresy! truth and heresy!
Are there no other words in all the world
To pour as wine
Upon a wedding-day! —
Are these your ways, my newly wedded lord,
To leave me, an hour's bride, away from home —
From my dear uncle's home —
With but a friend or two for comforting —
And bandy words of other stars than those
You swear to see when gazing in my eyes!

Rizzio (responsively).
My Porzia!

Porzia.
No, no! I'll not forgive you!
For is it not ill boding to our bridals
You quarrel over the heavens – and not me!

[As he laughs.

My beauty, he says, this husband I have taken,
Is life – and yet ere 'tis an hour his
Forgets to live on it! – and Osio,
The brother of him, —
E'en Osio there —

Rizzio (gay again).
Who swears he will protect you!

[Osio starts.

Porzia.
Protect?

Rizzio.
Against the heresy of robes
Of pagan fashion – and against your husband!

[Constraint. Porzia sees Bianca flush.

Porzia.
I do not understand – unless you jest,
As oft – too oft you do!
Or mean perchance Bianca ... unto whom
He was betrothed
And whom he would, this breath,
Be wooing again, were *I*, not *words*, your bride!

[Then winningly again, as Marina enters.

But see, here is Marina! the dance awaits!

[Music is heard.

Let us go in and give ourselves to Joy,
For Misery is quick enough to take us,
If first we do not wed us to her rival!
Is it not so?

Rizzio (with passion).
Or sun has never shone!
So in! the tarantelle! (*as Tasso enters*) And then a song
From Messer Tasso, who would be divine,

[Greets him.

Did he love Venus as he fears the Church,
Apollo as he shuns the Inquisition!
In! – Osio, will you come?

Osio.
I will not.

Rizzio.
Then
Dance with your own mad humors and delusions

Here to Vesuvius and to the sea, —
Or to Bianca plead your pardon!
(*To the rest*) Come!

[Seizes blossoms blithely.

For in this world there's but one heresy,
Denial of the divinity of Joy!

[Throws sprays over Porzia, takes her hand and they go singing. All follow,
but Osio and Bianca.

Osio (when their steps have died; in cold rage).
You shall hear more of this, my pretty brother!
Prater of pagan doubts!
Whom – but that God may use it – I would curse
For the resemblance that our mother gave us!
For, by the living blood of San Gennaro,
In yon Duomo, the scoffing siren song
Of heresy that swells in you shall cease,
Tho it shall take the sweat of the rack to hush it!
You shall hear more!..

Bianca (who has stood long indignant).
And others shall hear more!

[Her voice breaking as she turns on him.

Others who fix upon me this affront
Of broken and humiliate betrothals!

[As he attempts to speak.

Yes! you have made of me a thing of shame
Here in the eyes
Of those who're alien to me!
That you have loved me not – or love me less
Than once you did, too well I came to know —
I – with the blood in me of the Medici! —
And now it is open prate!.. But do you think
The women of my city want resentment,
Or less than these sun-lusting ones of Naples
Know how to cool their wrath?

Osio.
I think you mad —

In a mad maze —
And yield it no concern;
Nor shall – (*meaningly*) until a thing you know is done.
As to betrothals, give your memory breath:
Ours was agreed to end as either willed.

[Goes from her to gate and looks expectantly out.

Bianca (as he returns).
And you, weary of it, have utterly
Chosen to end it?

[Sits.

Osio.
Have I so affirmed?

Bianca (springing up).
I will not have evasions, Osio!
Shiftings and turnings
Radiant of hopes
That torture expectation till it breaks.

[Again sitting.

And yet – perchance it is as well they come
Now ... while there yet is time for more withdrawals.
Osio (starting).
More?

Bianca.
For – I fear all trust in you is folly;
And that the heresy of Rizzio
Which I agreed with you to take unto
Monsignor Querio —

Osio (clenching).
Shall not be taken?

[She rises.

Not! but you leave the brunt to me alone?

Bianca.
You purpose more, I think, than to restrain him.

Osio.

And you more than abjuring! You would gaze
Upon his godless schisms, ...
Upon the naked luring of his lies!

Bianca.

No! Tho the beauty of them —

Osio.

Beauty! beauty!

[Striking the Pan near him.

That wind of infidelity from Hell
He blows out of his lips do you call beauty!
No! – and he with his poets and philosophers,
His Platos
And star-mad Copernicas,
And that Dominican, Giordano Bruno,
For whom the stake to flames will yet be lit,
Shall learn you are too late in your relenting!

Bianca (stricken).

Too ... late!

Osio.

His heresies shall reap their due.

Bianca (death-pale).

Which means – that you
already have revealed them!
Have sent unto Monsignor Querio
To-day —
Rizzio's wedding-day! —
For that
It was you sought out Matteo, who, pledged
Unto Marina,
As were you to me,
Has broke his troth?..
And now, now you await him? – O was not
Your promise to me that a week should pend
Ere any step?

Osio.

I will not lose my soul,

[Turns away.

And dallying is the feebleness of fools.

Bianca.

And will lies save it – tho they be for Heaven! —
To one who nigh has lost her soul for you?

[When he does not answer, more penetratively.

We have been friends, Osio, long been friends,
And, woman that I am, I would 'twere more,
But in this I suspect —

Osio.

Enough! we prate!

[Rankling, uneasily.

I say enough.

Bianca.

And I say all too little,

[Bitterly.

Until I tell you now plain to your face,
And to your heart
Plunging toward this passion,
That not alone a hate of heresy
Is haunting you to it, but that the lips
And eyes and brows and soul of —

Osio.

Will you cease!

Bianca.

I tell you that you love her – Porzia!
And veer but to the vision of her face!

Osio (who after strangling silence finds words).

If you say that, Bianca, ever again
Or if, by all the demons that Avernus
Pours out upon the black Phlegraean fields,
You hint it or suggest it to her, till —

Bianca.

Till you achieve her! and have wrapped the rites
Of the Church round your achieving?

Till you have severed her from Rizzio —
Have swept her from perdition —
Into your swathing arms! I say you shall not!
Me you have set aside, but there an end!

[Starts toward door.

Osio.
Stop! whither do you go?

Bianca.
To call them! call!
And to betray your treachery – and mine!

[Calling.

Rizzio! Porzia! Rizzio!

Osio.
Maledictions!

[Seizing her wrists.

Will you become a dagger, and not know,
Stiletto that you are, what thing you stab!

Bianca.
The infatuation festering within you!
Till, deaf with the desire of it and dream,
You cannot tell their voice from Deity's.

[Calls again.

Rizzio! Porzia! Tasso!

[The music ceases.

Rizzio (within; startled).
It was Bianca!

[Hastening to door with the rest crowding closely after.

How? what? you called? what moves you? – Osio?

[Looks around.

Was some one here? what is it? speak!.. Bianca?
What burns you?

Bianca.
You shall hear! It must be told.
Yes, yes!.. (*Struggling to say it*) ...
And with no leavening delay of words.
We ... I ... You must be gone from here at once;
At once – for there is peril.

Rizzio.
Pah-ho! peril?
Now, Scylla and the Sibyl and Charybdis!
What megrim have you had?

Bianca.
None – for doubting;
Or any, it matters not, if you will go,
And quickly, trusting reason – as you boast to;
For I have heard —

Rizzio.
Have heard what and from whom?

[Again looks around.

Bianca.
There was one here who said Monsignor Querio
Knows of your excommunicant delight
In books that are forbid —
And ... of your heresies!

Porzia (in quick dismay).
The Inquisition!
You mean – he may be sought by it and seized,
Held in the trammels of it for a truth
That ...! Do you mean, Bianca, Osio,
That now, at any hour – ?.. Oh, he must go!

[Hears noise at gate.

And quickly! In, Rizzio, in, for they – !

[The gate opens and Matteo entering stops amazed and alarmed.

Rizzio (with laughing relief).

Now, now, do you not see your apprehension!
Is Matteo the Inquisition! Is
He then the prison that has come to seize me?
Fie, fie, Bianca, with your fears that mar
Again the bridal beauty of this hour,
And crowd with quiverings the bliss of it!
No more of them! – (*to dancers*) Hither! and wind your maze!
Again take up the dance!

Porzia.

No, Rizzio, no!
For now delight would die under our feet,
And we but trample on it! No! Dismiss them
Back now to Capri!..
More than the woman fear within me warns it.
For you have been o'er bold – not vainly, nay,
For truth, I know, must dare – but there may be
More in this than you think.

Rizzio.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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