

* * * * What can you say, to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

Her loyal soul revolts from such mockery of its dearest duty; she answers with simple truthfulness, not devoid of a trace of sarcasm for her sisters' palpable lies; and even imposes restraint upon those expressions of fondness which under other circumstances would be natural to her:

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more, nor less.

* * * * *
* * * * * Good my lord,

You have begot me, bred me, loved me; I
Return those duties back as are right fit—
Obey you, love you, and most honor you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord, whose hand must take my plight, shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care, and duty;
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

Lear. But goes this with thy heart?

Cor. Ay, good my lord.

Lear. So young, and so untender?

Cor. So young, my lord, and true.

Lear. Let it be so—thy truth then be thy dower:

For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate, and the night—
By all the operations of the orbs,
From whom we do exist, and cease to be—
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee, from this, forever.

In the next scene, in which Lear summons Cordelia's suitors to inform them of her fall from his favor, and to receive their final

decision, her conduct is eminently characteristic; nothing can exceed in serene dignity and inherent honor her appeal to her father, in answer to her royal lover's amazed reception of this intelligence—for which the effect upon her future husband is voucher enough:

France. This is most strange!

That she, that even but now was your best object,
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
Most best, most dearest, should in this trice of time
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle
So many folds of favor! Sure, her offence
Must be of such unnatural degree
That monsters it, or your fore-vouch'd affection
Fall into taint: which to believe of her,
Must be a faith that reason without miracle
Could never plant in me.

Cor. I yet beseech your majesty,
(If for I want that glib and oily art,
To speak, and purpose not; since what I well intend,
I'll do't before I speak,) that you make known
It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulness,
No unchaste action, or dishonor'd step,
That hath deprived me of your grace and favor;
But even for want of that for which I am richer—
A still soliciting eye, and such a tongue
That I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.

* * * * *
France. Is it but this? a tardiness in nature,
Which often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do? * * * *

* * * * *
Fairest Cordelia, thou art most rich, being poor;
Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd!
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon:

Be it lawful, I take up what's cast away.

Gods, gods! 'tis strange, that from their cold'st neglect
My love should kindle to inflam'd respect.—

Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France;
Not all the dukes of wat'rish Burgundy
Shall buy this unpriz'd precious maid of me.

In her charge to her unnatural sisters, at parting, she still maintains the calm majesty of demeanor that befits her grave misfortune:

The jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes
Cordelia leaves you. I know you what you are;
And, like a sister, am most loath to call
Your faults as they are nam'd. Use well our father:
To your professed bosoms I commit him;
But yet, alas! stood I within his grace,
I would prefer him to a better place.
So farewell to you both.

With this, the Cordelia of an incorruptible and somewhat rigid virtue disappears, and in her place we have the tenderest child that ever blessed a doting father. The following extracts are beautifully illustrative of that steadfast self-command, born of a most shrinking modesty, which has become habitual with her, even on occasions of extraordinary trial, and which, in later examples, is too often mistaken for insensibility, pride, or heartlessness:

Kent. Did your letters pierce the queen to any demonstration of grief?

Gent. Ay, sir; she took them, read them in my presence;
And now and then an ample tear trill'd down
Her delicate cheek: it seem'd she was a queen
Over her passion, who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.

Kent. O, then it moved her.

Gent. Not to a rage; patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest. You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears
Were like a better day. Those happy smiles,
That play'd on her ripe lip, seem'd not to know

What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence,
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd.—In brief, sorrow
Would be a rarity most belov'd, if all
Could so become it.

Kent. Made she no verbal question?

Gent. Faith, once or twice she heav'd the name of father
Pantingly forth, as if it press'd her heart;
Cried, *Sisters! sisters!—Shame of ladies! sisters!*
Kent! father! sisters! What! in the storm in the night?
Let pity not be believ'd!—There she shook
The holy water from her heavenly eyes,
And clamor moisten'd:—then away she started,
To deal with grief alone.

But the crowning beauty of Cordelia's character, as well as one of the master-pieces of this "best tragedy," is achieved in the scene where, having returned home to find her father hopelessly crazed by his children's cruelty, she bends, a pitying angel, over that sad wreck of manhood and of majesty:

O my dear father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms, that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!

Kent. Kind and dear princess.

Cor. Had you not been their father, these white flakes
Had challeng'd pity of them. Was this a face
To be expos'd against the warring winds?
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?
In the most terrible and nimble stroke
Of quick, cross-lightning? to watch (poor perdu!)
With this thin helm? Mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire. And wast thou fain, poor father,
To hovel thee with swine, and rogues forlorn,
In short and musty straw? Alack, alack!
'Tis wonder that thy life and wits at once
Had not concluded all.—He wakes; speak to him.

Phys. Madam, do you; 'tis fittest.

Cor. How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

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* * * * * O, look upon me, sir;

And hold your hands in benediction o'er me:—

No, sir, you must not kneel.

Lear.

Pray, do not mock me:

I am a very foolish, fond old man—

Fourscore and upward; and, to deal plainly,

I fear I am not in my perfect mind.

Methinks I should know you, and know this man—

Yet I am doubtful; for I am mainly ignorant

What place this is; and all the skill I have

Remembers not these garments; nor I know not

Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me;

For, as I am a man, I think this lady

To be my child Cordelia.

Cor.

And so I am, I am.

The great Master has not weakened his imposing work by a single allusion to her mere personality; let us not then vulgarly descend to guess at what he has left veiled, assured that such inner glory as Cordelia's would diffuse its radiance over any but a monstrous exterior. If, in conclusion, we confess that Cordelia presents to us few points of congeniality on which we may freely hang a familiar preference, the acknowledgment can be prejudicial only to ourself; for we feel that to be capable of worthily understanding and loving her, one must possess virtue as heroic, a heart as pure, and a conscience as void of offence, as her own.