

PARODY



Ambrose Bierce

(1842-1914?)

from "Our Tales of Sentiment" (c.1900)

...When presented to the object of his devotion the earl could not suppress his sentiments. The Lady Gwendolin saw them as plainly as if they had been branded upon his brow. Her agitation was comparable to his. All the pent-up emotion of her deep, womanly nature surged to her countenance and paralyzed her so that she was unable to offer her hand. She consequently contented herself with a graceful inclination of the head. The earl was excessively disappointed. Turning upon his heel he bowed and walked away. Gwendolin retired to the conservatory and uttered a deep-drawn sigh, then, returning to the ballroom, flung herself into the waltz with an assumed ecstasy that elicited wide comment....

Josephina had progressed but a brief distance into the garden when some inner sense proclaimed that she was followed: the crunching of a gentleman's heel upon the gravel was indisputable. Partially terrified, she sought concealment in the shrubbery that bordered the path on the one side and the other. It passed by her there in the moonlight, that dreadful sound, yet no one visible! It went on and on, growing fainter and fainter, like herself, and was lost to hearing. Then she remembered the tradition of the Invisible Knight and her heart smote her for the absence of faith with which she had so often greeted it. "I am fitly punished," she conceded, "for my skeptical attitude. Henceforth, so far as the constitution of my mind will permit, I will be more hospitable to the convictions of the simple." How she adhered to this expiational resolution we shall behold....

Captain Gerard introspected. He spread his heart, as it were, upon the dissecting-table of conscience and examined it from several points of view. It is a familiar act--we call it analysis of motive. When he had concluded he knew why he had accepted the invitation of the countess to dinner. He knew why he had insulted the count. Equally obvious were his reasons for mentioning to Iphigeneia the holy bonds of matrimony. In all his conduct since his last introspection but one act baffled him: why, alas, had he spoken to Iphigeneia of the bar-sinister in his crest? As he pondered this inexplicable problem a footfall fell upon his ear and he shuddered as if the hand of death had stepped in. It was the countess!...