

TWO BY ATKINS

*THE ABORTIONIST AND THE CORPSE*

TWO POETIC DRAMAS TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Russell Atkins

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THE ABORTIONIST  
A POETIC DRAMA TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Scene: A basement in a half-deserted building  
in a deteriorated, dark, old section of  
downtown in a large city.

DR. DRASSAKAR (on phone)

Dr. Drassakar. Well. Miss Harrington. You're late.  
I'm all ready. Near here you say? Then watch.  
There are the down steps. Then the door.  
Recall the bell? When you arrive ring it.  
Don't neglect the bell. It tells me it is you.  
Good. Come quickly, Miss Harrington.

(he hangs up)

Were she Dr. Harrington himself  
Other first-staged beforehand would rear me to  
the occasion!

(he then addresses small mice in a cage  
sticking small pieces of cheese into the cage)

At last we take the lamps from Harrington!

(Drassakar next applies himself to the pre -  
paration for the visit of his patient. He rolls a  
battered operating table behind apparatus in a cor-  
ner of the room under a light. This position  
obscures the table all but the head. He draws out  
of bag various instruments. He does this and more  
with a rather wild air about him. He is contemplating  
a hypodermic needle when there comes a ringing of  
a little bell. He grows ruthlessly active. Unlocks  
the door, then hurriedly seats himself behind desk.  
There is a knock.)

Come in, Miss Harrington.

(Enter Cecilia Harrington, face hidden somewhat  
behind coat collar. Young. Nervous.)

DR. 'DRASSAKAR

Sit down, Miss Harrington

And why do you tremble?

Let me help you - your coat -  
(rises to assist)

MISS HARRINGTON

No, no. I won't take long, Dr., for I -

That is - I - well - I

Have something to tell.

It's of - we understand,

My decision? - you see -  
That is - I mean -

DR. DRASSAKAR

This is but nerves, I say.  
For now, relax, Miss Harrington.  
The instrument' s temporarily off-key' d.  
Talk of something -  
Grow calm and -

MISS HARRINGTON

Hear me. Dr.! Our plan's a fang through me.

DR. DRASSAKAR

Ah now, Miss Harrington, listen:  
Don't let the commonplace  
Distress you. Remember,  
These days strain you,  
I say then look to a beyond  
Of cheer. Vision the unspoiled,

Generation and a father  
Famous throughout, surely,  
You think how propitious  
The universe is - All is, Ha!  
Miss Harrington, don't be hasty.  
Nine shadows of a year  
And this texture of yours  
Vanishes (he rises abruptly)  
Bruted about, dilated  
Swined in the sty -

MISS HARRINGTON

Dr., I - I -

DR. DRASSAKAR

You don't want that, Miss Harrington.

MISS HARRINGTON

You must listen -

DR. DRASSAKAR

You can't mean else.  
(places himself against door)

MISS HARRINGTON

You don't understand. I forbid -

DR. DRASSAKAR  
You forbid it do you!

MISS HARRINGTON  
Do you ask for money?  
Here tonight? You've assorted, readied,  
Undertaken. Oh, forgive me!  
Thoughts have built up a  
Pillar of me. This terrible thing!  
I won't think more of it.

DR. DRASSAKAR  
Did I mention money?

MISS HARRINGTON  
Are you detaining me, Dr.?

DR. DRASSAKAR  
Hoping to exact a debt I  
Thought of you. You will pay?

MISS HARRINGTON  
Tell me the cost.

DR. DRASSAKAR  
In money, Cecilia Harrington?  
In pain!  
(locks door. She reaches for it)  
What's to be said for you?  
Be calm. Do not resist  
(he seizes her)

MISS HARRINGTON  
Dr. - !

DR. DRASSAKAR  
Sit down!

MISS HARRINGTON  
You're a madman!

DR. DRASSAKAR  
So you would slander the Dr.?  
(he forces her into a chair;  
he lifts a glass from the table containing  
a liquid)  
Miss Harrington, drink this, will you?  
(forces her to drink)  
This will incapacitate you,

Of course.

(pause)

(Cecilia Harrington, her head held in her hands)

Consider your self my patient,  
Will you? What of patients? I  
Remember some recovered;  
Paid the bill; conversed with others similar. Dogs!  
What a low of conditions!  
I hated them. (Cecilia Harrington, head yet in hands)  
Miss Harrington, can you hear me?  
I'm scorpion'd for revenge.  
So you shall feel it sharp  
Violating the sanctum.

(Dr. Drassakar bears her to the table across  
the room. There he proceeds in a violent manner  
to tear off her clothes)  
Lie beautifully corpsed, will you?  
That is assume the cadaver of him.  
Ten years in debt, Miss Harrington!  
The interest's just short of  
Death. Let me tell of the debt of your father.  
Yearly it changes a season in me!

Ten years ago, Dr. Harrington grew famous.  
What on? Ideas thieved of me,  
From a confidence of ours.  
I was famous awhile.  
Your father, Miss Harrington,  
And I, once together  
Engaged in questionable  
Business - this business!  
To extinguish me, he, Dr.  
Harrington, your father,  
Occasion'd it all over  
But that on me the sinister contours looked better.  
I professionally died,

MISS HARRINGTON (delirious)  
Here's something - something very  
mysterious - think more of it -  
I've always wanted a child -  
infinitely possible -

DR. DRASSAKAR

The drear'd heath of an ever of birth and success!  
To one the womb. A gross, Miss Harrington,  
A gross of years! (there is violent action at the table:  
she screams)

So weed it out!

MISS HARRINGTON

Help me!

(she screams loud and long: he comes out  
downstage, his hand bloody, holding the fetus)

DR. DRASSAKAR

Miss Harrington, it is all over!

(he places the fetus in a washbowl.

Cecilia Harrington moans in delirium)

This will kill him - DEAR Harrington!

(starts over. There is a rap on the door.

Dead silence. Cecilia Harrington moaning de-  
liriously. The rap is repeated)

NIGHT WATCHMAN

Dr. Drassakar!

(silence)

Xavier the night watchman, Dr. Is everything alright?

DR. DRASSAKAR

What do you want, Xavier?

NIGHT WATCHMAN

Making the round Dr., I thought -

DR. DRASSAKAR

Excellent. Everything is proper, I hope?

NIGHT WATCHMAN

Yes, well, that is - I -

(Cecilia Harrington thrashes on table.

Gives short cry)

What's happening in there, Dr.?

(Drassakar hurries over to Cecilia Harrington.

attempts to stifle her. Struggle. The sound of things

falling. She gasps. Short screams. Drassakar

strikes her to floor. Knocking on door insistent)

Dr. Drassakar! Dr. Drassakar!

(She is writhing on floor. Bust and head  
visible)

Dr. Drassakar!

(night watchman pounds the door. The pounding

stops. Dr. Drassakar listens toward door. Cecilia

Harrington moans. Drassakar turns. His eyes catch

sight of the fetus. He proceeds to lift Cecilia Harrington -

ton up from the floor behind the table. Seizing the

sheet from the table he wraps it around her shroud -

like. She is faintly protesting - places her in arm chair on full stage. Blood colors the winding sheet)

DR. DRASSAKAR

You are a mother, Miss Harrington.

(clothes fetus in a cloth, thrusts it at her)

What when the newspapers tell the story!?

Sit up here, girl! Falling about won't help.

Madonna of the Chair! Look up! Ugh!

You're impossible!

Here is the child. It's too bad

Harrington can't see you. I laugh at you!

Harrington will hate it!

(sound of footsteps)

They promise the police, Madonna of the Chair!

(there is a hurried sound of about five men. There voices are confused. Drassakar stark)

NIGHT WATCHMAN

In here!

(terrific pounding)

(Cecilia Harrington slumps dead in the chair.

Fetus falls to floor)

VOICE I

Open up in there!

(terrific pounding)

DR. DRASSAKAR

You can't save her!

(Drassakar hurries to Cecilia Harrington.

Examines her)

NIGHT WATCHMAN

I have brought the law, Dr. Drassakar!

VOICE II

Let's break it in!

(there is a crash against the door)

NIGHT WATCHMAN

Again!

DR. DRASSAKAR

(leaning over Cecilia Harrington)

Dead

(curtain begins to close slowly)  
(the door weakens. Drassakar retreats. Picks  
up knife. Door falls open. They face each other  
They advance. Suddenly Drassakar rushes upon  
them. There is a shot. Drassakar falls among  
them as they bear him to the floor.)

*The Abortionist* was originally published by  
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THE CORPSE  
A DRAMA TO BE SET TO MUSIC

(A room in a large mansion of great age.  
On a wall is a magnificent portrait of a man.  
Beneath it is a kind of altar on which two candles  
burn. On the portrait and stage a blue light pours  
so that the portrait stands forth prominently. A  
woman in black veil-like garments stands motionless  
looking at the portrait. Behind her to the side, two  
glass-panelled doors would show far over what is at  
present an unintelligible garden)

WIDOW

Cold scare of the sky - the alas strewn way!  
Our drear of friends funeral'd - funeral'd away.  
Palling beyond hedges at the lean of trees,  
We left you Larenuf, done, dead, ceremonied.  
Time cannot make less of it, only more engrieve!

End of you! Rakes of it cruel over the heart's field.  
In one of months, a death comes to you again.  
Resemblance, the presence of you, all will wane.  
Out of the vaulted grey, a shadowed rain,  
(Enter two hired men of rugged appearance)

I HIRED MAN

Lady, when you are ready, we have the car waiting  
near.

WIDOW

I am ready, will it be properly late when we reach  
the cemetery?

I HIRED MAN

Perfect for what we have to do.

WIDOW

Come then.  
(All exit. Stage dimmed. Only light on  
portrait lingers. Dies)

SCENE II. VAULT

(Enter hired men and widow.  
They enter through a highly ornamented

gate staged so that the audience seems to be  
in the vault looking out upon the grave night.  
It is a moonlit night.)

WIDOW

We were not seen. Here is the grave of Larenuf.

I HIRED MAN

(setting down lamp and the wedges)

Should we begin, lady?

(Widow nods. Men begin to pry away  
at stone slab that forms a little door  
to place where coffin lies.)

WIDOW

(in evident mingled pity and suppressed  
anxiety)

Larenuf, we have silenced through the grave's gates.

Dusts haunt about you in the ghastly late.

If we were The Awaited only and had come

To salvage you out of death as out of tomb -

To take you home!

(Hired men move slab and draw out coffin.

A bunch of decayed flowers falls off of the casket)

WIDOW

A wither of horror these flowers, Larenuf!

I HIRED MAN

Lady - ?

WIDOW

I am prepared.

I HIRED MAN

If you visit to have a look at him, he probably will

have the same

look, buried four days.

(Hired men pry open coffin lid. They lift  
the lid. Corpse of Larenuf. Widow stares upon  
corpse.)

WIDOW

Larenuf, Of course you would be thus.

Bravely waiting on the worse.

II HIRED MAN

He seems only a little changed, lady.

WIDOW

Ah, Larenuf, you lie here passed merely nowhere.  
The head, the lips, familiar there.

I wished you "other worlds" knowing you were here.

I say again - it is hard not to say - ashes or gone all;  
Dead, were you suddenly unrecognizable;  
Had you been jaded, unsympathetic or old,

I would have bowed off as they resignedly  
Through the heath'd faint perfumed array.

(more to hired men)

Kissable he is. Yet he is from kissing far.  
The moons of his eyelids extinguished are.  
A blur comes there. The face cakes more.

There is not the same, though same the setting.  
Of his Sahara'd cheek, some sordid etching.

Now this place moved upon, keeping has of his  
lifelike hand.

Insidiously moved again, he will break  
And all ends.

(to hired men)

Leave me a moment, will you?

(hired men step out of vault. She kneels  
beside the encoffined body. Lovingly caresses  
the dead hand. Kisses the corpse upon the lips.  
Rises slowly.)

Goodnight for now, while resemblance is yet on  
your brow.

(Exit widow. Enter hired men)

II HIRED MAN

How many times will she come back?

I HIRED MAN

Until he dies his second death she says.

II HIRED MAN

You think the lady a little crazy?

I HIRED MAN

What else? But she can pay since she is rich.

II HIRED MAN

Well, we'll have something to sleep on.

I HIRED MAN

He was a very handsome fellow.

(Hired men replace coffin. Gather tools  
and lamps and exit closing ornamented gate.  
Stage dimmed.)

S C E N E III

(Setting as in scene I with portrait.  
Each scene is dark of stage. Widow must be very  
shadowed and dim. Only the portrait stands forth.  
Enter Widow. Her grief has her. Under a dull  
light her eyes have that deep look, resembling  
the hollows of a skull. Her veils in this scene  
are torn and hang askew.)

WIDOW

A year has come shadow' d and doled away.  
I have knocked upon things of the world, Larenuf,  
and they,  
As in a void, resound in long echoes, hollow'd,  
vanishing in decay.

Once-pleasures, and things once profound, all  
are museum' d.  
I am some barren spectator among them.  
They are nothing now. What could they have seemed?

Many months passed. Another rains over the slab.  
Each one the more more carelessly will rob  
You of identity, Larenuf. That will I die of.

A say again - it is hard not to say -ashes or  
gone all;  
Dead, were you suddenly unrecognizable;  
Had you been jaded unsympathetic or old,

I might have bowed off resignedly as they  
Through the heath' d faint perfumed array,  
Cloisteredly thinking of the mystery.

In one of months a death shall come to you again.  
Resemblance, the presence of you, all will wane.  
Out of the vaulted grey, a farewell of rain.

Tonight we will once more through the gravel s gates.  
Gloom will fierce about the ghastly late.  
And then my dearest and sweetest Larenuf,

Ours will be a silent, strange romancing,  
My recognition, your resemblance lingering.  
(Enter the two hired men)

I HIRED MAN

Lady, when you are ready we have the car waiting by.

WIDOW

I am ready. Is it the same hour as before?

I HIRED MAN

Later. It will be very late when we reach the  
cemetery.

WIDOW

(moving over to the portrait)  
Very late, Larenuf. Larenuf, linger. my love.  
Come. Quick!

I HIRED MAN

Lady, it's none of my affair, but I - perhaps -

WIDOW

Say, if you please.

I HIRED MAN

We won't complain. I have nothing to say.

WIDOW

I understand you. To you it is only horror.  
It is my yesterday, today, tomorrow.  
You will proceed?

I HIRED MAN

We will.

WIDOW

And if you would rather not afterwards  
I thank you for so far.  
(She leaves and they follow. Stage lights  
dim leaving portrait lit, as music forebodes.  
The stage goes dark.)

#### SCENE IV. VAULT

(In this scene the garments of the Widow may be  
in perpetual agitation throughout. There is a blowing  
of dead leaves about the vault. Enter Widow and hired

men. They advance. Place lamp. Widow holds back.  
Men draw forth coffin. Wait. Widow advances.)

I HIRED MAN

Open it now?

WIDOW

Let me see the ravage of a time. Open it.

(Coffin lid is lifted. Recoil and horror upon  
the faces of the hired men and widow. Larenuf  
appears hideous and broken of face like a cracked  
mask. Widow grasps her throat and looks made  
stone of. For a minute or so they are engrossed  
by the crumbling Larenuf. There is only continu-  
ous and descriptive music.)

(Widow, waving men to leave her)

WIDOW

Leave me.

(Men leave)

Larenuf, we have secreted through the grave's gate.  
And my love, for what? You leave me. A little wait,

How you are dying again! - an image too quickly  
dreamed.

This portrait, Larenuf, is sadly out of frame.  
Ruins shadow across you too serene,  
And out of name!.

On the dust-dulled forehead, a little ghastly quake,  
Skull'd and so horrid is the death that wrecks  
A face bearing yet a trace of my Larenuf.

"Other worlds," "spiritual thresholds," "heavens  
and hells, "

Friends will describe it so. But these things in  
the imaginations  
of men have being.

To me you will have lapsed into nothing!

Crumbled-and wormed the last look of once Larenuf,  
Passing out of the lighted-up into the -- what?

And as such how fragile a thing fondly loving is made,  
Centered upon resemblances and in identities! of shades  
Dying along sun forsaken places that fade.

Where there dwelt a dunness and a fellow light  
That made out of so much of sound and sight  
A man named Larenuf, came the blight,  
And his composition cracks up in a night.

Here's Love my heart of everything and farewell,  
A little remains like you where all of you dwelt.  
I'll come again but may never more hope to tell.

(Widow rises slowly. Exits. Enter hired men)

II HIRED MAN

I never thought of how it was!  
If and when we come again, he'll be trash!

I HIRED MAN

Let's close the thing up.

(Coffin is replaced. Lamp and tools are  
gathered. Hired men leave stage as it dims.)

S C E N E      V

(setting as in Scene I with portrait.  
Lightning and thunder and anger of rain. On  
portrait and stage a light pours. In this scene  
the light that falls upon them is green and hideous.  
The portrait must stand forth.

A stairway is prominently outlined at left  
stage. The Widow descends having over her right  
arm a black mantle and in her left hand the grave -  
yard lamp. She is wearing an evening dress very  
dissipated in character and white. She is deprived  
looking and the bones of her face are bold.

There comes the chiming of a clock. She  
stops upon the stairs.)

WIDOW

Eleven o'clock: the men have not as yet come through  
the wrack

of night with under' d drum.

Rain, dastarded on my husband! He lies, after the  
years,

Bereft of the false-face and so has on  
The true death of man's mien!

Drears and drears of friends funeral away.

Glance of the lightning illumines their way,  
Palling beyond and beyond eternally!

Bowing again and again bowing resignedly  
Through the heath'd faint perfumed array!

There, through the appall of the grave's gate,  
Even as it is, Larenuf, late and too late,  
I will lone about you among the desecrate.

Ah, there are your meaningless bones they save,  
Lying alack and bleak'd and brave.

There through the long of processional trees,  
Throng'd by the tendril'd winds, the thickened  
leaves  
Break open. A white death-mask flees!

(She flings open the panelled door; in  
rushes the wind; her garments are in violent  
agitation. A choir of voices singing faintly  
of ghastriness with a far away tinkling of wind  
chimes, hurriedly passes and is no more  
heard. There is the fall of the thunder.)

Blown, and for that unthawed of the winters,  
Sails of, a ship's forth! I have last seen Larenuf  
Upon aboard, one of burial black and of  
A mist of the undue and Time's enough!

(entering from the terrace furiously, she  
places over her shoulder the mantle of black;  
sieves the lamp  
taking out of a drawer a gun, she places it in  
a little bag; takes lamp and goes over breathes  
upon the candle that remains burning to blow it  
out; pausing between the open panelled doors, the  
ghostly choir with tinkling accompaniment is heard  
again. The Widow hurries out into the thunder and  
the lightning takes all light from the stage leaving  
a sudden gloom in which the thunder growls under  
music)

## SCENE VI VAULT

(Prelude of harsh hurried music. The  
storm commences to rage. The stage is dark,

all but the ornamented gateway of the vault.  
Through it we look out into the lightning and  
thunder and rain of the sodden cemetery.  
Enter two hired men, breathlessly. Conceal  
themselves in vault. Shouting across the grave  
is heard.)

I HIRED MAN

They haven't spotted us.

(Four men, three police officers and an  
inspector, briefly halt in consultation by the  
vault, then scatter in search of hired men.)

II HIRED MAN

How'd they catch on to our racket?

I HIRED MAN

We've had police troubles before, buddy. We  
must've been seen  
or suspected at one time or another: that last  
haul we made, I  
guess. Don't forget that candy-shop job. I  
was arrested on  
suspicion, they said. They brought me here  
straight off. I  
could've dropped dead when I saw you. What  
was you here for?

II HIRED MAN

I come here thinkin' you was here. She said  
this was the last  
night You hadn't called, and then I remembered  
the money. I  
had no idea -

I HIRED MAN

I think we're safe.

II HIRED MAN

What about the lady?

I HIRED MAN

We didn't pick her up, did we? She ain't comin'.  
Besides; it's way late. Get back.

(Policeman and Inspector reappear)

INSPECTOR

They seem to have slipped us. I see a light in  
the caretaker's  
house. Come on.

I HIRED MAN  
Now we can make the break.

(They approach the gate. They open it.)

Hold back! Somethin's coming!

(Hired men hide themselves again)

II HIRED MAN  
Look! Say - !

I HIRED MAN  
Of all th - !

II HIRED MAN  
It's the mad lady!

(The Widow approaches. Upon her coming  
the music assumes a dreadful character, horrifying  
up out of the deep. The Widow comes, opens the  
ornamented gate, pauses for a moment on the  
threshold.

them upon the huddled form of Widow  
the blood upon her face and her contorted  
position make her hideous. Enter caretaker  
with lamp. Inspector examines her.)

INSPECTOR  
Dead.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

With the production of these two works, Mr. Atkins began a series of original experiments for poems as dramas. They were unique on the current American literary scene at the time of their appearance and were in some ways antedate

*The Abortionist* was not designed as a comment, pro or con, relating to abortion, but it is, as is its relative *The Corpse*, an object poem in play form to be set to music.

Casper LeRoy Jordan  
Editor, Free Lance  
March 1963

The foregoing drama-poems have not sought to effect "strong characterization" or the usual "insights" into "human behavior", since these were incompatible with the experimentation.

R. A.