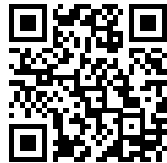

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IN ONE ACT.

BY AUTODICUS.

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CHARACTERS OF THE DRAMA.

RUBETA.

ASTER.

UNIO.

ÆRANOVA.

SPUTASENNO.

VOLPONE.

MELINDRERA.

ALETHE.

JUGLARESA.

*The place of Action is at Manhattan ; the time, such as
would be taken up in the representation of the drama.*

THE CRITIQUE

OF

THE VISION OF RUBETA.

SCENE I.

A Room in the House of Melindrera.

MELINDRERA. ALETHE.

MEL. Take it away! Don't let me see it! Take it away!

AL. But, my dear Aunt —

MEL. Take it away, Alethe! Don't you hear me? Take it away! I would as soon see a man in my bed-chamber, or a tom-cat, or a male rabbit. Why, my dear, will you make me speak so often, when you know so well the extreme sensitiveness of my delicacy?

AL. But, my dear Aunt, if you would but consider a little, and put on your glasses —

MEL. And, my dear niece, if you would but consider, yourself, a good deal, and use your natural vision, you would see, and reflect, how improper it is for so young a lady, — though there are but fifteen years between us —

AL. Twenty, Aunt, and six months.

MEL. Well then, six months. You are so very exact in dates! I believe you do nothing but read your grandmother's Bible just midway between the Old and New Testaments. You would know, I say, Alethe, that it is highly improper, in

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so young a woman, to speak in commendation of such a book. Why, niece, when I was of your age, a few years ago, I never presumed to open a book, written by a man, till I had consulted the rector —

AL. Who put into your hands *Tom Jones*. Ha! ha! — But do not be angry, Aunt. I know very well that *Tom Jones*, *Peregrine Pickle*, and all that sort of books, are thought very decent, by the very men who censure the coarseness of the *Vision*: and doubtless there is something in that. Have you ever read the *Vision*?

MEL. Read it? Read it, indeed! What do you take me for? Read the *Vision of Rubeta*? Hand me my salts! Read the *Vision of Rubeta*? Why don't you ask me if I am yet a maid? Read the *Vision of Rubeta*? I would not even touch the filthy compound of indecency, stupidity, ribaldry, blasphemy, and — and — and blasphemy. Read the *Vision of Rubeta*? Is my name *Melindrera*? Reach me my salts!

AL. But if you have not read it, Aunt, how do you know it is indecent, and stupid, and ribald, and blasphemous?

MEL. The press says so.

AL. What press?

MEL. Child, you worry me. The press, — the daily press.

AL. And know you not that the creatures of the daily press are the chief themes of the satirist, — “shown no quarter,” as my husband says; their venality, their falsehood, their ignorance, their hypocrisy, their licentiousness, their effrontery, all exposed, and set in the most glaring colors? They would be more honest in criticism than they are in politics, if they did indeed speak well of it. But let me undo the parcel. I have brought the book for your sole amusement. 'T is the town-talk; everybody reads it.

MEL. But I am not everybody ; and you know that I never — Don't open it ! I shall faint if you do, Alethe ; I will never forgive you.

AL. But, Aunt, you should at least be able to say you have seen it. It is quite the rage now ; and everybody of any fashion is expected to know something about it. Let me show you the cover. There ; there is no harm in the cover, you know.

MEL. Good Heaven ! is the child mad ? Alethe ! you are ruined. Look there. Why, there is a naked man on the back ! Shame to my eyes, that I should ever have looked upon it. I — I — shall go into hysterics. Take it away ! take him away ! A naked man !

AL. A naked man ? why, Aunt, this is Thalia, — the comic muse.

MEL. And, if she were all the Nine, what need has she to be exposed in that immodest manner ? I am now convinced ; I am sure the book must be indecent and blasphemous, or it would never have a naked woman on the cover.

AL. But, Aunt, this is only demi-nude. It is merely her upper parts, as you see, that are exposed.

MEL. And what right have her upper parts to be exposed ? Alethe, you talk indecently ; you are corrupted, yourself, by this wicked book.

AL. Do, dear Aunt, let me explain the figure, and you will see that it is all very proper. But first, observe, on the other side, this mask of a satyr. That explains itself.

MEL. It does ; indeed, with a vengeance. Why, Alethe, are you distracted ? here are horns on his head. You, a married woman, and — horns on his head ! Take it away. I never saw so wicked a book in my life. Naked women, and — horns ! This is downright profanity.

AL. Why, Aunt, they are the horns of a satyr. My husband explained it to me all.

MEL. Your husband 's a fool. He will tell you next, I suppose, that horns are elegant ornaments, and beg you to get him a pair. Naked women, and horns on his head! And I do not believe that it is a woman, after all. Let me look at the abomination. Monstrous! it has no bosom. A man! a naked man! a man with a stick and pudding in his hand. Burn the filth. Give it to me. As I am a maid, it shall no longer pollute my parlour.

AL. Indeed, Aunt, you must pardon me. My husband would rather you should burn any book in his library.

MEL. Child, how can you be so incorrigible? Your husband is ruining you. Ah, had you, like me, chosen to lead the pure and holy life of a maiden! Your husband corrupts you, niece. His library! Why, the man reads Pope, and Dryden, and Don Juan. The Vision is fit for him.

AL. Well, Aunt, I see I need not try any longer to convince you. I was going to show that this *stick* and *pudding* are the pastoral crook and the comic mask, emblematical of the origin of comedy and of the character of the muse; but —

MEL. Put it up, for Heaven's sake; the bell rings.

AL. And what then, Aunt? I am not ashamed of it; and I cannot consent to hide any book I dare to read. If you please, I will take it home; but — it is too late. Unio!

UNIO *enters.*

UN. My dear Miss Melindrera! Ah, Madam, you too? I am doubly happy.

MEL. Pray be seated, Mr. Unio. When did you leave Boston, Sir?

UN. Yesterday afternoon. I have been in your town only a few hours ; and my first visit is paid, as in duty bound, to one of my oldest friends —

MEL. (The savage ! I never saw him look so ugly.)

UN. — where I am happy to find more than I expected. And how have you been, Miss Melindrera ? Well ? Well, that 's well. But delicate as ever, I suppose. And you, Madam ? And my friend, your husband, is he as hearty as ever ? Eh ! you have *Rubeta* here ! Well, the pleasure is now triple. This is a newer friend than either of you, ladies ; but, — forgive me the ungallant speech, — his face is scarcely less welcome.

MEL. *His* face ? There, Alethe ! did I not tell you ? my niece has been endeavouring to persuade me, Sir, that it is a woman !

UN. What woman ? Where, Miss Melindrera ?

MEL. On the cover. I am astonished, Sir, that you and others can have so depraved a taste.

UN. Taste in what, Madam ? in relishing this book ? in liking *Rubeta* ? Upon my soul, and as I am a Christian, I think it the best satire in modern times. The fact cannot be disputed.

AL. Thank you, Mr. Unio. Aunt looks horror-struck. We were just discussing the matter ; or rather, I was endeavouring to persuade Aunt to consult her own reason, and judge for herself. I am happy to have found so able an auxiliary. Do convince her how wrong she is to take for guide the falsehood of its enemies, whose reputation depends on the suppression of the book.

UN. With the greatest pleasure in the world. And I think I could do it very easily, recollecting, as I must, that your Aunt is a person particularly well disposed to listen to reason.

But I saw my old acquaintances, Aster and Æranova, this morning, who both mentioned they should be here about this time. Had we not better wait to speak of it till they come? Out of a diversity of opinions we may gather the truth.

MEL. A plagiarism from Solomon. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety." Proverbs, eleventh chapter, fifteenth verse.

AL. (That has put my Aunt into a good humor. You can now bring her to reason.)

UN. Well, Madam, shall we have liberty to discuss this subject when our friends come in? For I do assure you, that, good or bad, the work is unique in America, and therefore deserving of examination.

MEL. Very well, Sir; provided you are not too free, I can have no objection. But I do abhor indelicacy. Till these gentlemen come, and others too, whom I expect, and whom you little look for, we will talk of more domestic matters.

SCENE II.

A Street.

ASTER. ÆRANOVA.

AST. Well overtaken, my worthy enemy. Though we bear arms in politics, we have none in social encounters.

ÆRA. Except to join together; as, for example.

AST. Well said, ÆEra. I see the poet was in his senses, when he bade Rubeta

Leave "pleasantry to him that clomb the moon."

ÆRA. Not more so, than when he bade

Aster, "who 's sense, play critic once a week."

And you acted on the suggestion. You made him a handsome return for his courtesy, barring some thrusts, which, between ourselves, Aster, you must allow were hardly fair.

AST. Why, what the devil could I do, man? The book is indecent, you must allow.

ÆRA. Psha, you 're joking.

AST. May I die of leanness, if I be.

ÆRA. What! more indecent, — if you must use the word, — than any other satire, of any note, before it?

AST. A thousand times. Pope is a fool to our poet in nastiness; and as for Gifford, and Byron, they, you know, have nothing in them whatever, that chastity revolts at.

ÆRA. But a devilish deal that immodesty would embrace. Come, come, Aster; you have not lately been reading either, or your edition wants gender sadly. Gifford has ten coarse expressions for our poet's one. I will instance but two phrases: — "Stinks in the nose of all succeeding times"; and, "Sponge on dirty wh— for dirty bread." You will find no such vulgarity, of sentiment or language, in the poet of Rubeta. On the contrary, I would engage, for any wager, to prove to you that he has not a dozen words — *words* even — of his own choice, in all the matter of his large volume, that can be rejected as coarse or indelicate. And when you come to look again at Gifford's virulent attack on Peter Pindar, you will acknowledge that the two cannot be compared in this question. Gifford always reminds you of his primitive profession; the author of Rubeta can never, I think, be found less than the gentleman.

AST. Well, we will give up that point; for, I confess, I have not read Gifford these twenty years. But what say you to Byron?

ÆRA. Byron cannot at all come into the comparison, —

and, by the by, I should have said the same of Gifford, — for this reason : Byron, in his *Bards*, is a mere satirist, a satirist such as we mean, when we speak of Juvenal and of Persius ; the author of *Rubeta* is, — and you read it on his title-page, — a writer of the burlesque epic, which calls for humor, and *will*, from its very nature, verge at times on indelicacy. Take our poet, where he may be compared with Byron, in the latter half of the fourth Canto for instance. There he is merely the satirist ; and there, if you find him any more gross, nay, if not less so, than even Byron himself, I will eat him, his book I mean, to-morrow.

AST. But what say you to Pope ?

ÆRA. Worse and worse, my dear fellow. Pope is absolutely outrageous. What ! do you recollect the squirting match, Eliza's cates, Jove's double seats, and all the other odious and beastly impurities of that still inimitable poem, — impurities, which required, as Pope himself acknowledged by intimation, all their author's exquisite skill, to render them at all tolerable, — do you recollect *these*, and pretend to say that Pope has not a tittle of the indecencies of *Rubeta* ? You should have reversed the position, and said, that, though occasionally *broad*, — there is the word, my dear Sir, — our author has not a tittle of the indecency of Pope ; and had you added, of any other author in his line, saving Boileau, you would have said but justice. No, Aster ; as immeasurably beneath Pope, as our author is in satire, — and who is not ? — so immeasurably is he above him in decency. He is, for an equal number of lines, and in a parallel style, not coarser than Byron, nor so coarse as Gifford, while he is far before both these poets as a satirist. But I am out of breath.

AST. And argument too, perhaps. But there is Sputaseno ahead of us, gazing with his mouth open, at Colman's window. Did you read his stuff ?

ÆRA. Sure ; I never saw a poor devil so outwit himself. What ! did he think the people would not see through so shallow a falsehood as that ? Egad ! they looked it through directly, and saw his bottom — gravelled.

AST. Ha, ha, ha ! Do you know the cause of his abuse of the Vision ?

ÆRA. I suppose, because he had not a place in it, among people of more character.

AST. Out, entirely. Guess again.

ÆRA. Well then, his partner and chief, the Colonel of the big sheet and little matter, might have taken the author's queer compliment to his elocution as irony ; for, you know, the poor Colonel has a voice that runs the middle scale between the semitones of a virgin of seventy and the notes of a starved kitten.

AST. That is better. But you are out entirely. Guess again.

ÆRA. Let me see. Hum ! I have it. His brother Epes is present editor of the *Mirror* ; and I suppose the little man's exacerbation was a sacrifice of honesty on the altar of fraternal affection.

AST. Bravo ! But you are only parcel-right. Did you never hear of a certain thing, yclept a tragedy, which is now under press by certain printers and publishers, whom the satirist has described as "gatherers of garbage" ?

ÆRA. Eh ! I begin to wake. *I see land*, as the Greek said.

AST. Yes, Johnny's brother has himself a tragedy in type, — God help the press ! and John's rage, to find Willis allowed what is his due, and passages cited from the latter of a character to which Epes's hobbling muse could never hope to aspire, may be easily imagined ; for the little creature is as spiteful as it is silly. We called it *pricked sweetmeats*, when we were at school.

ÆRA. Ha, ha, ha! Some more of that.

AST. I must *climb the moon*, first. But, to talk soberly. You recollect, that in the note to this passage, if I repeat it rightly, —

“ Much did he laud *Theresa's* tragic lay,
 Much too John Bailey's buskins of a day,
 Yet had no word of grace for Willis' play;
 Not for *Bianca*! though her baldest line
 Were, for such brows, a wreath almost divine,” —

the satirist tells us, that some anonymous scribbler had been suffered maliciously to defame Willis in the journal of Petronius, without receiving correction from the latter. Now, this piece was signed “ S.,” if I recollect rightly, and I have little doubt that it was written by John Spūtasenno.

ÆRA. By all that 's malignant, this is too good. Why, the dirty wretch! I had little idea of what was in the wind, but amused myself simply with the downright absurdity of calling the Vision *stupid*, and warning everybody *not to buy it*; a caution which did more to sell the poem than even your own critique; and when, the other day, I read in his journal that egregious falsehood, in a maliciously garbled extract from the Boston Daily Advertiser, stating that the publishers were to derive no profit from the book, — as if any man would publish, even for his own brother, without a view to personal benefit, especially such a book, — I thought the ridiculous and mean were at their highest, or lowest, whichever you please; but this beats any thing of the kind I have ever heard.

AST. 'T is true, nevertheless. But here he comes, close upon us. How amiable he looks!

ÆRA. Like a lobster with a plug in his claw.

AST. Or a school-girl eating pickles.

ÆRA. Or an ape fed on mustard.

AST. Or a pie-woman caught in a shower.

SPUTASENNO *comes up.*

ÆRA. We have been watching thee approaching, thou glorious defender of insulted delicacy ! Welcome to our arms.

SPUT. Why, what the devil is the meaning of all this ? Why do you address me in that fustian, Æra ? and you, Aster, what are you taking snuff so fast for ?

AST. I was thinking of your attack upon the Vision. We had been talking of it, and we were agreed, that a more ingenious and ingenuous thing had never been written. Wiley sold ten copies of the poem on the mere strength of it. Ha, ha, ha !

ÆRA. Ha, ha, ha !

SPUT. You are merry, gentlemen.

ÆRA. How can we help being so, my dear little acidity ? You look, for all the world, like a pot of *pricked sweetmeats*, put in the sun to ferment. Ha, ha, ha !

AST. Ha, ha, ha ! Don't get frothy, man,* or you 'll foam over. Come, come, my dear fellow, you must not pass us in that mood. We are going to the old prude's yonder, — at least I am. Turn about and walk with us, and we will talk you into better humor.

ÆRA. (Better leave him as he is ; he will suit her exactly.)

SPUT. I am engaged to go there myself. I will meet you in half an hour ; when I hope, gentlemen, you will be more civil.

ÆRA. Not a whit. Why, my little man, we are only merry. Come with us now ; and before you shall have taken the few steps we have yet to go, we will convince you we are your best friends.

* Clapping him on the back.

SPUT. Well, Sir, here I am to the right about. Let us hear your argument.

ÆRA. It is interrogatory. How could you insert such an abominable untruth as that in your paper ?

SPUT. What ?

AST. Don't affect ignorance. About the *Vision*.

SPUT. It was none. I think it the stupidest book I ever read —

ÆRA. — that you did not understand. Look you, John ; the least said about that, the soonest mended. You may as well attempt to kill Hydra, as to harm one of the thousand heads of the *Vision* ; and, as you are no Hercules, nor yet an Iolas, you stand a famous chance of bruising your own toes, or burning your fingers. Here 's the prude's : let us in.

SPUT. Stop one moment, gentlemen. How does it happen, that neither of you, with the high opinion you affect to entertain of this book, has entered upon its defence, but each has rested contented with once extolling it ? Surely, when you have been both so generously treated, it is little you can do to vindicate its author from *our* scurrility.

ÆRA. I will answer that question. The fact is, Sputa, that Aster and I are neither of us desirous of seeing the book succeed any more than yourself : it exposes too much of the dirtiness of our craft for us not to suppress it, if we can. But, though we are willing to see others tell lies about it, we do not choose to publish them ourselves. And that is the difference between us.

SPUT. Then you are the worst of the two parties ; for you are false friends, and we are open enemies.

ÆRA. Such as Indians are.

AST. We are much of one color I am afraid. Let us ring.

SCENE III.

“*The Bower on College-green.*” *

RUBETA. VOLPONE.

RUB. Well, Volp, you ’ll not forget ? you ’ll take the blame yourself, if anybody should suspect me ?

VOLP. Be sure I will. But who will suspect you ? Only give it some flaming signature, and the article will take readily.

RUB. What shall it be ? eh, my little Pony ? Let me see. Hum ! *One of the attacked.*

VOLP. Bah, man ! that will betray you at once. You must affect some disinterested motive, — if there be such a thing in creation. Call it — *Pro Bono Publico.*

RUB. The very thing. Ah ! Eh ! My dear Volp ! my lovely Volpone ! I ’ll put it down directly. People are so easily gulled by any professions of zeal in their service, they ’ll take it all for Gospel. I ’ve done it a thousand times. *Pro Bono Publico.* There it is, Volpy !

VOLP. Yes, that looks honest and generous. (The fool ! they will scent it at once.) Now let us hear the piece. “Read it,” as my lord Ogleby says, “read it, *Ruby*, with good emphasis and good discretion.”

RUB. “To the Editors of the Commercial Advertiser. Gentlemen” —

VOLP. What a libel ! No matter. Go on.

* Rubeta’s dwelling, so called in the “Vision,” where the hero, in his farewell to the sisters, speaks thus : —

“Ah ! might the soul unbar her cage at will,
Then should his spirit mingle with you still,
Despised for you the bower on College-green,
Couch in your laps, and doze with you unseen.” p. 177.

RUB. — “Gentlemen — Hem ! — I had just finished the reading of ‘Rubeta,’ the satirical poem of which you speak in last evening’s paper, and I honor your judgment in relation to the book and its author.”

VOLP. Capital ! (The ass !)

RUB. “It is throughout a vulgar, obscene, and profane exhibition of malignity, which can inspire no other sentiment than loathing and disgust in the minds of all men of any pretensions to character or decency.”

VOLP. Good ! that the poet will feel (as I do). It’s a great lie —

RUB. True, on my salvation.

VOLP. Stick to it, Rub ;

“Be the same hypocrite thou still hast been,
And match the Devil himself in pious sin !”

RUB. Sir ! Mr. Volpone ! you don’t mean to insult me, by quoting that villanous ribaldry against me ?

VOLP. Not at all, man ; but why do you think to impose upon me ? Let us be fair. You know you were lying — I mean, exaggerating ; you know you were, Ruby.

RUB. Exaggerating, exaggerating, if you please, Pony, — exaggerating — then, Volpo. That is only a play of the fancy, you know ; a — a — a play of the fancy. I never lie, — except in bed. He, he ! that’s a good one. Why don’t you laugh ?

VOLP. “I never lie” — anywhere. But go on with your stuff.

RUB. “As you and your paper constitute the theme of the venom” —

VOLP. Theme of what ?

RUB. Theme of the venom : the — er — er — the thing that the toad spits at.

VOLP. Go on.

RUB. — “the theme of the venom of this nameless toad” —

VOLP. *Toad*. Stop there ! that is elegant ; that will take ; that 's worth a dollar : *Toad*. At him again.

RUB. “I am glad that you exhibit the contempt which self-respect inspires” —

VOLP. What ?

RUB. “The contempt which self-respect inspires.”

VOLP. Oh, I see ! Quite a novel idea. Proceed.

RUB. “By promptly treating the author with merited scorn.”

VOLP. (A curious way to show contempt, by railing like a fishwoman ! This will be rare sport to the poet, — and to the public, or I mistake.)

RUB. Why are you silent ?

VOLP. I was praising you internally. But go on.

RUB. “But apart from the outrage upon decency and public morals, inflicted by such a compound of filthy and blasphemous language” —

VOLP. Stop there. Ha, ha ! that is too good. Shut it up ; I will hear no more after that. “*Blasphemous language !*” This will serve your point (if ridicule and public scorn are the object).

RUB. Surely, it will. That *blasphemy* is a great weapon. I have stabbed half a dozen with it already.

VOLP. (Yes, I remember that to your sorrow, though you have forgotten it.)

RUB. Nothing goes down so well with our religious community. Let them only hear that *that* is in a book, and they will shun it as they would Satan. *Filthy and blasphemous*. I think that will do, myself. It will damn, — Heaven and

Dr. Spring forgive me for using the word! — the author completely.

VOLP. You say well; it will damn its author completely, (and in more worlds than one, or I have not read my Bible rightly.) But, how can you tell such a — fable, Rub? Why, you know, my old lad of the Vision, there is no blasphemy in the book whatever, save your own, which is quoted for reprobation, in the notes.

RUB. What of that! I have as good a right to accuse him of it, as he has me. *Tit for tat*, you know.

VOLP. (Vulgar beast!) Yes; and, no doubt, it will fret him amazingly.

RUB. Sure.* He 'll sweat like a horse.

VOLP. (If he be fat enough, and laughter will make him do it.) Good bye. Are you for Melindrera's?

RUB. Yes, — will join you there in a minute. I stay only to touch this piece off a little more. *Pro Bono Publico*: is n't that good?

VOLP. Be sure you put in plenty of lies.

RUB. Sir?

VOLP. Oh, I was only joking. And hark you, Rub, † it would be well, if you were to prefix a few remarks of your own to your own piece, saying that you only “yield to the urgent solicitations of the writer,” etc.

RUB. I will! I will! Capital! that will make it complete.

VOLP. (And you the laughing-stock of the whole city.) Good bye, till I see you at the prude's.

RUBETA *alone*.

RUB. That Volp's a good creature. He no more remem-

* Rubbing his hands in great glee.

† Looking back, as he is about to close the door of the room.

bers the basting I gave his silly poem, than if it had been written a hundred years ago instead of ten. *Urgent solicitation!* Excellent thought. Let me see. Hum!* — There, that will do; that *must* do. *Ut vium veniam, aut facias*: I will either find a way or make one, as Pindar says: for if that rascally poem,— why was it not mere rhyme! — should succeed, *Rubeta's occupation's gone*. I dare not hang myself, nor cut my throat, nor swallow arsenic, nor have I the courage to pistol the author; and I should pine with shame were it to live. I have not been able to sleep soundly since it was published.

RUBETA *has turned his face to the fire and back to the door. Enters JUGLARESA, softly, and stands behind him.*

RUB. It is the most brilliant production, — curses on it! — that has appeared in America, — beyond a doubt. Everybody of sense says so. But it cannot live against our power; ours, who tread on the neck of kings? Impossible! it cannot, it shall not live! If I perjure my soul ten times over, it shall not live!

JUG. “*Thy name shall live, while towers the Hôtel Dieu!*”

RUB.† Who 's that? Out, Mephibosheth! — Mephistophiles, I mean.

JUG. Not quite so bad as that; only the “diffident” Juglaresa, and your humble servant.

RUB. Out, woman! I know you not. Who let you in?

JUG. Come, come, Colonel, no more foolery; we had too much of it together in Providence.

* Writing.

† Turning round, and seeing her.

RUB. What! "does the devil speak truth"? Did you indeed deceive me?

JUG. Be sure I did, and should be happy to do it again, only our time 's up. The Vision has dished us both.

RUB. And you have come here to insult me. Get out of my den — out of my house, I mean.

JUG. Your "piggery" and "snuggery"? Ha, ha! Do let me congratulate you. I have come on purpose.

RUB. Impudent trollop! Get out. Congratulate me?

JUG. Yes, on the ruin of your reputation. You are known through all the States, by this time, as a fool, and — very apochryphal.

RUB. Get out! I 'll raise the house.

JUG. Colonel! you 're damned.

RUB. Out, vixen! Or let me out.

JUG. Neither.* Colonel, you 're damned.

RUB. What do you mean, woman? You would not keep me here? (How her eyes glare!) You are mad — you 're — you 're — would you ravish me?

JUG. The Lord forbid!

RUB. Let me out, then. Do let me out, won't you? My dear, nice, modest little Juglaresa, do let me out, and I 'll somnambulize you as much as you please.

JUG. The Lord forbid that too!

RUB. (My God! she 'll eat me up. What shall I do?) Will nothing move you? I 'll raise the house, then; I will. Let me out.*

JUG. Colonel! you 're damned.

* Placing her back against the door.

† Seizing her arm, and struggling with her.

RUB. Rape ! murder ! fire ! rape !

He struggles with her. JUGLARESA suddenly slips from him, trips up his heels, and, as he falls on his back, opens the door, and escapes.

JUG. Colonel ! you 're damned.

RUBETA *alone.*

RUB. You lie, you young hag ! Rape ! murder ! stop thief ! I must help myself up, I see. So much for having my den built apart. No matter ; my pantaloons are not torn ; and I 'll take care that mad woman makes no more attempts upon my person ; I will buy one of Hannington's big dogs to-morrow. How strong the vixen was ! she were pretty though, if she did not grin so. What a lie I told about her modesty ! Bless me ! we shall be late at Melindrera's.

He brushes his clothes, adjusts them, and, putting on his hat, leaves the room. His voice, for the rest of the scene, is heard without.

RUB. Ah ! you are come, my dear ! just as you were near losing me for ever. I am going to Melindrera's. If any particular message should come for me, you know where to send. Good bye, my love.

A voice is heard to answer.

Good bye. Take care of yourself, my dear. Button up your coat. Had you not better take your cane ?

RUB. Curse the cane ! Heaven and Dr. Spring forgive me !

SCENE IV.

The parlour in Melindrera's house.

MELINDRERA. ALETHE. UNIO. ASTER. ÆRANOVA.
SPUTASENNO.

MEL. Oh, gentlemen! four against two are too great odds. You and my niece have had it all to yourselves. Wait till Volpone and Rubeta come, and you will no longer boast of victory.

AL. Rubeta? Dear Aunt! Do you expect him here? What pleasure!

MEL. Yes, and I assure you that the mere sight of him will convince you you are wrong, and that the book is slanderous.

AL. The mere sight of him? Why, Aunt, not even his friends, I am told, can deny that his portrait in the illustrations is one of the best likenesses ever given of a distinguished person.

MEL. You talk nonsense, Alethe. What should I know of the illustrations? which, no doubt, are as indelicate as the book itself. I mean, that in the very physiognomy of Rubeta you will read such strong good sense, such genuine humor, such manly honesty, and such dignity of temper, that you will see at once a refutation of your poet's calumnies.

AL. Why, my dear Aunt, all those qualities are depicted with a cunning hand in the lithographs; are they not, Mr. Aster? But who is this?

VOLPONE *enters.*

MEL. Ah, Mr. Volpone! Most happy to see you. My niece, — Mr. Volpone. Do not stay to pay compliments,

Mr. Volpone. Convince this lady, and these very obstinate gentlemen, whom I see you know, that the Vision of Rubeta is the paltriest trash that ever was put between boards.

VOLP. Madam, there is no need of conviction at all. You have only to look at my copy. It broke in the back by merely falling out of a third story window to a rough pavement. It is a positive fact.

MEL. Dear me, you are so pleasant, Mr. Volpone! But seriously?

VOLP. Seriously then, Miss Melindrera, I think with my friend here, Sputasenko, it is the most *unredeemably stupid* stuff—

AST. — you never read, Sir. Confess, Sir, how much did you read of it?

VOLP. Like my friend here, Sputasenko, as much — as I could “gather from a very cursory examination”: for who needs to read a page of such a book to see all its folly?

SPUT. Just so. And any line will show its indecency.

MEL. Gentlemen, I honor your decision. It is the only way that books should be judged of. For what right have people to expect, that you should disturb your quiet intellects, and consume your precious time, to explore ten pages, when you can get the whole pith of a book in any one? Not to say, that the very first mention one sees of shoes and stockings, and other parts, still more objectionable, of wearing apparel, should induce him, if a modest person, to lay the volume down at once, as shockingly indelicate.

AST. Certainly, madam, I am entirely of your opinion. I remember hearing of a virtuous lady, who always shut her eyes when she tied her own garters.

MEL. Oh for shame, Mr. Aster! I vow, you are too rude; you are, indeed. Althe, love, that fire-screen.

AST. I beg pardon. But will you permit me to ask Mr. Volpone, or this gentleman, to read us the part they find particularly stupid ?

MEL. But not indelicate, for Heaven's sake ! I have been too good-natured already, in allowing the book to lie on my table. Stupid, but not indelicate ; not indelicate, remember ! Alethe, untie the ribands of my cap.

SPUT. That condition, Mr. Aster, will render it impossible to comply ; for I know no part in the book that is not intolerably obscene. I only saw the plate where the rat figures, and *there* was an object in the corner—an object—I would not mention it for worlds ! but—an object—it had a handle—an object—

MEL. Oh heavens !—What a horrid impiety !

VOLP. Yes, madam, perfectly *blasphemous*, as my friend Rubeta says. (What asses !)

AL. Well, Aunt, as I have looked a little further than these two gentlemen, suppose you trust to my discretion, and permit me to read a passage which shall be neither indecent, nor blasphemous, nor stupid—

MEL. Not for worlds ! you are married. Close the book. Not for worlds ! Your husband has ruined you. Close the book,—the indecent, ribald, impious—Hand me my salts, dear Alethe.

VOLP. Gentlemen, I am so seriously of Miss Melindrera's opinion, that, if the book be opened again, I shall incontinently vanish, I shall indeed.

MEL. I thank you, dear Mr. Volpone ; you are always delicate and clear-minded. Mr. Volpone, you may hold this screen. Use it as a fan, if you please. I am so heated. Alethe, my salts again.

AL. Who is this, Aunt ?

MEL. Ah, Colonel Rubeta !

RUBETA enters.

AST. (The hero himself! He looks frightened.)

ÆRA. (As in the print, where the *Devil* gallops over him.)

MEL. Walk in, Colonel. What is the matter, Sir? you look disturbed.

RUB. I thought, madam, that young lady was — was — a —

MEL. My niece, Sir. Colonel Rubeta; the first name in Manhattan!

RUB. Oh yes — I see — your niece — very well — I thought — Yes, madam. Hope your ladyship is well — I hope, Miss Niece, you are well.

AL. Thank you, Uncle, perfectly so.

MEL. Alethe, you forget yourself. Be seated, Colonel. We have been expecting you. There, now you are cooler, and composed. There, Alethe; I told you, you would find in this great man's very face a refutation of that shameless book.

RUB. What book? Eh! you have the Vision there! * Good night, madam; I'll go out.

MEL. By no means, Sir, we are equally divided. My niece and those three gentlemen are indeed against you; but Mr. Sputasenko, Mr. Volpone, and myself, are for you; and you are yourself a host.

ÆRA. (So Caution said of him to his mama: —

————— "Is not thy son a host?
Not more thine own, than Levity's proud boast.")

RUB. Well, madam, since you are so pleased. I see Mr. Aster here. He has paid more incense to the would-be satirist, than any other, save that gentleman — Mr. Unio, of Boston, I think. Mr. Aster, will you please prove, if you can, what you said of him?

AST. Faith, Sir, I said so much, it would take me till mid-

* Springing up, and oversetting his chair.

night. I proved, I think, before you came, that the book is the best satire in modern times. Mr. Unio thinks the same. Æranova does not find it indelicate. What would you have ?

RUB. Not indelicate, Mr. Æranova ?

ÆRA. Not more so, Sir, than any other satire of equal compass.

RUB. But do you deny it is personal ?

UN. He will hardly deny that, Sir ; for it is its very essence, and chief excellence.

RUB. Sir ! Mr. Unio !

UN. Ay, I talk intelligibly, I hope. What we look for in a satirical poem, is sprightliness and vigor. How are these to be gained ? Not by dwelling on abstract vices or follies. I will be bound to say, that this has never been the method with any satirist of any note. Though the names of the characters may have been suppressed, or others substituted, yet the characters themselves, in all their individuality, were constantly before the mind of the poet. His figures were chalked according to their model, and, when he filled up the outlines, the colors on his easel were chosen and mixed to correspond with the complexion he copied. To add names to the portraits, that is, to give specification to the characters, is but to follow out the *Old Comedy*, which presented the objects of its mockery under their proper designations, and in their proper guise. Was this licentious ? Then is Boileau licentious ; then are Pope, Byron, Gifford, intolerable. The very best satires, in every age, are, from Juvenal down, those which abound the most in personalities ; and it is worse than affectation, it is mere hypocrisy, to censure the very act which gives us the most pleasure ; the more so, when it is the very act we should all imitate, had we the courage to dare, and the wit to perform it. Out upon such prudery ! nor, if we have to name “ damnation ” —

MEL. Mr. Unio ! I vow, Sir, — you shock me ; you do indeed ! Fan me, dear Mr. Volpone.

UN. I beg pardon. — Nor, if we have to speak of such a thing, let us *mollify it with a phrase*.

MEL. I hope you will, Sir, always nullify it in my presence. I do abhor indelicacy ! You may come nearer, Mr. Volpone.

UN. Well, madam. I will end my argument. — Provided the characters of the satirist be lawful game, let him place them before his mental vision in a bodily shape ; and, if that shape be an object of dislike, contempt, or hatred, so much the better.

RUB. Enough, enough. You confuse my head so much with your argument, — of which I cannot make out any sense, — that I will give it up, for the sake of quiet.

UN. You are exceedingly considerate, Sir.

VOLF. (To himself.)

RUB. I always am. But how will you defend the indecency ?

UN. By flatly denying that it exists.

RUB. How ? Then is Mr. Aster guilty of falsehood.

UN. Not necessarily so. But he will excuse me, if I tell him, he is guilty of misrepresentation. He probably spoke from his knowledge of the book, which could not have been complete. I, who have read it over, text and comment, twice, say without hesitation, that I know of no burlesque epic poem, save the Battle of the Frogs and Mice, which has less. No, Sir, not the Rape of the Lock, nor Boileau's Lutrín, themselves, in proportion to their extent. The Rape of the Lock, notwithstanding its subject, and though addressed to a lady, has two or three quite obscene allusions and double meanings, — I speak according to your own notions, observe ; I am not so

fastidious ; — and the chaste Boileau, when he comes to the wig-dresser's wife, cannot spare his merriment, but indulges in a dialogue which, it is a wonder, does not shock certain pure readers. Our author has freedoms in his text, but only such as are allowable in a work of satire and of humor ; and all the indecency in his notes happens to be extracts from your papers. The very passage for which I honor him — Here, I must turn to it. Here it is, — page 379 : — “ I hope,” he says, speaking of certain advertisements, “ I hope that this pains will not be altogether ineffectual, but that the sense of the community, awakened to the beastliness of these editors, will compel them *all* to reject for ever such indecent notices, which disseminate corruption *more widely than any other cause I know of.*” It is this very passage which has enraged all of you, and it is for this, and others like it, that I honor him, and wish his book success.

AL. Thank you, thank you, Mr. Unio ; for I feel your vindication of the *Vision* as a compliment to myself. Thank you ; and pray go on.

UN. I have nothing to add, Madam ; nothing, but what is as well known to these gentlemen as it is to ourselves ; nothing, except that the calumnies of its enemies can never crush the *Vision*, as the timidity of its friends has not retarded its success. When it shall have circulated a little longer, and two or three editions effaced certain marks of carelessness and haste in its composition, the whole United States will be proud to honor an effort which certainly is in itself no little glory, and be happy that, as Greece boasts of her mock-heroic poem, Italy of her two, France of hers, and England of hers, so America may lay claim to a like distinction. But what is all this ? Eh ? can it be possible ? *La Somnambula!*

JUGLARESA enters.

RUB. Impudent creature ! How — how dare you follow me into this place ?

MEL. What do you want, young woman ? Who are you ?

RUB. Turn her out !

AST. No, no ! I pray, don't. Let her deliver herself.

ÆRA. For Heaven's sake, not in this company !

VOLP. It may be Mary Monk ! Who may tell the consequences ? Think of "Holland's Countess."*

UN. Poh, poh ! gentlemen, how you jest ! It is only the somnambulist.

AL. The somnambulist ? Do you hear, Aunt ? Do let her stay.

MEL. Speak, young woman : what do you want in this company ? But don't say any thing indecent !

RUB. Who sent you here ?

JUG. Your wife.

RUB. Vixen ! 'T is false.

JUG. Not the "Vision" truer.

MEL. Suffer me, Colonel. What do you want, young woman ? I again ask you. Who are you ? Where do you come from ? Answer. But do be modest.

JUG. I come from Providence. —

VOLP. What *blasphemous language* ! The Lord forgive her !

JUG. — I am the omnipotent and omnituent Juglaresa, yokefellow of Rubeta in the mighty and inexplicable science, and whose poles have hitherto been, to the edification of philosophers, in affinity with his, as "the great Capon" —

MEL. She is too indecent ! she must go out.

RUB. Yes, turn her out ! she blasphemes. Turn her out !

* See "The Vision of Rubeta," Canto II. verse 60.

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JUG. — as the “ great Capon ” taught me ; though now, as you all behold, they repel each other. —

ÆRA. Being charged with a principle of the same nature.

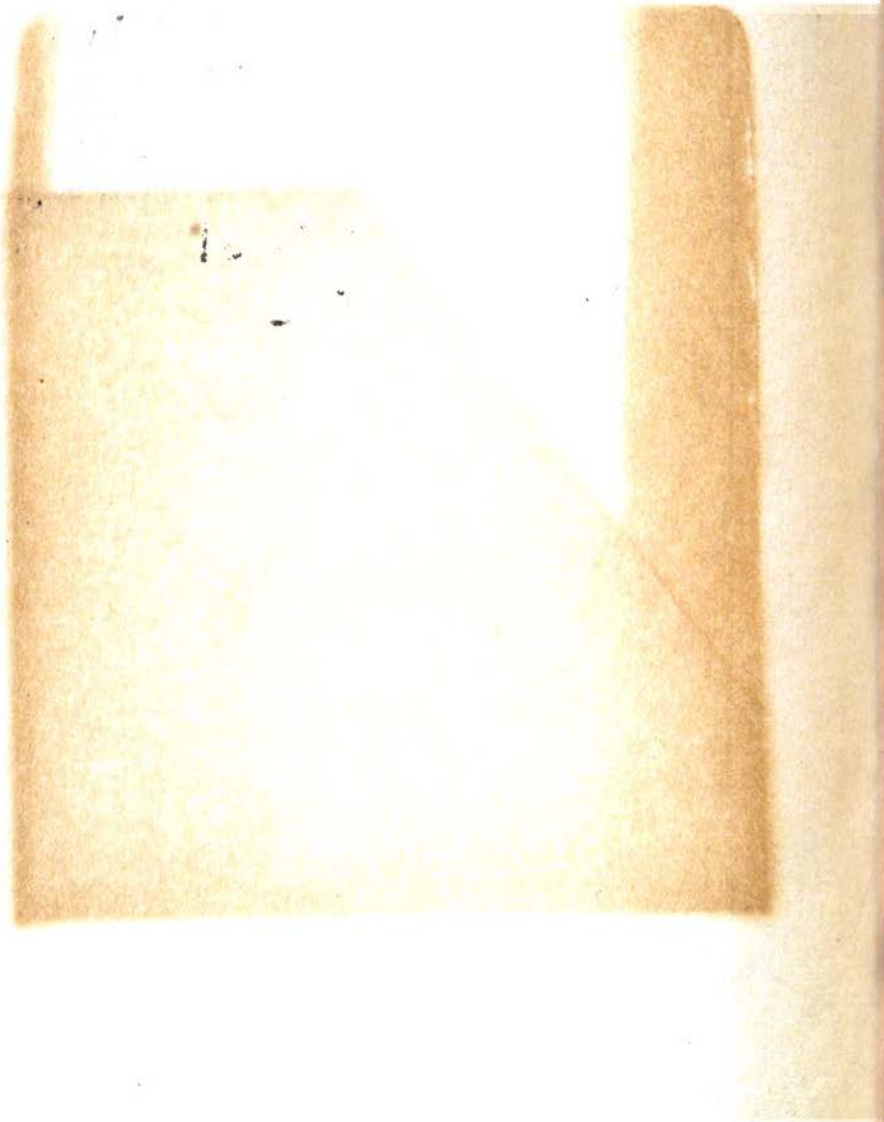
JUG. — I am come to assure the Colonel of what I told him before. He is *darned* —

RUB. Will nobody stop her mouth ?

JUG. — for the Vision is in everybody’s hands, they tell me, and a new edition will soon be called for, with new illustrations.

RUB. Oh *Thayendanega!*

The Colonel falls into a state of somnambulistic syncope. The company gather round him, with various action, according to their respective characters. JUGLARESA slips away in the confusion.



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Osborn, Laughton, 1809-1878.

The critique of the vision of Rubeta : a



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