

Richard Cumberland, “Envy”

Description

[RICHARD] CUMBERLAND

“Envy”

Oh! never let me see that shape again!
Exile me rather to some savage den,
 Far from the social haunts of men!
Horrible phantom! pale it was as death,
 Consumption fed upon its meagre cheek, 5
 And ever as the fiend essay'd to speak,
Dreadfully steam'd its pestilential breath!
Fang'd like the wolf it was, and all agaunt,
 And still it prowl'd around us and around,
Rolling its squinting eyes askaunt, 10
 Wherever human happiness was found.

Furious thereat, the self-tormenting sprite
Drew forth an asp, and (terrible to sight)
To its left pap th' envenom'd reptile prest,
Which gnaw'd and worm'd into its tortur'd breast. 15
 The desperate suicide, with pain,
 Writh'd to and fro, and yell'd amain;
And then, with hollow dying cadence, cries—
“It is not of this asp that ENVY dies;
‘Tis not this reptile's tooth that gives the smart; 20
‘Tis others' happiness that gnaws my heart.”

NOTES:

6 *essay'd* Tried.

7 *pestilential* “Carrying pestilence or epidemic disease, esp. bubonic plague” (*OED*).

10 *askaunt* “With suspicion or mistrust” (*OED*).

12 *sprite* Spirit.

13 *asp* “A small, venomous, hooded serpent, found in Egypt and Lybia” (*OED*).

14 *pap* Breast (*OED*).

17 *amain* “With full force” (*OED*).

Source: *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (August, 1791), p. 759.

Edited by Louise Noble