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From Elston Press : The Cenci: A Tragedy in Five Acts. before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Cenci: A Tragedy in Five Acts.:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Teaching the Human HeartBy Carl SavichThe Cenci is a tragic five-act play written and published in 1819 by Percy Bysshe Shelley. The work was one of Shelley's most critically acclaimed works and was his only work that was published in a second edition during his lifetime. The play was Shelley's most accessible work and the one for which he planned and anticipated not only critical acceptance, but popular acclaim as well. The controversial themes of parricide and incest prevented the play from achieving popular success during his lifetime. Shelley explained in the preface that the purpose of the play lies in "teaching the human heart": "The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself." Tragedy results due to flaws in human nature or to events or circumstances that we cannot control. Each person, however, has freedom of will or a choice. Our own decisions determine whether tragedy is the outcome. Beatrice Cenci, the victim of an incestuous rape, chose to retaliate. Shelley wrote that peace and love were the appropriate responses to injustice and crime: "Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes." It was by making these pernicious mistakes that Beatrice Cenci revealed her human flaws that ultimately culminated in tragedy. The tragedy, based on a historical event, is set in Rome in 1599. Beatrice Cenci is raped by her father, Francesco Cenci, although Shelley never used that term and the nature of the crime is left ambiguous. She then seeks retaliation against her father by planning his murder. By

executing this plan, she subverts and destabilizes the established hierarchical and patriarchal norms and dogmas of authority of her time, upsetting the accepted order. Her parricide becomes a revolutionary act that must be punished to the fullest extent of the law to preserve the status quo and to maintain stability. Mary Shelley described the play as "the best tragedy of modern times." She called the Fifth Act "a masterpiece" and emphasized that Shelley intended the play to be acted on the stage. Lord Byron wrote that the play was "a work of power and poetry" although he questioned whether it would succeed as a drama on the stage. Byron, nevertheless, concluded: "The Cenci is ... perhaps the best tragedy modern times have produced." Beatrice Cenci struggles to find a way to confront oppression. She states that "what a world we make/ The oppressor and the oppressed." Her brother Giacomo as well perceives himself as oppressed: "We are now no more, as once, parent and child, But man to man; the oppressor to the oppressed; The slanderer to the slandered; foe to foe: He has cast Nature off, which was his shield, And Nature casts him off." They are, however, "as scorpions ringed with fire", who in popular myth, will sting themselves to death rather than be consumed by the fire. The Cenci is a dramatic masterpiece that examines justice and injustice, the role of the oppressed and the oppressor, and how human flaws result in tragedy. Ultimately, it is an attempt in "teaching the human heart."

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. 4 and 1/2 Stars -- A Great, Overlooked Play By Bill R. Moore

The Cenci is not only Percy Shelley's most underrated work but one of the most underrated of all English dramas - nothing less than one of the best plays in the three centuries between the genre's Elizabethan height and its late Victorian resurrection. An excellent verse drama, it is one of the last of its kind, coming a few decades before prose became standard. As one would expect from a poet turning to drama, the verse quality is very high, reaching lyrical heights of extreme emotion and frequent beauty. Much of it is also very memorable, not so much epigrammatic as simply mesmerizing. Yet, unlike many verse dramas, it is believable as natural dialogue; Shelley somehow manages to play both ends well, as only the very greatest verse dramatists can. The story itself is more of a departure for Shelley. In contrast to his wildly creative and often intensely personal poetry, this is a historical drama. The tragedy of the Cenci family had been well-known for centuries and was in many ways ideal for drama; the unbelievably tragic tale of a man so evil as to be bent on destroying his own family only for them to be executed for his arguably just death could hardly be treated otherwise. Specific details were few, and Shelley essentially uses the basic outline and fills in the rest. The story would have been familiar to the audience had the play been produced, but Shelley's twists would have been more than compelling. He plays up the inherent drama for all it is worth and adds other lurid details, making for a highly wrought play that grabs attention quickly and keeps it. The result may be somewhat melodramatic, but we must remember the factual basis; Shelley may even underplay much of what happened for all anyone knows. The characters are also vividly memorable. Beatrice Cenci is one of the great pre-modern female parts, strong and highly sympathetic. Shelley was far ahead of his time in making a lead female character so independent, articulate, and powerful; this is one of the clearest signs of his proto-feminism and perhaps a large part of the reason the play was not staged for almost a century. Her many lines and their highly emotional nature make her a very difficult role; only the greatest actors can pull her off convincingly without being overdone. This is perhaps even more true of her father, who is one of literature's great villains - fully evil and thoroughly despicable. The same can again be said for most of the other characters in varying degrees. However, the play is not all melodrama and poetry; like Shelley's other work, it is notable for successfully mixing artistry with intellectual depth and political content. This last is muted beside his more politically explicit work, but he does touch on issues like the nature of justice, the fairness of the "justice system," a man's responsibility toward his family, women's rights, etc. The play is very thought-provoking on top of being extremely moving and entertaining. Debate about its onstage feasibility continues despite several successful performances, but The Cenci is definitely a great piece of literature and should be read by anyone interested in Shelley, English verse drama, historical drama, or simply great writing. As for which edition to buy, the dedicated will want a deluxe standalone such as this, but most will be well served by a Shelley anthology including it. Whatever method is chosen, one will not be disappointed.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Awesome retelling of a true story in dramatic form By F. Orion Pozo

Shelley's The Cenci is just one of many tellings of a true story that captures the imagination and the heart of almost everybody who hears of it. The story has been retold in many novels, even in opera. It is the tale of the lovely and innocent Beatrice Cenci, who in late 16th century Rome was molested by a corrupt and powerful father, Count Francesco Cenci. Her father was so well-connected that there was no one, not even the Pope, to whom she could turn for protection. So, with the help of her mother and her brother, she seeks the ultimate revenge and pays the price. Shelley's poetic drama is considered one of the best works of his short life. His treatment is more Shakespearean than poetic, but without the immortal bard's light comic touches. The Cenci is true tragedy through and through with a poetic touch that will capture the soul of the reader. I found myself reading passages aloud to myself to both hear the dramatic content and to better understand the meaning of dialogs broken into lines of poetry. This is not an easy book to read, both for its subject and its writing style, yet the reward is well worth the effort. Some of Shelley's greatest lines are in this work. Here is a brief segment from the 5th Act of Beatrice's words in contemplating her fate: Oh, trample out that thought! Worse than Despair, Worse than the bitterness of death, is hope; It is the only ill which can find place Upon the giddy, sharp and narrow hour Tottering beneath us. Plead with the swift frost That it should spare the eldest flower of spring; Plead with awakening earthquake, o'er whose couch Even

now a city stands, strong, fair, and free; Now stench and blackness yawn, like death. Oh, plead with famine, or wind-walking Pestilence, Blind lightning, or the deaf sea, not with man! Cruel, cold, formal man; righteous in words, In deeds a Cain.