

RHYTHM
OCTOBER 1912

REVIEW OF *MORTADELLO*

"Mortadello" is Mr. Crowley's thirty-third book (not counting his "Collected Works," in three volumes). and yet it is an amazingly juvenile performance. I gather, from the fatuously facetious "Preface," that the author, himself, regards the thing as a mere lark but, at its giddiest, it is a dull, stupid, dreary affair. The stale situations, the childish "comedy," and the puerile grossness, are incredibly school-boyish; though the verse in which the play is written is damnably accomplished. Mr. Crowley manipulates his medium with a deadly dexterity. He works the Alexandrine for all it is worth; and gets unexpected amusement out of it by the skilful surprise of unexpected internal rhymes. He is a master of metrical artifice. Possibly, I may be taking a hoax to seriously; but it seems to me a thousand pities that so much talent should be wasted on such wormy material, when the fresh stuff of poetry is ever ready to the poet's hand. So few poems have been written as yet; there are so many to be written; and men were never more in need of the poet's interpretation of the world about them than at the present day: so much passion, so much wonder, so much humour, are waiting for expression: and here is Mr. Crowley with boyish glee rehashing stale tales of fornicators and strumpets in ancient Venice! He is a clever cook; but we are sick of such concoctions. The would-be-dog-of-a-bard is the dullest of bores; and smutty stories, tricked out in fancy dress for the furtive delectation of hobbledehoys, are the cheapest and nastiest kind of entertainment. Mr. Crowley certainly carries the thing off with a swagger: but the man who plays the fool with his instrument must always pay the penalty; and this work should damage the author's reputation in the minds of grown men. But before I shut the book, I must, in fairness to Mr. Crowley, quote something of his own apology which he prints in his witless "Preface": and so give the author the last word.

He writes: "This comedy is perhaps my first serious attempt at a work of art; previous lucubrations of mine having been either works of necessity or of piety: that is, or I felt obliged to tell the truth about something, or I was definitely inspired.

"But the Angel of Venice (I protest) is a very cunning concoction. I have been revolving certain expositions by M. Henri Davray of Verlaine's skill in treating the Alexandrine; and I couldn't let it stay there! Hence the form. I had also been meditating on Maeterlinck's method of obtaining atmosphere: but this went awry.

"With regard to the matter of my proposed masterpiece, my mind was perfectly clear.

"It must look like a Monticelli; it must smell like a Musc ambré; it must feel like July and August of 1911 in Paris; and above all it must taste like the Truffes au Champagne of the Cafe Riche. How it sounded didn't matter so much. . . .

"Enough of this disastrous affair. The play is ruined; if I offer it to the public, it is that they may learn the great moral lesson., not to mix their drinks."

— W.W.G.