This version was prepared for a dramatised reading in the Combination Room of St John’s College, Cambridge on 20 September 2011. The text has been cut by just over a half.

In performance, there will be a screen behind the readers allowing the back projection of images and of words (indications of scene or the passing of time, essential stage directions, and dense summaries of the scenes that have been omitted). The text of the slides has been included (in a different font, smaller size and contrasting colour).

The images in the Powerpoint Presentation are taken as far as possible from the period in which the play was written (c. 1797-98). The main component consists of watercolours and engravings from Wordsworth’s lifetime to suggest the interiors (inns and a cottage) and the different parts of the moor where so much of the action takes place. Superimposed on the highest part of these images, there appear photos of eighteenth-century marble busts, chosen to represent the characters who are ‘on stage’ at any given moment and thus help the audience to follow the semi-staged performance more confidently. (These have been specially photographed from the rich collection in the Fitzwilliam Museum.)

The play is intended to be punctuated by music (played on the harp and borrowed mostly from Scottish folk-songs arranged by Haydn during the 1790s). These entractes are intended to sustain or increase the dramatic tension, while allowing the audience time to assimilate the summaries of omitted passages and the indications of scene. The cues for the music have been shown in capitals in contrasting colour.

The text is essentially that of the first published edition (in WW’s Collected Poems, 1842), but the names of the characters, and the text of Mortimer’s last speech, are taken from the original version of forty-five years earlier.

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THE SURVIVING DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Mortimer  Captain of the Band of Borderers
Rivers  A senior member of the Band
Herbert  A Baron
Matilda  his daughter
Robert  a Peasant

Scene, Borders of England and Scotland. Time, the Reign of Henry III.
Prior Events

Many years before the action of the play, Baron Herbert, who held lands in the county of Devon, went on crusade. He was blinded at the siege of Antioch when the Saracens retook the city, but he escaped with his infant daughter, Matilda, and somehow the two made their way back to England. The Baron discovered he had been dispossessed of his lands and the pair resumed their wanderings till they came to Cumbria (close to the Border with Scotland), where he found a patroness to bring up his daughter while he himself retired to live in a cottage next to an abbey at some considerable distance.

Not long before the action of the play, Matilda, now a young woman, went to live with her old blind father, who has become infirm. She has fallen in love with Mortimer, a local nobleman who has become Captain of a band of Borderers. (His situation resembles that of Robin Hood and his Outlaws, since he regards himself as a righter of wrongs and an instrument of natural justice).

One of the Borderers, Rivers, a sinister, older man, has gained ascendancy over Mortimer, whom he hates and whom he is now seeking to subjugate completely by leading him on to ‘execute’ an entirely innocent person. To this end, he has (almost) persuaded Mortimer that Baron Herbert is an impostor, that Matilda is not really his daughter anyway, and that Herbert is intending to yield her to the lusts of a local libertine, Lord Clifford.

Shortly before the play begins, Rivers was sent to Herbert to act as Mortimer’s go-between in his suit for Matilda’s hand in marriage. Treacherously he set the old man against Mortimer; and Matilda has been forced by her father to write a letter to her lover, renouncing him.

Matilda’s patroness has now died, leaving her a legacy. She and her father have set out on a journey to claim the inheritance — a journey of three days on foot across the wild, wooded moors near the Scottish Border.
Music 1. Prelude

(A shortened version of the Prior Events will be projected during the Prelude on four or five slides.)

Scene One
A road in the Borders.
Mortimer and Rivers appear, then conceal themselves.

Scene 1 (from Act 1)

A Road in a Wood.

Enter Rivers and Mortimer [with Matilda’s Fateful Letter of Renunciation in His Hand].

Rivers
See, they come,

Two Travellers!

Mortimer
(points).

The woman is Matilda.

Rivers
And leading Herbert.

Mortimer

We must let them pass---

This thicket will conceal us.
[They step aside.

Enter Matilda, leading Herbert blind.

Matilda
Plague on that dismal Moor---
In spite of all the larks that cheered our path,
I ne’er shall love it more. Indeed
You are quite exhausted. — Here is a green bank,
Let us repose a little.

Herbert
Few minutes gone a faintness overspread
My frame, and I bethought me of two things
I ne'er had heart to separate---my grave,
And thee, my Child!

Matilda
Believe me, honoured Sire!
'Tis weariness that breeds these gloomy fancies,
And you mistake the cause: you hear the woods
Resound with music, could you see the sun,
And look upon the pleasant face of Nature---
Herbert

I comprehend thee—I should be as cheerful
As if we two were twins; two songsters bred
In the same nest, my spring-time one with thine.
My fancies, fancies if they be, are such
As come, dear Child! from a far deeper source
Than bodily weariness. While here we sit
I feel my strength returning.
But when thy Father must lie down and die,
How wilt thou stand alone?

Matilda

Is he not strong?

Is he not valiant?

Herbert

Am I then so soon
Forgotten? have my warnings passed so quickly
Out of thy mind? My dear, my only, Child;
Thou wouldst be leaning on a broken reed---
This Mortimer---

Matilda

O could you hear his voice:
Alas! you do not know him. He is one
All gentleness and love.

Herbert

Unhappy Woman!

Matilda

Nay, it was my duty
Thus much to speak; but think not I forget---
Dear Father! how could I forget and live---
You and the story of that doleful night
When, Antioch blazing to her topmost towers,
You rushed into the murderous flames, returned
Blind as the grave, but, as you oft have told me,
Clasping your infant Daughter to your heart.

Herbert

Thy Mother too!—scarce had I gained the door,
I caught her voice; she threw herself upon me,
I felt thy infant brother in her arms;
She saw my blasted face—a tide of soldiers
That instant rushed between us, and I heard
Her last death-shriek, distinct among a thousand.

Matilda

Nay, Father, stop not; let me hear it all.
**Herbert**

Dear Daughter, thou hast been told,
That when, on our return from Palestine,
I found how my domains had been usurped,
I took thee in my arms, and we began
Our wanderings together.

Providence

At length conducted us to Rossland,---there,
Our melancholy story moved a Stranger
To take thee to her home.

And for myself,
Soon after, the good Abbot of St. Cuthbert's
Supplied my helplessness with food and raiment,
And, as thou know'st, gave me that humble Cot
Where now we dwell.---For many years I bore
Thy absence, till old age and fresh infirmities
Exacted thy return, and our reunion.

I did not think that, during that long absence,
My Child, forgetful of the name of Herbert,
Had given her love to a wild Freebooter,
Who here, upon the borders of the Tweed,
Doth prey alike on two distracted Countries,
Traitor to both.

**Matilda**

Oh, could you hear his voice!

I will not call on Heaven to vouch for me,
But let this kiss speak what is in my heart.

[Exeunt]

2. MUSIC DURING THE NEXT FIVE TILES

The exhausted baron and his daughter take refuge for the night in a wayside inn. They agree that Matilda will continue her journey alone. Her father will follow when he recovers strength.

Rivers comes to the inn. In private conversation, he assures Herbert that the tie between Matilda and Mortimer is broken. He offers to accompany the blind man on the next stage of his journey to the north.

In a nearby wood, Rivers stages an encounter between Mortimer and an accomplice, a Beggar Woman. She reinforces his lies about Herbert, about his relationship to Matilda, and about the character of Lord Clifford. Mortimer is increasingly incensed.

Scene Two

A room at the inn.

Rivers, at first alone, is joined by Mortimer.
Scene 2 (from Act 2)

A Chamber in a Hostel---

Rivers alone, rising from a Table on which he had been writing.

Rivers

They chose him for their Chief! The insult bred
More of contempt than hatred; both are flown.
---These fools of feeling are mere birds of winter
That haunt some barren island of the north,
Where, if a famishing man stretch forth his hand,
They think it is to feed them. I have left him
To solitary meditation;---now
For a few swelling phrases, and a flash
Of truth, enough to dazzle and to blind,
And he is mine for ever---here he comes.

Enter Mortimer.

Mortimer (to himself).

“Father”!---to God himself we cannot give
A holier name; and, under such a mask,
To lead a Spirit, spotless as the blessed,
To that abhorred den of brutish vice!---
Rivers, the firm foundation of my life
Is going from under me; these strange discoveries---
Looked at from every point of fear or hope,
Duty, or love---involve, I feel, my ruin.

Rivers

But this pretended “Father”---

Mortimer

Earthly law
Measures not crimes like his.

Rivers

We rank not, happily,
With those who take the spirit of their rule
From that soft class of devotees who feel
Reverence for life so deeply, that they spare
The verminous brood, and cherish what they spare
While feeding on their bodies. Would that Matilda
Were present, to the end that we might hear
What she can urge in his defence; she loves him.
Mortimer

We will conduct her hither;
These walls shall witness it---from first to last
He shall reveal himself.

Rivers

Happy are we,
Who live in these disputed tracts, that own
No law but what each man makes for himself;
Here justice has indeed a field of triumph.

Mortimer

Let us begone and bring her hither;---here
The truth shall be laid open, his guilt proved
Before her face. The rest be left to me.

Rivers

You will be firm: but though we well may trust
The issue to the justice of the cause,
Caution must not be flung aside; remember,
Yours is no common life. Self-stationed here,
Upon these savage confines, we have seen you
Stand like an isthmus 'twixt two stormy seas
That oft have checked their fury at your bidding.
Your single virtue has transformed a Band
Of fierce barbarians into Ministers
Of peace and order. Agéd men with tears
Have blessed their steps, the fatherless retire
For shelter to their banners. But
Benevolence, that has not heart to use
The wholesome ministry of pain and evil,
Becomes at last weak and contemptible.
Your generous qualities have won due praise,
But vigorous Spirits look for something more
Than Youth's spontaneous products; and to-day
You will not disappoint them; and hereafter---

Mortimer

You are wasting words; hear me then, once for all.
I have loved
To be the friend and father of the oppressed,
A comforter of sorrow;---there is something
Which looks like a transition in my soul,
And yet it is not.---Let us lead him hither.
Rivers

Stop for a moment; 'tis an act of justice;
And where's the triumph if the delegate
Must fall in the execution of his office?
The deed is done---if you will have it so---
Here where we stand!

Mortimer

How may this be done?

Rivers

A few leagues hence we shall have open ground,
And nowhere upon earth is place so fit
To look upon the deed. Before we enter
The barren Moor, hangs from a beetling rock
The shattered Castle in which Clifford oft
Has held infernal orgies. The Debauchee
Would there perhaps have gathered the first fruits
Of this mock Father's guilt.

[Exeunt Rivers and Mortimer.]

3. MUSIC DURING THE NEXT FIVE TILES

Meanwhile, Matilda continues her journey north. She falls into company with a party of pilgrims.

An old man in the party recognises Matilda. He tells her how the King has reasserted his power and restored Herbert to his ancestral lands in Devon.

On the following day, Herbert sets out again. The two Borderers accompany him, allegedly intending to pass the next night in a Convent on the moors.
(Blind Herbert is unaware of Mortimer's identity.)

In wild weather they have come to Stony-Arthur, the half-ruined castle of Lord Clifford on the edge of the moor. The exhausted Herbert lies asleep in the former dungeon.

Scene Three
Outside the castle.
Mortimer is increasingly tormented by the thought that he must kill the old man in cold blood.
Rivers is trying hard to strengthen his resolve.
Scene 3 (from Act 2)

The Area of the half-ruined Castle of Stone-Arthur [LORD CLIFFORD’S CASTLE]---
On one side the entrance to a dungeon---
Rivers and Mortimer pacing backwards and forwards.

Mortimer
'Tis a wild night.

Rivers
I'd give my cloak and bonnet
For sight of a warm fire.

Mortimer
The wind blows keen;

Rivers
'Tis a bitter night;
I hope Matilda is well housed. That horseman,
Who at full speed swept by us where the wood
Roared in the tempest, was within an ace
Of sending to his grave our precious Charge:
That would have been a vile mischance.

Mortimer
It would.

Rivers
Justice had been most cruelly defrauded.

Mortimer
Most cruelly.

When, upon the plank,
I had led him 'cross the torrent, his voice blessed me:
You could not hear, for the foam beat the rocks
With deafening noise,—the benediction fell
Back on himself; but changed into a curse.
That dog of his, you are sure,
Could not come after us,—he must have perished;
The torrent would have dashed an oak to splinters.
You said you did not like his looks——that he
Would trouble us; if he were here again,
I swear the sight of him would quail me more
Than twenty armies.

Rivers offers to go down into the dungeon.

Mortimer
How now, what mean you?

Rivers
Truly, I was going

To waken our stray Baron.
Mortimer

Stop, stop.

Rivers

Perhaps,
You'd better like we should descend together,
And lie down by his side---what say you to it?
Three of us---we should keep each other warm:
I'll answer for it that our four-legged friend
Shall not disturb us; further I'll not engage;
Come, come, for manhood's sake!

Mortimer

These drowsy shiverings,
This mortal stupor which is creeping over me,
What do they mean? were this my single body
Opposed to armies, not a nerve would tremble:
Why do I tremble now?---Is not the depth
Of this Man's crimes beyond the reach of thought?
And yet, in plumbing the abyss for judgment,
Something I strike upon which turns my mind
Back on herself, I think, again---my breast
Concentres all the terrors of the Universe:
I look at him and tremble like a child.
You say he was asleep,---look at this arm,
And tell me if 'tis fit for such a work.
Rivers, Rivers!

[Leans upon Rivers.

Rivers

This is some sudden seizure!

Mortimer

A most strange faintness,---will you hunt me out
A draught of water?

Rivers

Nay, to see you thus
Moves me beyond my bearing.---I will try
To gain the torrent's brink.

[Exit Rivers.

Mortimer

(after a pause).

It seems an age
Since that Man left me.---No, I am not lost.
Herbert  (at the mouth of the dungeon).
   Give me your hand; where are you, Friends? and tell me
   How goes the night.
Mortimer
   'Tis hard to measure time,
   In such a weary night, and such a place.
Herbert
   I do not hear the voice of my friend Rivers.
Mortimer
   A minute past, he went to fetch a draught
   Of water from the torrent. 'Tis, you 'll say,
   A cheerless beverage.
Herbert
   How good it was in you
   To stay behind!---Hearing at first no answer,
   I was alarmed.
Mortimer
   No wonder; this is a place
   That well may put some fears into your heart.
Herbert
   Why so? a roofless rock had been a comfort,
   Storm-beaten and bewildered as we were;
   And in a night like this, to lend your cloaks
   To make a bed for me!---My Girl will weep
   When she is told of it.
Mortimer
   This Daughter of yours
   Is very dear to you.
Herbert
   May you in age be blest with such a daughter!---
   When from the Holy Land I had returned
   Sightless, and from my heritage was driven,
   A wretched Outcast---but this strain of thought
   Would lead me to talk fondly.
Mortimer
   But when you were an Outcast,
   The little Orphan then would be your succour,
   And do good service, though she knew it not.
Herbert
   I turned me from the dwellings of my Fathers,
   Where none but those who trampled on my rights
   Seemed to remember me. To the wide world
   I bore her, in my arms; her looks won pity;
   She was my Raven in the wilderness,
   And brought me food. Have I not cause to love her?
Mortimer
    Yes.
Herbert
    More than ever Parent loved a Child?
Mortimer
    Yes, yes.
Herbert
    I will not murmur, merciful God!
    I will not murmur; blasted as I have been,
    Thou hast left me ears to hear my Daughter's voice,
    And arms to fold her to my heart. Submissively
    Thee I adore, and find my rest in faith.

Enter Rivers.

Rivers
    Herbert!---confusion!
(aside).
Here it is, my Friend,
[Presents the Horn.
    A charming beverage for you to carouse,
    This bitter night.
Herbert
    Ha! Rivers! ten bright crosses
    I would have given, not many minutes gone,
    To have heard your voice.
Rivers
    Your couch, I fear, good Baron,
    Has been but comfortless; and yet that place,
    When the tempestuous wind first drove us hither,
    Felt warm as a wren's nest. You'd better turn
    And under covert rest till break of day,
    Or till the storm abate.

To Mortimer (aside).
    He has restored you.
    No doubt you have been nobly entertained?
    But soft!---how came he forth? The Night-mare Conscience
    Has driven him out of harbour?
Mortimer
    I believe
    You have guessed right.
Herbert
    The trees renew their murmur:
    Come, let us house together.
[Rivers conducts him to the dungeon.
Rivers (returns).

Had I not
Esteemed you worthy to conduct the affair
To its most fit conclusion, do you think
I would so long have struggled with my Nature,
And smothered all that's man in me?---away!---

[Looking towards the dungeon.
This man's the property of him who best
Can feel his crimes. I have resigned a privilege;
It now becomes my duty to resume it.

Mortimer
Touch not a finger---

Rivers
What then must be done?

Mortimer
Which way soe'er I turn, I am perplexed.

Rivers
Now, on my life, I grieve for you. The misery
Of doubt is insupportable. Pity, the facts
Did not admit of stronger evidence;
Twelve honest men, plain men, would set us right;
Their verdict would abolish these weak scruples.

Mortimer
I cannot do it:
Twice did I spring to grasp his withered throat,
When such a sudden weakness fell upon me,
I could have dropped asleep upon his breast.

Rivers
Justice---is there not thunder in the word?
Shall it be law to stab the petty robber
Who aims but at our purse; and shall this Parricide---
Worse is he far, far worse --- shall he fulfil his purpose?
But you are fallen.

Mortimer
Fallen should I be indeed---
Murder---perhaps asleep, blind, old, alone,
Betrayed, in darkness! Here to strike the blow---
Away! away!---

[Flings away his sword.
Rivers

Nay, I have done with you:
We'll lead him to the Convent. He shall live,
And she shall love him. With unquestioned title
He shall be seated in his Barony,
And we too chant the praise of his good deeds.
Henceforth it shall be said that bad men only
Are brave: Clifford is brave; and that old Man
Is brave.

Taking Mortimer's sword and giving it to him.

To Clifford's arms he would have led
His Victim---haply to this desolate house.

Mortimer
(advancing to the dungeon).

It must be ended!---

Rivers

Softly; do not rouse him;
He will deny it to the last. He lies
Within the Vault, a spear's length to the left.

[Mortimer descends to the dungeon.]

(Alone.)
The Villains rose in mutiny to destroy me;
I could have quelled the Cowards, but this Stripling
Must needs step in, and save my life. The look
With which he gave the boon---I see it now!
The same that tempted me to loathe the gift.---

For this old venerable Grey-beard---faith
'Tis his own fault if he hath got a face
Which doth play tricks with them that look on it:
'Twas this that put it in my thoughts---that countenance---
His staff---his figure---

Murder!---what, of whom?
We kill a worn-out horse, and who but women
Sigh at the deed? Hew down a withered tree,
And none look grave but dotards. He may live
To thank me for this service. Rainbow arches,
Highways of dreaming passion, have too long,
Young as he is, diverted wish and hope
From the unpretending ground we mortals tread;---
Then shatter the delusion, break it up
And set him free. What follows? I have learned
That things will work to ends the slaves o' the world
Do never dream of. I have been what he---
This Boy---when he comes forth with bloody hands---
Might envy, and am now,---but he shall know
What I am now---

[Goes and listens at the dungeon.

Praying or parleying?---tut!
Is he not eyeless? He has been half-dead
These fifteen years---

4. MUSIC, TREMOLO, TO SUGGEST THE ELAPSE OF TIME BEFORE MORTIMER'S RETURN

Mortimer re-enters from the dungeon.
Rivers
It is all over then;---your foolish fears
Are hushed to sleep, by your own act and deed,
Made quiet as he is.
Mortimer
Why came you down?
And when I felt your hand upon my arm
And spake to you, why did you give no answer?
Feared you to waken him? he must have been
In a deep sleep. I whispered to him thrice.
There are the strangest echoes in that place!
Rivers
Tut! let them gabble till the day of doom.
Mortimer
Scarcely, by groping, had I reached the spot,
When round my wrist I felt a cord drawn tight,
As if the blind Man's dog were pulling at it.
Rivers
But after that?
Mortimer
The features of Matilda
Lurked in his face---
Yes, her very look,
Smiling in sleep---
Rivers
A pretty feat of Fancy!
Mortimer
Though but a glimpse, it sent me to my prayers.
Rivers
   Is he alive?
Mortimer
   What mean you? who alive?
Rivers
   Herbert! since you will have it, Baron Herbert;
   He who will gain his Seignory when Matilda
   Hath become Clifford's harlot---is he living?
Mortimer
   The old Man in that dungeon is alive.
Rivers
   Henceforth, then, will I never in camp or field
   Obey you more. Your weakness, to the Band,
   Shall be proclaimed: brave Men, they all shall hear it.
   You a protector of humanity!
   Avenger you of outraged innocence!
Mortimer
   'Twas dark---dark as the grave; yet did I see,
   Saw him---his face turned toward me; and I tell thee
   Matilda's filial countenance was there
   To baffle me---it put me to my prayers.
   Upwards I cast my eyes, and, through a crevice,
   Beheld a star twinkling above my head,
   And, by the living God, I could not do it.
[Sinks exhausted.

5. MUSIC DURING THE NEXT FOUR TILES
The band of Borderers arrive at the gallop. Rivers explains the (false) charges against Herbert.
The Borderers concur that his 'monstrous crime' must be 'avenged'—but only after a trial
'in open day' in their camp.

Matilda and the pilgrims reach a roadside inn.
They are told that Herbert is heading for the Convent accompanied by 'two friends'.

Scene Four (The following day)
A desolate part of the moor.

Rivers and Mortimer appear, having left Herbert resting close by.
Rivers is still trying to persuade Mortimer to kill Herbert now, here, on the open moor,
without the agreed trial.
Scene 4 (from Act 3)

A desolate Moor. [THE FOLLOWING DAY]

Enter Mortimer and Rivers [IN MID-CONVERSATION]

Mortimer

Last night, when moved to lift the avenging steel,  
I did believe all things were shadows---ya,  
Living or dead all things were bodiless,  
Or but the mutual mockeries of body,  
Till that same star summoned me back again.  
Now I could laugh till my ribs ached. Oh Fool!  
To let a creed, built in the heart of things,  
Dissolve before a twinkling atom!---Rivers,  
I could fetch lessons out of wiser schools  
Than you have entered, were it worth the pains.  
Young as I am, I might go forth a teacher,  
And you should see how deeply I could reason  
Of love in all its shapes, beginnings, ends;  
Of moral qualities in their diverse aspects;  
Of actions, and their laws and tendencies.

Rivers

You take it as it merits---

Mortimer

One a King,  
General or Cham, Sultan or Emperor,  
Strews twenty acres of good meadow-ground  
With carcasses;  
Another sits i' th' sun, and by the hour  
Floats kingcups in the brook---a Hero one  
We call, and scorn the other as Time's spendthrift;  
But have they not a world of common ground  
To occupy---both fools, or wise alike,  
Each in his way?

Rivers

Troth, I begin to think so.

Mortimer

Now for the corner-stone of my philosophy:  
I would not give a denier for the man  
Who, on such provocation as this earth  
Yields, could not chuck his babe beneath the chin,  
And send it with a fillip to its grave.

Rivers

Nay, you leave me behind.  
But first, how wash our hands of this old Man?
Mortimer

Oh yes, that mole, that viper in the path;
Plague on my memory, him I had forgotten.

Rivers

You know we left him sitting---see him yonder.

Mortimer

Ha! ha!---

Rivers

As 'twill be but a moment's work,
I will stroll on; you follow when 'tis done.

[Exeunt.

Scene 5 (from Act 3)

Another part of the Moor at a short distance---Herbert is discovered seated on a stone.

Scene Five. Another part of the moor at a short distance. Herbert is discovered resting.

Herbert

A sound of laughter, too!---'tis well---I feared,
The Stranger had some pitiable sorrow
Pressing upon his solitary heart.
Hush!!---'tis the feeble and earth-loving wind
That creeps along the bells of the crisp heather.
Alas! 'tis cold---I shiver in the sunshine---
What can this mean? There is a psalm that speaks
Of God's parental mercies---with Matilda
I used to sing it.---Listen!---what foot is there?

Enter Mortimer.

Mortimer

(aside---looking at Herbert).
And I have loved this Man! and she hath loved him!
And I loved her, and she loves the Lord Clifford!
And there it ends;---if this be not enough
To make mankind merry for evermore,
Then plain it is as day, that eyes were made
For a wise purpose---verily to weep with!

(To Herbert).
Good Baron, have you ever practised tillage?
Pray tell me what this land is worth by the acre?

Herbert

How glad I am to hear your voice! I know not
Wherein I have offended you;---last night
I found in you the kindest of Protectors.
But for these two hours past
Once only have you spoken, when the lark
Whirred from among the fern beneath our feet,
And I, no coward in my better days,
Was almost terrified.

_Mortimer_ That's excellent!---
So, you bethought you of the many ways
In which a man may come to his end, whose crimes
Have roused all Nature up against him---pshaw!---

_Herbert_ For mercy's sake, is nobody in sight?
No traveller, peasant, herdsman?

_Mortimer_ Not a soul.
Here is a tree, raggèd, and bent, and bare,
That turns its goat's-beard flakes of pea-green moss
From the stern breathing of the rough sea-wind;
This have we, but no other company:
Commend me to the place. If a man should die
And leave his body here, it were all one
As he were twenty fathoms underground.

_Herbert_ Where is our common Friend?

_Mortimer_ A ghost, methinks---
The Spirit of a murdered man, for instance---
Might have fine room to ramble about here,
A grand domain to squeak and gibber in.

_Herbert_ Lost Man! if thou have any close-pent guilt
Pressing upon thy heart, and this the hour
Of visitation---

_Mortimer_ You have a Daughter!

_Herbert_ Oh that she were here!---
She hath an eye that sinks into all hearts,
And if I have in aught offended you,
Soon would her gentle voice make peace between us.

_Mortimer_ (aside). I do believe he weeps--I could weep too---
There is a vein of her voice that runs through his.
These tears---
I did not think that aught was left in me
Of what I have been---yes, I thank thee, Heaven!
One happy thought has passed across my mind.
---It may not be---I am cut off from man;
No more shall I be man---no more shall I
Have human feelings!---

(To Herbert)

---Now, for a little more
 About your Daughter!

Herbert

Troops of armed men,
Met in the roads, would bless us; little children,
Rushing along in the full tide of play,
Stood silent as we passed them! I have heard
The boisterous carman, in the miry road,
Check his loud whip and hail us with mild voice,
And speak with milder voice to his poor beasts.

Mortimer

And whither were you going?

Herbert

Learn, young Man,---
To fear the virtuous, and reverence misery.
Here do I stand, alone, to helplessness,
By the good God, our common Father, doomed!---
But I had once a spirit and an arm---

Mortimer

Now, for a word about your Barony:
I fancy when you left the Holy Land,
And came to---what's your title---eh? your claims
Were undisputed!

Herbert

Like a mendicant,
Whom no one comes to meet, I stood alone;---
I murmured---but, remembering Him who feeds
The pelican and ostrich of the desert,
From my own threshold I looked up to Heaven
And did not want glimmerings of quiet hope.
So, from the court I passed, and down the brook,
Led by its murmur, to the ancient oak
I came; and when I felt its cooling shade,
I sate me down, and cannot but believe---
While in my lap I held my little Babe
And clasped her to my heart, my heart that ached
More with delight than grief---
I heard a voice
Such as by Cherith on Elijah called;
It said, "I will be with thee." A little boy,
A shepherd-lad, ere yet my trance was gone,
Hailed us as if he had been sent from heaven,
And said, with tears, that he would be our guide:
I had a better guide---that innocent Babe---
Her, who hath saved me, to this hour, from harm,
From cold, from hunger, penury, and death;
To whom I owe the best of all the good
I have, or wish for, upon earth---and more
And higher far than lies within earth's bounds:
Therefore I bless her: when I think of Man,
I bless her with sad spirit,---when of God,
I bless her in the fulness of my joy!

Mortimer

The name of daughter in his mouth, he prays!
With nerves so steady, that the very flies
Sit unmolested on his staff.---Innocent!---
If he were innocent---then he would tremble
And be disturbed, as I am.

(Turning aside.)

I have read
In Story, what men now alive have witnessed,
How, when the People's mind was racked with doubt,
Appeal was made to the great Judge: the Accused
With naked feet walked over burning ploughshares.
Here is a Man by Nature's hand prepared
For a like trial, but more merciful.
Why else have I been led to this bleak Waste?
Bare is it, without house or track, and destitute
Of obvious shelter, as a shipless sea.
Here will I leave him---here---All-seeing God!
Such as he is, and sore perplexed as I am,
I will commit him to this final Ordeal!---
He heard a voice---a shepherd-lad came to him
And was his guide; if once, why not again,
And in this desert? If never---then the whole
Of what he says, and looks, and does, and is,
Makes up one damning falsehood. Leave him here
To cold and hunger!---Pain is of the heart,
And what are a few throes of bodily suffering
If they can waken one pang of remorse?

[Goes up to Herbert.]
Old Man! my wrath is as a flame burnt out,
It cannot be rekindled. Thou art here
Led by my hand to save thee from perdition;
Thou wilt have time to breathe and think---

Herbert

Oh, Mercy!

Mortimer

I know the need that all men have of mercy,
And therefore leave thee to a righteous judgment.

Herbert

My Child, my blessèd Child!

Mortimer

No more of that;
Thou wilt have many guides if thou art innocent;
Yea, from the utmost corners of the earth,
That Woman will come o'er this Waste to save thee.

[He leaves Herbert on the Moor.

6. MUSIC DURING THE NEXT TWO TILES
In their camp on the moor, the band of Borderers meet under a beacon.
They have discovered River's villainy from the Beggar Woman who confessed her role in the plot.
They ride off, hoping to be in time to prevent the murder.

Scene Six On the edge of the moor.
Mortimer appears, at first alone, deep in thought.

Scene 6 (from Act 3)

The Wood on the edge of the Moor.

Mortimer (alone).

Mortimer

Deep, deep and vast, vast beyond human thought,
Yet calm.---I could believe, that there was here
The only quiet heart on earth. In terror,
Remembered terror, there is peace and rest.

Enter Rivers.

Rivers

Ha! my dear Captain.

Mortimer

A later meeting, Rivers,
Would have been better timed.
Rivers

Alone, I see;
You have done your duty. I had hopes, which now
I feel that you will justify.

Mortimer
Wherefore press this on me?

Rivers
Because I feel
That you have shown, and by a signal instance,
How they who would be just must seek the rule
By diving for it into their own bosoms.
To-day you have thrown off a tyranny
That lives but in the torpid acquiescence
Of our emasculated souls.
You have obeyed the only law that sense
Submits to recognise; the immediate law,
From the clear light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent Intellect.

Mortimer
I would be left alone.

Rivers
(exultingly).
I know your motives!
Your struggles
I witness'd, and now hail your victory.

Mortimer
Spare me awhile that greeting.

Rivers
It may be,
That some there are, squeamish half-thinking cowards,
Who will turn pale upon you, call you murderer,
And you will walk in solitude among them.
A mighty evil for a strong-built mind!---
Solitude!---

The Eagle lives in Solitude!

Mortimer
Even so,
The Sparrow so on the house-top, and I,
The weakest of God's creatures, stand resolved
To abide the issue of my act, alone.

Rivers
Fortitude is the child of Enterprise:
Great actions move our admiration, chiefly
Because they carry in themselves an earnest
That we can suffer greatly.
Action is transitory—a step, a blow,
The motion of a muscle—this way or that—
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity.
---I see I have disturbed you.

Mortimer

By no means.

Rivers

Compassion!—pity!—pride can do without them;
And what if you should never know them more!---
He is a puny soul who, feeling pain,
Finds ease because another feels it too.

Remorse---
It cannot live with thought; think on, think on,
And it will die. What! in this universe,
Where the least things control the greatest, where
The faintest breath that breathes can move a world;
What! feel remorse, where, if a cat had sneezed,
A leaf had fallen, the thing had never been
Whose very shadow gnaws us to the vitals.

Mortimer

Now, whither are you wandering? That a man
So used to suit his language to the time,
Should thus so widely differ from himself---
It is most strange.

Rivers

Murder!—what's in the word!---
If a snake/crawl from beneath our feet we do not ask
A license to destroy him: our good governors
Hedge in the life of every pest and plague
That bears the shape of man; and for what purpose,
But to protect themselves from extirpation?---
This flimsy barrier you have overleaped.

Mortimer

My Office is fulfilled—the Man is now
Delivered to the Judge of all things.

Rivers

Dead!

Mortimer

I have borne my burthen to its destined end.

Rivers

This instant we'll return to our Companions---
Oh how I long to see their faces again!
7. MUSIC DURING THE NEXT FOUR TILES
Matilda and the pilgrims arrive in the same place.
Matilda remains as the pilgrims continue on their way

She tells Mortimer of her father's restoration. Soon he 'will sun himself before his native doors'. She pleads her constancy and tells how she was compelled to write him the fateful letter.

Mortimer realises that she is innocent and that he has left an innocent man to die. He promises to escort her to a nearby hut and to return to her again when he has finished some 'business' with Rivers.

Scene Seven
Another part of the moor nearby.
A desolate prospect — a ridge of rocks — a Chapel on the summit of one —Moon behind the rocks — night stormy —irregular sound of a bell —
Herbert enters exhausted.

Scene 7 (from Act 4)

A desolate prospect---a ridge of rocks---a Chapel on the summit of one---Moon behind the rocks---night stormy---irregular sound of a bell ---
Herbert enters exhausted.

Herbert
That Chapel-bell in mercy seemed to guide me,
But now it mocks my steps; its fitful stroke
Can scarcely be the work of human hands.
Hear me, ye Men, upon the cliffs, if such
There be who pray nightly before the Altar.
Oh that I had but strength to reach the place!

Enter Robert, a peasant, 'in search of a stray heifer'.
(He is the owner of the hut where Matilda now is.)

Enter Robert.
[A moaning voice is heard.]

Robert
Ha! what sound is that?
Trees creaking in the wind (but none are here)
Send forth such noises---and that weary bell!
Surely some evil Spirit abroad to-night
Is ringing it---'twould stop a Saint in prayer,
And that---what is it? never was sound so like
A human groan. Ha! what is here? Poor Man---
Murdered! alas! speak---speak, I am your friend!
(Kneels to him).
I pray you speak!
What has befallen you?
Herbert
(peeibly).

A stranger has done this,  
And in the arms of a stranger I must die.

Robert
Nay, think not so: come, let me raise you up:
[Raises him.
This is a dismal place--- Take me for your guide  
And your support---my hut is not far off.
[Draws him gently off the stage.]

8. MUSIC, BRIEF
Scene Eight
A room in a Hostel.
Mortimer has joined Rivers to do his ‘business’ with him.

Scene 8 (from Act 4)

A room in the Hostel---Mortimer and Rivers.

Mortimer
But for Matilda!---I have cause to think  
That she is innocent.

Rivers
Leave that thought awhile  
This day's event has laid on me the duty  
Of opening out my story; you must hear it,  
And without further preface.—In my youth  
I was the pleasure of all hearts, the darling  
Of every tongue---as you are now. You've heard  
That I embarked for Syria. On our voyage  
Was hatched among the crew a foul Conspiracy  
Against my honour, in the which our Captain  
Was, I believed, prime Agent. The wind fell;  
We lay becalmed week after week, until  
The water of the vessel was exhausted;  
I felt a double fever in my veins,  
Yet rage suppressed itself;---to a deep stillness  
Did my pride tame my pride;---for many days,  
On a dead sea under a burning sky,  
I brooded o'er my injuries, deserted  
By man and nature;---if a breeze had blown,  
It might have found its way into my heart,  
And I had been---no matter---do you mark me?
Mortimer
Quick---to the point---if any untold crime
Doth haunt your memory.

Rivers
Patience, hear me further!---
One day in silence did we drift at noon
By a bare rock, narrow, and white, and bare;
No food was there, no drink, no grass, no shade,
Nor any living thing whose lot of life
Might stretch beyond the measure of one moon.
To dig for water on the spot, the Captain
Landed with a small troop, myself being one:
There I reproached him with his treachery.
Imperious at all times, his temper rose;
He struck me; and that instant had I killed him,
And put an end to his insolence, but my Comrades
Rushed in between us:
then did I insist
(All hated him, and I was stung to madness)
That we should leave him there, alive!---we did so.

Mortimer
And he was famished?

Rivers
Naked was the spot;
Methinks I see it now---how in the sun
Its stony surface glittered like a shield;
And in that miserable place we left him,
Alone but for a swarm of minute creatures
Not one of which could help him while alive,
Or mourn him dead.

Mortimer
A man by men cast off,
Left without burial! nay, not dead nor dying,
But standing, walking, stretching forth his arms,
In all things like ourselves, but in the agony
With which he called for mercy; and---even so---
He was forsaken?

Rivers
'Twas an island
Only by sufferance of the winds and waves,
Which with their foam could cover it at will.
I know not how he perished; but the calm,
The same dead calm, continued many days.
Mortimer
    But his own crime had brought on him this doom,
    His wickedness prepared it; these expedients
    Are terrible, yet ours is not the fault.

Rivers
    The man was famished, and was innocent!

Mortimer
    Impossible!

Rivers
    The man had never wronged me.

Mortimer
    Banish the thought, crush it, and be at peace.
    His guilt was marked---these things could never be
    Were there not eyes that see, and for good ends,
    Where ours are baffled.

Rivers
    I had been deceived.

Mortimer
    And from that hour the miserable man
    No more was heard of?

Rivers
    I had been betrayed.

Mortimer
    And he found no deliverance!

Rivers
    The Crew
    Gave me a hearty welcome; they had laid
    The plot to rid themselves, at any cost,
    Of a tyrannic Master whom they loathed.
    So we pursued our voyage: when we landed,
    The tale was spread abroad; my power at once
    Shrunk from me; plans and schemes, and lofty hopes---
    All vanished. I gave way---do you attend?

Mortimer
    The Crew deceived you?

Rivers
    Nay, command yourself.

Mortimer
    It is a dismal night---how the wind howls!

Rivers
    I hid my head within a Convent, there
    Lay passive as a dormouse in mid winter.
    That was no life for me---I was o'erthrown,
    But not destroyed.
Mortimer

The proofs—you ought to have seen
The guilt—have touched it—felt it at your heart---
As I have done.

Rivers

A fresh tide of Crusaders
Drove by the place of my retreat: three nights
Did constant meditation dry my blood;
And, wheresoe’er I turned me, I beheld
A slavery compared to which the dungeon
And clanking chains are perfect liberty.
You understand me—I was comforted;
I saw that every possible shape of action
Might lead to good—I saw it and burst forth
Thirsting for some of those exploits that fill
The earth for sure redemption of lost peace.

[Marking Mortimer's countenance.

Nay, you have had the worst. Ferocity
Subsided in a moment, like a wind
That drops down dead out of a sky it vexed.
And yet I had within me evermore
A salient spring of energy; I mounted
From action up to action with a mind
That never rested. My sleep was bound
To purposes of reason—not a dream
But had a continuity and substance
That waking life had never power to give.

From Palestine / we marched to Syria: oft I left the Camp,
When all that multitude of hearts was still,
And followed on, through woods of gloomy cedar,
Into deep chasms troubled by roaring streams;
Or from the top of Lebanon surveyed
The moonlight desert, and the moonlight sea:
In these my lonely wanderings I perceived
What mighty objects do impress their forms
To elevate our intellectual being.

When from these forms I turned to contemplate
The World's opinions and her usages,
I seemed a Being who had passed alone
Into a region of futurity,
Whose natural element was freedom---

Mortimer

Stop---
I may not, cannot, follow thee.
Rivers

You must.
I had been nourished by the sickly food
Of popular applause. I now perceived
That we are praised, only as men in us
Do recognise some image of themselves,
An abject counterpart of what they are,
Or the empty thing that they would wish to be.
I felt that merit has no surer test
Than obloquy; that, if we wish to serve
The world in substance, not deceive by show,
We must become obnoxious to its hate,
Or fear disguised in simulated scorn.

Mortimer
I pity, can forgive, you; but those wretches---
That monstrous perfidy!

Rivers

Keep down your wrath.
Life stretched before me smooth as some broad way
Cleared for a monarch's progress.
And the men, from whom
This liberation came, you would destroy:
Join me in thanks for their blind services.

Mortimer
'Tis a strange aching that, when we would curse
And cannot.---You have betrayed me---I have done---
I am content---I know that he is guiltless---
That both are guiltless, without spot or stain,
Mutually consecrated.
Have you betrayed me? Speak to that.

Rivers

The mask,
Which for a season I have stooped to wear,
Must be cast off.---Know then that I was urged,
(For other impulse let it pass) was driven,
To seek for sympathy, because I saw
In you a mirror of my youthful self.
Now you are suffering---for the future day,
'Tis his who will command it.---Think of my story---
Herbert is innocent.

Mortimer
(in a faint voice, and doubtingly).

You do but echo
My own wild words?
Rivers
Young Man, the seed must lie
Hid in the earth, or there can be no harvest;
'Tis Nature's law. What I have done in darkness
I will avow before the face of day.
Herbert is innocent.

Mortimer
What fiend could prompt
This action? Innocent!---oh, breaking heart!---
Alive or dead, I'll find him.

[Exit.

Rivers
Alive---perdition!

[Exit.

9. MUSIC DURING THE NEXT SIX TILES
The scene changes to Robert’s hut where Matilda has found refuge.

Robert’s wife tells Matilda about her husband, whose nature was soured by years of wrongful imprisonment.

Robert returns — alone. Reluctantly, self-defensively, he confesses that he has abandoned a blind old man to die on the moor, fearing he might be charged with his murder.

Matilda overhears the end of the conversation. She realises the old man must be her father. She and Robert hurry out in a final attempt to rescue him.

Two or three hours have elapsed.
On the edge of the stormy moor, Rivers tries to catch up with Mortimer who is desperately trying to find Herbert. Rivers is still confident of success.

Scene Nine (Nearby on the edge of the stormy moor.)
Mortimer and Robert enter from opposite sides.

Scene 9 (from Act 5)

The edge of the Moor. [EARLY ON THE FOLLOWING MORNING]
Mortimer and Robert enter from opposite sides.

Mortimer
(raising his eyes and perceiving Robert).
In any corner of this savage Waste,
Have you, good Peasant, seen a blind old Man?

Robert
I heard---

Mortimer
You heard him, where? when heard him?
Robert

As you know,

The first hours of last night were rough with storm:
I had been out in search of a stray heifer;
Returning late, I heard a moaning sound;
Then, thinking that my fancy had deceived me,
I hurried on, when straight a second moan,
A human voice distinct, struck on my ear.
So guided, distant a few steps, I found
An aged Man, and such as you described.

Mortimer

You heard!---he called you to him? Of all men
The best and kindest!---but where is he? guide me,
That I may see him.

Robert

On a ridge of rocks
A lonesome Chapel stands, deserted now:
The bell is left, which no one dares remove;
And, when the stormy wind blows o'er the peak,
It rings, as if a human hand were there
To pull the cord. I guess he must have heard it;
And it had led him towards the precipice,
To climb up to the spot whence the sound came;
But he had failed through weakness. From his hand
His staff had dropped, and close upon the brink
Of a small pool of water he was laid,
As if he had stooped to drink, and so remained
Without the strength to rise.

Mortimer

Well, well, he lives,
And all is safe: what said he?

Robert

But few words:
He only spake to me of a dear Daughter,
Who, so he feared, would never see him more;
And of a Stranger to him, One by whom
He had been sore misused; but he forgave
The wrong and the wrong-doer.

Mortimer

But had he strength to walk? I could have borne him
A thousand miles.
Robert
I am in poverty,
And know how busy are the tongues of men;
My heart was willing, Sir, but I am one
Whose good deeds will not stand by their own light;
And, though it smote me more than words can tell,
I left him.

Mortimer
Oh Monster! Monster! there are three of us,
And we shall howl together.

[AFTER A PAUSE AND IN A FEEBLE VOICE.

---Where was it? where?

[DRAGGING HIM ALONG.

Robert
'Tis needless; spare your violence. His Daughter---

Mortimer
Ay, in the word a thousand scorpions lodge:
This old man had a Daughter.

Robert
To the spot
I hurried back with her.---Oh save me, Sir,
From such a journey!---there was a black tree,
A single tree; she thought it was her Father. ---
As we approached, a solitary crow
Rose from the spot;---the Daughter clapped her hands,
And then I heard a shriek so terrible ---

[MORTIMER SHRINKS BACK.

The startled bird quivered upon the wing.

Mortimer
Dead, dead!---

Robert
(after a pause).

A dismal matter, Sir, for me,
And seems the like for you; if 'tis your wish,
I'll lead you to his Daughter; but 'twere best
That she should be prepared; I'll go before.

Mortimer
There will be need of preparation.

[ROBERT GOES OFF.

[MORTIMER PAUSES AND THEN GOES OFF].
Scene Ten  (Robert's cottage)
Robert enters to 'prepare' Matilda for her lover's coming.

Mortimer enters. Robert leaves the room.

Scene 10 (from Act 5)

The door of Robert's cottage---
Matilda seated---enter Robert.

Robert
Your Father, Lady, from a wilful hand
Has met unkindness; so indeed he told me,
And you remember such was my report.

Matilda
My Father is dead;
Why dost thou come to me with words like these?

Robert
A wicked Man should answer for his crimes.
Hard by, a Man I met, who, from plain proofs
Of interfering Heaven, I have no doubt,
Laid hands upon your Father. Fit it were
You should prepare to meet him.

Matilda
I have nothing
To do with others; help me to my Father---

Enter Mortimer.

[She turns, sees Mortimer and throws herself upon his neck; then, after some time]:

In joy I met thee, but a few hours past;
And thus we meet again; one human stay
Is left me still in thee. Nay, shake not so.

Mortimer
In such a wilderness---to see no thing,
No, not the pitying moon!

Matilda
And perish so.

Mortimer
Without a dog to moan for him.

Matilda
Think not of it,
But enter there and see him how he sleeps,
Tranquil as he had died in his own bed.
Mortimer
  Tranquil---why not?
Matilda
   Oh, peace!
Mortimer
   He is at peace;
   His body is at rest: there was a plot;
   A hideous plot, against the soul of man:
   It took effect---and yet I baffled it,
   In some degree.
   Give me a reason why the wisest thing
   That the earth owns shall never choose to die,
   But some one must be near to count his groans.
   The wounded deer retires to solitude,
   And dies in solitude: all things but man,
   All die in solitude.

[Moving out through the inner door of the cottage].

10. MUSIC, A TREMOLO, DURING THE NEXT TILE
Mortimer goes into the bedroom to see the body.
And returns…

(Returning).
   The dead have but one face.
Matilda
   Oh, had you seen him living!---
Mortimer
   I (so filled
   With horror is this world) am unto thee
   The thing most precious, that it now contains:
   Therefore through me alone must be revealed
   By whom thy Parent was destroyed, Matilda!
   I have the proofs!---
Matilda
   O miserable Father!
   Thou didst command me to bless all mankind;
   Nor to this moment, have I ever wished
   Evil to any living thing; but hear me,
   Hear me, ye Heavens!---
(kneeling)

---May vengeance haunt the fiend
For this most cruel murder: let him live
And move in terror of the elements;
The thunder send him on his knees to prayer
In the open streets, and let him think he sees,
If e'er he entereth the house of God,
The roof, self-moving, unsettling o'er his head;
And let him, when he would lie down at night,
Point to his wife the blood-drops on his pillow!

Mortimer

My voice was silent, but my heart hath joined thee.

Matilda

(leaning on Mortimer).
O Friend! My faithful true and only Comforter.

Mortimer

Ay, come to me and weep.
(He kisses her.)

Matilda

Thy vest is torn, thy cheek is deadly pale;
Hast thou pursued the monster?

Mortimer

I have found him.---
I am accurst:
All nature curses me, and in my heart
Thy curse is fixed; the truth must be laid bare.
It must be told, and borne. I am the man,
(Abused, betrayed, but how it matters not)
Presumptuous above all that ever breathed,
Who, casting as I thought a guilty Person
Upon Heaven's righteous judgment, did become
An instrument of Fiends. Through me, through me,
Thy Father perished.

Matilda

[AFTER PREGNANT PAUSE TO REPLACE A CUT]

You have then seen my Father?

Mortimer

He has leaned
Upon this arm.
Matilda

You led him towards the Convent?

Mortimer

That Convent was Stone-Arthur Castle. Thither
We were his guides. I on that night resolved
That he should wait thy coming till the day
Of resurrection.

Matilda

[AFTER ANOTHER PREGNANT PAUSE TO REPLACE A CUT]

Was it my Father?---no, no, no, for he
Was meek and patient, feeble, old and blind,
Helpless, and loved me dearer than his life.
---But hear me. For one question, I have a heart
That will sustain me. Did you murder him?

Mortimer

No, not by stroke of arm. But learn the process:
Proof after proof was pressed upon me; guilt
Made evident, as seemed, by blacker guilt.

His looks,
His words and tones and gestures, did but serve
With me to aggravate his crimes, and heaped
Ruin upon the cause for which they pleaded.
Then pity crossed the path of my resolve:
Confounded, I looked up to Heaven, and cast,
Matilda! thy blind Father, on the Ordeal
Of the bleak Waste---left him---and so he died!---

[Matilda sinks senseless  AND IS BORNE OFF]

11. MUSIC DURING THE FOLLOWING THREE TILES

Matilda sinks senseless.

Rivers enters.
He believes that Mortimer has killed Herbert as planned, and that he will soon recover from his remorse.
A tumult of horses is heard outside.
The band of Borderers burst into the cottage.
Rivers is seized and stabbed to death.

Mortimer defends his noble aims and achievements but ‘resigns his station’.
The Borderers are urged to watch over Matilda and to ensure she enters her ‘long-suspended rights’.
Then he pronounces his own verdict on himself:
Epilogue (last speech of Act 5)

Mortimer

No more of that; in silence hear my doom:

A hermitage has furnished fit relief
To some offenders; other penitents,
Less patient in their wretchedness, have fallen,
Like the old Roman, on their own sword's point.

They had their choice: a wanderer must I go,
The Spectre of that innocent Man, my guide.

No human ear shall ever hear me speak;
No human dwelling ever give me food,
Or sleep, or rest: but, over waste and wild,
In search of nothing, that this earth can give,
But expiation, will I wander on---
A Man by pain and thought compelled to live,
Yet loathing life---till anger is appeased
In Heaven, and Mercy gives me leave to die.

FINIS