

PENGUIN  CLASSICS

LIFE IS A DREAM

PEDRO CALDERÓN DE LA BARCA was one of the leading dramatists of the Spanish Golden Age. He was born in Madrid on January 17, 1600. His father was Secretary to the Royal Treasury and a minor noble, and his mother was a devoutly religious woman who died when he was a child. Calderón studied canon law in preparation for his presumed career in the church, but in the 1620s he started to write verse, and his success in competitions attracted attention. The first known staging of one of his plays was a 1623 performance of *Amor, honor, poder* (Love, Honor, and Power). Eventually, the prolific Calderón would write approximately 120 full-length dramatic works, some 80 one-act *autos sacramentales* (religious mystery plays), and many other short pieces of poetry and works for the theater. In 1636 King Philip IV named him a knight of the Order of Santiago. His output lessened in the 1640s, and in 1651 Calderón entered the priesthood, becoming chaplain of the Capilla de los Reyes Nuevos at the cathedral in Toledo, and then, in 1656, head of the congregation of San Pedro in Madrid. He continued to write both secular and religious plays until his death on May 25, 1681.

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PEDRO CALDERÓN
DE LA BARCA

Life Is a Dream

(LA VIDA ES SUEÑO)

Translated with an Introduction by
GREGARY J. RACZ

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Introduction

Pedro Calderón de la Barca's path to literary fame as Spain's pre-eminent Golden Age dramatist was far more direct than his circuitous road to the priesthood. Born in Madrid on January 17, 1600, to a father of minor nobility serving as Secretary to the Royal Treasury and a pious mother whose dream was that her second surviving male child enter the church, Calderón should have been on a career trajectory predetermined by birth order. His older brother, Diego, by the societal logic of the time, was dutifully bound to inherit his father's position while the younger, José, would become a military officer; their sister, Dorotea, was dispatched to a convent at the tender age of thirteen. Young Pedro was only ten, and a student at the city's excellent Jesuit-run Colegio Imperial, when his beloved mother died—the first of a series of childhood tragedies that would derail his intended assumption of a family-endowed chaplaincy. Shortly after becoming a widower, Calderón's father married a woman who cared little for her stepchildren. In 1614, Pedro continued his studies at the Universidad de Alcalá outside Madrid. When his father passed away in 1615, he left a will that contained a clause urging Pedro to follow the path expected of him, and the Calderón children were looked after largely by a maternal uncle. Pedro studied canon law in pursuit of his vocation at the Universidad de Salamanca until 1618, when, probably as a result of the family's reduced economic circumstances, he was temporarily excommunicated for his failure to pay rent to the convent in which he lodged, and was held for a time in the university prison.

Two events of the 1620s point to an early adulthood at odds with his widely acknowledged qualities of charity, responsibility, and collegiality later in his life. Though details are sketchy, it is known that all three Calderón brothers sought refuge in the Austrian embassy in 1621 after the violent death of Nicolás de Velasco, the son of a man in the Duke of Frías's service, and that this affair was settled with a hefty monetary payment raised by the sale of Diego's title to their deceased father's position. In 1629, an attack on one of Calderón's brothers forced the assailant to seek refuge in a Trinitarian convent, where the surreptitious removal of nuns' veils by his overly zealous pursuers caused a minor scandal famously denounced by a fiery preacher of the day. It was during this decade, though, that evidence of Calderón's first successful attempts at writing come to light in the verse he composed for competitions held to honor Madrid's patron saint, Isidore. His submissions attracted the attention of no less a luminary than Lope Félix de Vega Carpio, the reigning playwright of the day, who praised the young writer for his skill and grace. Calderón would go on to place third in the contests of 1622. While biographical information on Calderón is occasionally as imprecise as the chronology of his manuscripts, the first recorded performance of a play, *Amor, honor, poder* (Love, Honor, and Power), dates from 1623. Over the course of a long and extremely productive career, Calderón would write approximately 120 full-length dramatic works, some 80 one-act *autos sacramentales* commemorating the divine mysteries of the Eucharist, and other short pieces of poetry and works for the theater. His copious output was greatly encouraged by the patronage of King Philip IV, who commissioned works for a new palace theater and named Calderón a knight of the Order of Santiago in 1636.

By the 1635 composition of *La vida es sueño* (Life Is a Dream), a work many hold to be the supreme example of Spanish Golden Age drama, Calderón had completed a varied body of work for the theater that includes the majority of the plays for which he remains best known. While dates are sometimes approximate, comedies such as *La dama duende* (The Phantom

Lady) and *Casa con dos puertas mala es de guardar* (A House with Two Doors Is Difficult to Guard) were written in 1629; the drama of Christian sacrifice *El príncipe constante* (The Constant Prince) and the semimystical *La devoción de la cruz* (Devotion to the Cross) were finished the following year. In 1632, Calderón published his first play, *El astrólogo fingido* (The Fake Astrologer), a comedy that inspired adaptations by such world-renowned writers as France's Thomas Corneille, England's John Dryden, and Germany's Johann Ludwig Tieck. The murder of a wife, an incorrectly designated "Spanish" theme with which Calderón remains doggedly identified, lies at the heart of two dramas also written around this time, *El médico de su honra* (The Surgeon of His Honor) and *A secreto agravio, secreta venganza* (Secret Vengeance for Secret Insult), the former set in an earlier era and the latter in a foreign country. Sometime between 1635 and 1637 Calderón also wrote *El gran teatro del mundo* (The Great Theater of the World), widely considered his finest *auto*; the equally notable honor play *El alcalde de Zalamea* (The Mayor of Zalamea); and *El mágico prodigioso* (The Wonder-Working Magician), a delightfully lyrical work loosely based on the Faust legend.

In the 1640s, at the height of Calderón's professional standing and prestige at court, a series of unfortunate events constricted his burgeoning theatrical output. A revolt in the province of Catalonia against centralized Spanish rule obliged Calderón in his capacity as knight of the Order of Santiago to fight in two campaigns against the rebel armies, and in 1642 he returned to Madrid wounded. The death in 1644 of Isabel, Philip IV's queen, shuttered the theaters for an observance of national mourning. The personal tragedy of his brother José's death in battle followed in 1645, a year before the untimely death of Baltasar Carlos, the heir apparent to the Spanish throne, which closed the theaters once again, this time from 1646 to 1649. During this period, his other brother, Diego, also died, as did the mother of Calderón's illegitimate son, whom he recognized and provided for throughout his life. These sudden emotional and professional setbacks may have occasioned a period of

midlife reflection in Calderón, intensified perhaps by increased economic difficulties. Whatever the case, the many detours on Calderón's road to the priesthood ended in 1651, when he at last took holy orders, becoming chaplain of the Capilla de los Reyes Nuevos at the cathedral in Toledo. From this time until his death on May 25, 1681, Calderón dedicated his theatrical talents almost entirely to the production of *autos*. Possibly to figure more prominently in the theatrical life of the capital, Calderón returned to Madrid in 1656 to head the congregation of San Pedro. There, in this final phase of his professional life, he wrote additional mythological plays, a few works set to music, and the occasional secular comedy.

Lope de Vega's death in 1635, the year *Life Is a Dream* was written, all but cemented Calderón's position as the leading Spanish playwright of the day. The last of Calderón's challengers to this unofficial claim was Tirso de Molina, author of the Don Juan play *El burlador de Sevilla* (The Trickster of Seville), who died in 1648. By then, the Spanish baroque stage had lost such greats as Pérez de Montalván (d. 1638), Ruiz de Alarcón (d. 1639), and Mira de Amescua (d. 1644). Inheriting the mantle of Lope de Vega, the man Miguel de Cervantes called "*el monstruo de naturaleza*" (the prodigy of nature) for having written more than seven hundred plays, Calderón would come to be dubbed "*el monstruo de ingenio*" (the prodigy of invention) for his perfection of the three-act dramatic structure and mixed versification Lope had both instituted and popularized for a nascent national theater.

While tales of the sleeper transported had appeared for centuries in Western and non-Western cultures alike, critics have noted that *Life Is a Dream* bears more than a passing resemblance to Ludovicus Hollonius's play *Somnium vitae humanae* (1605), written in German despite its Latin title, although no direct line of influence has been established between these works. The story of a drunkard who is turned into the Duke of Bourgogne before resuming his natural state invites compelling comparisons with Calderón's masterpiece. So, too, does the au-

thor's own *Yerros de naturaleza y aciertos de fortuna* (Nature's Errors Redeemed by Fortune), co-written in 1634 with Antonio Coello, in which the relationships and experiences of a royal family seem a sort of preliminary sketch for the work Calderón wrote the following year. The emerging canon of the Spanish Renaissance theater, however, contained little that could prepare for Calderón's intricately woven handling of this theme in *Life Is a Dream*, a highly poetic drama of free will versus predestination and of nature's versus nurture's role in self-determination played out against the backdrop of court intrigue and the restoration of personal honor.

Life Is a Dream relates the story of Prince Segismund's spiritual redemption and improbable assumption of the Polish throne. Heartlessly imprisoned from birth by his father, King Basil, a devotee of astrology who had divined in the stars that an ungodly son would one day place his heel upon his sire's head, Segismund is reared in nearly savage isolation, attended only by the fitfully pitiless Clotaldo. Rosaura, a Russian noblewoman on a quest to demand satisfaction of the nobleman who has deceived her, accidentally stumbles upon the rightful heir's rustic cell on the eve of the prince's return to court. There, the putatively childless king has decided to determine whether human beings can contravene the dictates of the heavens. Having ordered the prince drugged to ensure his ready transport, Basil allows his uncultivated son to interact freely with the nobles and servants at the palace. In the meantime, Astolf, the nephew Basil plans to name the next king of Poland, is revealed to be the deceitful suitor who has abandoned Rosaura.

Astolf's subsequent wooing of his cousin Stella, Basil's choice for Poland's next queen, is complicated by the sudden appearance of Rosaura, now disguised at court as one of Stella's ladies-in-waiting on the advice of Clotaldo, who has realized that she is the child he abandoned when leaving Russia for Poland as a young man. Segismund develops a strange attraction to Rosaura, and takes a liking to her former manservant, Clarion,

who comes to function as the rightful prince's hapless valet and erstwhile jester. When Basil's ill-conceived experiment in unrestrained behavior yields predictably disastrous results, Segismund is drugged again and unceremoniously taken back to languish in his cell. There, Clotaldo informs the prince that all he believes he has experienced was nothing more than a dream, and Segismund despairs of deliverance until Basil's Polish subjects learn of his existence and revolt in support of proper royal succession. The resolution of these various subplots and the fates of the characters involved rest ultimately upon the battle for monarchical succession waged at the play's end, in which political fortunes are not strictly adjudicated by the standards of personal worthiness found in conventional morality.

A truly singular figure in the canon of Western literature, Segismund attains critical insight into the importance of maintaining a nobility of spirit after successive stages of suffering, resignation, and reflection. These trials of a human soul, individualistic though they may appear, are nevertheless played out within a context of competing universal philosophies, ideologies, and worldviews. This may surprise readers expecting to find a traditional Judeo-Christian cosmogony informing the action of the play. While the predominantly Catholic Spain of 1635 had grown accustomed to the doctrinal rigors of the Inquisition, established in 1478 to eradicate Jewish heresy but increasingly used by Philip IV's father to combat the spread of Calvinism, and while Spanish royalty and Calderón held orthodox Catholic beliefs, *Life Is a Dream* seems more imbued with pagan Greek and Roman values than with a staunch Christian faith. The play's fleeting mentions of Christ's crucifixion, the Catholic Church's calendar, sacred skits, oaths to God, and the un-Christian belief in fatalism, for example, pale beside the numerous references to mythological and historical figures from classical antiquity. Within this ambient paganism, critics are correct to note a Platonist sensibility in a plot revolving around the ungodly "science" of astrology, as well as in Segismund's unschooled response to female beauty and the apparent innateness of his latently "magnanimous" character. Whether

the prince is better viewed as an analogue to Prometheus, severely punished by the gods for the threat of usurping their sovereign powers, or to Adam, a new man fallen from an edenic life though destined to have dominion over a lesser land, is open to debate. In either case, these apparent tensions between conflicting worldviews in Calderón's play are smoothed over through the rationalizations of medieval scholasticism, a theological and philosophical method that sought to bridge the myriad chasms between classical pagan culture and Catholicism by integrating Aristotelian and Platonic thought with Christian teachings. The resulting hybridization of the work's textual universe is typical of the Renaissance mind's ability to accommodate such obvious incongruities.

Still, it is neither Catholicism nor paganism but so-called natural law, elements of which may be found in both of these ontological systems, that takes primacy in the ethical framework selectively governing the characters and events in *Life Is a Dream*. As manifested in the relationships among human beings in families, society, and politics, natural law broadly unites the play's competing worldviews under the moral imperatives (also shared at least in theory by the chivalric codes of the aristocracy) of goodness, mercy, justice, and virtue. Basil, for example, is a reprehensible if slightly ridiculous figure not because of his fatuous belief in astrology, but because he is an inhumane, unnatural father who has robbed his son of a tolerable existence and the Polish people of their rightful heir through natural succession by primogeniture. Similarly, Segismund, though marginally catechized by Clotaldo, derives the bulk of his learning and understanding of the world not from church doctrine but from direct observations of nature. Before the prince can assume the throne for which he is destined, he must learn the universally ennobling values of prudence and forgiveness. In a textual world only nominally Christian, what besides an abiding belief in the intrinsic importance of benevolence would compel Clotaldo to urge a prison-bound Segismund to perform good deeds regardless of whether he believes life is reality or dream? Salvation in a traditionally religious sense resonates weakly among such

competing ideologies. Following the heraldic strictures of a divinely ordained order giving primacy to bloodline and caste, the actions at the Polish court inevitably lead to the resolution of dramatic conflict in accordance with the law of nature: a father and son are duly reconciled; an intermittently heartless tutor is pardoned for his shortcomings; a rebellious soldier is imprisoned for treason; a woman's honor is restored through an acknowledgment of past transgression when Astolf weds Rosaura (though only after her noble status has been confirmed); and the prince marries the abandoned Stella, thereby ensuring a final orderly pairing and the ultimate return of the king's son to the throne. Reflecting the slow trajectory of this recovery of essential goodness and innate nobility, the "wild"—that is, unnatural—horse/hippogriff mentioned in the first line of *Life Is a Dream* tellingly yields the stage to Segismund's "prudent and judicious" prince at play's close.

The work's prevailing metaphysics aside, Segismund's progressive transformations from noble savage to brutish courtier to enlightened monarch may strike a discordant note in audiences unfamiliar with pre-Romantic conceptualizations of character. Segismund's scripted, somewhat hasty conversions reflect the Spanish Golden Age aesthetic that relegates individual psychology to a secondary plane and conceives of personality as subservient to the conventional exigencies of plot, theme, and structure. This approach to characterization is, perhaps, best viewed in the baroque tension of competing identities each protagonist subsumes in somewhat stilted fashion within a dual self. Segismund, as mentioned above, is both abject prisoner and exalted prince, "a man of a beast / [a]nd a beast of a man," as he declares in the play's best-known chiasmus—a "mongrel mix," as he elsewhere describes this ontological dialectic. Basil is both superstitious and learned, a gullible astrologer and a concerned (if duped) ruler. Rosaura is alternately a woman wronged and a warrior in masculine clothes, part man, part woman, as she explains to Segismund while preparing to join his forces. Clotaldo is the prince's committed tutor and only source of human contact, as well as his warden and jail keeper,

at once compassionate and cruel. Clarion, the play's clown figure, or *gracioso*, is simultaneously cowardly buffoon and truth-telling pragmatist.

This duality of character in *Life Is a Dream* has its structural counterpart in the many parallels throughout the play, and is emblematic of the intricate baroque symmetry uniting the various elements of plot and subplot. Shortly after it is revealed that Rosaura has been abandoned by her father, Segismund's abandonment comes to light. No sooner has Duke Astolf declared himself the likely heir to the Polish throne than King Basil announces his intention to observe the actions of the freed Segismund at court. While Stella for a time is destined to be Astolf's queen, she ultimately will reign as the wife of the future King Segismund. Rosaura serves Stella as a lady-in-waiting under the assumed name of Astrea, which, like her mistress's name, means "star," a sidereal etymology upon which Segismund expounds at the close of Act II, scene 7. As Rosaura laments her deception by Astolf through a false promise of marriage, she recounts the heartfelt sympathy she received from her own deceived mother. Clarion shares the fates of two unfortunate masters, wandering lost with Rosaura through the mountains of Poland and later suffering imprisonment with Segismund for his knowledge of court secrets learned while in the prince's service. Locked in a remote tower, Clarion even invites comparison with King Basil's belief in planetary augury when he attempts to read his fortune in a deck of cards.

Similarly strange for their grounding in an earlier theatrical tradition are the lengthy monologues strewn throughout *Life Is a Dream*. The most extreme are Basil's ponderous first-act speech of 255 lines and Rosaura's 232-line counterpart in Act III. Such virtuosic set pieces have been likened to operatic arias, and are almost always shortened in contemporary performances. In nearly all cases, they serve a narrative function, and these expository declamations, typically of background information and/or events that have transpired offstage, are vestiges of the unity of time, place, and action first proposed by Aristotle as conventions for the drama of classical antiquity. To ensure that

a theater piece treats one subject in one location over the course of a single day, many playwrights felt compelled to compress their story lines by making use of speeches in this way. Calderón followed Lope and other early Spanish Renaissance dramatists in flouting these strictures, although *Life Is a Dream* still employs only two basic settings—the mountain prison and the Polish court—as well as more or less unified action (which includes the well-integrated Rosaura/Clotaldo/Astolf subplot) over the course of as little as three days.

Rosaura's disguises, first as a male traveler and then as Astrea, may also seem like forced contrivances to today's theatergoers, yet they mirror the play's central secrets, the final revelations of which lead to a neat resolution of the plot. Rosaura's, Basil's, Clotaldo's, and Astolf's concealments are thematically linked to the poles of fiction/dream and reality/wakefulness proposed by the play, and underscore the inherent tensions between empirical observation and absolutist belief.

Calderón's masterly use of conceitism—witty, allusive conceits couched in rich language—is also characteristic of seventeenth-century Spanish writing, and was a favored stylistic technique of his near-contemporaries Francisco Quevedo and Baltasar Gracián. Such expert touches of formalistic flair are responsible for some of the most memorable poetic passages in *Life Is a Dream*, including the wretched Segismund's prison-cell lament in Act I, scene 2, Astolf's somewhat foppish praise of Stella in Act I, scene 5, and Clarion's magniloquent description of Rosaura's horse as an embodiment of the four elements in Act III, scene 9. (Segismund's starry wooing of Rosaura-as-Astrea mentioned above also falls into this category.) Calderón reveals his virtuosic facility with baroque verse by ending each speech tidily with a summary listing of every element included in the elaborate comparison. This Spanish Golden Age taste for seemingly logical paradox in free linguistic play may also be observed in Segismund's rationale for wishing to strangle Rosaura in Act I, scene 2, and in the latter's long and intricate exchange with Clotaldo on the relative merits of giving versus receiving in Act III, scene 8.

Many of Calderón's plays, *Life Is a Dream* among them, were first performed in *corrales*, outdoor spaces located in large, open courtyards. The configurations of these theaters, along with the limitations of Renaissance stagecraft, virtually dictated certain conventions of Golden Age plays. In seventeenth-century Spain, a theatrical presentation would generally take place in the afternoon, in natural light on a curtainless stage with bare-bones décor. The characters would often refer to setting or locale, as well as to the weather and such pertinent dramatic details as the time of day, as in the first one hundred lines or so of *Life Is a Dream*. Scene changes were frequently signaled simply by actors leaving the stage empty for a short period of time, although on occasion some sort of rudimentary backdrop might be employed. Perhaps most foreign to a modern concept of theater, though, was that plays of this period, even those as serious and well crafted as *Life Is a Dream*, were performed between additional entertainments that likewise affected their theatrical composition. Though by Calderón's day songs with musical accompaniment and the recitation of poetic prologues preceded dramatic functions infrequently, the first act of a Golden Age play was typically followed by an *entremés* or *sainete*, a short comic farce dealing with the lower classes, while a sort of ballet was staged after Acts II and III. Once the action resumed, the audience often found it difficult to remember, over the hours of a long afternoon's bill, what exactly had transpired in the drama, so it was treated to a repetitious summary monologue, which recounted the plot of the previous act or acts. In *Life Is a Dream*, Basil's explanation to Clotaldo at the beginning of Act II, which repeats the reasons why Segismund has been brought to court, is one clear instance of this practical requirement, as is Rosaura's recapitulation of her entire role in the drama in Act III, scene 9. This speech, in fact, is so lengthy that midway through it Rosaura self-consciously suggests, "Let's skip a bit."

Several of Calderón's works were translated during his lifetime, and versions of his plays appeared continually in French, Ital-

ian, Dutch, English, and German productions. Calderón's status as one of Europe's premier dramatists continued until the end of the eighteenth century, during which period his works were performed with a frequency second only to Molière's. After hundreds of years of Reformation challenges to Catholic hegemony on the Continent, and with the rise of an Enlightenment aesthetic that considered Calderón's sensibility too broadly imaginative and emotive for the rational demands of the neo-classical temperament, Calderón's standing in Europe suffered from the prevailing winds of change. In his native land, however, he remained the most performed playwright until his popularity was eclipsed by Tirso de Molina during Romanticism's relatively late flowering in Spain. The somewhat medieval religiosity that critics point out in many of Calderón's dramas—somber and retributive—was a stumbling block for a reawakened Europe just emerging, unlike the more isolated Spain, from the sweeping secular humanism of the Renaissance. During this time, the most frequent productions of Calderón were of relatively lesser-known comedies, since the ultimately doctrinaire aura of Catholicism in many of his tragedies and, of course, the *autos sacramentales*, placed him effectively off-limits and out of sympathy with northern Protestant audiences.

If Shakespeare owes his present-day standing as the West's finest playwright to his rescue by and subsequent revival through the British Romantic establishment, it might be claimed that Calderón's current status in the canon of Western literature is due to a similar rediscovery, by the German Romantics. *Life Is a Dream* was by far the most popular play in Germany for practically the entire first half of the nineteenth century, and such influential German poets and critics as A. W. Schlegel, Friedrich von Schiller, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe enthusiastically hailed a figure they considered to be the most "aristocratic" of playwrights. Calderón's fame at this time was so great that Percy Bysshe Shelley undertook a partial translation of *El mágico prodigioso*, while the Spanish master's impact on German sensibilities extended to a host of retranslations and adaptations for the stage (some of these in musical productions).

In an increasingly liberal nineteenth-century Spain, however, Calderón's foothold on the Castilian imagination continued to slip. The progressivism that culminated in the works of the Generation of '98—writers such as Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja, Azorín, and Ramón María del Valle-Inclán, who explored Spain's cultural rebirth following the loss of its last overseas colony—relegated the Golden Age author to the status of a reactionary representative of what had become by that time a rapidly modernizing nation. Nevertheless, in English-speaking countries throughout the twentieth century there was, and continues to be of late, a flurry of translation activity reintroducing Calderón in general and *Life Is a Dream* in particular to ever-broadening audiences. In the end, it is safe to assert that *Life Is a Dream* has attained the well-deserved stature of a world classic, perhaps more respected than understood or loved. When it is staged these days, often in American regional theaters, productions predictably emphasize the play's universalizing qualities, and focus considerably less on Spanish period effects. Calderón, however, continues to win over adherents to his unique and impressive oeuvre as he did Shelley, whose effusive, if chauvinistic, remarks in a letter of 1819 reflect an admittedly biased though still commonly voiced sentiment: "I have read about twelve of his plays; some of them certainly deserve to be ranked among the grandest and most perfect productions of the human mind. He exceeds all modern dramatists with the exception of Shakespeare."

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A Note on the Translation

Some twenty English-language translations of *La vida es sueño* may currently be found. The majority of these have been published in book form, though some remain in manuscript, and many are now out of print. These texts vary considerably in aesthetic conceptualization and poetic strategy, and range from literal prose versions to free-verse renderings to abridged adaptations for the stage. The present translation of Calderón's masterpiece represents the first attempt to render the drama entirely in analogous meter and rhyme since 1853, when both Denis Florence MacCarthy and Edward FitzGerald, with varying degrees of success, contemporaneously produced full-length English-language versions of the play. The earliest translation of *La vida es sueño*, by Malcolm Cowan, dates from 1830.

The language of this translation has attempted to retain a hint of archaism without striving to sound pseudo-Shakespearean. One aim of this approach has been to allow contemporary English-language audiences to eavesdrop, as it were, on the aesthetics of dramatic production in a Spain whose nearly four-hundred-year remove in time is surpassed by a cultural distance vaster still. All Spanish syllabic lines have been converted into English strong-stress meters: that is, the eleven-beat hendecasyllable into iambic pentameter, octosyllables into iambic tetrameter, and so on. Rhyme appears wherever it does in Calderón's original Spanish, while the alternating assonantal rhymes of the extended narrative passages have been turned into quatrains in which the second and fourth lines produce an off-rhyme in English. Since Calderón utilized a variety of metrical and rhyming patterns—*romance*, *redondillas*, *silvas*, *décimas*, *quintillas*, and *octavas reales*—the reader should readily note

all instances of poetic shift in the present English-language play. The somewhat shorter Spanish line has likewise been retained to differentiate Spanish Golden Age metrics from Elizabethan poetics.

No manuscript of *La vida es sueño* survives, and early published versions differ considerably. The present translation follows in almost all cases the text presented by Ciriaco Morón Arroyo in the Cátedra "Letras Hispánicas" series, which maintains the scenic divisions created by Juan Eugenio de Hartzenbusch in his *Biblioteca de autores españoles* of 1851.

Life Is a Dream

Characters

SEGISMUND, *the prince, son of Basil*

BASIL, *King of Poland*

ROSAURA, *a Russian noblewoman*

CLOTALDO, *an old nobleman, father of Rosaura*

ASTOLF, *Duke of Moscow*

STELLA, *niece of King Basil*

CLARION, *a clown*

GUARDS

SERVANTS

SOLDIERS

LADIES-IN-WAITING

COURTIERS

MUSICIANS

*The action alternates between a remote mountain prison in Poland
and the Polish court, including their environs.*

ACT I

Scene i

[Enter ROSAURA, high on a mountainside in Poland, dressed in a man's traveling clothes. Having been thrown from her horse, she descends while addressing the runaway animal.]

ROSAURA: Dash off, wild hippogriff!
Why are you charging wind-swift down
a cliff
So barren and strewn with stone
You'll only tumble headlong all alone
Into its tangled maze? 5
Dull lightning bolt devoid of fiery rays,
Scaled fish, bird shy of hue,
Where is that horse sense instinct
tendered you?
Dwell on these pinnacles
And be a Phaëthon for the animals, 10
While I, forlorn and blind,
Oblivious to the path fate has in mind
For me, descend the brow
Of this imposing, sun-burnt mountain now
And dodge its tangled hair, 15
Emerging I could hardly tell you where.
This welcome, Poland, would
Be more hospitable if strangers could

Sign in with ink, not blood.
 I'm hardly here, but bleed hard on your mud. 20
 Still, fortune foresees all:
 Where does one find compassion for a fall?

[Enter CLARION, a clown.]

CLARION: One? Make that two of us
 And count me in when you kick up a fuss!
 My lady, may I speak? 25
 As two, we left our native land to seek
 Adventure in the world,
 Both saw strange sights, watched miseries
 unfurled
 Before our very eyes
 And tumbled down these hills to great surprise. 30
 I've shared all your duress,
 So tell me now, what's causing you distress?

ROSAURA: I'd hoped to spare your ear
 From my complaining, Clarion, out of fear
 A servant might be prone 35
 To start bemoaning troubles not his own.
 There's so much joy to find
 In sorrows, one philosopher opined,
 That those who've naught to rue
 Will seek a share so they can grumble, too. 40

CLARION: Philosopher? Perhaps
 A whiskered drunk! I say a hundred slaps
 Would leave the rogue well served,
 And then I bet he'd whine they weren't
 deserved!
 But what should we do now, 45
 My lady, stranded here, you will allow,
 At just the worst of times,

Right when the sun is seeking western
 climes?

ROSAURA: Who ever tread such singular terrain?
 If my imagination will refrain 50
 From fooling with my sight,
 I dare say, by this day's fainthearted light,
 I see a structure rise
 Amid those peaks.

CLARION: Now, either my heart lies
 Or hope views what it wills. 55

ROSAURA: A palace born within these barren hills
 So rustic and so crude
 The sun is loath to look on frames so rude;
 An edifice of rough 60
 Construction, fashioned ruggedly enough
 That, lying at the base
 Of rocky crags that touch the sun's warm face
 And bask in brilliant lights,
 It looks like some huge stone pitched from
 the heights.

CLARION: Let's wander down a bit 65
 Where we can get a better look at it.
 If destiny is kind,
 The castle dwellers there might feel inclined
 To take us in.

ROSAURA: Its door 70
 Stands open like a gaping mouth mid-roar
 And night springs from its jowls,
 Engendered in the cavern of its bowels.

[Chains clank within.]

CLARION: Good God, do I hear chains?
 ROSAURA: I'm frozen stiff, but fire runs through
 my veins!
 CLARION: Just dig my early grave! 75
 If that isn't a captive galley slave,
 My fear's deceiving me.

Scene ii

[SEGISMUND, *within.*]

SEGISMUND: Oh, abject wretch! To bear such misery!
 ROSAURA: What voice sounds these laments?
 Fresh sorrows and new torments wrack my
 sense! 80
 CLARION: Strange fears besiege my head!
 ROSAURA: Come, Clarion.
 CLARION: Lady mine!
 ROSAURA: It's time we fled
 From this enchanted tower.
 CLARION: I hesitate
 To flee our only refuge in this strait.
 ROSAURA: Do I glimpse from afar 85
 The weak and pallid gleam as of a star
 Whose feeble, flickering haze,
 The emanation of dull heat and rays,
 Diffuses through some room
 A light so pale it magnifies the gloom? 90

Yes, even standing here
 I spy unlighted hollows that appear
 To be dark prison cells,
 The rank tomb where some live cadaver
 dwells.
 How wondrous! There within, 95
 A squalid man lies clad in animal skin,
 Restrained by chains, it seems,
 His only company those sickly beams.
 Since we've no hope for flight,
 Let's listen as he chronicles the plight 100
 Of his lost liberty.

[SEGISMUND is revealed, chained beneath a faint light and
 dressed in animal pelts.]

SEGISMUND: Oh, abject wretch! To bear such misery!
 I've struggled, heavens, night and morn
 To comprehend what horrid crime
 Was perpetrated at the time 105
 When I, offending you, was born.
 At last I grasp why cosmic scorn
 Should be my portion after birth:
 Your justice may enlist no dearth
 Of reasons to be harsh with me 110
 As being born, I've come to see,
 Is mankind's greatest sin on earth.
 But still I venture, stars, to learn,
 If only for some peace of mind,
 Discounting my dark birth, what kind 115
 Of crime could warrant in return
 A punishment as fierce and stern
 As this I live, a living hell?
 Weren't all the others born as well?
 If all came in the world this way, 120
 What sort of privilege had they
 I'll never savor in this cell?

The bird is born with sumptuous hues
 And hatches wielding beauty's power.
 In time, this lovely feathered flower, 125
 A winged bouquet of shades, will choose
 To soar the sky's blue avenues
 As swift as anything flies free,
 Forsaking the sure sympathy
 And peaceful quiet of its nest. 130
 As I've more soul within my breast,
 Should I enjoy less liberty?
 The beast is born, and on its fur
 Fair markings leave their bold design.
 In time, this horoscope-like sign 135
 Drawn by the master picturer
 Will learn, when human cravings stir
 In cruel self-interest, not to flee
 But act as cruel as man can be,
 Like some dread monster in a maze. 140
 As worthier of higher praise,
 Should I enjoy less liberty?
 The fish is born not breathing air,
 A freak amid sea slime and grass.
 In time, this scaly ship will pass 145
 Unfettered through the waves, aware
 It's free to swim the hydrosphere
 And, measuring the watery
 Expanses of the open sea,
 Conceive of greater spaces still. 150
 As I possess the freer will,
 Should I enjoy less liberty?
 The stream is born, a snake that wends
 Its way where wildflowers bide.
 In time, this silvery fresh will glide 155
 Along green banks as it extends
 A song of gratitude that sends
 Its thanks up toward the canopy
 For granting it the majesty

Of open fields in which to flow. 160
 As I've more life within me, though,
 Should I enjoy less liberty?
 In suffering that's known no ease,
 I smolder like Mount Etna, whose 165
 Release comes only when it spews
 Its heart out of its vortices.
 Which edicts, laws, codes, or decrees
 Deny a man who's sepulchered
 That sweetest privilege proffered,
 The natural prerogative 170
 Just God above would freely give
 To beast and stream, to fish and bird?

ROSAURA: His words evoke in me a fear
 And sympathy that cloud my sense.

SEGISMUND: Who's overheard my soul's laments? 175
 Clotaldo?

CLARION: Answer, "Yes, I'm here!"

ROSAURA: Alas, none but this mountaineer
 Who, stumbling on your cell, now braves
 The melancholy it encaves.

[SEGISMUND seizes her.]

SEGISMUND: I've no choice but to kill you so 180
 You'll never live to know I know
 You know how craven I've behaved.
 My honor dictates that I stretch
 These arms about your neck and wring
 The life from you for eavesdropping. 185

CLARION: I'm hard of hearing, and didn't catch
 A word you said!

ROSAURA: Were you, poor wretch,
Born human, I would surely meet
With mercy, prostrate at your feet.

SEGISMUND: Your voice could cause my heart to melt, 190
Your presence challenge all I've felt,
Your guise make my disquiet complete.
Who are you? Pent inside these walls,
I've known so little of the world—
My cradle and my grave unfurled 195
Before me in this tower's palls—
That from my birth my mind recalls—
If birth it was—no other place
Than these backwoods of barren space
Where I endure in wretched strife, 200
A living skeleton stripped of life,
A dead man only live by grace.
In all my days, I've spoken to
One man and one alone. He knows
The grievous nature of my woes 205
And taught me all I hold most true
About the earth and heavens. You
Appear now, shocked that I could be
The monstrous human rarity
You spy mid ghosts and wraiths,
so feast 210
Your eyes: I'm a man of a beast
And a beast of a man, you'll see.
Yet, while I've paid misfortune's price,
I've versed myself in politics,
Observing how the wild brutes mix 215
And listening to the birds' advice.
My measurements have been precise
When I map starry paths in space.
But you alone possess the grace
To cause my anger to subside, 220

My eyes to doubt what they've descried,
My ears to trust all they embrace.
And every time I fix my gaze
On you, I feel fresh wonder soar.
The more I look at you, the more 225
I want to see you all my days.
It's dropsy making my eyes glaze
And brim with water now, I think,
For knowing it's sure death to drink,
They drink you in still more like wells. 230
Still, seeing that my seeing spells
My death, I'll die to let them graze.
Oh, let me look on you and die!
For all I know, come my last breath,
If seeing you will mean my death, 235
What will not seeing you imply?
Much worse than death would signify—
Dread fury, rage, and wracking pain.
At least in death my teeming brain
Will grasp life's harsh finality: 240
Why grant life to a wretch like me
When happy mortals can be slain?

ROSAURA:

I'm awed by you, yet filled with dread.
Still marveling at your tender speech,
I find it difficult to reach 245
Conclusions that remain unsaid.
I'll only say the heavens led
Me here to this sequestered site
To help console me in my plight,
If by "consoling" what is meant 250
Is happening on a wretch who's pent
And makes one's own distress seem slight.
A learned man down on his luck,
The story goes, became dirt poor
But soon surmised he would endure 255

By feeding on the herbs he'd pluck.
 "Who else," he asked, "could be so struck
 By worldly cares and yet abide?"
 At this, he turned around and spied
 His answer straightway, noticing 260
 Another wise man gathering
 The wild herbs he'd cast aside.
 I've sighed my fate could be no worse;
 Mere living seemed a daunting task.
 So when it came my turn to ask, 265
 "Who else could suffer through the curse
 Of luck so ill-starred and adverse?"
 You answered me with sympathy
 Because of which I now can see
 How all you've said was but a ploy 270
 To turn my sorrows into joy
 And thereby ease my pain for me.
 So if this sharing of my woes
 Can soothe your pain to some extent,
 Take all you wish by listening, 275
 I'll still possess no end of them.
 My name is . . .

Scene iii

[CLOTALDO, *offstage*.]

CLOTALDO: Tower guards! Are you
 Asleep or simply faint of heart?
 Your negligence let travelers
 Gain access to the prison yard! 280

ROSAURA: I don't know what to think or feel!

SEGISMUND: My jail keeper Clotaldo's men!
 When will my sorrows ever end?

[*Offstage*.]

CLOTALDO: Look lively and be vigilant!
 They must be seized, alive or dead!
 Be careful now, they may be armed. 285

[*The sound of guards offstage*.]

Oh, treason!

CLARION: Tower guards—yes, you
 Who've kindly let us come this far—
 As long as there's a choice involved,
 We're easier to take alive! 290

[*Enter CLOTALDO with a pistol, and soldiers, all with their faces hidden*.]

CLOTALDO: Make sure your faces are concealed
 As this precaution's been devised
 To keep whoever happens by
 From recognizing all of you.

CLARION: I love a jolly masquerade! 295

CLOTALDO: Oh, ignorant, misguided fools!
 By trespassing upon a site
 Off limits to all wayfarers,
 You violate the king's decree
 That stipulates no sojourner 300
 Should ever set his curious eyes
 Upon the wonder mid these crags.
 Surrender and give up your swords
 Or else this firearm, an asp
 Recast in metal molds, will spew
 A venom forth that penetrates 305

Your skin, two bullets with enough
Foul smoke and noise to grieve the air.

SEGISMUND: Say, tyrant master, what you will,
But do these wanderers no harm. 310
I'll hold my bleak existence cheap
And rot here chained among your guards—
Where, by God's name, I'm left no choice
But to dismember this bound flesh
With my own hands or teeth—before 315
I'll stand for their unhappiness
Or end up, mid these lonely crests,
Lamenting more of your abuse.

CLOTALDO: If, Segismund, you know full well
How large your own misfortunes loom, 320
Enough for heaven to have sealed
Your doom before your birth; if you
Know that this prison serves to keep
In check your haughty fits of rage,
A bridle for your furious starts 325
To harness them in lieu of reins,
Why must you go on raving? Guards,
Make fast these prison doors and keep
This man again from sight.

[*They bolt the door. SEGISMUND's voice is heard within.*]

SEGISMUND: How right
You've been, cruel skies, to wrest from me 330
My liberty! I'd only rise
Against you like a giant who,
To smash the crystallinity
The sun displays upon its route,
Would pile jasper mountains high 335
Atop a base of solid stone.

CLOTALDO: Perhaps, preventing such an act
Explains why you must suffer so.

Scene iv

ROSAURA: As I've observed how arrogance
Offends your grave propriety, 340
It would be senseless not to beg
You for this life prone at your feet.
May you be moved to pity me
And be not unrelenting should
Humility or arrogance 345
Make sympathy impossible.

CLARION: Humility or Arrogance
Should work. As stock protagonists
They move the plots bad playwrights use
In far too many sacred skits. 350
But if they don't, then mid extremes,
Not overhumble or too proud,
I beg you, somewhere in between,
Do what you can to help us out!

CLOTALDO: Guards! Guards!

SOLDIERS: My lord!

CLOTALDO: Disarm these two 355
And blindfold them at once! These men
Must never be allowed to leave
These confines or retrace their steps.

ROSAURA: My sword, sir. Duty and respect
Oblige me to surrender this 360
To you alone, the principal

Among us here, and not permit
Its cession to a lesser power.

CLARION: My own is such the worse for wear
That anyone could take it. Here. 365

ROSAURA: I yield it, should I not be spared,
To mark the pity I've been shown,
A token worthy of regard
Because of one who wore it girt
In days gone by. Indulge my charge
And hold it dear, for I know not
What muted secret it enfolds,
Except to say this gilded sword
Contains great mysteries untold
And, having sworn on it a pledge, 370
Am come to Poland to avenge
A grave wrong done me. 375

CLOTALDO: Stars above!
Can this be? All my old suspense
And sorrow, my remorse and grief
Conspire to cause me still more pain. 380
Who gave you this?

ROSAURA: A woman did.

CLOTALDO: How was the lady called?

ROSAURA: Her name
May not be spoken.

CLOTALDO: Is this your
Assumption or do you avow
That there's some secret in this sword? 385

ROSAURA: She who bestowed it said, "Set out
For Poland, using all the charm
And artful cunning you possess
To make the noblemen you meet
Bear witness to this testament. 390
I'm certain one among them there
Will show you favor in your quest,"
Though she declined to give his name
In case the man she meant was dead.

CLOTALDO: God help me! What assails my ears?
Now, how will I contrive to prove
That what has just transpired here
Is no illusion, but the truth?
This is the sword I left behind
With fair Viola as a pledge 400
That whosoever wore it girt
Upon his thigh within my ken
Would find himself a much-loved son
And me a sympathetic sire.
But now, alas, what can I do? 405
Chaotic thoughts run through my mind
For he who brings this sword in grace
Brings with it unawares his death,
Condemned before he ever fell
On bended knee. This senselessness 410
Confounds me! What a ruinous fate
And tragic destiny are mine!
This is my son; all markers point
To these corroborating signs
Within my heart, now pulsing at 415
The portals of my breast. Its wings
Still flutter there, incapable
Of forcing back the bolts, akin
To one who's locked inside a room
And, hearing noises in the street, 420

Peers through a window eagerly.
 Like him, my heart cannot conceive
 What's happening and, mid such noise,
 Looks through the eyes to catch a view,
 As eyes are windows of the soul 425
 Where hearts pour out in teary dews.
 What choice have I? God help me now!
 What choice have I? To lead this man
 Before the king—how harsh the blow!—
 Would mean his certain death. I can't 430
 Conceal him, though, and thus infringe
 Upon my sworn obedience.
 I'm torn between these deeply felt
 Emotions and the duteousness
 I owe my liege. Why vacillate? 435
 Pledged loyalty, and not our lives
 Or loves, must needs take precedence.
 Just so, let loyalty abide!
 I seem now to recall a claim
 He made of having solely come 440
 To right a wrong, yet well I know
 How wronged men can be villainous.
 He's not my son, he's not my son!
 He does not share my noble blood!
 But if some threat to his good name 445
 Indeed occurred—a plight no one
 Escapes, as honor is composed
 Of such infirm material
 The slightest touch can shred its weft
 And whispered rumor stain its woof— 450
 What else would any nobleman
 Essay for honor's sake, what else
 But seek the satisfaction owed,
 However plenteous the peril?
 He is my son! He shares my blood! 455
 We've witnessed his courageous mien
 And as I stand here, wracked with doubt,

One saving recourse comes to me:
 I'll go myself to tell the king
 That he's my son, but must be killed. 460
 If honorable piety
 Won't stay his hand, then nothing will.
 Now, should I warrant him his life,
 I'll join his quest to seek amends
 For wrongs endured. But if the king 465
 Is overly intransigent
 And puts my son to death, he'll die
 Not ever knowing I'm his sire.
 Come, strangers, we're to journey now,
 But rest assured that I'll provide 470
 Good company in misery
 For, mired in our present doubts,
 Unsure which here will live or die,
 Whose wretchedness is paramount?

[Exit all.]

Scene v

[Enter ASTOLF, escorted by soldiers, and STELLA, accompanied by ladies-in-waiting. Music is playing.]

ASTOLF: Bedazzled by the shimmering rays 475
 Your eyes shoot forth like comet tails,
 The drums and trumpets fire off praise
 In salvos seldom heard in vales,
 Where birds and brooks trill other lays.
 This equal musical delight, 480
 Performed by instruments in thrall
 To one so heavenly a sight,
 Lets feathered clarions sound their call
 And metal birds put notes to flight.
 Their strains, fair lady, honor you 485
 Like cannonades salute the queen,

The birds Aurora's rosy hue,
 The trumpets Pallas the Athene,
 The flowers Flora damp with dew.
 You've banished black night's sunlessness 490
 By making light of day, for you're
 Aurora, this earth's happiness,
 Its Flora, peace, its Pallas, war,
 And my heart's queen in loveliness.

STELLA: Such honeyed discourse flows sincere 495
 And in accord with how men act,
 But one mistake you make, I fear,
 Is that fine words can't counteract
 A soldier's garb and martial gear.
 These militate against you while 500
 My being fights your aspect so
 Intensely I can't reconcile
 The flattery I'm hearing flow
 With all the rigor of your style.
 For it is vile and indiscreet, 505
 Unworthy of the basest brute,
 The seed of treachery and deceit,
 To trade on wiles to win one's suit
 Or guile to speed a maid's defeat.

ASTOLF: You misconstrue my plain intent 510
 In voicing all this errant doubt
 Concerning what these words have meant.
 Here, Stella, with your kind consent,
 Is what this cause has been about:
 The death of King Eustorge the Third, 515
 Proud Poland's monarch, left his son
 Prince Basil sovereign afterward.
 One sister was my mother, one
 Yours. Not to bore you with absurd
 Recitals of each king and queen, 520
 I'll make this brief. Fair Clorilene,

Your mother—and to me, Her Grace,
 Who now rules in a better place
 Beneath the starry damascene—
 Was elder, with no progeny 525
 But you. Her younger sister was
 Your aunt, but mother unto me,
 Fair Recisunda, whom God does
 Hold likewise dear in memory.
 In Moscow, where I came of age, 530
 She'd married. Here, I must forgo
 Strict sequence and turn back a page:
 King Basil, lady, as you know,
 Has lost the war all mortals wage
 Against Time. Ever with a mind 535
 To study, he was disinclined
 To woo. His childless queen now dead,
 Our bloodlines stand us in good stead
 To be the heirs he'll leave behind.
 You hold a strong claim to the throne— 540
 His elder sister's daughter would—
 But I, a male, the fully grown
 Son of his younger sister, should
 Be favored to ascend alone.
 We sought our uncle, then, impelled 545
 To plead the justness of each case.
 His reconciling us compelled
 The naming of this time and place
 So that our meeting could be held.
 Such was my aim in setting out 550
 From Moscow's distant, lovely land.
 I've come for Poland's crown without
 A fight, but found this fight on hand,
 Though I've declined to press the bout.
 Oh, may the people, God of Love, 555
 Precise astrologers they are,
 Be wise like you and think well of
 Our union! Let them thank the star

That designates you queen above,
 For you're the queen I choose! Be shown 560
 The honors you deserve! So please
 It that our uncle yield his throne,
 Your virtue bring you victories
 And my love make this realm your own.

STELLA: I trust my own heart shares the aim 565
 You've set forth in your dashing speech.
 I only wish that I could claim
 The throne now sits within my reach
 So you could rule with lasting fame.
 Still, I confess you must convince 570
 Me that your faith will pass the test
 Of quelling my suspicions since
 The portrait pendant on your chest
 Belies these fine words from a . . . prince.

ASTOLF: I'd hoped to give you a complete 575
 Account of this, but know not how
 As trumpets noisily entreat
 Attendance on the king, who now
 Approaches with his royal suite.

Scene vi

[*Trumpets blare. Enter the aged King BASIL with retinue.*]

STELLA: Wise Thales!

ASTOLF: Learned Euclid, hail! 580

STELLA: You rule today . . .

ASTOLF: Today you dwell . . .

STELLA: Mid starry signs . . .

ASTOLF: Mid starry trail . . .

STELLA: And calculate . . .

ASTOLF: And measure well . . .

STELLA: Each orbit's path . . .

ASTOLF: Each sphere's true scale.

STELLA: Oh, let me twirl like ivy round . . . 585

ASTOLF: Oh, let me lie down duty bound . . .

STELLA: Your trunk, as fitting and discreet.

ASTOLF: Here prostrate at your royal feet.

BASIL: Dear niece and nephew, our profound
 Embrace! As loyal from the start 590
 To our most sentimental plans,
 You come with such a show of heart
 That we pronounce you, by these banns,
 True equals, each a part to part.
 We ask, though, since our person nears 595
 Exhaustion from the weight of years,
 That you respectfully refrain
 From speaking, as it will be plain
 Our speech will soon amaze your ears.
 For well you know—now mind our words, 600
 Beloved nephew, dearest niece,
 Grand nobles of the Polish court,
 Good subjects, kin, friends we esteem—
 For well you know, men have bestowed
 On us the epithet of "wise" 605
 To honor our enlightenment.
 Against Oblivion and Time,

Timanthes in his portraits and
 Lysippus in his sculptures grand
 Proclaim us "Basil Rex, the Great" 610
 And so we're called throughout these lands.
 For well you know, the sciences
 Are what we've loved and cherished most,
 Fine mathematic formulae
 By which we've robbed Time of its role, 615
 Foreseeing what the future holds,
 The only source of its renown,
 And presaged more events each day.
 For when our charts reveal accounts
 Of incidents set to occur 620
 In centuries still unbegun,
 The dupe is dull chronology
 As we glimpse first what's yet to come.
 Those circular, snow-colored spheres
 In glassy canopies that move 625
 Illuminated by the sun
 But rent by cycles of the moon;
 Those gleaming, diamantine orbs
 And planets crystalline in space.
 Where incandescent stars shine bright 630
 And zodiacal creatures graze,
 Remain the major inquiry
 Of our declining years, the books
 In which the heavens list all fates,
 Benign or far less merciful, 635
 On paper strewn with diamond dust
 In sapphire ledgers finely lined
 With patterned bars of glittering gold,
 Inscribed with multitudes of signs.
 We study these celestial tomes 640
 And let our spirit wander free
 In fast pursuit of starry trails
 Wherever their swift paths should lead.
 Wise heavens, if you'd only stopped

This active mind before it filled 645
 Their margins with its commentaries
 Or indexed every page at will!
 If only you'd conceived our life
 As but the first of casualties
 Exacted by their wrath, this might 650
 Have been our only tragedy.
 But those who are misfortune-prone
 Feel merit slice them like a knife,
 For whomsoever knowledge harms
 Is nothing but a suicide! 655
 Though we be late in voicing this,
 Events tell better tales than speech
 And so, to leave this congress awed,
 We ask again that you not speak.
 Our late wife, your Queen Clorilene, 660
 Bore us a male child so ill-starred
 The wary skies announced his birth
 With wonders patently bizarre.
 Before her womb, that sepulcher
 Predating life, gave living light 665
 Unto the boy—for being born
 And dying are indeed alike—
 His mother had seen countless times,
 Amid the strange delirium
 Of dream, a monstrous form not quite 670
 A human, but resembling one,
 Which disemboweled her from within.
 Once covered with her body's blood,
 The brute would kill her, then emerge
 Half mortal man, half viper slough. 675
 Now, come the day the child was born,
 These omens proved to be correct,
 For dire portents never lie
 And strictly see how things will end.
 Spheres inauspiciously aligned 680
 Provoked the scarlet-blooded sun

To challenge the cold moon to duel
 And turned the heavens rubicund,
 With all the earth their battleground,
 These two celestial lanterns gleamed 685
 In savage combat perched on high,
 Both beaming bright as they could beam.
 The longest and most horrible
 Eclipse that ever did transpire—
 Besides the one that dimmed the globe 690
 The day Our Lord was crucified—
 Occurred next. As the planet sensed
 Itself engulfed in living flames,
 It must have thought the throes of death
 Were making its foundations shake. 695
 Then, suddenly, the skies grew black
 And sturdy buildings lurched and spun.
 The clouds rained stones upon the land
 And rivers coursed along like blood.
 This fatal confluence of stars 700
 Or planetary pull prevailed
 At Segismund's birth, presaging
 The foulness of his soul that day.
 For life, he gave his mother death,
 And by such savagery affirmed: 705
 "I am a man who will not cease
 To menace all mankind in turn."
 Recurring to the sciences
 For guidance, we divined dire plans
 For Segismund. We learned our heir 710
 Would be the most rebellious man
 The world could know, the cruelest prince
 And even most ungodly king
 Whose reckless rule would leave the realm
 Divided and in open rift, 715
 A fractious School for Treachery
 And roiled Academy of Vice.
 These signs revealed one so possessed

Of furious rage and violent crime
 We even saw him set his heels 720
 Upon us as we lay beneath—
 This gives us great distress to say—
 The brute soles of his conquering feet!
 The silver hairs that grace this crown
 Were but a carpet for his steps. 725
 Who'd not put credence in such doom
 Precisely when such doom is read
 Secure in one's own study where
 Self-interest plies its influence?
 So, putting credence in the fates 730
 As prophets given to dispense
 Bleak auguries of promised harm
 Through omens and foretokened signs,
 We ordered that the newborn brute
 Be everlastingly confined 735
 To find out whether an old sage
 Might thwart the dictates of the stars.
 The false news of his stillborn birth
 Was propagated near and far
 While we, forewarned, ordained a tower 740
 Be built between the craggy peaks
 Of two remote, secluded hills
 Where light could scarcely hope to reach
 So that these rustic obelisks
 Might seal off entry to the place. 745
 The strict laws and harsh penalties
 For breaking them were then displayed,
 Declaring a forbidden zone
 Off limits to all sojourners
 Who'd think to pass, the grave result 750
 Of these events we've just referred.
 There Segismund, our son, dwells yet,
 Imprisoned, wretched, and forlorn,
 Attended by Clotaldo, still
 His only company of sorts, 755

Who tutored him in sciences
 And catechized him in beliefs
 Of Christian faith, the only man
 Who's seen him in captivity.
 Three issues guide us here: the first, 760
 As we hold Poland in such high
 Esteem, our lasting wish has been
 To free her from the heinous plight
 Of serving tyrant kings. Indeed,
 A sovereign who would so imperil 765
 The native soil that is his realm
 Cannot be said to govern well.
 The second bears upon the charge
 That, by our actions, we've removed
 The right to reign from its true line— 770
 Of which no codex would approve—
 Through lack of Christian charity
 As no existing law permits
 A man who'd keep another man
 From tyranny and insolence 775
 To take on those same qualities.
 For if our son's a tyrant, then
 How may we perpetrate vile crimes
 To keep him from committing them?
 The third and final point entails 780
 Determining to what extent
 A person errs too readily
 By trusting in foretold events,
 For though our heir may be disposed
 To outbursts and impetuous acts, 785
 This bent is but a tendency.
 The direst fate, we know for fact,
 Much like the rashest temperament
 Or strongest planetary pull,
 May boast some influence on free will 790
 But cannot make man bad or good.
 Engrossed, then, in these quandaries

And hesitant with self-debate,
 We hit upon a remedy
 That's sure to leave your senses dazed. 795
 Tomorrow, we will have enthroned—
 Without him knowing he's our son
 Or your next king—the man who bears
 The fateful name of Segismund.
 Beneath our royal canopy 800
 And seated in our august place,
 He'll have his chance to reign at last
 As all our subjects congregate
 To pledge their humble fealty.
 In doing so, it is our hope 805
 To solve three matters that relate
 To questions you have heard us pose.
 One, should our heir display a mien
 Deemed prudent, temperate, and benign
 And thus belie what heartless fate 810
 Forebode in all it prophesied,
 The realm will see its natural line
 Restored, as till this hour the prince
 Has held court only in those hills,
 A neighbor but to woodland things. 815
 Two, should our son reveal himself
 Rebellious, reckless, arrogant
 And cruel, inclined to give free rein
 To vice that typifies his bent,
 We will have acted piously, 820
 Complicit with time-honored codes,
 And shine like an unvanquished king
 When we depose him from our throne,
 Returning him to prison not
 In cruelty, but punishment. 825
 Three, should the heir apparent
 Show the qualities that we suspect,
 Our love for Poland's subjects will
 Provide you with a king and queen

More worthy of this sceptered crown, 830
 To wit, our nephew and our niece.
 The individual right to reign
 Comes wedded in these two, conferred
 By dint of their intended bond,
 And both will have what both deserve. 835
 For this is our command as king;
 The nation's father bids it so.
 We urge it as a learned sage;
 This wise old man is thus disposed.
 If Spanish Seneca believed 840
 The king is but a humble slave
 Within his own republic's land,
 Then we beseech you as the same.

ASTOLF: If, as the man whose future gains 845
 Are most affected by these plans,
 I have your leave to answer first,
 I'll speak for all the court at hand
 And say, let Segismund appear!
 It's quite sufficient he's your son.

ALL: Restore the royal line! Yes, let 850
 Our long-lost prince rule over us!

BASIL: Good subjects, our sincerest thanks
 For this outpouring of support.
 Escort our kingdom's Atlases
 To their respective chamber doors. 855
 You'll have your prince upon the morn.

ALL: Long live our great King Basil! Hail!

[All exit except BASIL, who is detained by the entrance of
 CLOTALDO, ROSAURA, and CLARION.]

Scene vii

CLOTALDO: A word with you, sire?

BASIL: Our good friend
 Clotaldo! Welcome here today.

CLOTALDO: I might, indeed, have been most pleased 860
 To come, sire, at some other time
 But now it seems a tragic turn
 Must for the moment override
 The privilege our law confers
 And courtesy our ways demand. 865

BASIL: What's happened?

CLOTALDO: A calamity
 That in another circumstance
 Might not have proved so dire a blow
 But been a cause for jubilation.

BASIL: Go on.

CLOTALDO: This handsome youth you see, 870
 Through derring-do or recklessness,
 Gained entrance to the tower grounds
 And saw the prince there pent in chains.
 He is . . .

BASIL: Clotaldo, have no fear. 875
 Had this occurred some other day,
 He would have felt our royal wrath,
 But as we've just divulged this news,
 It matters little that he knows,
 As we've today confirmed the truth.
 Come see us by and by. We've such 880

A many wonders to relate
 And you so much to do for us.
 You'll learn soon of the role you'll play
 In carrying out the most sublime
 Event this world has countenanced. 885
 As for these prisoners—we're loath
 To punish you for negligence
 And thus, with mercy, pardon them.

[Exit BASIL.]

CLOTALDO: Oh, may you rule a thousand years!

Scene viii

CLOTALDO: The heavens have restored my luck! 890
 I've no need for professing here
 That he's my son, as he's been spared.
 Strange pilgrims, seek your wonted route,
 You're free to go.

ROSAURA: I kiss your feet
 A thousand times.

CLARION: I'll . . . miss them, too. 895
 So what's one letter more or less
 Between friends who have come to terms?

ROSAURA: You've given me my life back, sire;
 It's thanks to you I walk this earth.
 Consider me eternally 900
 Your grateful slave.

CLOTALDO: A life is more
 Than I can give you in your plight.
 No gentleman that's nobly born

Can live as long as he's aggrieved.
 For if it's certain that you come, 905
 According to your very words,
 To right a wrong that you've been done,
 I can't have given your life back;
 You didn't have one when you came.
 A life defamed is not a life.

[Aside.]

I hope my words leave him inflamed! 910

ROSAURA: I don't possess one, I confess,
 Though I accept what you've bestowed
 And, after I'm avenged, I'll boast 915
 True honor so pristine and whole
 The life I claim as mine that day
 Will turn aside all future threats
 And seem the gift it is at last.

CLOTALDO: Take back this burnished blade you've
 pledged
 To bear. I realize your revenge 920
 Won't be complete until it shines
 Bright with your adversary's blood.
 Of course, a sword I once called mine—
 I mean, just as I held it now,
 Possessing it to some extent— 925
 Would know how to avenge.

ROSAURA: I wear
 It in your name and once again
 Do swear on it I'll be avenged
 Despite my able enemy's
 Superior force.

CLOTALDO: Is it so great? 930

ROSAURA: So great I must forswear my speech
And not because I feel I can't
Confide in you far greater things
But so you'll not withdraw from me
The sympathetic ministering
You've shown. 935

CLOTALDO: I'd sooner join your cause
If you would but disclose his name.
This knowledge also might forestall
My rendering him unmindful aid.
[*Aside.*]
Who is this mortal enemy? 940

ROSAURA: Good sir, so you'll not think I hold
Our newfound trust in low esteem,
Know that my honor's bitter foe
Is no one less than Astolf, Duke
Of Moscow.

CLOTALDO: [*Aside.*] What a stunning blow
To all these plans! His cause appears
More grave than even I'd supposed.
I'll delve more deeply into this.
If you were born a Muscovite,
Then he who is your natural lord
Could hardly be accused of
slights. 945
Return to your ancestral land
And try to quell this ardent zeal
That hurls you madly forth.

ROSAURA: The wrong,
My lord, that left me so aggrieved
Was anything but slight. 955

CLOTALDO: Perhaps,
A slighting slap that stung too hard,
Offending—heavens!—that dear cheek?

ROSAURA: The injury was worse by far.

CLOTALDO: What was it, then? I've seen so much
Of late it scarce could cause alarm. 960

ROSAURA: I'll tell you, though I know not how,
Considering the deep respect
And veneration that I feel
For you and all this represents. 965
How can I venture to explain
The riddle these deceptive clothes
Conceal? They don't belong to whom
You'd guess. Judge wisely what this shows:
I'm not who I appear to be 970
While Astolf's plan has been to come
Wed Stella. Think, how might I feel
Insulted? Now I've said too much!

[*Exit ROSAURA and CLARION.*]

CLOTALDO: Beware! Pay heed! Keep up your guard!
This is a puzzling labyrinth 975
Where even reason toils to find
The thread laid down to exit it.
My honor is the one aggrieved,
Its foe by all accounts quite strong,
A vassal I, a woman she. 980
May heaven steer my hand from wrongs,
Though I'm not certain that it can.
The world is one confused abyss;
The skies above portend no good
And all God's earth seems curious. 985

ACT II

Scene i

[Enter King BASIL and CLOTALDO.]

CLOTALDO: Your orders have been carried out
With due dispatch.

BASIL: Then he is come,
Clotaldo? Tell us what transpired.

CLOTALDO: Sire, this is how the deed was done:
I plied him with the calming drink 990
You wished distilled, a most superb
Confection of ingredients
That blent the might of sundry herbs.
The tyrant strength of such a mix,
Its secret potency concealed, 995
Deprives a man outright of sense
And robs him of the power of speech
While rendering him a living corpse.
The violence of its attributes
So dulls the mind and saps the force 1000
That those benumbed by it lie mute.
Stale arguments repeatedly
Ask whether this is possible,
But time-honored experience
With scientific principles 1005

Has shown this ever to be true.
 For Nature's secrets find a home
 In Medicine and there exists
 No single creature, plant, or stone
 That cannot boast of properties 1010
 Unique to it. If base intent
 First prompted man to catalogue
 The thousand poisons causing death,
 How little more had he to search
 When classifying qualities 1015
 Of every venom known to kill
 To find those that would bring on sleep?
 Let's lay aside, then, any doubts
 Concerning whether this be true,
 As reason backed by evidence 1020
 Provides us with conclusive proof.
 So, bearing that peculiar brew
 Of opium and henbane held
 Together by the poppy's charms,
 I slipped down to the narrow cell 1025
 Where Segismund dwelt. There, we spoke
 A while of the philosophies
 And disciplines he'd mastered, each
 From voiceless Nature when she speaks
 In mute guise of the hills and skies, 1030
 For years at so divine a school
 Had trained him in the rhetoric
 Of every bird and beast he knew.
 Attempting, then, to animate
 His spirit and to sound his mind 1035
 Before the task at hand, I turned
 The topic to the speedy flight
 A mighty eagle flaunted high
 Above us, scornful of the wind's
 Low-lying sphere and soaring like 1040
 Some feathery bolt amid the rings
 Of fire in the canopy,

A comet blazing on the heights.
 I praised the creature's lofty sweep
 By saying, "Now I see how right 1045
 You are, grand queen who rules all birds,
 To feel that you outshine the rest."
 Well, that one reference in my speech
 To majesty caused such duress
 In him, he gave vent to bold thoughts, 1050
 His pride and self-conceit stirred up.
 The pure blood coursing through his veins
 Incites and instigates him thus
 To eye great feats, and he exclaimed:
 "Then even from the raucous realm 1055
 Of birds a leader must emerge
 To claim the fealty he compels!
 My lessons in misfortune should
 Console me with the argument
 That only the superior strength 1060
 Of jailors keeps my spirits pent,
 For I would never willingly
 Submit to any mortal's law."
 Thus, seeing him enraged by talk
 On subjects that recalled the cause 1065
 Of so much pain, I offered him
 The potent brew. No sooner had
 This potion passed from cup to lip
 Than all his willful rage collapsed
 In heavy sleep. An icy sweat 1070
 Coursed through his veins, and every limb
 Perspired to such macabre effect
 That had I not been warned that this
 Was no true death, I would have thought
 He'd breathed his last. At just this time, 1075
 The men you'd charged to carry out
 This bold experiment arrived
 And, placing him inside a coach,
 Conveyed him to your chambers where

Accommodations following 1080
 Strict protocol had been prepared
 To lodge him with due majesty.
 They laid him sleeping in your bed
 And, when the pòtion's numbing force
 Wears off and his deep slumber ends, 1085
 They'll serve him as you've ordered, sire,
 As if he were the king himself.
 So should my fast obeisance
 Incline you to reward me well
 For all these efforts, lord, my sole 1090
 Wish is to learn a puzzling truth.
 Pray, pardon me this liberty:
 What purpose lies behind this move
 Of Segismund unto the court?

BASIL: Clotaldo, well might you voice doubts 1095
 About our plan, and these we will
 Allay if you'll but hear us out:
 As Segismund, our only son,
 Was born beneath a baleful star
 That, well you know, predestined him 1100
 To sorrows, tragedy, and harm,
 We'd hoped to probe the heavens now,
 As they're incapable of lies
 And never ceased revealing signs
 Of what that cruelty may be like 1105
 Still lodged within his brutal soul.
 We'll fathom, then, if stars relieve
 Their harshest edicts or, when moved
 By man's restraint and bravery,
 Reverse dire omens, for we know 1110
 Each person rules his stars and fate.
 As this is what we wish to probe,
 We've had him brought inside these gates
 To tell him he's our son and put
 His inclinations to the test, 1115

For should he prove magnanimous,
 He'll reign. But if his temperament
 Should rage tyrannical and cruel,
 He'll be constrained forthwith by chains.
 Why is it, you do well to ask, 1120
 That this experiment you aid
 Could only have been brought to pass
 Once deathlike sleep had been induced?
 Our sole wish is to satisfy
 Your every query with the truth. 1125
 Should our son learn he's prince today
 But on the morrow come to see
 His strange existence once again
 Subjected to jail's miseries,
 Mere contemplation of this state 1130
 Would doubtless lead him to despair,
 For once he's found out who he is,
 What could console him in his pain?
 It's therefore been our plan to leave
 The door to pretext open wide 1135
 So we may claim that all he saw
 Was dreamt, and thereby expedite
 Determining two separate things:
 His natural condition first,
 According to which he'll proceed 1140
 To bare his soul in deeds and words,
 And second, whether such a ruse
 Can furnish solace to a wretch
 Who, presently obeyed by all,
 Might soon return to prison depths 1145
 To understand that he had dreamt.
 This he'd do wisely to believe
 Because, Clotaldo, in this world
 All think they live who only dream.

CLOTALDO: How readily could I present 1150
 Sound refutations of this plan!

But these would serve no purpose now
As I am led to understand
The prince has wakened from his sleep
And, fully conscious, comes this way. 1155

BASIL: Our thought is to withdraw from sight
While you, as tutor, extricate
Your pupil from what lingering doubt
And puzzlement still plague his mind.
The prince will learn the truth at last. 1160

CLOTALDO: Then I have your permission, sire,
To make the plot known?

BASIL: Tell him all.
Thus any danger he may pose
To us while fully cognizant
Will be more easily controlled. 1165

[Exit BASIL. Enter CLARION.]

Scene ii

CLARION: A halberdier whose reddish hair
And whiskers matched his uniform
Just whacked me good and hard four times
As I ran here to stay informed
Of court events as they unfold. 1170
What window offers finer views—
Not counting those in front-row seats
That ticket vendors hold for you—
Than man's own eyeballs in his head?
For, with or without sense or cent, 1175
Whenever there's a show to see,
He'll sneak a peek with impudence.

CLOTALDO: Ah, faithful Clarion, servant once
To she—sweet heavens!—she indeed
Who, trading in misfortune, brought 1180
To Poland my past infamy.
Good Clarion, have you news?

CLARION: Word is,
My lord, that your benevolence
In stating this intent to right
Rosaura's wrong has her convinced 1185
She should again wear ladies' clothes.

CLOTALDO: It's for the best, lest she be deemed
Too frivolous.

CLARION: Word is, she's changed
Her name to boot and, cleverly
Rechristening herself your niece, 1190
Has watched her reputation surge
At palace, where she now resides,
Attendant to the singular
Dame Stella.

CLOTALDO: Then, I've helped the child
Gain part of her lost honor back. 1195

CLARION: Word is, she's biding time until
The moment your avenging wrath
Restores her honored name in full.

CLOTALDO: No surer thing to bide exists,
For only Time as it transpires 1200
Can put an end to all of this.

CLARION: And word is, too, that she's regaled
With treatment fit a queen at court
By falsely posing as your niece

While I, who served her night and morn, 1205
 Am left to die from hunger's want,
 Forgotten and ignored by all,
 Although a Clarion nonetheless.
 For if I ever did sound off
 To Astolf, Stella, or the king, 1210
 They might be shocked by what they heard.
 Both manservants and clarions toot
 Like trumpets in this noisy world
 And just don't harbor secrets well.
 The moment that her fingers lift 1215
 This veil of silence from my lips
 The song I sing might well be this:
*No clarion blaring at first light
 Did ever sound more right.*

CLOTALDO: Your grievance is well taken, man, 1220
 But I can help address this plaint.
 For now, attend me in her stead.

CLARION: Look! Segismund, and unrestrained!

Scene iii

[Enter musicians, singing, and servants attiring SEGISMUND,
 who appears dazed.]

SEGISMUND: God save me! What's this I perceive?
 God help me grasp what I've seen here! 1225
 I'm awed and not untouched by fear
 But can't be sure what to believe.
 Do I stand at the court today
 Mid sumptuous fabrics, lush brocades,
 Lithe footmen and fair chambermaids 1230
 Who serve me in their fine array?
 Did I awake completely free

And resting in some stately bed
 Surrounded, like one highly bred,
 With valets to attire me? 1235
 To claim I dream would be a ruse,
 For sleep and waking aren't the same.
 Still, isn't Segismund my name?
 Fair heavens, won't you disabuse
 My fancy's flight and make it clear 1240
 What wondrous circumstances might
 Have troubled it thus in the night
 To leave me so convinced I'm here?
 Whatever turns out to be true,
 Who could dispute what I've observed? 1245
 I'll let myself be richly served
 Here, come what may, in this milieu.

2ND SERVANT: Despondence sits upon his cheek.

1ST SERVANT: Could anyone who's led a life
 So drear not bear such signs of strife? 1250

CLARION: Yes, me.

2ND SERVANT: Approach the man and speak.

1ST SERVANT: Another round of singing?

SEGISMUND: Why,
 Not now. I don't care to hear more.

2ND SERVANT: You looked so lost and dazed before,
 I thought songs might amuse you.

SEGISMUND: My 1255
 Ordeal would be as burdensome
 Without these choruses of cheer.

I only truly wish to hear
The martial strains of fife and drum.

CLOTALDO: Your Royal Highness! Majesty! 1260
Oh, let me be the first to kiss
Your hand lest I appear remiss
In pledging you my fealty.

SEGISMUND: Is this Clotaldo, my jail keep, 1265
Whose torments I could once expect,
Now treating me with such respect?
I know not if I wake or sleep!

CLOTALDO: The great confusion that you find
This new condition brings about
Has raised in you some lingering doubt 1270
That clouds your reason and your mind.
I've come to help you be less prone
To things that cause undue concern
Because today my lord will learn
He's heir apparent to the throne 1275
Of Poland. If till now you've dwelt
Sequestered vilely far afield,
It's all because your fate was sealed
By cards intemperate fate had dealt,
Portending bane that would allow 1280
Our empire here to come to grief
The moment that the laurel leaf
Would come to grace your august brow.
But trusting in your better will
To prove the stars erroneous— 1285
For men who are magnanimous
Find ways to overrule them still—
They've brought you to the palace from
The tower where they kept your cell,
Your senses dulled by sleep's deep spell 1290

And all your forces rendered numb.
The king, your sire and my liege lord,
Will come soon, Segismund, to call,
At which time he will tell you all.

SEGISMUND: Vile traitor, born to be abhorred! 1295
What could remain for me to know
When knowing my identity
From this day forward leaves me free
To flaunt my power and cause men woe?
How could you bring this treasonous act 1300
Against your land, to jail your prince
And strip him of all honors, since
No right or reason could retract
A crown, blood pledged?

CLOTALDO: Is this my plight?

SEGISMUND: You've long betrayed our country's laws, 1305
Fawned on the king to aid your cause
And treated me with cruel delight.
For this, the king, the law, and I,
In light of crimes we three condemn,
Now sentence you to die for them 1310
At my own hands.

2ND SERVANT: My lord!

SEGISMUND: Don't try
To thwart me or impede my plan;
I won't be hindered. By the cross,
Dare step between us and I'll toss
You headfirst through that window, man! 1315

1ST SERVANT: Clotaldo, flee!

CLOTALDO: Oblivious dunce,
To manifest such reckless pride
Not conscious you've dreamt all you spied!

[Exit CLOTALDO.]

2ND SERVANT: Be mindful that . . .

SEGISMUND: Leave here at once!

2ND SERVANT: He looked but to obey his king. 1320

SEGISMUND: When unjust laws are duly weighed,
The king, too, may be disobeyed.
They owed their true prince everything.

2ND SERVANT: His charge was not to reason why
The king's will isn't sovereign. 1325

SEGISMUND: You must care little for your skin
To make me constantly reply.

CLARION: Correct, sire! Right the prince is, too!
It seems like you're the one remiss.

2ND SERVANT: What gives you leave to speak like this? 1330

CLARION: I took the leave myself, man.

SEGISMUND: Who
On earth are you?

CLARION: A meddling drone
And chief among that nosy group,
The best example of a snoop
Our great wide world has ever known. 1335

SEGISMUND: In this strange realm, I've yet to greet
A man who's pleased me more.

CLARION: Kind lord,
I aim to please and am adored
By every Segismund I meet.

Scene iv

[Enter ASTOLF.]

ASTOLF: Oh, ever happy dawns the day 1340
When you, the son of Poland, show
Your face resplendent and aglow
In joyfulness and bright array!
You tinge the earth's horizons red;
Your crimson mantle hues the skies, 1345
For like the morning sun you rise
Out some secluded mountain bed.
Ascend, however late! Defer
No more the crowning of these slopes
With laurel leaves the palace hopes 1350
Shall never fade.

SEGISMUND: God keep you, sir.

ASTOLF: You might have earned a stern rebuke
For having failed to see in time
That rank deserves more reverence. I'm
The titled Astolf, highborn Duke 1355
Of Moscow, cousin to your line.
We're equals, each a noble peer.

SEGISMUND: So, when I say "God keep you" here,
What does that greeting undermine?
Prone as you are to boastful rot 1360

About your name and to complaint,
I'll say without the least restraint
When next we meet, "God keep you not."

2ND SERVANT: Such brusqueness, Highness, still occurs
Throughout his speech and can cause chills, 1365
But then, they raised him in the hills.
The noble Astolf far prefers . . .

SEGISMUND: His smug complacency and strut
Annoyed me greatly. Then to doff
His hat and fail to keep it off . . . 1370

2ND SERVANT: He's royal.

SEGISMUND: But a royal what?

2ND SERVANT: That said, it's fitting there should be
More mutual respect from two
Who aren't mere noblemen.

SEGISMUND: Pray, who
Dispatched you here to torment me? 1375

Scene v

[Enter STELLA.]

STELLA: Your Royal Highness, may the throne
Beneath this canopy extend
A welcome that shall never end
To one it proudly claims its own.
And may you reign here free from fears 1380
Of intrigue as our monarch who'll
Augustly and serenely rule
For centuries, not merely years.

SEGISMUND: Oh tell me, who is that discreet
And sovereign beauty standing there? 1385
What human goddess passing fair
At whose divine, celestial feet
The skies cast down their crimson light?
What lovely maid do I admire?

CLARION: Your cousin, Lady Stella, sire. 1390

SEGISMUND: Say "sun" and you'd be no less right.
How fine of you to wish me well
With fine-wrought words in this strange
place.
Since first I saw that fine-shaped face,
Your well-wishing has worked its spell 1395
And as I've come to feel such fine
Remarks unearned, though gladly heard,
I'm grateful for the gracious word.
Sweet Stella, you who rise and shine
To light the mornings with your rays 1400
And cheer the radiant orb's bright run,
What function do you leave the sun
By rising at the break of days?
Oh, let me kiss that gorgeous hand,
A snow-white chalice where the breeze 1405
Imbibes quintessence at its ease.

STELLA: My lord, be courteous in your stand.

ASTOLF: If she succumbs to this, then I
Am lost!

2ND SERVANT: I sense good Astolf's pain
But can I make the prince refrain? 1410
My lord, I'm sure you fathom why
This violates court protocol
With Astolf present . . .

- SEGISMUND: Didn't we
Agree you'd stop tormenting me?
- 2ND SERVANT: I said it's not correct.
- SEGISMUND: This all 1415
Has greatly angered me today!
Thwart any outcome I expect
And I will deem that incorrect.
- 2ND SERVANT: But sire, I even heard you say
That service and obedience both 1420
Are acts correct beyond compare.
- SEGISMUND: I think you also heard me swear
I'd throw a nuisance, on my oath,
From off this balcony to die.
- 2ND SERVANT: You can't treat men like me with so 1425
Much disregard and scorn.
- SEGISMUND: Oh, no?
Why don't I just give this a try?
- [*He grabs the 2ND SERVANT, exits followed by all. SEGISMUND, ASTOLF, STELLA, and CLARION return.*]
- ASTOLF: I can't believe what I've just seen!
- STELLA: Come quickly and help stop this row!
- [*She exits.*]
- SEGISMUND: He plunged into the sea below 1430
And God let no one intervene!
- ASTOLF: I'd look to moderate these sorts

- Of reckless acts and rash pursuits;
Men are no farther from base brutes
Than mountains are from palace courts. 1435
- SEGISMUND: Keep talking like some paragon
Of virtue as you lecture me
And, sooner than you think, you'll see
You've naught to place your hat upon.
- [*Exit ASTOLF. Enter BASIL.*]
- Scene vi*
- BASIL: What's going on here?
- SEGISMUND: Not a thing. 1440
I stopped a knave from pestering me
And tossed him off the balcony.
- CLARION: Take care, you're talking to the king.
- BASIL: Not one day at the palace, yet
Already human life's been lost. 1445
- SEGISMUND: He claimed I couldn't, and it cost
Him dear. Looks like I won that bet.
- BASIL: It grieves us greatly that our late
Reunion be so villainized:
We'd thought that, having been apprised 1450
Of how the stars have steered your fate,
You might supplant this rage with tact.
And yet, to what do you resort
On first appearing at the court?
A savage, homicidal act. 1455
What kind of fatherly embrace
Could you expect these arms to give

When we could only hope to live
 To breathe the air by God's good grace
 Far from your murderous grasp? Who could 1460
 Behold a naked dagger glow
 Before it struck a mortal blow
 And fail to shrink in fear? Who would
 Bear witness to the blood-red pall
 That lingered where a man was killed 1465
 And not be moved? The strongest willed
 Among us would heed instinct's call.
 As we perceive the grievous harms
 That issue from your cruel embrace
 And contemplate this bloodied place, 1470
 We'll keep safe distance from those arms.
 So though we'd planned, our love revealed,
 To fling these arms about your neck,
 We hold these sentiments in check,
 Fear-stricken by the might you wield. 1475

SEGISMUND: I've lived outside their fold till now
 And don't see what I stand to lose.
 A father who would so abuse
 Authority to disavow
 His own son's birthright merits scorn. 1480
 Entombed as if I were deceased,
 Raised wild like a savage beast
 And treated like some monster born
 To forfeit life by your decree,
 I hold that clasp for which you yearn 1485
 Of no emotional concern—
 You robbed me of humanity.

BASIL: By heaven's just omnipotence,
 We rue the day we gave you life
 To countenance this fiery strife 1490
 And tolerate such insolence.

SEGISMUND: Had you not sired me willfully,
 I'd have no basis for complaint,
 But since you did, what need restraint?
 You took my life away from me. 1495
 And while no act is nobler than
 To give, whatever that gift's worth,
 No baser act exists on earth
 Than taking back that gift again.

BASIL: Are these the thanks that lay in store
 For turning a foul prisoner
 Into a prince? 1500

SEGISMUND: I can't infer
 What I've to be so thankful for,
 You tyrant to my will! Malign,
 Decrepit despot! You'll soon breathe 1505
 Your last! What gift do you bequeath
 But that which rightfully is mine?
 Since you're my father and my king,
 The grandeur and nobility
 That Nature's law bestowed on me 1510
 Were mine for the inheriting.
 So in my new exalted state
 And in no way obliged to you,
 I say your day of reckoning's due
 For all the years you'd abrogate 1515
 My honor, life, and liberty.
 You should be thanking me, you know,
 For not collecting what you owe,
 As you, sir, are in debt to me.

BASIL: Impulsive, wild, and barbarous!
 All heaven augured has come true.
 Look down, skies, on his rage and view
 Him utterly contrarious!
 Although our ultimate behest 1520

Disclosed your true identity 1525
 And palace graces guarantee
 The prince be prized above the rest,
 Attend these words for your soul's sake:
 Be humble, man, and less extreme,
 For all you see might be a dream, 1530
 Though you may think you're wide
 awake.

[*He exits.*]

SEGISMUND: What could he mean? I, dreaming, when
 All this is patent to my eyes?
 I touch, I feel, and can devise 1535
 What I am now and was back then.
 You may well rue your choices, yet
 You're powerless to change them now.
 I'm noble, and no matter how
 Intently you may feel regret,
 No man can ever strip away 1540
 The prince and heir apparent's crown.
 Though your first sight of me was down
 In that dank prison where I lay,
 My fast self-knowledge has increased
 And now that I've seen through the sham 1545
 Of what I was, I know I am
 Some mongrel mix of man and beast.

Scene vii

[*Enter ROSAURA, dressed as a lady-in-waiting.*]

ROSAURA: Dame Stella wants me near,
 Though I'm afraid of meeting Astolf here.
 Clotaldo thinks it best 1550
 He neither see me nor divine my quest,
 As cleansing honor warrants sacrifice.

I trust his sage advice,
 Indebted as I am to he who came
 And rescued both my life and honored name. 1555

CLARION: [To SEGISMUND.] So, which among the host
 Of things you've seen today has pleased you
 most?

SEGISMUND: I wasn't much surprised
 By anything. All was as I'd surmised.
 But since you have inquired, 1560
 The thing on earth that's most to be admired
 Is woman's beauty. Mind
 Me now: I'd read, while odiously confined,
 That out of all the creatures in His plan,
 God spent most time on that small
 cosmos, man. 1565
 But this cannot be true,
 For woman is a slice of heaven, too,
 And lovelier by far,
 As distant from male clay as earth from star,
 Like her I now behold. 1570

ROSAURA: The prince! I must withdraw and be less bold.

SEGISMUND: I beg you, woman, stay.
 Don't make the sun set at the break of day
 By leaving on the run.
 You'll blend the dawn and twilight into one, 1575
 Cold dark with sunbeams bright,
 And cut too short the shining of the light.
 Wait! What's this I perceive?

ROSAURA: I can't trust my own eyes, yet must believe.

SEGISMUND: I've seen this loveliness 1580
 Before.

- ROSAURA: And I this grandeur, though with less
Solemnity back when
It lay in chains.
- SEGISMUND: I've found my life again!
Speak, woman—yes, I use
The most endearing term a man can choose— 1585
Who are you? Have we met?
No matter; you owe me allegiance, yet
Some strange bond links us more.
I'm certain that I've seen your face before.
Who are you, woman fair? 1590
- ROSAURA: [*Aside.*] I must pretend. [To SEGISMUND.]
A lady wrought with care
Who serves in Stella's train.
- SEGISMUND: No, say you are the sun, in whose domain
Of fire the stellar bides,
For Stella basks in rays your light provides. 1595
In all the fragrant realm
Of flowers, there's but one goddess at the
helm,
The rose, whom others call
Their empress, being loveliest of all.
I've seen the finest stones 1600
Extracted from the earth's profoundest zones
Revere the diamond's shine,
Their emperor as brightest in the mine.
At lush courts in the sky
Where stars from teetering republics vie, 1605
I've seen fair Venus reign
As queen of all that vast and starred
demesne.
In those ethereal climes,
I've seen the sun convene the orbs oftimes
At court, where he holds sway, 1610

- Presiding as the oracle of day.
How could a case arise,
Then, where the planets, stones, and flowers
prize
Great beauty, yet yours serves
A lady far less fair? Your charm deserves 1615
More praise than hers bestows,
Oh, bright sun, Venus, diamond, star, and
rose!

Scene viii

[Enter CLOTALDO.]

- CLOTALDO: Restraining Segismund devolves on me,
As he was once my ward. What's this I see?
- ROSAURA: I'm flattered by your praise, 1620
Though silence plies a lofty turn of phrase,
For when a person's judgment seems most
blurred,
The best response is not to say a word.
- SEGISMUND: You musn't go yet. Wait!
You wouldn't want to leave in such a state, 1625
Misjudging my desire?
- ROSAURA: I beg permission, Highness, to retire.
- SEGISMUND: Your veiled demands aggrieve;
You don't so much request as take your
leave.
- ROSAURA: What choice have I when you won't
let me pass? 1630
- SEGISMUND: I'm civil now, but might become more crass

Soon, for resistance strains
My patience like a poison in my veins!

ROSAURA: Not even poison laced
With fury so intensive it effaced 1635
This patience you declare
Could ever stain my honor, nor would dare.

SEGISMUND: You're trying hard, I see,
To make yourself appear less fair to me.
You'll always find me game 1640
To take on the impossible. The claim
Some knave made that I couldn't cause his
death
Was breathed with his last breath,
So if I dared to probe all I could do,
I'd throw your honor out the window,
too! 1645

CLOTALDO: His rage will not relent.
What should I do, dear heavens, with him bent
Upon this lustful crime,
Imperiling my name a second time?

ROSAURA: The fateful prophecy 1650
That warned this kingdom of your tyranny
Foresaw the crimes you'd bear,
The scandal, murder, treason, and despair.
Still, who could stoop to blame
A human being who's just a man in name, 1655
Cruel, reckless, inhumane,
A barbarous tyrant no one can restrain,
Reared like some savage beast?

SEGISMUND: I'd thought my wooing at the very least
Would spare me this display 1660
And hoped to win your favor in this way.

But since my suit occasions such alarm,
See what you think of me without the
charm!
Leave us, the lot of you, and bolt the door.
See no one enters here.

[Exit CLARION.]

ROSAURA: I die for sure! 1665
Wait . . .

SEGISMUND: Fleeing my embrace
Will hardly put this tyrant in his place.

CLOTALDO: Again he kindles strife!
I hope this meddling won't cost me my life.
Desist, sire! Let her be. 1670

SEGISMUND: This is the second time you've angered me,
You doddering old dunce.
Have you no fear you'll pay for these
affronts?
How did you slip in here?

CLOTALDO: I entered, summoned by these tones of fear, 1675
To urge you to restrain
Such impulse if you ever wish to reign.
You're not king yet, so temper this extreme
Behavior. All you see may be a dream.

SEGISMUND: You know I grow irate 1680
When you use fantasy to set me straight.
Would it be dream to slay
You or quite real?

[As SEGISMUND draws his sword, CLOTALDO grabs his arm
and kneels before him.]

- CLOTALDO: I know no other way
To save my life, my lord!
- SEGISMUND: How dare you place your hands
upon my sword? 1685
- CLOTALDO: I won't release this blade
Until a body comes to give me aid
And calm your rage.
- ROSAURA: My God!
- SEGISMUND: Let go, I said,
You senile fool, or you're as good as dead!
If you continue so, [*They struggle.*] 1690
I'll crush you in my arms, detested foe!
- ROSAURA: Who'll help us? Anyone!
Clotaldo's being killed!

[*She exits. ASTOLF enters, CLOTALDO falls at his feet, and ASTOLF steps between CLOTALDO and SEGISMUND.*]

Scene ix

- ASTOLF: What have you done
To him, good-hearted lord?
Cold blood should never blight so
brave a sword 1695
With stains of infamy.
Resheathe your blade and let the old man be.
- SEGISMUND: I will when his depraved
Blood tinges it bright red.
- ASTOLF: His life is saved—
He's sued for sanctuary at my feet 1700

- And not to spear him, sire, would scarce be
meet.
- SEGISMUND: Allow me, then, to spare your life as well
So I might have revenge for what befell
Me earlier at your hands.
- ASTOLF: No self-defense
Could cause judicious majesty offense. 1705

Scene x

[*ASTOLF and SEGISMUND draw their swords. Enter King BASIL and STELLA.*]

- CLOTALDO: Don't injure him!
- BASIL: What, drawn before
the king?
- STELLA: It's Astolf, furious and battling!
- BASIL: Just what is happening here?
- ASTOLF: Sire, not a thing now that Your Grace
is near.
- [*ASTOLF and SEGISMUND sheathe their swords.*]
- SEGISMUND: A great deal, sire, be you near or not. 1710
I'd just begun to murder this old sot.
- BASIL: Why, was no reverence shown
For these gray hairs?

CLOTALDO:

My liege, they're
mine alone

And little matter.

SEGISMUND:

Nothing you could say
Would force me to respect that hoary gray 1715
And all its vile deceit.
I'll see it someday, too, beneath my feet,
Which may at last avenge
My stolen life and bring me sweet revenge.

[*He exits.*]

BASIL:

Before you see these things, 1720
You'll sleep again, and all the happenings
You'd once believed were real
Will only prove to be what dreams reveal.

[*Exit BASIL and CLOTALDO.*]

Scene xi

ASTOLF:

The stars above so rarely lie
When they predict catastrophes. 1725
They forecast ills with acumen
But blessings hesitatingly.
How famous an astrologer
Would that man be who only spied
Disasters, for, without a doubt, 1730
These always manage to transpire!
My life and Segismund's attest
To this contrivance of the stars,
Which presaged for the two of us
Divergent fortunes from the start. 1735
For him, they foresaw misery,
Misfortune, insolence, and death.
As all these have been evident,

The stars have since been proved correct.
For me, though, lady, once I'd gazed 1740
Upon your eyes' unrivaled beams—
Beside which sunshine looks like shade
And light from heaven epicene—
They seemed to foretell gladdened times
Of triumph, comfort, and acclaim, 1745
Which proved to be both true and false
Because stars only forecast fates
With accuracy when they turn
The joy they bode to wretchedness.

STELLA:

I've no doubt that these gallant words 1750
Are spoken with the best intent
But you must mean them for the maid
Whose painted likeness hung about
Your neck, good Astolf, first you
came
To visit me and seek the crown. 1755
As this is so, these sentiments
Belong to her, and her alone.
Go seek sweet recompense from her
Because, as promissory notes,
The courtly grace and oaths of faith 1760
You use as currency to serve
For other maids and other kings
Are worthless in love's constant world.

Scene xii

[*Enter ROSAURA, not seen by STELLA and ASTOLF.*]

ROSAURA:

[*Aside.*] Thank heavens my calamitous
Adversity has reached its end! 1765
Whoever's seen what I've seen should
Have nothing more to fear again!

ASTOLF: I'll take her portrait from my chest
 And lovingly hang in its place
 The image of your loveliness. 1770
 For where fair Stella shines, no shade
 Can fall, no lowly star besmirch
 The sun's bright realm! I'll fetch it now.
 Oh, fair Rosaura, pardon this
 Transgression, but you aren't around. 1775
 When men and women are apart,
 Their troth is worth no more than this.

[*He exits.*]

ROSAURA: Because I feared I might be seen,
 I hid and couldn't hear a thing.

STELLA: Astrea!

ROSAURA: Yes, fair lady mine. 1780

STELLA: How very much my heart's consoled
 To find you here of all my train,
 For I could think to bare my soul
 To no one else.

ROSAURA: You honor one
 Whose only wish has been to please. 1785

STELLA: Astrea, I can scarcely claim
 I know you, yet you hold the key
 To opening my inmost heart.
 Because of all you clearly are,
 I'll risk confiding to you what 1790
 I've long been keeping in the dark
 From my own self.

ROSAURA: I'm here to serve.

STELLA: Then, let me keep the story brief.
 My cousin Astolf—cousin, sure!
 Why say he's so much more to me 1795
 When some things are as good as said
 In thought, where wishes are fulfilled?—
 Yes, Astolf and I are to wed
 If it should be the heavens' will
 To undo countless miseries 1800
 By granting us this happiness.
 A lady's portrait that he wore
 About his neck when we first met
 So saddened me, I gently pressed
 To know the maid's identity. 1805
 A gallant man, he loves me well
 And has withdrawn now to retrieve
 The likeness. Modesty forbids
 My being here on his return,
 So wait for him and, when he comes, 1810
 Request he leave the miniature
 With you. For now, I'll say no more.
 Your beauty and discretion show
 That you'll soon know what love is, too.

[*She exits.*]

Scene xiii

ROSAURA: I wish to God I'd never known!
 Just heavens, help me now! Is there 1815
 A woman anywhere alive
 Whose artfulness could find a means
 To rescue her from such a bind?
 Have those inclement skies above 1820
 Oppressed a lady so before,
 Assailing her with ceaseless grief
 Until she's wretched and forlorn?
 My delicate predicament

Makes it impossible for me 1825
 To be consoled by arguments
 Or counseled on my miseries,
 As ever since that first mischance
 Befell me, not one incident's
 Occurred that hasn't brought me grief. 1830
 This sad succession of events,
 All heirs apparent of themselves,
 Arise like phoenixes from ash
 As each, newborn, begets the next.
 They come to life mid smoldering death, 1835
 The cinders of this renaissance
 Their sepulcher and birthing bed.
 "Our cares are cowards, and poltroons,"
 A certain sage was wont to say,
 "Stalk humans cravenly in packs." 1840
 But I declare misfortunes brave
 For always forging nobly on
 And never beating weak retreats.
 Whoever has experienced
 The strain of care may face life free 1845
 Of worries or the nagging fear
 That cares will ever leave his side.
 I know this far too well from all
 The woes inflicted on my life
 And can't recall a time when cares 1850
 Were absent. They'll refuse to rest
 Till I succumb, a casualty
 Of fate, into the arms of death.
 What choice would any woman have
 If she were in my place? 1855
 Disclosing my identity
 Might cause Clotaldo great offense,
 For he's vouchsafed my refuge, life,
 And honor under great duress.
 By keeping silence, he believes, 1860
 I'll see my honored name restored,

But if I don't say who I am
 When Astolf spies me here at court,
 How will I feign not knowing him?
 For even if my voice and eyes 1865
 Unite to fake their ignorance,
 My soul would give them all the lie.
 So what am I to do? Why plan
 Contrivances when it's so plain
 To see that, notwithstanding all 1870
 The thought I'd given to prepare
 For my encountering him again,
 This heartache will respond the way
 It pleases? Who among us boasts
 Dominion over all his pain? 1875
 So with a soul too timorous
 To dare determine what my course
 Should be, oh, may my heartache end
 Today, may all the pains I've borne
 Desist, and may I leave behind 1880
 Both semblances that once deceived
 And lingering doubt. But until then,
 Sweet heavens, stand guard over me!

Scene xiv

[Enter ASTOLF with the portrait.]

ASTOLF: Fair lady, here's the portrait you . . .
 My God, what's this?

ROSAURA: My lord appears 1885
 Amazed. What causes his surprise?

ASTOLF: Beholding you, Rosaura, here.

ROSAURA: Rosaura? Why, Your Lordship is
 Confused and certainly mistakes

- Me for another maid. I'm called
Astrea, and my humble state
Could scarcely captivate a duke
Or bring such rapture to my life. 1890
- ASTOLF: Rosaura, let this pretense end.
You know the soul can never lie;
Though I may see Astrea here,
I'll love her like Rosaura yet. 1895
- ROSAURA: I comprehend you not, my lord,
Hence my replies are hesitant.
I'll only say that I was bid
By Stella, Venus's star here,
To tarry in this place until
Such time as you, my lord, appeared
To ask from you on her behalf
The portrait causing her such hurt—
An understandable demand—
Which I would then remit to her.
My lady's pleasure wills it so;
However small the pleas she makes,
Though they be to my detriment,
Are Stella's still, and I obey. 1900
- ASTOLF: Say what you will, Rosaura, though
You're terrible at subterfuge.
Go tell that music in your eyes
To play in concert with the tune
Your voice sings so their melody
Might temper this discordant clash
And harmonize their instrument,
Adjusting measures in the dance
Of all the falsehoods that you speak
And that one verity you feel. 1905

- ROSAURA: Let me repeat, I wait but for
The portrait.
- ASTOLF: Very well. I see
You won't forsake this pretense, so
I'll answer, then, with one my own. 1915
Astrea, given my esteem
For Stella, let the lady know
That my obliging her request
To fetch this pendant seems a poor
Example of gentility. 1930
Hence, as she is so well-adored,
I send her the original,
Which you may bear her in the flesh,
Revealing the extent to which
You and the likeness are enmeshed. 1935
- ROSAURA: A man who sets out bold and brave
To bring back something on his word
And then returns not with this prize
But with some thing of greater worth
Conceded him, still thinks himself
A slighted fool whose mission failed. 1940
I'd hoped to take my portrait back
Though the original won't pale
In force beside it. Still, I can't
Return so slighted. Come, my lord,
You'll hand the portrait over now—
Without it I must shun the court. 1945
- ASTOLF: And if I don't relinquish this,
What will you then?
- ROSAURA: All-out assault—
Let go of it!

- ASTOLF: You strike in vain. 1950
- ROSAURA: The portrait mustn't ever fall
Into another woman's hands.
- ASTOLF: You're spirited!
- ROSAURA: False-hearted cheat!
- ASTOLF: That's quite enough, Rosaura mine.
- ROSAURA: I yours, you scoundrel? You're deceived! 1955

Scene xv

[Enter STELLA.]

- STELLA: Astrea! Astolf! What's all this?
- ASTOLF: Now Lady Stella's come.
- ROSAURA: [Aside.] Oh, Love,
Grant me the prowess to retrieve
My portrait! Lady, if you want
To know why we are quarreling,
I'll tell you. 1960
- ASTOLF: What's the point of this?
- ROSAURA: You bade me, lady, tarry here
For Astolf so he might remit
To me the portrait you desired.
Well, once I found myself alone—
The mind can traipse so easily
Through scores of subjects, as you know—
This talk of portraits drifted back 1965

- To jog my memory, as it would,
Till I recalled my sleeve bore one 1970
Of me, and thought I'd take a look—
For when no one's around, we must
Amuse ourselves with what is near—
But then I dropped the thing just as
Duke Astolf presently appeared 1975
To bring the other portrait by.
He picked mine up, but so resists
Complying with the charge he's borne
That now he says he'll harbor it
Along with yours. Despite my pleas, 1980
He won't consent to hand mine back.
Your Ladyship came just in time
To see me in the frenzied act
Of repossessing it by force.
The portrait dangling in his grasp 1985
Is mine, which you could verify,
My lady, with a simple glance.
- STELLA: You may return her miniature.
- [She takes it from him.]
- ASTOLF: My lady . . .
- STELLA: Yes, I must allow 1990
It almost does you justice, maid.
- ROSAURA: You see it's mine, then?
- STELLA: I've no doubt.
- ROSAURA: Now ask him for the other one.
- STELLA: Please take your portrait and retire.

ROSAURA: [Aside.] Why should I care what
happens next
As long as I've reclaimed what's mine? 1995

[She exits.]

Scene xvi

STELLA: I'd like the portrait that I asked
You for. I'll never lay my eyes
On you or speak to you again.
Still, knowing it remains your prized
Possession pains me to no end, 2000
Not least because I fondly did
Petition it.

ASTOLF: [Aside.] What's there to say
In such confused predicaments?
[To STELLA.]
Fair Stella, I'm your servant still
In every possible regard. 2005
It's just not in my power now
To grant your wish because . . .

STELLA: You are
A faithless lover and vile man.
Forget I asked for it at all;
Why should I want her portrait when 2010
The very sight of it recalls
My having had to plead for it?

[She exits.]

ASTOLF: Don't go! Please listen! Give me time,
Rosaura! Dear Lord, grant me strength!
Just how, from where, for what and why 2015

Did you turn up in Poland now
To seek your ruin as well as mine?

[He exits.]

Scene xvii

[SEGISMUND appears as he did at play's start, wearing animal
pelts and in chains, asleep on the ground. Enter CLOTALDO,
CLARION, and two servants.]

CLOTALDO: Just leave him drowsing on the ground.
Today his overweening pride
Will end where it began.

1ST SERVANT: I've tried 2020
To chain him as he'd once been bound.

CLARION: Why rush to wake and be decrowned
When sleeping, Segismund, will save
Yourself the sight of fortune's knave?
The glory you've enjoyed is fled 2025
And you'll endure, alive but dead,
A specter from beyond the grave.

CLOTALDO: An orator with this much flair
Will also need a cloistered space,
Some quiet, isolated place 2030
Where he might discourse free of care.
Go seize that speechifier there
And lock him in his tower retreat.

CLARION: Why me?

CLOTALDO: Because it's understood
That clarions left unmuffled could 2035

Sound off and noisily repeat
Our palace secrets in the street.

CLARION: Do I, perchance, plot endlessly
To murder my own father? No!
Was I the one who dared to throw 2040
That sorry Icarus in the sea?
Am I reborn or still just me?
Is this a bad dream? Why this plan
To jail me?

CLOTALDO: Your name's Clarion, man.

CLARION: Then during my imprisonment 2045
I'll be a viler instrument,
The cornet, and stay mute a span.

[*The servants take CLARION away.*]

Scene xviii

[*Enter King BASIL, disguised.*]

BASIL: Clotaldo.

CLOTALDO: Sire! Does this disguise
Befit your Royal Majesty?

BASIL: The foolish curiosity 2050
To view the prince with our own eyes
And see the state in which he lies
Has led us to his cell today.

CLOTALDO: Just look at him there, brought to bay
In chains, dejected and forlorn. 2055

BASIL: The star beneath which you were born
Determined it would be this way.
Go wake him. So much for our schemes.
The drink you brewed has run its course
And all its herbs have lost their force. 2060

CLOTALDO: His sleep is restless, yet he seems
To speak.

BASIL: What manner of strange dreams
Could visit Segismund alone?

SEGISMUND: [*In his world of dream.*] A pious
prince is one who's known
For purging tyrants from his lands. 2065
Clotaldo dies by these two hands
While Basil, prostrate, yields his throne.

CLOTALDO: My dying makes the plot complete.

BASIL: He joins effrontery with threat.

CLOTALDO: He'll see me foully murdered yet. 2070

BASIL: And vanquish us beneath his feet.

SEGISMUND: [*Still dreaming.*] Parade your valor in
the street,
The world's great theater, onstage where
Its size will loom beyond compare.
Avenging my base sire's neglect 2075
Will only have the right effect
If Segismund's triumphant there.
[*He awakens.*]
What's this about? Where can I be?

BASIL: He's not to learn that we're here, too.
Now do what you've been charged to do 2080
As we retire where we can see.

[He withdraws from view.]

SEGISMUND: What's happened? Is this really me
In chains again amid this blight,
A horrid and pathetic sight?
And is that you, my living tomb, 2085
Old tower? God help me meet this doom!
But what strange things I dreamt tonight!

CLOTALDO: I'm duty bound to keep this mime
Alive, whatever it may take.
Is it not time for you to wake? 2090

SEGISMUND: Yes, it's well past my waking time.

CLOTALDO: Do you intend to spend the prime
Of day asleep? Can it be right
That, ever since we tracked the flight
Of that grand eagle heaven bound, 2095
You've lain here drowsing on the ground
And never once awakened?

SEGISMUND: Quite,
And haven't yet, as I'd conceived.
As far as I can ascertain,
I sleepwalk still through dream's domain 2100
And would not feel at all deceived
If everything that I'd believed
Took place would dissipate anew
Or if what I saw now weren't true.
For one in chains, it's no great leap 2105
To understand, though fast asleep,
That one can dream while waking, too.

CLOTALDO: What did you dream while so confined?

SEGISMUND: Supposing that it was a dream,
Clotaldo! Here is what I deem 2110
Occurred, and not just in my mind:
I wakened yesterday to find
Myself—this taunts me!—lounging in
A bed so bright it might have been
The flowery cot by which the Spring 2115
Adorns the earth with coloring
From all the hues contained therein.
A thousand nobles bowed before
My vaunted feet and, once they'd hailed
Me as their prince, I was regaled 2120
With banquets, jewels, robes, and more.
You purged what calm my senses bore
By naming me, to my delight,
King Basil's heir by natural right
And though my fortune's fallen since, 2125
I briefly reigned as Poland's prince.

CLOTALDO: What great reward had I in sight?

SEGISMUND: Accusing you of treachery,
My heart made bold with power and vice,
I tried disposing of you twice. 2130

CLOTALDO: But why were you so cruel to me?

SEGISMUND: I'd thought to rule with tyranny
And match the evil I'd been done.
I loved none but one woman—one—
The only real thing to transcend, 2135
As I believe, my dreaming's end,
An endless need that's just begun.

[BASIL exits.]

CLOTALDO: [Aside.] The king was moved by
 what he heard
 And fled affected from the tower.
 Our talk in your last waking hour 2140
 About that eagle must have spurred
 These dreams of empire afterward.
 Still, Segismund, you really ought
 To honor one who reared and taught
 You, even in the realm of dream. 2145
 For doing good is man's supreme
 Imperative and not for naught.

[He exits.]

Scene xix

SEGISMUND: How very true! Then let's suppress
 The fury of our savage state,
 The vile ambition and the hate, 2150
 So when we dream we won't transgress.
 For dream we will, though we possess
 No sense of where it is we thrive
 And dreaming just means being alive.
 The insight life's experience gives 2155
 Is that, until man wakes, he lives
 A life that only dreams contrive.
 The king dreams he is king and reigns
 Deluded in his full command,
 Imposing order in his land. 2160
 The borrowed plaudits he obtains
 Blow scattered through the wind's domains
 As death—man's life is so unjust!—
 Transmutes them into ash and dust.
 Oh, who on earth could wish to wield 2165
 Such might when waking means to yield
 It all to death's dream, as we must?
 The rich man dreams his riches great,

Which makes his wealth more burdensome.
 The poor man dreams that he'll succumb 2170
 To misery in his beggared state.
 He also dreams who prospers late.
 The striver and aspirer do,
 The mocker and offender, too.
 In fact, all mortal souls on earth 2175
 Dream their conditions from their birth,
 Though no one knows this to be true.
 I'm dreaming now that darker days
 Await me, chained, in this dark cell
 As I'd dreamt I'd been treated well 2180
 Of late in some strange coddled phase.
 What's life? A frenzied, blurry haze.
 What's life? Not anything it seems.
 A shadow. Fiction filling reams.
 All we possess on earth means nil, 2185
 For life's a dream, think what you will,
 And even all our dreams are dreams.

ACT III

Scene i

[Enter CLARION.]

CLARION: I lodge in this enchanted tower
A captive, for I know the truth,
But if my knowledge means sure death, 2190
What will my ignorance lead to?
That such a hungry, hungry man
Should perish like a living corpse!
I'm feeling sorry for myself,
So go ahead, say, "That's for sure," 2195
For surely, that's not hard to see.
This silence, too, is pretty rough,
But when your name is Clarion, well,
There's just no way to hold your tongue.
My sole companions in this place— 2200
And this would be a wild guess—
Are mice and spiders lurking here.
Who needs a goldfinch for a pet?
My teeming brain is still awhirl
With everything I dreamt last night: 2205
The sound of trumpet blares and shawms
Came mingled with deceptive sights
Like one of flagellants that marched
In some procession of the cross,
First rising, then descending, then 2210

Succumbing once they saw the lost
Blood flowing down their fellows' backs.

These bouts with hunger here of late
May cause the swoons in me as well,
For, while I'm left to starve by day, 2215

An empty Plato offers no
Consolement of philosophy,
While each night I appear before
A Diet of Worms, which isn't meet. 2220

So if this new Church calendar
Considers silence "blessed" now,
Let Secret be my patron saint—

I'll fast for him and break no vows.
I haven't breathed a word yet, so
My punishment seems well deserved: 2225

What greater sacrilege is there
Than quiet from one hired to serve?

Scene ii

[*The sound of drums and soldiers' voices offstage.*]

1ST SOLDIER: They're holding him inside this tower.
Here, batter down these bolted doors
And storm the cell!

CLARION: Good heavens, have 2230
They come for me? I'm pretty sure,
Since they seem pretty sure I'm here.
Whatever could they want?

1ST SOLDIER: Charge in!

2ND SOLDIER: He's here!

CLARION: Oh, no he's not!

SOLDIERS: [To CLARION.] My lord!

CLARION: They must be drunkards on a binge! 2235

2ND SOLDIER: All hail, our prince and rightful liege!
To you alone do we submit
Our forces, natural-born heir,
And not to any foreign prince.
To prove our troth, we kiss-your feet. 2240

SOLDIERS: Long live the prince, whom we love well!

CLARION: Good God, can this be happening?
Is it the custom in this realm
To seize a body every day
And make a prince of him before 2245
He's thrown back in the tower? Must be,
Since each day there's a different lord.
Looks like I'll have to play the part.

SOLDIERS: Give us your feet!

CLARION: I can't because
I need to use them for myself 2250
And it would be a tragic flaw
To govern as a soleless prince.

2ND SOLDIER: We've seen your father and declared
Our will to him: it's you alone
We recognize as Poland's heir, 2255
And not the Muscovite.

CLARION: You told
My father? Have you no respect,
You lousy bunch of so-and-so's?

1ST SOLDIER: One can't keep loyal hearts in check.

CLARION: Well, loyalty I can excuse. 2260

2ND SOLDIER: Restore the kingdom to your line.
Long live Prince Segismund!

SOLDIERS: Long life!

CLARION: Ah, they said "Segismund." All right,
So Segismund's the word they use
To mean a prince is counterfeit. 2265

[Enter SEGISMUND.]

Scene iii

SEGISMUND: Is someone calling out my name?

CLARION: Am I a has-been as a prince?

2ND SOLDIER: Who here is Segismund?

SEGISMUND: I am.

2ND SOLDIER: You reckless fool! Impersonate
The heir apparent to the throne? 2270

CLARION: Now that's a game I'd never play.
Besides, it was the lot of you
That segismundized me. Ergo,
The only foolish recklessness
Put on display here was your own. 2275

1ST SOLDIER: Great prince, brave Segismund! Although
The standards that we bear are yours,
It's solemn faith alone compels
Our number to proclaim you lord.

Your father Basil, our great king, 2280
Has lived in terror of the skies
Fulfilling their dread prophecy
That presaged you would see him lie
Subdued beneath your feet. For this,
He'd planned to yield your titled claim 2285
And highborn right to Astolf, Duke
Of Moscow, and eclipse your reign.
King Basil had convened the court
When Poland learned an heir survived
And wished him to succeed the king, 2290
Reluctant that a foreign line
Should govern them on native soil.
So, holding the inclemency
Of starry fate in noble scorn,
They sought your cell to see you freed 2295
From these cruel chains. All live in hope
The rightful heir will leave these grounds
And, buttressed by their arms, reclaim
For them the scepter and the crown
Out that usurping tyrant's grip! 2300
Come forth! Amid this barrenness
An army, sizable and strong,
Of bandits and staunch citizens
Acclaims you. Longed-for liberty
Awaits you, hear its beckoning call! 2305

VOICES: [Offstage.] Long live Prince Segismund!
All hail!

SEGISMUND: What's this? Must I be held enthralled
Again, cruel skies, to fleeting dreams
Of grandeur Time will surely mock?
Must I again be forced to glimpse 2310
Amid the shadows and the fog
The majesty and faded pomp
That waft inconstant on the wind?

Must I again be left to face
 Life's disillusion or the risks 2315
 To which man's limits are exposed
 From birth and never truly end?
 This cannot be. It cannot be.
 Behold me here, a slave again
 To fortune's whims. As I have learned 2320
 That life is really just a dream,
 I say to you, false shadows, Go!
 My deadened senses know your schemes,
 To feign a body and a voice
 When voice and body both are shams. 2325
 I've no desire for majesty
 That's phony or for pompous flam,
 Illusions of sheer fantasy
 That can't withstand the slightest breeze
 And dissipate entirely like 2330
 The blossoms on an almond tree
 That bloom too early in the spring
 Without a hint to anyone.
 The beauty, light, and ornament
 Reflecting from their rosy buds 2335
 Fade all too soon; these wilt and fall
 When but the gentlest gusts blow by.
 I know you all too well, I do,
 To fancy you'd act otherwise
 Toward other souls who likewise sleep. 2340
 So let this vain pretending cease;
 I'm disabused of all I thought
 And know now life is but a dream.

2ND SOLDIER: We have not come here to deceive.
 Just cast your eyes upon the lair 2345
 Of haughty hills that ring this tower
 And see the host of men prepared
 To follow and obey you.

SEGISMUND: Once
 I saw the same approving crowd 2350
 Appear before me as distinct
 And clear as I perceive things now,
 But I was dreaming.

2ND SOLDIER: Great events
 Are oft preceded, good my lord,
 By portents, which is what occurred 2355
 When you did dream these things before.

SEGISMUND: A portent. Yes, you must be right.
 If all is truly as you've deemed
 And man's life, sadly, is so short,
 Then let us dream, my soul, let's dream 2360
 Again! But this time we will face
 Full recognition of the fact
 That we may waken from this sleep
 At any hour and be brought back.
 Still, knowing such things in advance
 Should temper disappointment's stings; 2365
 To put the cure before the harm
 Does much to mock the injuring.
 In short, as all have been forewarned
 That, even when man's sway seems sure,
 Our power is borrowed on this earth 2370
 And harks back always to its source,
 What can we lose by venturing?
 I thank you, vassals, for this show
 Of loyalty. With all my skill
 And bravery I'll smash this yoke 2375
 Of foreign slavery you fear!
 Come, sound the call to arms. This
 sword
 Will vouch my courage is no lie.
 It's my intent to levy war

Against my father, proving thus 2380
That heaven prophesied the truth.
I'll see him prone beneath my feet—
Unless I wake before I do,
In which case it might just be best
To say no more about these plans. 2385

ALL: All hail to you, Prince Segismund!

Scene iv

[Enter CLOTALDO.]

CLOTALDO: Good heavens, what's this uproar, man?

SEGISMUND: Clotaldo.

CLOTALDO: Sire. [*Aside.*] He's sure to vent
His rage upon me now.

CLARION: I bet
He throws the codger off this cliff. 2390

[*He exits.*]

CLOTALDO: I bow to you, though I expect
To die here at your feet.

SEGISMUND: Pray stand,
Good father. Rise up from the ground,
My polestar and sole guiding light!
You coaxed my better nature out 2395
And well I know the debt you're owed
For rearing me so faithfully.
Let me embrace you.

CLOTALDO: How is that?

SEGISMUND: I'm dreaming now, but in my dream
I'm striving to do good. No chance 2400
To do kind deeds should be ignored.

CLOTALDO: My lord, since you profess these acts
Of grace as your new creed, I'm sure
You'll take no great offense with me
For likewise cleaving to these views. 2405
Wage war against your father? Then
I simply cannot counsel you
And aid the downfall of my king.
So slay me, humbled still upon
This ground you tread.

SEGISMUND: Oh, traitor! Vile, 2410
Ungrateful wretch! Almighty God!
Some self-command might serve me well
Until it's certain that I wake.
I envy your stouthearted show,
Clotaldo. Thank you for this faith. 2415
Go, then, and serve the king you love;
We'll meet upon the battle lines.
All others, sound the call to arms!

CLOTALDO: I kiss your feet a thousand times.

SEGISMUND: Come, Fortune! Off we go to reign, 2420
So dare not wake me if I sleep
Nor let me sleep should this be true,
For whether I now sleep or dream
It's vital still that man do good
In dream or sleep for good's own sake, 2425
At least to win himself some friends
For when he ultimately wakes.

[*All exit as the call to arms sounds.*]

Scene v

[Enter King BASIL and ASTOLF.]

BASIL: Good Astolf, who can stop a bolting horse
And still its rage into serenity?
Or check a surging river's headlong course 2430
Before its waters flow into the sea?
Or halt a falling boulder gathering force
While hurtling down a mountain fast and free?
Yet, none of these is harder to arrest
Than masses who feel angered and
oppressed. 2435
Divulge by edict any news from court
And all at once you'll hear the echoes sound
Throughout the hills, as anguished cries
exhort
"Hail Astolf" while "Hail Segismunds"
resound.
Our throne room has been turned into
a sort 2440
Of second stage where horrid plays abound,
A baneful theater where fate flaunts her will
And only tragedy is on the bill.

ASTOLF: Then, sire, I will assuredly delay this cause
For celebration proffered by your hand 2445
And shun both flattery and loud applause,
For Poland, where I'd looked to rule as
planned,
Resists my reign today and flouts your laws
So I might prove my worth to lead the land.
Bring me a steed whose spirit knows no like; 2450
You've heard me thunder, now watch
lightning strike!

[He exits.]

BASIL: No one escapes the inescapable
Or any danger omens have in store.
Resisting fortune is impossible;
Ignoring forecasts just makes them
more sure. 2455
In our case, this harsh law looms terrible
As fleeing danger brings one to its door.
Base ruin now appears our secret's cost,
For we're alone to blame now Poland's lost.

Scene vi

[Enter STELLA.]

STELLA: If your wise presence, sire, can't stop
the spread 2460
Of opposition forces gaining ground
While ever more combative factions head
Throughout our streets and plazas, palace
bound,
You'll see the realm awash in waves of red,
Your subjects bathing in the blood
now found 2465
But in their crimson veins. What tragic
gloom
Surrounds our kingdom's decadence and
doom!
To sense the downfall of your rule so near
Amid the savage violence of this plot
Astounds the eye and terrifies the ear. 2470
The wind grows still, the sun turns to a blot;
Each rock will be a headstone to revere,
Each flower the marker on a fresh grave's
spot,
Each edifice a lofty house of death,
Each soldier but a skeleton with breath. 2475

Scene vii

[Enter CLOTALDO.]

CLOTALDO: I've made it here alive, for God is kind.

BASIL: Clotaldo, have you news about our son?

CLOTALDO: The masses, sire, a monster rash and blind,
Besieged the tower and, seeing it overrun,
Freed Segismund. No sooner did he find 2480
A second time this second honor won
Than out he burst emboldened and uncouth,
Resolved to prove the heavens spoke the
truth.

BASIL: Bring us a steed, for as your king we must
Defeat this ingrate out of royal pride. 2485
But this time in our crown's defense we'll
trust
Cold steel where once our hapless science
vied.

[He exits.]

STELLA: Bright sun, I'll be Bellona at your side
And join my name to one far more august.
On outstretched wings I'll soar above
the frays 2490
And rival Pallas in my warlike ways.

[She exits as the call to arms is sounded.]

Scene viii

[Enter ROSAURA, who stops CLOTALDO.]

ROSAURA: I know the seething valor pent
Within your breast attends the call
To arms, but hear me now, for all
Can see that war is imminent. 2495
When I arrived in Poland just
A poor, humiliated maid,
Your valor was my only aid
And you the sole man I could trust
To pity me. Then you procured 2500
That I'd reside—oh, heart!—disguised
At palace, where I was advised
To keep my jealousy obscured
And my good self from Astolf's sight.
He spied me, though, and now insists 2505
On mocking me with garden trysts
He holds with Stella every night.
But I hold this, the garden's key,
Which you could use for entering
The place unseen, and thereby bring 2510
An end to all my cares for me.
So might my honor be restored
By one who's strong, brave, and resolved
To see this problem duly solved
By winning vengeance with the sword. 2515

CLOTALDO: It's true I've been disposed to act
On your behalf since first we met,
Rosaura, and collect that debt—
Your tears bore witness to this fact—
By all the powers I possess. 2520
That's why I urged you to acquire
More proper feminine attire

So you'd be clad in seemly dress
 When Astolf sighted you at court.
 It couldn't, then, occur to him 2525
 Your clothes were but a flighty whim
 To turn lost honor into sport.
 At just that time I moved to find
 Some way to make the rogue repent
 His insult, even if this meant— 2530
 For honor so engaged my mind!—
 Contriving Astolf's death. See where
 The ravings of an old man lead?
 He's not my king, and thus the deed
 Should cause not wonder or despair. 2535
 I'd plotted murder when the same
 Urge struck Prince Segismund, who tried
 Dispatching me! Good Astolf spied
 This wrong and, self-neglecting, came
 To my defense stoutheartedly. 2540
 His noble showing of largesse
 Bore all the marks of recklessness
 And far surpassed mere bravery.
 Now, as mine is a grateful soul,
 How could I ever cause the death 2545
 Of one whose heart left me with breath
 And handed me my life back whole?
 My care and my affection stand
 Divided now between you two:
 As I gave back a life to you 2550
 But then received one from his hand,
 To which of you do I owe more?
 Which action claims priority?
 Receiving now obliges me
 As much as giving did before 2555
 And so fulfillment of my plan,
 Which once seemed certain, now does not.
 I'd suffer compassing the plot
 And wrongly kill a worthy man.

ROSAURA: It's not my place here, I believe, 2560
 To sway one so superlative
 But, noble as it is to give,
 It's just as vile to receive.
 So, following this principle,
 You owe that man no gratitude, 2565
 For anyone would now conclude
 That, though he made life possible
 For you and you for me, it's clear
 He basely undermined your fame
 And compromised your noble name 2570
 While I've made you look cavalier.
 He, therefore, causes you offense.
 I, therefore, merit your first thought
 As what you've given me is naught
 But what he gave in impudence. 2575
 You, therefore, ought to strive to
 save
 A reputation thus disgraced
 And favor my claim, not his, based
 On what you both received and gave.

CLOTALDO: A mark of true nobility 2580
 Entails this giving with free hands,
 But showing gratitude demands
 That one receive as graciously.
 The reputation that's pursued
 My person holds me generous 2585
 And honored by the populace,
 So add to these marks gratitude,
 A noble trait I hope to claim
 By acting now both liberally
 And gratefully, for honesty 2590
 Is giving and receiving's name.

ROSAURA: You gave this damaged life to me
 And I recall well how you pled.

When I accepted it, you said
 A life lived with indignity 2595
 Was no true life and so the thought
 That I've received one is absurd.
 The life your giving hand conferred
 On me was not a life, but naught.
 If you'd be liberal before 2600
 You're grateful, following your fame,
 As I have heard you just proclaim,
 My hope is that you'll soon restore
 The life you thought you'd given. Why,
 If giving makes one seem sublime, 2605
 Be liberal first and you'll have time
 For feeling grateful by and by.

CLOTALDO: Then liberal first I'll be, for these
 Persuasive arguments declare
 Your fitness to be named my heir. 2610
 Take my bequest and seek the ease
 A convent grants, for in your case
 This recourse makes the greatest sense:
 Exchange this fleeing from offense
 For refuge in a holy place. 2615
 The kingdom presently is torn
 By factional extremity
 And such affliction mustn't be
 Made worse by one who's nobly born.
 Through this solution, I'll be viewed 2620
 Both loyal to my country's fight
 And generous to your suffered slight
 While showing Astolf gratitude.
 This remedy resolves things best;
 What else might you have settled for? 2625
 God knows I couldn't help you more
 Were I your father in this quest.

ROSAURA: Were you my sire out to avenge

This wrong, I'd suffer it as mine.
 But as you aren't, I must decline. 2630

CLOTALDO: How, then, will you exact revenge?

ROSAURA: I'll kill the duke.

CLOTALDO: What's this? The same
 Poor maid who grew up fatherless
 Displaying such courageousness?

ROSAURA: That's right.

CLOTALDO: What moves you?

ROSAURA: My good name. 2635

CLOTALDO: Soon Astolf will claim reverence . . .

ROSAURA: He stole all honor from my life.

CLOTALDO: As king, and Stella as his wife.

ROSAURA: An outrage God won't countenance!

CLOTALDO: It's madness, child.

ROSAURA: I'm sure you're right. 2640

CLOTALDO: Control these urges.

ROSAURA: So you say.

CLOTALDO: You'll lose your life . . .

ROSAURA: It's true, I may.

CLOTALDO: And honor, too.

ROSAURA: How well I might.

CLOTALDO: What will this mean?

ROSAURA: My death.

CLOTALDO: Don't wage
War out of spite.

ROSAURA: My honor calls. 2645

CLOTALDO: That's folly!

ROSAURA: Valor never palls.

CLOTALDO: Sheer lunacy!

ROSAURA: Or wrath and rage.

CLOTALDO: Can't this blind fury be allayed
In any other way?

ROSAURA: No, none.

CLOTALDO: But who will second you?

ROSAURA: No one. 2650

CLOTALDO: You won't be swayed?

ROSAURA: I won't be swayed.

CLOTALDO: The deed brings with it quite a cost.

ROSAURA: I would be lost at any rate.

CLOTALDO: If that's the case, my child, then wait—
Together let us both be lost. 2655

[*They exit.*]

Scene ix

[*Trumpets blare as soldiers march onstage with CLARION and SEGISMUND, who is dressed in animal pelts.*]

SEGISMUND: If proud Rome's Golden Age
Could view my entrance on this martial
stage,
How loudly would it voice
Delight at this strange triumph and rejoice 2660
Amazed to understand
A beast had armies under his command!
With such unbridled might,
The heavens could be mine without a fight!
But spirit, help me quell
These arrogant displays and not dispel 2665
This lingering applause;
I'd grieve to wake without it now because
To lose what dreams contain
Would surely bring me pain.
The less I hold things dear, 2670
The less I'll suffer when they disappear.

[*A clarion sounds offstage.*]

CLARION: Look there! A wingèd horse—
I'm sorry, but my stories pack more force
When I hyperbolize—
Four elements incarnate in its guise: 2675
Its body mass the earth,
Its soul the fire ablaze beneath its girth,
Its froth the water and its breath the air.

I relish chaos and confusion where
 The soul, froth, breath, and body all can be 2680
 A monster made of fire, wind, land, and sea,
 Though dapple-gray of hue
 And patchy, straddled by a horseman who
 Digs spurs into its side
 To fly upon his ride. 2685
 But this is a refined
 And jaunty dame!

SEGISMUND: Her radiance leaves me blind.

CLARION: Lord, it's Rosaura! See?

[*He exits.*]

SEGISMUND: The heavens have restored this sight to me.

Scene x :

[*Enter ROSAURA, dressed in a loose-fitting skirt, with a dagger and sword.*]

ROSAURA: Magnanimous Prince Segismund! 2690
 Your lordly heroism shines
 Upon this day of noble feats
 From out the shades of darkest night!
 For as the brightest-gleaming orb
 Among the stars displays its power 2695
 In Dawn's embrace, restoring light
 To roses and to blooming flowers,
 Emerging crowned with fulgent rays
 Above the mountains and the seas,
 Dispersing beams, dispensing glow, 2700
 Illuming froth and bathing peaks,
 So may you rise atop the world,

Proud Poland's shining sun! Avail
 A woman fraught with wretchedness 2705
 Who, prostrate at your feet today,
 A woman first and then a wretch,
 Trusts you'll comply—as either one
 Of these conditions should suffice—
 Since each is more than I could want
 To obligate a gentleman 2710
 Who boasts of gallantry to act.
 Three times already have you looked
 On me with wonder, blind to facts
 About my life, as all three times
 My clothes displayed a different self: 2715
 On the occasion we first met
 Inside a cell so dank I held
 My grieved existence charmed beside
 Your own, you took me for a man.
 When next you gazed on me you saw 2720
 A woman, as the palace plans
 Suspending you mid dream and pomp
 Turned all to shadows and vain schemes.
 The third time here, your eyes behold
 This monstrous and unnatural freak 2725
 Attired in female finery
 Yet bravely bearing manly arms.
 As you'll be more disposed to aid
 My cause once pity moves your heart,
 I'll tell now of the tragic blows 2730
 That fate's compelled me to absorb.
 I was of woman nobly born
 In Moscow at the royal court.
 My mother had to have been fair,
 For she was not a happy maid. 2735
 A vile deceiver laid his eyes
 On her, a villain who remains
 Both nameless and unknown to me.
 His valor, though, has given rise

To mine, and being the result 2740
 Of his desires, I now repine
 Not being born a pagan child
 So I half-madly might feel pleased
 To think this man was like those gods
 Whose cunning metamorphoses 2745
 Into a swan, gold shower, or bull
 Left Leda ravished, Danaë duped,
 And fair Europa raped. I thought
 I was digressing, but these lewd 2750
 Accounts of perfidy provide
 An overview to this sad tale.
 My mother, far more lovely still
 Than any woman, fell betrayed
 By her seducer's gallant words
 And thus, like many, was undone. 2755
 The old trick of a marriage pledge
 Imparted by a honeyed tongue
 Beguiled her so, that to this day
 Its memory dispels her joys.
 In fact, the tyrant so recalled 2760
 Aeneas in his flight from Troy
 He even left his sword behind.
 We'll leave its blade ensheathed for now
 But have no doubt I'll draw this steel
 Before I end my sad account. 2765
 So, from their bond, a loose-tied knot
 That neither ties one down nor binds,
 Not quite a marriage or a crime—
 It's all the same now to my mind—
 I issued forth, my mother's twin 2770
 And living picture when it came
 Not to her comely countenance
 But all her sorrows and travails.
 As heiress to the vast estate
 Of love's misfortune she bequeathed, 2775
 I hardly feel the need to say

I've come into her destiny.
 The most I'll say about myself
 Is that the thief who dared despoil 2780
 The trophy of my honor's claim
 And left my maiden virtue soiled
 Is Astolf! Heavens, how my heart
 Beats quick with rage when I pronounce
 His name, a natural response
 To hearing enemies announced. 2785
 Duke Astolf, disremembering
 The joys he'd so ungratefully found—
 Yes, memories of love gone by
 Are just that quickly blotted out—
 Arrived in Poland, called away 2790
 From this great conquest, having come
 To claim fair Stella as his bride,
 A torch beside my setting sun.
 Now who would think so stellar-made
 A union, sanctioned by the stars, 2795
 Could come unraveled just because
 Maid Stella came between our hearts?
 I, then, dishonored and deceived,
 Remained forlorn, remained half-crazed,
 Remained a corpse, remained myself, 2800
 Which is to say, too much remained
 Of that infernal turmoil lodged
 Within the Babylon of my mind.
 I swore myself to silence, then,
 As there are trials and pains in life 2805
 Authentic feeling can convey
 Far better than the mouth could hope,
 And voiced my grief by keeping mute.
 One day, though, as I sat alone,
 My mother, Violante, stormed 2810
 The fortress where these miseries lay
 And out they poured like prisoners
 Colliding all in unleashed haste.

I felt no shame confessing them,
 For when a person shares her griefs 2815
 With one she knows has likewise felt
 Her share of them from being weak,
 The sorrow starts to dissipate
 And spreads a balm upon the hurt.
 A bad example, after all, 2820
 Can be of use. In short, she heard
 My plaints with sympathy and tried
 Consoling me with her own woes—
 A judge who's been delinquent finds
 Forgiveness easy to bestow! 2825
 So, as she'd learned that honor wronged
 Could never hope to be set right
 By whiling idle hours away
 Or simply watching time go by,
 She set me on a different course. 2830
 Her sage advice? That I pursue
 And hold my tempter liable for
 The loss his blandishments produced,
 Obliging him with courtly ways.
 Now, to ensure this quest would pose 2835
 Small risk to me, fate intervened
 To outfit me in manly clothes.
 My mother took an old sword down,
 The one I've girded round my waist,
 And so the time has come at last, 2840
 As I have pledged, to bare its blade.
 Convinced this sword would be a sign,
 She said, "Set out for Poland's fields
 And let her grandest noblemen
 Be certain to observe the steel 2845
 Now gracing you. In one of them
 Your luckless fortune may well find
 A sympathetic ear, and all
 Your sorrows solace in due time."
 I came, indeed, to Poland, where— 2850

Let's skip a bit, for why repeat
 What everyone already knows?—
 A bolting brute, half-horse, half-beast,
 Unsaddled me outside that cave 2855
 Where you first spied my loveliness.
 Now skip to where Clotaldo takes
 A special interest in my quest
 And begs the king to spare my life,
 A favor Basil deigns to grant. 2860
 On learning my identity,
 He urges me, dressed like man,
 To put on lady's clothes and serve
 Maid Stella on the palace grounds
 Where I've used all my craft to thwart 2865
 Duke Astolf's love and Stella's vows.
 Let's also skip where seeing me
 Confounded you that time at court
 As I, then wearing female garb,
 Appeared in yet another form, 2870
 And speak of what Clotaldo's done.
 Self-servingly, he now ascribes
 Great weight to Astolf being king
 With Stella reigning as his bride
 And, to my honor's detriment,
 Has bid me suffer this offense. 2875
 Brave Segismund, how clear it dawns
 On all this day that sweet revenge
 Belongs to you! The heavens smile
 On your felicitous release
 From out so crude a prison cell 2880
 Where you had grown resigned to be
 A rock against all suffering
 And beast unmoved by sentiment.
 Now, as you take up arms to fight
 Your native land and sovereign, 2885
 I come to pledge my aid, bedecked
 In chaste Diana's flowing robes

Atop a suit of Pallas's
 Own armor, Draped in clashing clothes
 Of genteel fabric and cold steel, 2890
 I join your forces dually dressed.
 To battle, then, bold general!
 For it's in both our interests
 To stop these banns from going forth
 And set this royal bond aside: 2895
 For me, so that the man I call
 My husband takes no other wife;
 For you, so that no gain in strength
 Resulting from their allied states
 Will threaten our great victory 2900
 Once you've returned as prince to reign.
 I come, a woman, urging you
 To join the cause to which I'm bound;
 But as a man, I come to press
 This late reclaiming of your crown. 2905
 I come, a woman, at your feet
 To move you to commiserate;
 But as a man, I come to serve
 Beside you in your people's aid.
 I come, a woman, so you might 2910
 Assuage my sorrows and my pain;
 But as a man, I come with sword
 And person ready to assail.
 So, should you find yourself inclined
 To woo me as a woman, rest 2915
 Assured that, as a man, I'd be
 Compelled to kill you in defense
 Of honor, honorably, because
 In this campaign of love you've planned,
 I'll play the woman with my complaints, 2920
 But fight with honor like a man.

SEGISMUND: Just heavens! If it's really true
 I dream, suspend my memory!

It isn't possible for all
 I've seen to fit into a dream! 2925
 If God would but reveal to me
 How I might blot these troubles out
 And give them not another thought!
 What mortal ever faced such doubts?
 If I had only dreamt I dwelt 2930
 Amid such luxury, how could
 This woman have recounted what
 I saw and seemed so plausible?
 It was true, then. That was no dream.
 If this is so, which by all rights 2935
 Should leave me more confused, not less,
 Who is it that could call my life
 A dream? Do this world's glories so
 Resemble dreams in what they vaunt
 That even the most genuine 2940
 Are destined to be reckoned false
 As fake ones are considered true?
 Have these so little difference
 That every man must ask himself
 Now whether all he relishes 2945
 Around him is a lie or truth?
 Why must the copy counterfeit
 The true original so well
 That none dare hazard which is which?
 If such be life's design, and all 2950
 Our splendid pageantry and strength,
 Our solemn pomp and majesty,
 Must vanish into shadow's depths,
 Let's seize the time that's given us
 And reap what pleasures may be reaped, 2955
 For all we now enjoy on earth
 Is but what we enjoy in dreams.
 I hold Rosaura in my power;
 Her beauty captivates my soul.
 So let me profit from this chance 2960

To let love set aside the codes
 Of valor, trust, and chivalry
 That she's invoked in her request.
 As this is but another dream,
 Let's all dream happy things on end 2965
 And rue them only once we wake!
 Be careful or your logic might
 Convince you this is fact again!
 A dream may reach vainglorious heights,
 But who'd pass heaven's glories up 2970
 For human ones, had he the choice?
 What happy turns of fate weren't dreams?
 What man has felt tremendous joy
 And not then asked himself in time,
 Once memory had reviewed the scene: 2975
 "Weren't all these things I witnessed but
 A dream?" If knowledge like this means
 Great disappointment—for I've learned
 That pleasure is a lovely flame
 The merest breath of air blows out 2980
 So only wafting ash remains—
 Let's look toward the eternal, then,
 And seek renown that never dies
 Where joy will not succumb to sleep
 Or splendor ever napping lie! 2985
 Rosaura's honor lingers lost
 And it's incumbent on a prince
 To see that honor be restored.
 I swear by God above I'll win
 Her honor back before my crown 2990
 And save her name from future harm!
 It's best I flee temptation so
 Enticing. Sound the call to arms!
 I'll wage war on my foes this day
 Before the night's encroaching shade 2995
 Can shroud the sunlight's golden rays
 In somber black and dark-green waves.

ROSAURA: Sire, why do you withdraw from me?
 I would have hoped that soothing words
 Were due my sorrows at the least 3000
 As balm for salving heartfelt hurt.
 How is it possible, then, lord,
 That I should go unseen, unheard?
 Why won't you even look this way?

SEGISMUND: Rosaura, only honor's call 3005
 Could prompt this seeming cruelty
 In serying kinder mercy's cause.
 My voice declines to answer you
 To let my honor give reply.
 I hold my speech so that my deeds 3010
 Will speak for me in their own right
 And shield my gaze from you because
 No man in such dire straits can pledge
 To aid a woman's honor when
 She looks the sight of loveliness. 3015

[Exit SEGISMUND and soldiers.]

ROSAURA: Why does he speak in riddles, skies?
 He knows my suffering has been great,
 So how could he equivocate
 By giving such abstruse replies?

Scene xi

[Enter CLARION.]

CLARION: My lady, when you've time to spare . . . 3020

ROSAURA: Why, Clarion! Man, where have you been?

CLARION: Just trying to read my fortune in
 A deck of cards, confined up there—

They slay me . . . no, they slay me not—
 A face card would ensure a brush 3025
 With death, but trumped, would leave me
 flush
 With life again. That parlous spot
 All but convinced me I would bust.

ROSAURA: Whatever from?

CLARION: From finding out
 The secret of your past. No doubt

 [Drumbeats sound offstage.] 3030

 Clotaldo . . . What's that sound I just
 Heard?

ROSAURA: Beating drums and battle
 whoops?

CLARION: Armed soldiers sortie from the court
 To end the palace siege. To thwart 3035
 Prince Segismund's unruly troops,
 They'll make a stand for all they're worth!

ROSAURA: It's cowardly to be allied
 With him and not fight at his side,
 A scandalous wonder on this earth,
 Where cruel acts flourish and survive 3040
 In anarchy despite man's laws.

[She exits.]

Scene xii

SOME VOICES: [Offstage.] Long live our king's
 triumphant cause!

OTHER VOICES: [Offstage.] Long may our freedom live
 and thrive!

CLARION: Long live their freedom and their king!
 I wish the both of them the best, 3045
 But nothing leaves me more distressed,
 Than being forced to choose one thing.
 Instead of risking life and limb,
 I'll step aside, avoid distress,
 And act like Nero through this mess— 3050
 He never let things get to him!
 It's up to me now to decide
 What else should worry me but me.
 I'll just make sure that I can see
 The party rage from where I hide. 3055
 Ah, this is where I'll catch my breath,
 Secluded on this rocky sheer.
 No, death will never find me here
 And I don't give two figs for death.

[He hides.]

Scene xiii

[With the sound of arms clashing, King BASIL, CLOTALDO,
 and ASTOLF enter fleeing.]

BASIL: What king has ever felt defeat 3060
 Or father harassment so dire?

CLOTALDO: Your army has been routed, sire,
 And scatters in confused retreat.

ASTOLF: None but the treacherous victors stride
The field.

BASIL: The battle thus desists 3065
To make of victors loyalists
And traitors of the losing side.
Let's flee our tyrant son and his
Inhuman rage, Clotaldo, flee
His savage wrath and cruelty! 3070

[Shots are heard offstage, and CLARION falls wounded from his hiding place.]

CLARION: Sweet heavens, help me now!

ASTOLF: Who is
This soldier of misfortune here
That wallows at our feet in mud,
His body soaked and stained with blood?

CLARION: A hapless piece of man, I fear, 3075
Who vainly sought to turn his face
From death, but met it anyhow,
Whose final dodge did not allow
Him final shrift. There's just no place
To hide from death and not be found, 3080
From which a man might well assume
The more he tries to spurn the tomb,
The sooner he'll lie underground.
Go, then, rejoin your vast brigades
And charge into the bloody breach 3085
Where you'll be farthest from harm's
reach,
Mid clashing swords and cannonades,
More safe than hiding in the hills,
Which offer no security

Against the tide of destiny 3090
Or what inclement fortune wills.
Think you by fleeing you'll be fine
And cheat death in this way again?
You'll die precisely where and when
Your deaths fulfill God's grand design. 3095

[He collapses offstage.]

BASIL: You'll die precisely where and when
Your deaths fulfill God's grand design!
Almighty heavens, truer words
Than these man never spoke before!
They lead us toward a greater truth 3100
Imparted by this talking corpse
Whose wound is but a second mouth
From which that trickling liquid drips
Like wisdom off a bloody tongue
To teach how man's initiatives 3105
All come to naught when they presume
To counteract the powers on high.
Our own attempts to rid this land
Of treachery and homicide
Have ended in its capture by 3110
The forces we had most opposed.

CLOTALDO: Though it is common knowledge, sire,
That fate's familiar with all roads
And hunts down even those who think
Themselves hid mid these stones, it still 3115
Is hardly Christian sentiment
To say one can't escape its ills.
A prudent man might easily
Emerge victorious over fate.
I beg you, sire, if you stand fair 3120
To common wretchedness and pain,
Seek refuge where it might be had.

- ASTOLF: Your Majesty, Clotaldo may
Advise you as a prudent man
Who's reached a wise, mature
old age, 3125
But I'll speak as a daring youth:
You'll find a horse concealed within
The tangled thickets of these hills,
A fleet abortion of the wind.
Ride hard until you're safe; I'll guard 3130
The rear to safeguard your escape.
- BASIL: If death fulfills God's grand design
Or otherwise should lie in wait
For us today, we'll stand our ground
And meet it face-to-face at last. 3135

Scene xiv

[The call to arms sounds, and SEGISMUND enters with his entire company, including STELLA and ROSAURA.]

- SOLDIER: Here! Somewhere mid these bosky hills
In thickets off the beaten path
The king is hiding.
- SEGISMUND: After him!
Look under every living plant!
I'll see this dusky forest combed 3140
First trunk by trunk, then branch by branch!
- CLOTALDO: Flee, sire!
- BASIL: What purpose would it serve?
- ASTOLF: Who holds you?
- BASIL: Astolf, step aside.

- CLOTALDO: Where will you turn, my lord?
- BASIL: We've but
One recourse left us at this time. 3145
If it is us you look for, prince,
Then look no farther than your feet
Where we now lay this carpet wove
Of white hairs from our snowy peak.
Come, tread upon our neck and trounce 3150
Our crown, humiliate us, drag
Our dignity and reverence down,
Take vengeance on our honor fast
And use us as your captive slave.
For what has our precaution served? 3155
Let fate receive its proper due:
The heavens stayed true to their word.
- SEGISMUND: Proud worthies of the Polish court,
Attend your true and rightful prince
And I'll make sense of what these
strange 3160
Events you've witnessed have evinced.
What heaven has decreed shall come
To pass is writ in God's own script
Upon this drawing board of blue,
Where shining print and twinkling signs 3165
Embellish these celestial sheets
Like gilded letters hand-inscribed.
Not once have stars deceived or lied,
Though one soul does lie and deceive:
That man who'd read this coded script 3170
To hazard wildly what stars mean.
My father, humbled at my feet,
Believing he could shun the rage
Portended for me, had his son,
Born human, made a beast and caged. 3175
His action thus ensured, despite

My natural nobility,
 My pure aristocratic blood
 And all my gallant qualities—
 For I was born a docile soul 3180
 And gentle child—that so deprived
 An upbringing and inhumane,
 Debasing, brutish way of life
 Would father in me beastlike ways.
 Now, how was this confounding fate? 3185
 For say some stranger should predict
 One day: "An animal shall slay
 You by and by." What strategy
 For thwarting such a fate would force
 A man to rouse brutes from their sleep? 3190
 Or if that stranger warned, "The sword
 You gird upon your thigh shall be
 The one to cause your death," how vain
 All efforts to eschew this end
 Should seem if one then bared the blade 3195
 And left it pointing at his chest!
 Or if he bode, "The silvery spumes
 That cap the sea shall someday serve
 As gravestones on your watery tomb,"
 How prudent would it be to brave 3200
 The ocean deep precisely as
 Its cresting waves and snow-capped peaks
 Arose like mountains of clear glass?
 To act so heedlessly tempts fate,
 As he who wakes a sleeping beast 3205
 Discovers once he's sensed its threat;
 As he who fears a sword's cold steel
 Learns while unsheathing it; as he
 Who swims in stormy seas construes.
 For even if—now hear me out— 3210
 My fury were a sleeping brute,
 My savagery a tempered sword,
 And all my raging tranquil seas,

Harsh treatment and blind vengefulness 3215
 Would not reverse man's destiny,
 But hasten that it come to pass.
 That mortal who, by hopeful acts,
 Would influence the turns of fate
 Must seek a more judicious path.
 Foreseeing future harm does not 3220
 Ensure the victim will be spared
 Its ravages, for while it's true
 That man may save himself some care
 Through sheer humility—that's clear—
 This happens only once the harm 3225
 Presents itself, as there is just
 No chance that fate will be disarmed.
 Let this amazing spectacle,
 These strange events, this horror show
 And wondrous pageant play serve as 3230
 A lesson to us all. Who knows
 A more exemplary case? Despite
 Divining heaven's secret plans,
 A father lies at his son's heels,
 A king who's forfeited command. 3235
 The skies had willed this to occur
 And, intrigue as he might to stave
 Off fate, he failed. What chance could I
 Then hope to have—a man less gray,
 Less brave, less erudite than he— 3240
 To alter fortune's ways? Rise, sire.
 Give me your hand. Since heaven has
 Exposed the ruses you contrived
 As yet more futile ploys to change
 Their plotted course, I humbly bare 3245
 My neck to you, beneath your heels,
 So you might settle these affairs.

BASIL:

Our noble son, this virtuous
 Display has fathered you again

- In our own heart. You'll reign as prince. 3250
 The laurel leaf and palm are meant
 For you as victor on this day.
 Let gallant actions be your crown.
- ALL: Long live Prince Segismund! All hail!
- SEGISMUND: Now that it seems my valor's bound 3255
 To win me yet more victories,
 I'll start with my most dogged foe
 And quell myself. Come, Astolf, take
 Rosaura's hand and be betrothed.
 Thus will your debt of honor be 3260
 Repaid, and I'll vouchsafe for this.
- ASTOLF: Correct though you may be about
 Such satisfaction, lord, admit
 The lady cannot claim descent
 And that I'd stain my family name 3265
 By marrying a woman who . . .
- CLOTALDO: Before you say more, Astolf, wait.
 Rosaura's blood is noble as
 Your own, and gladly would I duel
 The man who'd gainsay this, for she's 3270
 My child. That should suffice for you.
- ASTOLF: How's that?
- CLOTALDO: I thought it best to keep
 The secret hid till she could be
 Both honorably and nobly wed.
 The story is quite long, indeed, 3275
 But in the end, she is my child.
- ASTOLF: If this is true, I will uphold
 My pledge.

- SEGISMUND: We've only Stella now
 To turn our thoughts to and console. 3280
 Considering her sudden loss
 Of so renowned and brave a prince,
 I place in my own hands the charge
 Of finding one who rivals him,
 If not superior in worth
 And riches, then at least his peer. 3285
 Fair Stella, take my hand.
- STELLA: I've no
 Right to the happiness I feel.
- SEGISMUND: Clotaldo, loyal servitor
 Of my good sire, these arms now stretch 3290
 Forth to embrace you, promising
 To render all you may request.
- 1ST SOLDIER: This man has never served your cause
 And yet is honored so? What lies
 Ahead for me, then, as the font
 Of all this turmoil and the might 3295
 That freed you from your tower jail?
- SEGISMUND: That selfsame tower. And to ensure
 You'll not set foot from there alive,
 We'll station guards at all the doors.
 Of what use is the traitor once 3300
 The treason has been carried out?
- BASIL: Your wisdom awes this gathering.
- ASTOLF: He seems a different person now.
- ROSAURA: A prudent and judicious prince!
- SEGISMUND: But why should you feel awe or fear? 3305

The dream that was my schoolmaster
 Will grieve me if it reappears
 And I awake to find myself
 Imprisoned once again, locked up
 In my rank cell. But should it not,
 To dream this would be quite enough!
 For on this earth, I've come to see
 That all of human happiness
 Must reach an end, just like a dream.
 So in what little time is left,
 I'll seize this opportunity
 To ask forgiveness for our flaws,
 As noble souls like yours are wont
 To pardon others for their faults.

3310

3315

Explanatory Notes

- line 1—hippogriff: a mythic creature having the body of a horse and the wings, head, and claws of a griffin.
- line 10—Phaëthon: son of Helios who was killed by Zeus's thunderbolt while driving his father's sun chariot too near the earth.
- line 164—Mount Etna: an active volcano in Sicily beneath which, according to Roman mythology, the god Vulcan housed his forge.
- line 227—dropsy: also called "hydropsy" or "edema," an ailment characterized by the accumulation of fluid in body parts or cavities.
- line 332—giant: perhaps a conflation of the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 : 1-9 with the myth of the Titans' attempt at their birthplace in Flegra (modern-day Macedonia) to expel the gods from Mount Olympus.
- line 350—sacred skits: a glib reference to the *autos sacramentales*, one-act allegorical plays celebrating the divine mysteries of the Holy Eucharist. Clarion here makes the qualities of humility and arrogance into stock characters.
- line 487—Aurora: Roman goddess of the dawn.
- line 488 (and lines 2491 and 2888)—Pallas the Athene: Pallas Athena, Greek goddess of war, wisdom, and crafts, born fully grown and clad in armor by springing from her father Zeus's head.
- line 489—Flora: Roman goddess of flowers and spring.
- line 555—God of Love: Amor or Cupid in Roman mythology, Eros to the Greeks, the blind, winged son of Venus (Aphrodite in Greek mythology) whose arrows caused their unwitting targets to fall in love.
- line 580—Thales: Greek philosopher, scientist, and mathematician from Miletus (625-547 B.C.).
- line 580—Euclid: antiquity's most prominent mathematician, active in Alexandria (fl. 300 B.C.).

- line 608—Timanthes: noted Greek painter who flourished around 400 B.C.
- line 609—Lysippus: famous Greek sculptor of the fourth century B.C.
- line 691—Our Lord was crucified: according to the Gospels Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44-45, the skies grew dark as Jesus Christ died on the cross.
- line 840—Seneca: Roman playwright, philosopher, and rhetorician (4? B.C.—A.D. 65) born in the imperial province of Hispania (modern-day Spain).
- line 854—Atlases: in Greek mythology, the Titan Atlas was condemned to support the world on his shoulders for having led a failed rebellion against Zeus.
- line 975—labyrinth: in Greek mythology, the maze constructed by Daedalus to enclose the fearsome Minotaur. Theseus found and slew this creature, half man, half bull, following thread he had unraveled in order to ensure his exit.
- line 1833—phoenix: a mythological bird, with a life span of five hundred years, that is magically reborn from the ashes of its own pyre.
- line 1838-40—"Our cares are cowards . . . cravenly in packs": a popular Spanish refrain notes that misfortunes tend to befall people all at once.
- line 2041—Icarus: a youth in Greek mythology who, wearing wings fashioned from feathers and wax, flew too near the sun and fell into the sea.
- line 2216—Plato: famous Greek philosopher (c. 427-c. 348 B.C.); his name here is a play on the word "plate." "Nicomedes," in the Spanish original, was a Greek mathematician (280?-210? B.C.) whose name is a play on "you don't eat."
- line 2219—Diet of Worms: the imperial assembly before which Martin Luther in 1521 defended religious beliefs that would lead to the Protestant Reformation. Clarion plays on these words in a reference to his unappetizing prisoner's fare. In the Spanish original, the "Nicene Council," the Catholic Church's first ecumenical assembly, is a play on "nor do I sup" ("*ni cenó*").
- line 2222—Secret: this ironic personification of a little known, newly canonized saint with a beatific quality of silence parodies the Catholic Church's updating of its already crowded calendar.
- line 2488—Bellona: Roman goddess of war who followed Mars into battle.
- line 2675—four elements: the Greek philosopher and statesman Empe-

- docles (c. 490-430 B.C.) believed that all matter was composed of earth, air, fire, and water.
- line 2747—Leda: in Greek mythology, a maiden raped by Zeus, who took the shape of a swan. Their offspring was the famed beauty Helen of Troy.
- line 2747—Danaë: in Greek mythology, a princess of Argos ravished by Zeus, who took the shape of a shower of gold that rained down upon her as she slept.
- line 2748—Europa: in Greek mythology, a Phoenician princess carried off by Zeus, who took the shape of an enticing white bull.
- line 2761—Aeneas: Trojan warrior and hero of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Having fled the fall of Troy, he became a lover of Dido, queen of Carthage, who committed suicide with a sword after he had abandoned her on his way to founding Rome.
- line 2803—Babylon: ancient Mesopotamian city considered by Old Testament Jews to be idolatrous and, thus, a place of moral confusion.
- line 2887—Diana: Roman virgin goddess of the hunt and the moon (see line 682).
- line 3050—Nero: dissolute Roman emperor (A.D. 37-68) who, according to legend, fiddled while Rome burned in A.D. 64.

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