

PIERRE CORNEILLE

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## From *Le Cid*

*Pierre Corneille's Le Cid (1636) was responsive to a public enthusiasm for nobility in love and honor, and for aristocratic glory in general. The play, which is in itself glorious for vigor and invention, locates its heroic action in the romantic world of medieval Spain, at a time of transition between feudal custom and royal power. It is the rival claims of throne and family which animate the plot, and confront the noble natures of Chimène and Rodrigue with their tragic choices.*

*A play which contains much passionate eloquence, and so often takes place within a royal court, requires its translator to use some lofty language; but I have found, in striving for a faithful transparency, that Le Cid contains no hollow sonorities and that something urgent is always being said. I hope that the following excerpts will convey something of the flavor and story-line of Corneille's great play.* Translator's Note

### Cast of Characters

DON FERNAND, first King of Castile  
DOÑA URRAQUE, Infanta of Castile  
DON DIÈGUE, Father of Don Rodrigue  
DON GOMES, Count of Gormas, father of Chimène  
DON RODRIGUE, in love with Chimène; her beloved  
DON SANCHE, in love with Chimène  
DON ARIAS, Castilian noble  
DON ALONSE, Castilian noble  
CHIMÈNE, daughter of Don Gomes  
LÉONOR, the Infanta's lady in waiting  
ELVIRE, Chimène's lady in waiting  
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## Act II, Scene 3

INFANTA

Chimène, my dear, don't grieve and suffer so;  
Don't let yourself be shattered by this blow.  
Calm will return soon, after this little squall;  
A passing cloud has dimmed your bliss, that's all,  
And you'll lose nothing by a brief delay.

CHIMÈNE

My heart has lost all hope in its dismay.  
The sudden storm that shook my calm has made  
Me certain of our shipwreck, and afraid  
That we shall founder in the port, indeed.  
I loved, was loved, our fathers were agreed,  
And I was giving you that happy word  
Just at the moment when their quarrel occurred.—  
Which, when the news was brought you, made it plain  
That all sweet expectations were in vain.  
Cursèd ambition, lunacy which rules  
In noblest hearts, and turns men into fools!  
Honor, which wrests from me my dearest prize,  
What shall you cost me now in tears and sighs!

INFANTA

Their quarrel's nothing to be troubled by:  
'Twas a moment's flare-up, and as soon will die.  
It's made a stir that quickly will be ended.  
The King already bids the breach be mended;  
And you well know that I, who feel your grief,  
Will spare no pains to bring your heart relief.

CHIMÈNE

Such things won't vanish at the King's behest,  
A mortal insult cannot be redressed.  
Neither to force nor reason will men yield;  
Only in semblance can the wound be healed.

The hatred that men's hearts contrive to hide  
Grows hotter still for being kept inside.

INFANTA

Your sacred tie with Don Rodrigue will be  
The solvent of your fathers' enmity,  
And you will feel your love the stronger for  
Its power to make them harbor hate no more.

CHIMÈNE

I wish for that, yet doubt it can be so.  
Don Diègue's too proud; my father's mind I know.  
I can't hold back these tears of grief I shed.  
I mourn the past; the future's full of dread.

INFANTA

Is it a frail old man's revenge you fear?

CHIMÈNE

Rodrigue's courageous.

INFANTA

He's too young, my dear.

CHIMÈNE

Brave men, at any age, are always such.

INFANTA

You mustn't fret about Rodrigue too much.  
He loves you, and he'll do as you require.  
A word from you, and he'll suppress his ire.

CHIMÈNE

How crushed I'd be, if he did not obey!  
And if he obeyed me, what would people say?

Would a good son suffer such indignity?  
Whether he heeded or resisted me,  
I'd either be ashamed of his compliance  
Or deeply troubled by his just defiance.

INFANTA

Your soul, Chimène, is noble, and in spite  
Of your own interest, sees with honest sight.  
But, till the quarrel's settled, what if I were  
To make your perfect knight my prisoner,  
And stand between his courage and his foe?  
Would you be happy if I acted so?

CHIMÈNE

Oh, Madam! I would then be free of fear.

## Act II, Scene 7

DON ALONSE

Sire, the Count is dead.  
Don Diègue has taken vengeance through his son.

DON FERNAND

I feared this outcome when the wrong was done,  
And bade the Count make peace then with Don Diègue.

DON ALONSE

Chimène is coming here in tears to beg  
For justice, Sire, and clasp your royal knees.

DON FERNAND

Though in her grief she has my sympathies,  
What the Count did seems richly to deserve  
This just chastisement of his pride and nerve.  
And yet, however just his death may be,

I grieve to lose a champion such as he.  
 After the loyal, long career he led,  
 And all the blood that for my throne he shed,  
 Though he was arrogant, his passing yet  
 Weakens my power and fills me with regret.

### Act III, Scene 6

DON DIÈGUE

Rodrigue! Thank heaven I've found you, my dear boy!

DON RODRIGUE

Alas!

DON DIÈGUE

Let's have no sighs to mar my joy.  
 When I've caught my breath, I'll praise you, for you've shown  
 A valor that's the equal of my own.  
 You've learned your trade, and in your derring-do  
 A race of heroes lives again in you.  
 Through me, you stem from that intrepid line;  
 Your first great sword-blow equaled all of mine,  
 And by your youthful ardor you became  
 At once the rival of your father's fame.  
 Prop of my age, fine son of whom I dreamed,  
 Touch these white hairs whose honor you've redeemed,  
 And kiss this cheek, the once-insulted place  
 Whose shame you've had the courage to erase.

DON RODRIGUE

Sir, I could do no less; it was your due  
 From one who was begot and raised by you;  
 And I rejoice that he to whom I owe  
 My life approves my sword's initial blow.  
 But kindly don't object if I reveal,  
 Despite your pleasure, what in turn I feel.

Let my despair speak out, which until now  
Your joy did not permit me to avow.  
I'm happy to have served you, Sir, but I  
Am desolate at what I've lost thereby;  
Avenging you, this arm deprived me of  
My heart's desire, and robbed me of her love.  
Pray say no more; my happiness is lost.  
I've paid my debt to you at cruel cost.

DON DIÈGUE

Come, be exultant in your victory.  
I gave you life; you saved my name for me.  
I value honor more than the light of day,  
And owe you, therefore, more than I could pay.  
For brave hearts, though, amours aren't worth a penny.  
We've but one honor; mistresses are many.  
Love's a diversion; honor is our career.

DON RODRIGUE

What are you saying?

DON DIÈGUE

What you need to hear.

DON RODRIGUE

I'm the chief victim of my vengeance, Sir,  
And now you'd have me break my faith to her!  
The craven warrior and the perjured swain  
Are equally disgraceful, I maintain.  
Don't chide my faithfulness, but let me be  
A knight who's guiltless of inconstancy.  
My bonds to her are far too strong to sever;  
Though I've no hope, I shall be hers forever,  
And since I cannot leave nor win Chimène,  
I seek my death, and shall be peaceful then.

DON DIÈGUE

It's not yet time to seek your death. Tonight  
 Your King and country call on you to fight.  
 The ships we feared have come upriver, and  
 Intend to sack the town and waste the land.  
 Floodtide and night will bring the Moorish power  
 Soundlessly to our shore within an hour.  
 The court's in disarray; the people's fears  
 Fill all the town with cries and wailing tears.  
 Amid that panic, there's one cheerful sign;  
 I found at home five hundred friends of mine  
 Who, hearing of the insult done me, came  
 With one accord to vindicate my name.  
 You have forestalled them, but their valor would  
 Be better used in spilling Moorish blood.  
 Go lead them now, as honor bids you do:  
 Those noble warriors want no chief but you.  
 Go meet the ancient foe who's drawing nigh,  
 And die then nobly, if you want to die.  
 Yes, seize some glorious moment, pay the price,  
 And win the King's thanks for your sacrifice.  
 Or better still, return with laurelled brow,  
 Not just as the avenger you are now,  
 But with achievements so superlative  
 That the King will pardon, and Chimène forgive.  
 If you love her still, the one way you can earn  
 Her heart's by a victorious return.  
 But I waste time in telling you these things:  
 I hold you here, when I would give you wings.  
 Come, follow me, and show the King that you  
 Can serve him as the late Count used to do.

## Act IV, Scene 1

CHIMÈNE

It's not a false report? You're sure, Elvire?

ELVIRE

You'd not believe how all the people cheer  
The brave young hero whom they idolize,  
Praising his wondrous exploits to the skies.  
He put the Moors to rout; if their attack  
Was sudden, he more swiftly drove them back.  
Three hours of battle saw our men repel  
The foe, and seize two kings of theirs as well.  
Our leader's valor could not be withstood.

CHIMÈNE

And 'twas Rodrigue who showed such hardihood?

ELVIRE

Both of those kings were captured through his pains;  
He bested them, and put them both in chains.

CHIMÈNE

Who gave you this extraordinary news?

ELVIRE

The populace, which shouts his name, and views  
Him as its cause and object of delight,  
Its guardian angel and its perfect knight.

CHIMÈNE

What does the King say of this brave report?

ELVIRE

Rodrigue does not yet dare appear at court;  
Don Diègue, however, has rejoiced to bring  
His son's two royal captives to the King,  
Entreating him to give, with gracious hand,  
An audience to the savior of his land.

CHIMÈNE

Rodrigue's not wounded?

ELVIRE

Not to my knowledge, no.  
How pale you are! You mustn't worry so.

CHIMÈNE

What I must do is keep my rage awake.  
Shall I slight my duty, fretting for his sake?  
He's praised, he's lauded, and my heart assents!  
My honor falters, and my wrath relents!  
Be still, my heart, and don't impede my ire:  
Two kings he's captured, but he killed my sire.  
These mournful garments, which express my woe,  
Are the first results his bravery could show,  
And though the world may laud his gallantry,  
Here everything bespeaks his crime to me.  
You gloomy things which fuel my laments,  
Dark veils, dark dress, lugubrious ornaments,  
Sad pomp which his first victory requires,  
Protect my just resolve from passion's fires;  
And, lest my love should gain the upper hand,  
Speak to my soul of duty's grave command.  
Arm me to face this hero without fear.

ELVIRE

Compose yourself. The Princess, Madam, is here.

## Act IV, Scene 2

INFANTA

I have not come to bring your woes relief;  
My sighs shall mingle with your tears of grief.

CHIMÈNE

My Lady: none but I should grieve today.  
The danger that Rodrigue has driven away,  
The public weal which through his sword we keep,  
Mean that I only have a right to weep.  
He's saved the city; he has served his King,  
And I alone have grounds for sorrowing.

INFANTA

He has indeed done wondrous things, my dear.

CHIMÈNE

That vexing news has long since reached my ear,  
And I am told that he's as famous for  
Bad luck in love as for success in war.

INFANTA

Why does it vex you, what the people say?  
This young Mars whom they praise was yesterday  
Your all in all, your love, and when their voice  
Acclaims his valor, they approve your choice.

CHIMÈNE

The people justly praise him, but for me  
To hear their praises is an agony.  
Those high opinions are for me a cross.  
The more his fame, the bitterer my loss.  
What pain it is to be enamored of him!  
The more I learn his worth, the more I love him:  
My duty, nonetheless, is stronger still;  
I seek his death with an unshaken will.

INFANTA

Your sense of duty, yesterday, was deemed  
Heroic, dear, and all at court esteemed  
The self-control with which you rose above

All other claims, and sacrificed your love.  
But will you hear a faithful friend's advice?

CHIMÈNE

That gracious gift you need not offer twice.

INFANTA

What made sense then does not make sense today.  
Rodrigue is now our one support and stay,  
The people's hope and pride and cynosure,  
Castile's great prop, the terror of the Moor.  
The King himself supports the public view  
That in Rodrigue your father lives anew.  
What my opinion is, I'll tell you straight:  
Seeking his death, you seek to wreck the State.  
Come! To avenge a father, is one free  
To yield one's homeland to the enemy?  
Have you good reason to afflict us thus?  
What have we done that you should punish us?  
It's not as if you were obliged to wed  
The man whose sword-thrust left your father dead.  
That's understood. For our sake, dear, deprive  
Him of your love, but leave the man alive.

CHIMÈNE

Alas, I cannot do as you advise;  
My furious duty will not compromise.  
Though I admire this hero, though I love him,  
Though King and people are adoring of him,  
Though valiant warriors guard him round about,  
My cypresses will shade his laurels out.

INFANTA

It's noble if, to avenge a father, we're  
Compelled to seek the head of one so dear;  
But it is nobler still if we forsake  
Our private quarrels for the nation's sake.  
Take back your heart from him. If you can snuff

That flame of love, 'twill punish him enough.  
For your country's good, then, do that noble thing.  
Besides, what can you hope for from the King?

CHIMÈNE

He may refuse me, but my pleas won't cease.

INFANTA

My dear Chimène, I leave you now in peace;  
Think deeply, and consult your inmost voice.

CHIMÈNE

After my father's death, I have no choice.

### Act IV, Scene 3

DON FERNAND

Brave scion of a family renowned  
As bold protectors of their native ground,  
A house whose gallant story is well known,  
Whose gallantry is matched now by your own:  
Your worth is greater than I can repay;  
What thanks I'd offer you, your deeds outweigh.  
Castile delivered from the savage Moors,  
The scepter steadied in my hand by yours,  
The enemy defeated long before  
I could have roused our citizens for war—  
Such exploits leave your King unable to  
Imagine any way of thanking you.  
But your two captive kings can fill that need.  
I heard them both describe you as their *Cid*:  
Since, in their language, *Cid*'s the word for "lord,"  
I give you that great title as reward.  
Henceforward be the *Cid*; may that name make  
Granada and Toledo cringe and shake,  
And may it show to all my subjects here

That I'm your debtor, and that I hold you dear.

DON RODRIGUE

Your Majesty, don't make too much, I pray,  
Of the small service I performed today.  
It makes me blush, Sire, that so great a King  
Should do me honor for so slight a thing,  
I owe to such a monarch, while he reigns,  
The air I breathe, the blood that's in my veins,  
And if it were my fate to lose them for  
His sake, 'twould be my duty and no more.

DON FERNAND

Not all of these who out of duty serve  
My throne have shown such valor and such verve;  
When courage isn't wed to recklessness,  
It can't produce so splendid a success.  
Then let yourself be praised; and furnish me  
A full account, now, of your victory.

DON RODRIGUE

Sire, when the rumored threat was drawing near  
The town, and all the streets were full of fear,  
A band of friends at Father's house appealed  
To me to lead them, though my head still reeled . . .  
Oh, Sire, forgive my rashness if I then,  
Without your sanction, chose to lead those men.  
Danger approached; resistance must be led;  
If I went near the court, I'd risk my head;  
If I had to die, 'twas better in my view  
To perish fighting for Seville and you.

DON FERNAND

Your rash revenge I pardon and dispense;  
The State, defended, speaks in your defense.  
Chimène, hereafter, will accuse in vain;  
I'll hear her only to console her pain.  
Speak on.

DON RODRIGUE

Sire, under me those warriors now  
Moved forward, stern resolve on every brow.  
We were at first five hundred, but before  
We reached the port we'd gained three thousand more,  
For, seeing us march by, assured and strong,  
The most unnerved took heart and came along.  
Once there, I sent two-thirds of them to hide  
In vessels anchored at the harborside;  
The rest, their number growing constantly  
And full of hot impatience, stay with me  
And, for some starlit hours, make no sound  
But, speechless, lie in wait upon the ground.  
The guards, obeying my command to them,  
Hide also, to support my stratagem,  
I having dared to claim that it was you  
On whose behalf I told them what to do.  
At last we see, by the stars' glimmering light,  
A rising tide bring thirty sails in sight,  
And soon the surges of the sea escort  
The vessels of the Moors into our port.  
We let them pass. To them, all seems serene;  
On wall or pier no soldier's to be seen;  
Our utter silence renders them unwise;  
They're sure that they shall take us by surprise;  
They heave to, drop their anchors, wade to land  
And blindly run into the trap we'd planned.  
We rise then, and a thousand battle cries  
Burst from our lips and echo in the skies.  
Our comrades in the ships reply, and come  
Forth sword in hand; the Moors are stricken dumb;  
Half-disembarked, they're seized by deep dismay  
And, ere they fight us, feel they've lost the day.  
They'd come to pillage; they encountered war.  
We rush them in the shallows and on shore,  
And ere they can form ranks or strike a blow,

We cause great rivers of their blood to flow.  
 But soon their princes rally them; they gain  
 Some courage back; their panic starts to wane;  
 The shame of being killed without a fight  
 Restores their weakened spirits and their might.  
 Now resolute, they draw their scimitars;  
 Our blood and theirs are sacrificed to Mars;  
 River and bank and port are soon no more  
 Than fields of carnage and of mingled gore.  
 How many feats which history might remark  
 Went unobserved then in the cloaking dark  
 Where each, sole witness of the deeds he dared,  
 Had little sense of how the battle fared!  
 I moved among our forces as their chief,  
 Bade some advance, to others gave relief,  
 Took fresh recruits in hand and urged them on,  
 And could not guess fate's verdict till the dawn.  
 Day breaks then, and it's clear we've won the fray;  
 The Moors look, and their courage drains away;  
 Seeing new reinforcements at our rear,  
 Their will to fight gives way to mortal fear.  
 They fly back to their ships in panic, lift  
 Hoarse cries to heaven, cut themselves adrift,  
 And in their wild departure pay no mind  
 To the two kings whom they have left behind.  
 Their fear has overcome their loyalty:  
 The tide, which brought them, takes them back to sea.  
 Meanwhile their kings fight on, helped by a few  
 Brave followers, all badly wounded, who  
 To their last drop of blood dispute the field;  
 In vain I call upon those kings to yield,  
 But, scimitars in hand, they won't comply  
 Till, seeing now that all their soldiers lie  
 Dead at their feet, they ask for our commander.  
 I say that I am he, and they surrender.  
 I send the two of them to you at once,  
 And the battle ends for want of combatants.  
 Thus, happily, we overcame the dire . . .

## Act V, Scene 7

INFANTA

Chimène, your Princess bids you to receive  
This hero from my hands, and cease to grieve.

DON RODRIGUE

Forgive me, Sire, if in your court I kneel  
To show her the respect and love I feel.  
I have not come to claim a prize, Chimène:  
I'm here to offer you my head again.  
Lady, I shall not cite in this my plea  
The laws of combat or the King's decree.  
If all I've done has not avenged your sire,  
Tell me what satisfactions you require.  
Must I confront a thousand rivals more,  
Extend my fame to Earth's remotest shore,  
Eclipse the fabled heroes of the past,  
And with my sword make armies flee aghast?  
If through such feats my crime can be forgot,  
I'll undertake them and achieve the lot;  
But if your fiery honor and your pride  
Cannot without my death be satisfied,  
Don't send against me any human foes:  
Your hands must take my life, for only those  
Could hope to vanquish the invincible  
And turn this offered head into a skull.  
Pray let my death suffice to punish me,  
And do not bar me from your memory,  
But keep me in your heart, and so requite  
A vengeance that will keep your honor bright,  
Saying of me at times, with some regret,  
"Had he not loved me, he'd be living yet."

CHIMÈNE

Arise, Rodrigue. Sire, I cannot undo  
The love I feel, and have confessed to you.  
Rodrigue's high virtues I cannot gainsay,  
And when a king commands, one should obey.  
And yet, whatever you have once decreed,  
Can you permit this marriage to proceed?

If I obey your orders, as I must,  
 Shall that compulsion seem entirely just?  
 If Rodrigue is now essential to the State,  
 Must I, for salary, become his mate,  
 And bear an endless guilt because the stains  
 Upon my hands are from my father's veins?

DON FERNAND

Often, what seemed at first to be a crime  
 Has come to be acceptable in time.  
 Rodrigue has won you; you are his, and though  
 Upon this day his valor made you so,  
 I would abuse your honor if I placed  
 Your hand in his with an unfeeling haste.  
 We shall defer the marriage. My words still stand,  
 And you shall wed, in time, by my command.  
 Take, if you wish, a year to dry your tears.  
 For you, Rodrigue, another battle nears.  
 Now that you've thrown the Moors' invasion back,  
 Foiling their plans and stemming their attack,  
 Carry the war to them, taking command  
 Of all my forces, and lay waste their land.  
 The name of *Cid* will set them quivering;  
 They've called you *lord*, they'll want you for their king.  
 But mid these deeds, remain her faithful lover;  
 Return, if may be, still more worthy of her,  
 After such splendid exploits that for pride  
 And honor's sake she'll gladly be your bride.

DON RODRIGUE

To win Chimène, to serve the State and you,  
 What labors are there that I could not do?  
 Though to be far from her will mean distress,  
 That I can hope will be my happiness.

DON FERNAND

Trust in your valor and my promise, then,  
 And since you're loved already by Chimène,  
 Hope that this scruple, to which we see her cling,  
 Will yield to time, to courage, and your King.

*[Translated from the French by Richard Wilbur]*