

Belshazzar's Feast

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Persons who speak:

- MUSICIANS

The beautiful Garden of BELSHAZZAR's Palace, terminated by a Summer-House and Wall

SCENE THE FIRST

*Enter THOUGHT dressed in a coat of many colors, as The Fool,
and after him DANIEL, detaining him*

DANIEL: Stay!

THOUGHT: Why stay? the road is free.

DANIEL: Stop!

THOUGHT: Why stop? the coast is clear.

DANIEL: Hear me!

THOUGHT: I don't want to hear.

DANIEL: See though-

THOUGHT: I don't want to see.

DANIEL: Who before, in words like these,

Questioned thus, has thus replied?

THOUGHT: I, for I, by rules untied,

I alone say what I please.

DANIEL: Say, who art thou?

THOUGHT: Thy not knowing

THIS OFFENDS ME, I CONFESS:--

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Tells it not to thee this dress 10
 With a thousand colors glowing,
 Like the many-hued emission
 The chameleon's skin gives out,
 Leaving its true shade in doubt?
 Hear, then, this, my definition: 15
 I am of those attributes
 In which deathless being prideth,
 I that light am which divideth
 Man's high nature from the brute's.
 I am that first crucible, 20
 In which fortune's worth is tested
 Swift as sunlight unarrested
 THAN THE MOON MORE MUTABLE:
 I have no fixed place wherein
 To be born, or live, or die.
 On I move, yet know not I 25
 Where to end or to begin.
 Fate, how dark or bright it be
 Ever at its side beholds me
 Every human brain enfolds me
 Man's and woman's-none are free 30
 I am in the king his care,
 When he plans his kingdom's weal;
 I am vigilance and zeal,
 When his favorite's toils I share.
 I am guilt's sure punishment, 35
 Self-reproach in the offender;
 I am craft in the pretender,
 Foresight in the provident.
 In the lady, I am beauty,
 In the lover, his romance; 40
 In the gambler, hope of chance;
 In the gallant soldier, duty;
 In the miser, money-madness;
 In the wretch, his life's long dearth;
 In the joyful, I am mirth-, 45
 And in the sorrowful, am sadness;
 And, in fine, thus strangely wrought,
 Restless, rapid, on I fly,
 Nothing, everything am I,
 Since I am the Human Thought. 50
 See, if such strange changes give

Thee, O Man, true views about me,
 Since the thing that lives without me,
 Scarcely can be said to live.
 This I am for each and all, 55
 But to-day I am assigned
 To the King Belshazzar's mind
 He for whom the world's too small.
 Though in fool's clothes dressed completely,
 I am not sole fool; and why? 60
 Just because in public, I
 Try my best to act discreetly,
 Since a fool 'twere hard to find
 More incurable than he
 Who would do, or say, or be 65
 What he thought within his mind.
 Thus few wear the fool's-cap feather,
 Although most that badge might win,
 For, when looked at from within,
 We are madmen all together 70
 Fools of the same kith and kin.
 And, in fine, I, being a fool,
 Did not like to stop and pause
 Here to speak with thee, because
 It would outrage every rule, 75
 That we two were joined, and trod
 On together, badly mated,
 For if "Daniel," when translated,
 Meaneth Wisdom as of God,
 It were difficult to try 80
 To keep up a conversation,
 We being in our separate station,
 Wisdom thou, and Folly I.
 DANIEL: Yet to-day I know no rules
 That forbid our casual speaking, 85
 Thou the way of the wise man seeking
 I NOT STOOPING TO THE FOOL'S:
 For, although the distance be
 Great 'twixt wise and witless words,
 Still 'tis from two different chords
 Springs the sweetest harmony. 90
 THOUGHT: Well, I'll answer with decision,
 And get over my confusion,
 Since it is a fight conclusion

Thought should tell the Prophet's vision.

DANIEL: Say what pleasure, deeply drawn, 95
 Art thou now in spirit drinking?

THOUGHT: Of the bridal I am thinking,
 Which, to-day, all Babylon
 Celebrates with festive roar.

DANIEL: Now the bridegroom's name declare. 100

THOUGHT: King Belshazzar, son and heir
 Of Nabuchadónosór,
 Heir of pride, by pride increased:-

DANIEL: Who is, then, the happy bride?

THOUGHT: She who rules the Orient wide 105
 The fair Empress of the East,
 Cradle of day's infancy.

DANIEL: An idolatress, is she?

THOUGHT: Yes, And so great an idolatress
 She is herself Idolatry. 110

DANIEL: Is he not, in marriage vows,
 Wed already to a wife,
 In the vanity of life?

THOUGHT: Yes; but then his law allows
 Two, or even a thousand wives, 115
 And, though wed to Vanity,
 Now for Paganism he,
 With imperious passion, strives,
 Daniel, or "God's Wisdom," names
 --For the two are one--to thee 120
 Given by Scripture.

DANIEL: Woe is me!

THOUGHT: Would you wed yourself the dames
 (That you thus take on you so? *Aside*
 This to tell was wrong, I see.)

DANIEL: Woe! God's people! woe to thee! 125
 Woe! unhappy kingdom, woe!

THOUGHT: If the truth were told, thy deepest
 Pain is now the contemplating
 The great bride-feast celebrating,
 While a captive here thou weapest, 130
 This it is that saddens thee;
 For if he had chanced to wed
 With the Jewish rite instead,
 Thou wouldst be redeemed and free;-

Clarions are heard

Hark! the distant music sounds; 135
Now I pass to other things;
Babylon with rapture rings,
Every heart with joy rebounds,
Welcoming, with jubilee,
The new Wife-Queen. Let us go. 140
DANIEL: Woe! unhappy kingdom, woe!
Woe! Gods people! woe to thee!

They retire

SCENE THE SECOND

*Peal of trumpets Enter BELSHAZZAR and VANITY at one side,
and IDOLATRY, fantastically dressed, at the other, with
Attendants, Followers, etc.*

BELSHAZZAR: Crown thy fair forehead at this feast
With all the dazzling splendor of the East,
If for so bright a diadem 145
The sun itself is not too dull a gem.
Beauteous Idolatry,
Queen of my kingdom, dearer queen to me,
Thrice welcome be the hour
That thou to Babylon's imperial bower 150
Hast come; where, o'er thy royal head,
My greatness a fit canopy shall spread
Presenting at thy feet
The noblest statues, the most rare conceit,
By sculptor ever wrought for man to adore, 155
Which, with whole holocausts from every shore,
Their fealty shall pay
In gold, in silver, bronze, and stone, and clay.
IDOLATRY: Great King of Babylon,
Generous Belshazzar, earth's most potent son, 160
Whose sacred name sublime
Defeats oblivion and defieth time,
Because its Hebrew sense
Translated, means a hidden and immense
Unfailing treasure; She--the happy She-- 165
Empress of Day's fair house-Idolatry,

Queen of the Orient clime,
 Where the young sun, resplendent and sublime,
 Receives the homage first of wonderin eyes--
 Himself the primal source of wonder and surprise-- 170
 She to thy kingdom comes to-day--
 By right she to thy altars finds her way,
 Because, when from the Flood's abysmal throes,
 The World, like some great swimmer, struggling rose,
 Here in this kingdom, here, 175
 First polity arose, and codes severe,
 And laws commanding and remitting things
 The human fond idolatry of kings;
 Then followed after the divine,
 With gods and votive flames at every shrine. 180
 Thus Nimrod was adored;
 Thus Moloch, 'mid the fires that round him roared.
 Nor undeserved such heights of honor deem
 Nimrod for king was held, Moloch for god supreme.
 Then followed after--a stupendous sight!-- 185
 As many idols as to-day unite
 These bridal-rites auspicious to attend,
 For here with offerings strange, that clash or blend,
 Full thirty thousand barbarous gods behold,
 In clay, in stone, in bronze, in silver, and in gold. 190

In the background, aside to DANIEL

THOUGHT: Could Thought himself a happier life invent?
 What! thirty thousand gods all different!
 Man need not fear to ask whate'er he choose,
 One godwill grant what other gods refuse.
 And thou, O Judah's Son! 195
 What canst thou hope to gain from only One
 I tremble but to think of or to name?
 How can one god hear each particular claim
 Among so many?

Aside to THOUGHT

DANIEL: He alone can hear,
 His hand it is that holds the universe, far and near. 200

To IDOLATRY

BELSHAZZAR: Speak to fair Vanity, until this morn
My only bride, and since you both were born
Of one idea, my ambitious duty

IS TO UNITE YOU THUS: What loveliness! What
beauty!

He looks from one to the other, standing between them

IDOLATRY: Let me embrace thee, haughty Vanity.

VANITY: Eternal must such sweet embracements be. 205

IDOLATRY: Beauty like thine would pierce my heart like steel,
If the divine could aught of envy feel.

VANITY: Splendor like thine would turn my heart to stone,
If jealousy were a thing to Vanity known.

BELSHAZZAR: (One day doth darken to another day, *Aside* 210

Whilst thus my trembling soul, in sweet dismay,
Doubts which of these is fairer-the sweet face
Of Vanity, or proud Idolatry's grace;

For each is fair, as each fond tongue deceives me,
Or calls me king, or as a god receives me.) 215

IDOLATRY: Why art thou standing in such deep suspense?

VANITY: What thought has seized thy mind and drawn it
hence?

BELSHAZZAR: Thy glorious beauty, O Idolatry! fires me;
Thy voice, O Vanity! whispering sweet inspires me.

And thus, in order to divert my sadness, 220

Moved by thy beauty, and thy words of gladness,
To-day, my grief forsaking,

I wish to woo, and win ye two, thus making

Idolatry be sharer of my glory,

And Vanity proclaim my conquests' wondrous story:- 225

Of that haughty King Nabuco,

To whose valorous hand triumphant,

To whose majesty and splendor

Fortune, fate, and power were subject,

Of that lightning of Chaldea, 230

Which, as from a sphere of thunder,

Bursting, left Jerusalem

Weeping 'mid its fires unnumberd;

Of that king, who captive led

All that was of Jewish culture, 235

Best of blood and birth, who still

Pine in Babylonian dungeons;
 Of that king who, from the Temple,
 Golden cups and treasures plunder'd--
 Sacred spoil which, round my throne, 240
 Casts a new and dazzling lustre;
 Of that king, in fine, who fed
 On the green grass and the stubble
 Of the fields, half man, half beast,
 Hair-clad as with plumes of vultures 245
 I am son, fair deities.
 And to be in all things worthy
 Of my father's fame and kingdom
 Of his fame, as of his fury
 The high gods whom I adore 250
 Have bestowed such noble nurture
 On me, that my breast, I doubt not,
 Bears repeated, or redoubled,
 HIS PROUD SPIRIT: thus succeeding
 To his soul as heir, it worketh
 In my body, if two bodies 255
 Ever so with one soul flourished:--
 Not to be, then, Sovereign King
 Of the lands that with their currents
 Tigris or Euphrates bathes,
 Or the sun in his effulgence 260
 Lights-those numerous lands which he
 Rises early from his slumbers
 But to see--that so his task
 May be over ere the sunset--
 Can the thirst of my ambition 265
 Satisfy or well keep under,
 Nothing can do that, I feel,
 Be it madness or presumption,
 Until I o'er all these mountains
 Am sole ruler or usurper. 270
 'Tis the region of Senaar,
 'Tis that rude and rigorous country,
 Which beheld, 'twixt heaven and earth,
 That stupendous strife and struggle
 When the pride of daring men 275
 Boldly, but with little judgment,
 Built, to counteract the gods,
 Towers that soared sublimely sunward.

And that thou, O Vanity!
 Mayest thy triumph know still further, 280
 Thine, too, O Idolatry!
 Listen, and be mute with wonder.
 Calmly was the world enjoying,
 In its first primeval summer,
 The sweet harmony of being, 285
 The repose of perfect structure;
 Thinking, in its inner thought,
 How from out a mass so troubled,
 Which, by poesy, is called
 Chaos, and by Scripture Nothing, 290
 Was evolved the face serene
 Of this azure field unsullied
 Of pure sky, extracting thus,
 In a hard and rigorous combat,
 From its lights and from its shadows, 295
 The soft blending that resulteth,
 From the earth and from the waters,
 The elaborate knot that couples,
 By dividing and disparting,
 Things which--each one taken asunder-- 300
 Form a separate something so,
 But when all are joined, are nothing:--
 She considered how the earth,
 Though till then a wild uncultured
 Waste it lay, grew bright with flowers, 305
 Painted of a thousand colors;
 How the vacant air was peopled
 With the blithe birds' flight and flutter,
 How the silver sea grew brighter,
 As the fish clove through its surges; 310
 How the fire, its torches twain,
 Sun and moon, with fresh flames furnished,
 Day and nights' undying lamps,
 Night and day forever burning.
 Finally, she thought of Man, 315
 Who of all His glorious works here
 God has fashioned like himself,
 AS CREATION'S CROWNING WONDER:--
 Vain of such transcendent beauty,
 All restraint she soon trod under,
 Since for Beauty to be vain, 320

Is as ancient as the world is.
 Vain and beautiful in truth,
 An eternal home she judged it,
 Not perceiving that for crimes,
 Such as those that she indulged in, 325
 Was reserved a universal
 Deluge for her sure destruction.
 In this fatal confidence,
 Vicious men alone consulted
 Their own passions; sin-possessed, 330
 They to gluttony were subject;
 They to avarice, anger, lust,
 They to pride and self-indulgence.
 Growing angry then, the gods,
 From whom nothing can be curtained, 335
 Counsel took to destroy the world,
 Which to make had cost such trouble.
 Not red deluges of lightnings,
 Forged and falling from heaven's furnace,
 Worked their wrath; but flames of water-- 340
 Since, of gods, the sire and sovereign,
 Often thunders with the snow-fall--

OFTEN WITH THE FIRE INUNDATES:

Covered thick was Heaven with clouds,
 Dense, opaque, and dark, and turbid,
 For though angry, that it might 345
 Not revoke the absolute justness
 Of the world's dread sentence, wished
 Not to see the rigorous fullness
 Of its own revenge; and thus
 Hid itself in clouds and thunder-- 350
 Wrapped itself in robes of darkness--
 For even God, being God, oft suffers,
 When His wrath He most exhibits,
 Slight excuses, to o'ercome it.
 First began a dew as soft 355
 As those tears the golden sunrise
 Kisseth from Aurora's lids;
 Then a gentle rain, as dulcet
 As those showers the green earth drinks
 In the early days of summer; 360
 From the clouds then water-lances,
 Darting at the mountains struck them,

In the clouds their sharp points shimmer'd--
 On the mountains rang their butt-ends;
 Then the rivulets were loosened, 365
 Roused to madness, ran their currents--
 Rose to rushing rivers--then

SWELLED TO SEAS OF SEAS:--O Summit

Of all Wisdom! Thou alone
 Knowest how Thy hand can punish!
 Drinking without thirst, the globe 370
 Made lagoons and lakes unnumber'd,
 Then a mighty sea-storm rushed
 Through the rents and rocky ruptures,
 By whose mouths the great earth yawns,
 When its breath resounds and rumbles 375
 From internal caves. The air,
 In a prison dark and murky,
 Now was held, which lower air,
 When it sought to reach the upper
 Roared confined--the palpitation 380
 Of its fierce internal pulses
 Making the great hills to shake,
 And the mighty rocks to tumble.
 The strong bridle of the sand,
 Which the furious onset curbeth 385
 Of the white horse of the sea
 With its foam-face silver fronted,
 Loosened every curbing rein,
 So that the great steed, exulting,
 Rushed upon the prostrate shore, 390
 With loud neighing, to o'errun it.
 The scared wild beasts, dispossessed
 Of the savage caves that nursed them,
 Flying to air-piercing peaks,
 Might have thought, with slight presumption, 395
 They were birds. The birds, too, swimming,
 Might have thought some power had turned them
 Into fishes; and the fishes,
 Seeing earth's great caves and culverts,
 Might have thought themselves transformed 400
 Into land-beasts; for so jumbled
 Was each separate species, that
 In this moment of convulsion
 --Twixt two waters, as we say

Of a man in doubt and trouble-- 405
 The poor bird, and beast, and fish
 Roamed disconsolate and discursive,
 Seeking where skin, scale, and plume
 Might some sheltering home discover.
 And at the last paroxysm, 410
 When despair's lethargic dullness
 Numbed each nerve, in mighty fragments
 Burst the world's great frame asunder:
 And as one, when drowning, strives,
 With convulsive arm, to struggle 415
 'Mid the waves, which, at their will
 Raise or sink him like the plummet,
 Thus the World, in life's last throes,
 Struggled so, and so was worsted.
 Here a palace was prostrated, 420
 There was hid a peak's proud summit,
 Until utterly o'erwhelmed
 Amid groans and dying murmurs,
 To the depth of forty cubits,
 Water every portion covered 425
 Tomb too small for corse so great,
 Was the ocean it lay under.
 Forty sunless mornings rose,
 For the clouds hung dark and dusky,
 Mourning the sad obsequies 430
 Of the mighty form defunct there.
 That first saving ship alone,
 Safe 'gainst every wild wave's bluster,
 Borne upon the swelling sea,
 Floated free o'er all its surface-- 435
 In such vicinage to the stars,
 Near, so near, the day-star's lustre,
 Venus was its topmast's lantern,
 AND ITS BEACON-FIRE ARCTURUS:--
 To this ship had Noe's care
 What remained of the world conducted, 440
 There depositing, in safety,
 Every species that earth nurtures,
 Till the moment came, the sea,
 To its God-given laws made subject,
 Wondering, saw once more, once more, 445
 The pale earth, now moist and musty,

With its tangled, matted hair,
 Full of wrinkles, cracked and crumpled,
 Lifting up its mournful face,
 Touched, but warmed not, by the sunbeams, 450
 Lifting its sad countenance,
 Draped with sea-weeds, dank and muddy,
 And in silent eloquence,
 With a grateful heart saluting,
 O'er the Ark, the bow of peace, 455
 Shining golden, green, and ruddy.--
 Thus men's second Adam came,
 And a second birth resulted
 In the numerous living things
 With which all the earth was furnished. 460
 Nimrod, son of Canaan, heir
 Of the thrice-transmitted curses,
 He and his, a hateful brood,
 Full of evil and injustice,
 All the broad lands of Chaldea, 465
 With their families and sons there,
 Occupied, their sons, of whom
 Each was of a size so bulky,
 As to seem a moving mountain,
 Formed of members and of muscles. 470
 These, then seeing that an Ark
 Saved the world, conspired, consulted,
 With a fabric more ambitious--
 With a safe and surer structure--
 How to counteract Heaven's anger, 475
 By a force so proud and stubborn,
 As might, in a second deluge,
 Save, restore, and reconstruct them,
 They to make a lofty tower
 Mountains upon mountains tumbled, 480
 And the proud neck of the earth,
 Bending 'neath so great a burden,
 Felt as if it needs must break
 From the pressure that it suffered,
 So that with the weight it groaned, 485
 So that with the load it shudder'd.
 Higher grew the tower, and higher
 The ambition of the workmen
 To a double height to raise it,

For there were none there but further'd 490
 The great work, intent to see
 The tall tower's stupendous structure--
 Straight as the Ionic column,
 Strong and simple as the Tuscan,
 A huge hindrance to the winds, 495
 The moon's plaything and obstructor.
 Now with its imposing front
 Had it the blue sky encumber'd,
 And its great trunk in the air,
 As with shadowy night had blurrd it, 500
 When, in all the pomp and pride
 Of this daring and presumption,
 Heaven was pleased to stop its course,
 For it was displeased, disgusted
 To behold the attempt to scale 505
 Heaven's high walls, by God constructed.
 And that, therefore, by assault
 Man should never gain the summit,
 It such varied forms of language
 Introduced among the workmen, 510
 That not one could understand
 Even the words himself had muttered.
 Voices mingled all together
 Inharmoniously concurrent--
 Sounds were spoken, human sense 515
 Ne'er before had heard or utter'd;
 This one knew not what was said,
 What he heard confused the other,
 So that every order given
 Caused confusion, cries, and blunders. 520
 Two and seventy tongues were those,
 Which these men with strange and sudden
 Impulse spoke--it pleasing Heaven
 To inspire so great a number.--
 Two and seventy dialects 525
 Echo, which each sound redoubles,
 Quickly formed from every tongue;
 So that men, confused and puzzled,
 Almost rushed from their own selves--
 That is, if one e'er so rushes. 530
 And so ceased the mighty siege:
 Nothing from the attempt resulted--

Nothing of that wondrous fabric--
 Nothing of that glorious structure.
 For a cloud, with storm-fire pregnant, 535
 That to a more swift destruction
 It might bring it, from its entrails
 Darted flames, and smoke, and sulphur,
 Making of the tower's high daring
 Its own solemn tomb sepulchral-- 540
 Monument, and pyre, and urn,
 Of its ruined walls constructing.
 I, then, seeing that my breast
 Even for Nimrod's glory thirsted,
 Think that from the existing ashes 545
 Of the tower that so has crumbled,
 I am he who should rebuild it.
 Since in synchronous conjunction
 Vanity and Idolatry
 To this high achievement urge me: 550
 Since if thou wilt give the boldness
 That to empire must conduct me;
 If, for me, the gods thou movest--
 If thou, Vanity, giv'st me succor
 If, Idolatry, thou dost aid me, 555
 Who will dare deny, distrustful,
 That thus, desperate and undaunted,
 I so great a deed can compass?
 Idolizing thy proud beauty--
 Vain of thine, too, so effulgent-- 560
 Sacrificing to thy idols,
 Of thy favor ever trustful,
 Kneeling reverent at thy altars,
 In fruition of thy fullness,
 Upon plates of gold and silver, 565
 High embossed or deeply sculptured,
 Shall my name endure forever,
 While the years of time are numbered.

IDOLATRY: At thy feet thou'lt see me lie,
 Ever fond, and faithless never. 570
 VANITY: Ever, O Belshazzar! ever,
 Of thy life, the light am I!
 IDOLATRY: Wouldst thou have a god's position?--
 Thee, as God, will I adore!

VANITY: And my wings, that thou may'st soar, 575
 I will give to thy ambition!
 IDOLATRY: Crowned by me, thy star shall live,
 Though the dark cloud round it gathers.
 VANITY: I, a ladder of light feathers,
 So to scale the sun, will give! 580
 IDOLATRY: I, in sculpture's fair relief,
 Shall thy form to time hand down!
 VANITY: I, the laurel of thy crown
 Shall increase by many a leaf!
 BELSHAZZAR: Give me both your hands: I've trod 585
 Doubtful paths, but this embracing--
 This close bond--this interlacing---
 What shall break?

Advancing

DANIEL: The hand of God!
 BELSHAZZAR: Who has ventured--who is he
 That has dared this bold reply? 590
 THOUGHT: I it was not.
 BELSHAZZAR: Who, then?
 DANIEL: I!
 BELSHAZZAR: How, O Jew! and can it be,
 That you thus so bold have grown,
 In Jerusalem, the holy,
 Late a captive, now a lowly 595
 Dweller here in Babylon?
 Exiled from that natal sod,
 Which a home, a shelter, gave you;
 Poor and wretched, what can save you
 From my power? 600

Half draws his dagger

DANIEL: The hand of God!
 BELSHAZZAR: (Oh! this potent voice that dares me *Aside*
 Strong to stop the heart's pulsations
 Makes me wonder at my patience,
 From my very anger scares me;
 Something strange, mysterious, odd, 605
 Marks us two.--

Aloud

Since I intend thee
Here to die, can aught defend thee?
Speak! Say what?

DANIEL: The hand of God!

THOUGHT: (How he the upper hand maintains!) *Aside*

VANITY: Leave him, for I can't express,
How I loathe his lowliness.

IDOLATRY: How his faith my faith disdains!

BELSHAZZAR: Safe from my chastising rod

Take your life; but you should know,
It to these two queens you owe,
Not unto the hand of God!

Exit [BELSHAZZAR] with VANITY, IDOLATRY, and Attendants

SCENE THE THIRD

THOUGHT: You have got off nicely now,
And I thank you for the lesson,
Since when any troubles press on
My attention, I know how,
In a moment's time, to clear me;
I, not knowing why or wherefore,
Need but say "God's hand," and therefore
Every soul about must fear me.
Since the thing's so nicely planned,
That at hand good guardians hide here,
Let us, shaking hands, divide here;
Go, in God's name, to God's hand.

Exit [THOUGHT]

SCENE THE FOURTH

Presently DEATH [enters]

DANIEL: Who, O Lord of night and day!
Can endure these dread offences--
Sinful Vanity's pretences,
Bold Idolatry's display?
Who will end so great an ill?

Who will give my faith full scope,
'Neath the buckler of my hope, 635
To avenge such wrongs?

*Enter DEATH, wearing a sword and dagger, and dressed
symbolically in a cloak covered with skeletons*

DEATH: I Will.

DANIEL: Awful shape, to whom I bow,
Through the shadowy glooms that screen thee,
Never until now I've seen thee;
Fearful Phantom, who art thou? 640

DEATH: Daniel, thou Prophet of the God of Truth,
I am the end of all who life begin,
The drop of venom in the serpent's tooth,
The cruel child of envy and of sin.
Abel first showed the world's dark door uncouth, 645
But Cain threw wide the door and let me in;
Since then I've darkened o'er life's checker'd path
The dread avenger of Jehovah's wrath.

From Sin and Envy, then, I first drew breath,
That these two furies might possess my breast; 650
Through envy is it that I give white death
To all who have the light of life possessed;
Through sin it is my dark breast treasureth
Death for the soul, for souls die like the rest:
If to expire doth bring, with dolorous dole, 655
Death to the body, sin doth kill the soul.

If from God's Judgment thou thy name dost take,
And I, with fatal flash, must strike the blow,
Since 'neath my feet as victims I must make
All things that live, or think, or breathe, or grow, 660
Why art thou frightened at me? Why dost quake
With what is mortal in thee, weak and low?

Take courage, then, and let us two, to-day,
God's Judgment thou, and I His Power display.
Though 'tis no wonder thou art frightened--no, 665
Even wert thou God, to look and gaze on me,
Since when will come the flower of Jericho
The blood-bright beauteous rose of Calvary,
He, in his human part, though God, will show
A trembling fear; and when He yields to me, 670

The stars will fall, spark after mighty spark--
 The moon grow pale, and even the sun grow dark.
 This hapless fabric shall appear to fall,
 This lower sphere shall feel the earthquake's shock;
 The earth shall faint as at the end of all, 675
 And flower on flower lie crushed, and rock on rock,
 Long ere the evening spreads her purple pall,
 Long ere the western sky shall fold his flock
 Of fleecy clouds, the day shall die, and night
 Don its dark cloak in mourning for the light. 680
 But my sole duty in this present hour,
 O Wisdom sent of God! is thee to obey;
 Give thy commands, the deathless need not cower,
 And that which cannot die, may surely slay;--
 Mine is the arm, but thine the motive power 685
 Mine is the work, but thou must point the way;
 So great my thirst of life is, that its rage
 Not even an angry deluge could assuage.
 The proudest palace that supremely stands,
 'Gainst which the wildest winds in vain may beat-- 690
 The strongest wall, that like a rock withstands
 The shock of shells, the furious fire-ball's heat:
 All are but easy triumphs of my hands
 All are but humble spoils beneath my feet,
 If against me no palace wall is proof, 695
 Ah! what can save the lowly cottage roof?
 Beauty, nor power, nor genius, can survive,
 Naught can resist my voice when I sweep by,
 For whatsoever has been let to live,
 It is my destined duty to see die. 700
 With all the stem commands that thou may'st give,
 I am, God's Judgment, ready to comply,
 Yea, and so quickly shall my service run,
 That ere the word is said the deed is done!
 In the brief respiration, which between 705
 The heart and lip doth flow, while life doth last,
 The movement of the marvelous machine
 Will, by a breath be stopped, and all be past!
 Corse of itself, the heart will then be seen
 To fall, like some lost world through chaos cast, 710
 And that which was the throne of life become,
 By just decree, its sepulchre and tomb.
 I Nimrod's fields shall waste with burning fire,

I shall bring low proud Babel's rabble rout,
 I shall the dreams of Behemoth inspire, 715
 I shall the plagues of Israel pour out,
 I Naboth's vines shall stain with dyes of Tyre,
 I the bold front of Jezebel shall flout,
 I shall revengeful Absalom's beard make red
 With the warm blood of Amnon foully shed! 720
 I shall the majesty of Achab smite,
 Dragged in his crimson chariot o'er the plain,
 I with the daughters of the Moabite
 The unsullied tents of Zanibri shall profane;
 I shall the spears of Joab guide aright, 725
 And if a greater glory I can gain,
 I shall inundate, in my sateless mood,
 Senaar's broad plains with lost Belshazzar's blood!

DANIEL: Minister severe and just,
 Agent of an angry God, 730
 Thou whose dread judicial staff
 Is a scythe and not a rod;
 Since we two His dread tribunal
 Represent here, I would not
 That the awful book's decree-- 735
 Book that, in all strictness, ought
 To be book the best remembered,
 But which is the most forgot,
 You should execute, until,
 In a voice with pity fraught, 740
 You have given him needful warnings,
 Ere his final doom is wrought.
 King Belshazzar's name doth mean
 Hidden treasure, and I know
 That, 'mong men, their souls, unseen, 745
 Like a hidden treasure glow.
 His I wish to win; and thus
 Only give thee leave to go
 To Belshazzar, to awake him

TO A SENSE OF COMING WOE:
 Make him think that he is mortal; 750
 And as anger the swift blow
 Oft suspends, the sharp sword clutching
 Ere that it unsheathes it-so
 I permit that you should clutch it,

But that you unsheathe it, no.

755

Exit [THOUGHT and BELSHAZZAR]

SCENE THE FIFTH

DEATH: Woe is me! how great a yoke

On my hapless head you throw! O'er

my feet what chains of ice!

O'er my hands what numbing snow!

By thy precepts bound, O thou

760

Type of God's unfathomed course!

Death is without any vigor,

Anger, without any force.

That he is a mortal man,

To remind him, and no more,

765

Faintly adumbrates my rigor,

Gives my voice, but not my roar.--

Thought, come hither.

Enter THOUGHT

THOUGHT: Who doth call me?

DEATH: I am he who called.

770

THOUGHT: And know

I am just the one who'd rather

Ne'er be called to thee to go.

DEATH: Why, what reason have you?

THOUGHT: Dread.

DEATH: What is dread?

THOUGHT: The fear I show.

DEATH: What is fear?

775

THOUGHT: Why, fear is terror.

DEATH: What is terror?

THOUGHT: Pictured woe.

DEATH: Ah! You speak an unknown language;

None of all these things I know.

THOUGHT: Then you give the thing you have not.

DEATH: It, not having, I bestow.

780

Tell me, where is now Belshazzar?

THOUGHT: In the garden there below,

With the two he worships.

DEATH: Place me

With him. Swift as winds that blow,
Bear me thither. 785

THOUGHT: I will do so,
Since the courage to say no
Wholly fails me.

DEATH: How most just
Is God's precept this doth show,
That to make him think of me,
With his very Thought I go. 790

Exit [DANIEL, THOUGHT, and DEATH]

SCENE THE SEVENTH

Enter BELSHAZZAR, IDOLATRY and VANITY

IDOLATRY: Oh! my lord, what sudden sadness...
VANITY: Oh! my lord, what painful throe...
IDOLATRY: ...Interrupts thy conversation?
VANITY: ...Thus disturbs thy fancy so?
BELSHAZZAR: Ah! I know not this strange pain. 795

SCENE THE EIGHTH

Enter THOUGHT, followed by DEATH

THOUGHT: Come, he's here.
BELSHAZZAR: I only know
I was thinking of the threats
By the prophet's voice foretold,
In what way God's promised hand
Would its vengeance wreak. 800

THOUGHT recedes, letting him see DEATH who was behind him

DEATH: Behold!
BELSHAZZAR: What is this I see, O Heavens?--
Phantom, that no blood doth warm,
Vision, feigning form and voice,
Without having voice and form!
Say, how didst thou enter here? 805
DEATH: With his light the bright sun throws

SHADOW ALSO: I'm the shadow,
 If he as the World's Life glows
 I am the World's Death, and thus
 I can go where'er he goes;
 Since to lights and shadows space 810
 Equally possession owes.
 IDOLATRY: (Who is this at sight of whom *Aside*
 We two here are left forlorn?
 BELSHAZZAR: Why at every step of thine
 Does my pride seem backward borne? 815
 DEATH: 'Tis because thy steps turn back,
 Mine press on untired, unworn.
 THOUGHT: (It was wrong in me, I see, *Aside*
 To have borne him to his bourne.)
 BELSHAZZAR: Say, what wouldst thou, and who art thou, 820
 Light or Shadow?
 THOUGHT: I'm no more
 Than a creditor of thine,
 Who wants payment of the score.
 BELSHAZZAR: What do I owe thee? What do I owe thee?
 DEATH: Here is the whole debt you owe, 825
 In this note-book written down.

Takes out a memorandum-book

BELSHAZZAR: 'Tis a false and treacherous blow,
 For this note-book is mine own,
 Lost by me some time ago.
 DEATH: Yes; but then the memoranda 830
 Which you lost, I found;--and so
 Read them.

Reading

BELSHAZZAR: "I, the great Belshazzar,
 Of Nabuco-Donosór
 Son, confess my mother's womb 835
 Me in sin conceived and bore,
 And that I received a life
 --Oh! I freeze to read it o'er!--
 Which I'm bound to pay to Death,
 When and where, on sea or shore, 840

He is pleased the debt to claim:--
 'Tis the primal bond of yore
 Moses' pen transcribed, to which
 Adam, Job, and David bore
 Their attestation." 'Tis too true, 845
 I confess it; but implore
 For my life extended time.
 DEATH: Well, I'm liberal now, the more
 That this is not the fixed day
 When God's Mercy will be o'er. 850
 And that you, Belshazzar, may
 Recollect the debt hencefore,
 Take this note of highest wisdom,
 On the dread memorial pore.

Exit DEATH giving BELSHAZZAR a paper

SCENE THE NINTH

BELSHAZZAR: It is written, how the Spirit 855
 Spoke to man these words of woe,

"Dust thou wert, and dust thou art, And dust thou'rt doomed to be." Oh, no!

Was I dust, and I immortal?
 Am I dust, yet no end know?
 Can I yet be dust?--the mighty?--
 'Tis delusion to say so. 860

Stands musing, while THOUGHT moves rapidly round him

THOUGHT: I, the Thought, as fool, dance round
 All my masters, high and low.
 BELSHAZZAR: Is not Idolatry divine?

Moving toward IDOLATRY

THOUGHT: Lady, now to you I go.
 BELSHAZZAR: Is not Vanity a goddess? 865

Moving toward VANITY

THOUGHT: Now to you my cares I owe.

Moves round both

BELSHAZZAR: How my vacillating Thought
'Twixt the twain goes to and fro!

To VANITY

IDOLATRY: What can this strange scroll contain,
That can thus divert him so 870
From ourselves?

Taking the paper from him

VANITY: In this way we
Will find out.

THOUGHT: A clever throw!
The memorial of Death
Vanity takes from him so.
BELSHAZZAR: What is this that passes from me? 875
VANITY: Useless leaves that thus I throw
To the winds, to be their sport.

Tears up the paper, and scatters the pieces about

BELSHAZZAR: Then you both were here? Is't so?
IDOLATRY: What has happened?
BELSHAZZAR: Oh! I know not,
Some knight-phantom, spectre, ghost, 880
All engrossed my phantasy,
My discourse, my words engrossed:
But whate'er the phantom was,
It, with all its horrid host,
Has evanished. Was it much 885
Night fled frightened--sure to know
That in your bright eyes the sun
Would be seen so soon to glow?
And not only unto me,
Not to me, it seems, alone, 890
Shines the light that thus illumines me--
Beams the splendor o'er me thrown--
BUT TO THE WHOLE GARDEN: since
Dark was the red orient zone

Of the sun, till you it saw,
 Then, indeed, the morn arose-- 895
 Rose with double light; your eyes
 Flash two suns; your cheeks disclose
 Two auroras;--waiting these
 Day kept dark his realm of rose.
 VANITY: Since we're suns, then, and auroras, 900
 From its world-wide worship old,
 Idolatry must be the sun,
 I the aurora, pale and cold,
 By the greater light outshone.
 Thus to her the valley owes 905
 All the splendor it enjoys,
 Since from shadowy night's repose
 'Tis not the aurora wakes it,
 But another sun that glows!
 IDOLATRY: I concede that thou'rt aurora, 910
 And to give thee first place so,
 I concede that I'm the sun,
 For 'tis on the beauteous snow
 Of aurora's clouds of pearl
 That the sun's first roses glow. 915
 And her light thus being the first
 Over his a charm to throw,
 Then aurora's light must be
 Fairer than the sun's can show,
 Since it shone into the valley 920
 Earlier than the sun's could go.
 THOUGHT: Wit and Beauty here compete
 Which the higher place shall hold;
 And since now the garden bowers,
 In sweet rivalry enrolled, 925
 Call us to their founts and flowers--
 On this couch of green and gold,
 Woven by the hand of spring,
 Sit ye down. The birds' sweet notes
 Woo us, and among the boughs 930
 A delicious soft air floats
 Murmuring music, while the leaves
 Tremble as its breath steals o'er--
 Where in flowing fragrance glide
 Streamlets by an emerald shore, 935
 And in frankincense and myrrh

Spreads the meads' enameled floor.

*They all sit down, BELSHAZZAR being in the midst. IDOLATRY
takes off his hat, and fans him with the plume*

IDOLATRY: With this beauteous tuft, whose plumes
Vanity's fair fingers wove
From the peacock's radiant tail, 940
Worthy of the wife of Jove,
I will fan thee.

THOUGHT: Wer't not better
That was left to me, who go
Thus about, the subtle fan
Of the Thought? But no; not so-- 945
Since'tis only in appearance
A Japan-faced fan I show.

VANITY: Listening to my voice and lute,
Shall the light breeze linger o'er.
BELSHAZZAR: Oh! the music of aurora 950
Shall not touch the inmost core
Of my heart with tenderer feeling
Than the song your sweet lips pour,
Even when morn, with pearl and flower,
Welcomes the young day once more. 955

Singing

VANITY: *"Yes, Belshazzar is divine, Since to-day to his high
praises Statues proud Idolatry raises, Vanity erects a shrine."*

SCENE THE TENTH

Enter DEATH

DEATH: Borne in rapid flight along, **[Aside]**
Here sweet notes salute mine ears,
False as are the crocodile's tears
Fatal as the siren's song. 960
Vanity hath done this wrong,
Driving from his thoughtless brain
All remembrance of my pain.
Let my shadow then affright him,
Let my awful shape excite him 965

To new fears, since words are vain.
Henbane and the poppy's juice
With your slumberous spells enthrall him;
Let my pallid shape appal him
In the dreams that you produce. 970
Pour, as from some Stygian sluice,
Visions words cannot express,
Typical of me no less--
Frenzy, lethargy, illusion,
poison, horror, and confusion. 975

BELSHAZZAR sleeps

VANITY: Seems he not to slumber?
IDOLATRY: Yes.
VANITY: Then a glad delusive show,
From the realm of shadows taken
--That more proudly he may waken--
I athwart his dreams shall throw. 980

Exit VANITY

IDOLATRY: I desire, too, he should know
To what daring heights and deeps
My proud pinion soars and sweeps.

Exit IDOLATRY

THOUGHT: Here I lay my burden down,
For I only sleep, poor clown, 985
When my lord Belshazzar sleeps

THOUGHT lies down to sleep

SCENE THE ELEVENTH

DEATH: Man the rest of slumber tries,
Never the reflection making,
That, O God! asleep and waking,
Every day he lives and dies; 990
That a living corpse he lies,
After each day's daily strife,
Stricken by an unseen knife,

In brief lapse of life, not breath,
 A repose which is not Death, 995
 But what death is teaches life:--
 Sugared poison 'tis, which sinks
 On the heart which it o'ercometh,
 Which it hindereth and benumbeth.
 And can a man then live who poison drinks? 1000
 'Tis forgetting, when the links,
 That gave life by mutual fretting
 To the Senses, snap, or letting
 The imprisoned five go free,
 They can hear not, touch, or see:-- 1005
 And can a man forget this strange forgetting!--
 It is frenzy, that which moves
 Heart and eyes to taste and see
 Joys and shapes that ne'er can be:--
 And can a man be found who frenzy loves?-- 1010
 'Tis a lethargy that proves
 My best friend;--in trust for me,
 Death's dull, drowsy weight bears he,
 And, by failing limb and eye,
 TEACHES MAN THE WAY TO DIE:--
 And can a man then seek this lethargy?-- 1015
 'Tis a shadow, which is made
 Without light's contrasted aid,--
 Moving in a spectral way,
 SAD PHANTASMAL FOE OF DAY:--
 And can a man seek rest beneath such shade?--
 Finally, 'tis well portrayed 1020
 AS DEATH'S IMAGE: o'er and o'er,
 Men have knelt its shrine before,
 Men have bowed the suppliant knee,
 ALL ILLUSION THOUGH IT BE:--
 And can a man this Image then adore?
 Since Belshazzar here doth sleep,
 Since he hath the poison drank, 1025
 Since he treads oblivion's blank,
 Since no more his pulses leap,
 Since the lethargy is deep,
 Since, in horror and confusion,
 To a other sight's exclusion, 1030
 He has seen the Image-seen
 What this shade, this poison mean--

What this frenzy, this illusion:
Since Belshazzar sleepeth so,
Let him sleep and never waken,
Be his body and soul o'ertaken
By the eternal slumber.

1035

He draws his sword, and is about to kill him

SCENE THE TWELFTH

DANIEL rushes in. He holds back the arm of DEATH

DANIEL: No!
DEATH: Who withholds my arm?
DANIEL: Thy blow
SO TO STOP, 'TIS I: because
PAYMENT IS NOT DUE: to laws
Life and death are subject still,
Till their number they fulfill,
Thou, O Death! perforce must pause.
DEATH: And thy weeks their round will fly
--Cruel fate! O pain severe!--
They will end and disappear
When the Sinless One will die
FOR THE SINNER'S SAKE: But why,
O thou judge of what I dare!
Why delay? With scornful air
They to-day mock me and thee--
Listen, there is Vanity,
Look, Idolatry is there.

1040

1045

1050

SCENE THE THIRTEENTH

The back scene opens: at one side a bronze equestrian STATUE is seen, the bridle of which is held by IDOLATRY; and at the other side, upon a tower, VANITY appears, plumed with many feathers, and having an instrument in her hand

IDOLATRY: Babylon's great king, Belshazzar,
Thou who, in sweet sleep's soft meshes,
Thus the sepulchre of thyself,
Diest living or livest deadened...

VANITY: Babylons great king, Belshazzar, 1055
Thou who on the fresh and verdant
Turf-tomb of the spring, here liest
Corse-like, yet with soul unsevered...

In his sleep

BELSHAZZAR: Who doth call me? who doth call me?
But if I my dreams may credit, 1060
Still, O Vanity! still I see thee,
O Idolatry! still thou'rt present.
IDOLATRY: I, divine Idolatry,
From the sun-god first descended,
Unto thee to raise this statue, 1065
Come from Heaven's high halls eternal,
That your Image on the earth
May be revered and respected.
VANITY: I, the Vanity of the world,
In the abysses first engendered, 1070
And 'mong men being born, for sphere
Have Heaven's vacant void selected,
Worthily to enshrine thy statue,
I this fair fantastic temple,
Dedicate to thee, this structure, 1075
Built upon the wind with feathers.

In his sleep

BELSHAZZAR: Oh! what triumphs so exalted,
Oh! what flatteries sweet and pleasant,
Altars, offerings, prayers, and incense,
Thou, Idolatry, dost present me;-- 1080
Oh! to think that my proud statue
With the mightiest shall be reckoned:--
Rise! O Vanity! rise and crown thee
With Dominion's circling emblems--
Prove your essence, one by rising, 1085
One by falling, prove your essence.

*The STATUE descends, and the Tower rises, while VANITY and
IDOLATRY sing*

IDOLATRY: *"Down, O Statue, down to be Worshipped wide on every shore."*

VANITY: *"As a shrine for evermore, Rise, O Tower of Vanity!"*

IDOLATRY: *"Downward sink!"*

VANITY: *"And upward soar!"*

THE TWO: *"Since to-day the breezes bore..."* 1090

IDOLATRY: *"Statues consecrate to me..."*

VANITY: *"And a shrine to Vanity."*

DEATH: Daniel, oh! my hand let loose;

Let me with one bold stroke level,

Even as mighty Samson once, 1095

Both the idol and the temple--

DANIEL: I shall leave it--O swift comet

Winged with fire! -unchecked, unfetter'd,

When the day of wrath comes round:

But until that day descendeth, 1100

This bronze statue shall recall

To his mind another metal,--

Yea, a brazen trumpet, which,

Touched by my command, shall threaten,

Like the trumpet of the Judgment. 1105

DEATH: For us both this course is better,

Since when that dread trumpet soundeth,

The whole universe must tremble

TO ITS BASE AND DIE: and so,

O thou mighty mass of metal,

In thy breast, even as its soul, 1110

Say what damned spirit dwelleth!

Bare thyself even to thyself,

False bronze deity or devil!

Exit DEATH with DANIEL

SCENE THE FOURTEENTH

STATUE: King Belshazzar!

BELSHAZZAR: Oh! what would'st thou,

Strange illusion, phantom, spectre, 1115

Why afflict me, why attack me?

STATUE: List! and let the waking senses

Of the soul attend and hear me,

While those of the body rest them,

I, against Idolatry turn, 1120
 Turn as if a brazen serpent,
 Since, even as a serpent dies,
 I must die in mine own venom;
 And while my hard lip of bronze
 Slowly gives its iron message, 1125
 Let those flatteries of the wind,
 Song and music, be suspended.
 I that Statue am, which he,
 Nabuchodonosor saw, of many
 Metals made, with feet of clay, 1130
 Which a stone, by heaven directed,
 Struck and crushed, a stone which fell
 From the mountain of God's mercy:--
 No, in vain thou would'st extort
 Worship which high heaven rejecteth, 1135
 For I once, such worship seeking
 From the Hebrew youths, God's servants,
 Lit the Babylonian furnace,
 Where, indeed, their faith was tested
 By the fire that raged around them, 1140
 But in which it was not melted.
 Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago,
 By their lives this day attest it.
 All the gods whom thou adorest,
 Matter-formed of earth are earthy; 1145
 Thou adorest bronze in Moloch,
 Gold in Astaroth thou respectest,
 Wood in Baal, clay in Dagon,
 Stone in Baalin, and the welded
 IRON IN THE GODS OF MOAB:--
 And as now my voice expresses 1150
 The great God's decree, ye two
 To its metal sounds surrender!--
 Rend your feathers! break your statues!

The STATUE rises and the Tower descends

VANITY: Oh! I burn.

IDOLATRY: With cold I tremble!

VANITY: In the rays of another sun 1155
 Has my flight abruptly ended.

IDOLATRY: In the light of another faith

Has my darkness been dispersèd.

VANITY and IDOLATRY disappear, and the scene closes

SCENE THE FIFTEENTH

Awaking

BELSHAZZAR: Hear me! linger! listen! wait!

Oh! do not so soon desert me, 1160

Such sweet Vanity! Such proud rapture!

Awaking

THOUGHT: Why this outcry? what affects thee?

BELSHAZZAR: Ah! my Thought, I do not know:--

Since, when as a god I felt me,

Since, when sovereign lord I called me, 1165

And awake from such sweet error,

'Tis thy foolishness alone,

'Tis thy folly I find present.

THOUGHT: What has passed then? What has happened?

BELSHAZZAR: In pale sleep, as here I rested, 1170

I beheld my various glory

In one dazzling dream collected.

High I saw my Vanity soar,

Till her starry brows touched heaven,

From her golden empire down 1175

My Idolatry descended.

This to me a Statue raised,

That a glorious Fane erected,

And they scarce had raised the two,

That the Statue, this the Temple, 1180

When a voice of bronze, a trumpet,

Which even yet doth make me tremble,

Burned, of this, the feathery fane--

And of that, the image melted--

Leaving to the winds the spoil 1185

Of their ruins' smoking embers...

Woe is me! poor Vanity

Is the fleeting flower whose freshness

Blooms upon the almond tree,

And the rose, whose blood is reddened 1190

By the Sun, Idolatry;
 That, with facile fall surrenders
 Easily to the first faint sigh,
 Which the angry north wind threatens,
 This, when absent dies the day, 1195
 Faints, or folds the crispèd velvet
 Of its buds. Brief sun, brief rose,
 Against Time's assaults so helpless!

SCENE THE SIXTEENTH

Enter IDOLATRY

IDOLATRY: No, a voice shall not conclude my story,
 No fraud shall rob my triumphs and my glory,-- 1200
 The pomp that I display,
 Shall make this night outshine the light of day.--
 Belshazzar, Prince Supreme,
 For thee a god, more than a king, I deem.
 Whilst thou in sweet suspense 1205
 Of sleep gave rest to every weary sense,
 Making a truce with thought,
 My love, with thy best interests ever fraught,
 Its faithful watch would keep,
 For fond affection knows not how to sleep, 1210
 A supper, rich and rare,
 Full of all dainties cunning could prepare,
 Things yet unknown to taste,
 Are all, by my prevision, duly placed:
 What every sense could wish 1215
 Breathes from each vase, or tempts from every dish:
 Upon the sideboards glow
 Rich gold and silver vessels all a-row,
 And many a costly prize,
 Whose brightness gives a dropsy to the eyes. 1220
 Sweetest perfumes
 Breathe their delicious fragrance through the rooms
 From emerald braziers filled with souls of flowers
 That died in fair Arabia's happy bowers:
 Sole food, as thou thyself can'st tell, 1225
 That satisfies the hunger of the smell,
 The music, too, in well-accorded note,
 Nor yet too near, nor yet too far remote,

From many a silken string, and mellow horn,
 Quenches the thirst wherewith the ear is born. 1230
 The table-cloths of white,
 Around whose 'broidered edges pinks unite
 With clustered lilies, which commingled throw
 A brighter brightness o'er the blinding snow
 On which they lie; give to the wondering touch, 1235
 A smooth surprise it cannot feel too much.
 Nectar, ambrosia, such as gods might claim,
 Cold, icy drinks 'tis freshness but to name,
 From the rich orange and the rose distilled,
 For thee, in golden goblets shall be filled, 1240
 To please thy taste, that so in joyous state,
 With every course the cups should alternate.
 And that these cups may be
 To-day the surest proof of victory,
 The vessels sacred then to Israel's God, 1245
 Which Nabuchodonosor, unawed,
 Bore off from great Jerusalem, the day
 When a remoter East received his sway,
 COMMAND THEM HERE TO BRING:--
 This night, with them, thou'lt pledge the Gods, O King!
 And thus profane the temple's sacred store, 1250
 IN HONOR OF THE IDOLS I ADORE:
 For sweet dessert, let these my arms suffice,
 Inventing, feigning, every fond device
 By which, as in a cipher's interlacing,
 Thy greatness may be known from my embracing,
 Love's sweetest manna this, in which unite 1255
 Smell, tasting, touch, the hearing, and the sight.
 BELSHAZZAR: In seeing thee, the memory fades away,
 Of all the solemn thoughts I held to-day,
 Thy living light in lustrous beauty beams,
 I wake and find thee fairer than my dreams. 1260
 Thy light, alone, I feel,
 Can from my heart the fatal sadness steal,
 That keeps it so dejected.
 THOUGHT: By heaven! this is but just what I expected,
 You're not so foolish, though not overwise: 1265
 As such a glorious supper to despise:--
 Let there be feasting, let us be jolly,
 This night, at least, we'll banish melancholy,
 My folly rises now to exaltation,

By cynics sometimes called inebriation. 1270

BELSHAZZAR: Let the gold vessels, which within the shrine
Of conquered Judah, flowed with mystic wine
For Israel's priests, those cups so richly chased,
Be filled for me too.

THOUGHT: I admire your taste.

BELSHAZZAR: Go for them. 1275

SCENE THE SEVENTEENTH

Enter VANITY, Music, Attendants, etc.

VANITY: Stay; for I the vessels bring,
From Vanity's hands receive the cups, O King!
VANITY: Set out the tables for the supper here,
Close by the summer-house.

THOUGHT: For me? Oh, dear!

IDOLATRY: For thee, my friend? Why, who here spoke 1280
of thee?

THOUGHT: He who says supper, speaks he not of
me?

For if I am to sup, the thing is clear,
Señora, that the supper standeth here,
And this reminds me of an antique song,
Brief is the moral and the stave not long. 1285

Sings

*"Supper for me was made, I think, Since I was born to eat and
drink, For in easy mood, I submit to food, When the wine is old
and the meat is good*

*The table is brought in, on which the sacred vessels are displayed;
the attendants commence serving the banquet*

BELSHAZZAR: Here take your seats ye two; along the sides
Sit ye, my friends, and take what heaven provides,
When even the Temple gives us cups at call,
Be sure the supper has been meant for all:--
Now, let the thanks that to the gods belong, 1290
From your full hearts find utterance in song.

MUSIC: *"This table, O Idolatry! Is an altar raised to thee, O Vanity! thou'rt here adored, Since, a thing without example, The rich vessels of the Temple Decorate Belshazzar's board."*

They all take their seats at the table

SCENE THE EIGHTEENTH

Enter DEATH, disguised as one of the Attendants

DEATH: (To the great feast of the king, **[Aside]**

THUS DISGUISED I FREELY ENTER:

Since at this great supper I
Am concealed and unsuspected, 1295
I believe that I can hide me
'Mong the crowd of his attendants.
Careless here Belshazzar sits,
And of me has no remembrance,
Circled by his women round, 1300
By his nobles and dependents.
Those rich cups which Solomon
To the one true God presented,
And with which his holy priests
Sacrificial rites effected, 1305
Here but grace his banquet board...
Oh! Thou Judgment of the Eternal,
Loose thy hand now, let mine loose, too,
For he surely hath the measure
Of his sins at last accomplished 1310
In a sacrilege so dreadful.)
BELSHAZZAR: Give me wine.

To DEATH

THOUGHT: Halloo! Ho! Comrade,
Have you an attack of deafness?--
Bring the king a cup of wine,
Whilst I to this dish address me. 1315

He draws a dish to himself and begins to eat

DEATH: (For a servant I am taken:-- **[Aside]**
Well, the cup I will present him,

Since he can't know me, he who
Is so blinded and forgetful.

He takes a gold goblet from the table

This rich vessel of the altar 1320
Holds life in it, it is certain,
Since the soul, athirst for life,
Finds in it its sure refreshment.
But it also holds within it
Death as well as Life; its essence 1325
Is of life and death commingled,
And its liquor is the blended
Heavenly nectar and the hemlock--
Bane and antidote together--)

Aloud

Here, O Monarch! is the wine. 1330

He presents the cup to the King

BELSHAZZAR: From thy hand I will accept it.
What a beauteous cup!

DEATH: (O woe! **[Aside]**

Not to know the draught is deadly!)

IDOLATRY: The King drinks; let all arise.

All arise

BELSHAZZAR: Ye, the glories of my empire, 1335
In this cup of Israel's God
I salute our own. Forever,
Moloch, god of the Assyrians,
Live!

He drinks slowly

THOUGHT: We drink the toast with pleasure:
Thirty thousand gods to-day 1340
Seem too few to fill our revels,
I would like to drink them all.
IDOLATRY: Let song mingle with the pledges.

MUSIC: *"This table, O Idolatry! Is an altar raised to thee, O Vanity! thou'rt here adored,-- Since, a thing without example, Ihe rich chalice of the Temple Drains Belshazzar at his board."*

A great clap of thunder is heard

BELSHAZZAR: What an awful sound! What means 1345

This tumultuous voice of terror

That doth call the clouds to arm

On the battlefield of Heaven?--

IDOLATRY: When you drank, it must have been

A salute the heavens presented 1350

With their fearful thunder-guns.

VANITY: See, a gloomy horror settles

O'er the sky, that hides the stars.

DEATH: I, who darkest night engender--

How I love this gloom, this horror! 1355

BELSHAZZAR: Comets dark, with burning tresses,

Through the air, wild birds of fire

Flash the lightning's flames incessant,

With loud cries of grief and pain

Groans the cloud, as if 'twere pregnant: 1360

It in travail seems to be,

And 'tis so, for from its entrails

Breaks a bright bolt forth, the glowing

EMBRYO THAT FILLED ITS CENTRE:

When the cloud gives birth to lightning,

Thunder but its cry expresses. 1365

A louder and more terrific clap of thunder is heard, accompanied by lightning: on the ceiling of the hall appears a hand, pointing to a paper, on which is inscribed "Mané, Thecel, Pharés."

BELSHAZZAR: See ye not? Oh, woe is me!

Through the trembling air projected

What is bursting, what is breaking,

Which, above my head, suspended

Hangs but by a hair, and glideth 1370

Toward the wall. Its form presenteth

The appearance of a hand,

Of a hand, the cloud has sever'd

From some monstrous form unseen!--

Who, oh who, in lightning, ever, 1375

Arteries saw till now? I know not
 What its finger writes, what message,
 Since when it has left the impress
 Of three rapid strokes or sketches
 On the wall, to join its body 1380
 Once again the hand ascendeth...
 Pale my cheek has grown, my hair
 Stands on end through fear and terror,
 Trembling throbs my heart, my breath
 Chokes my parched throat, or deserts me. 1385
 For what was the Babel of tongues
 Is to-day the Babel of letters.
 VANITY: I a burning mountain seem.
 IDOLATRY: I a statue of ice resemble.
 THOUGHT: I am neither mountain nor statue,-- 1390
 But a nice, fine fear o'erwhelms me.
 BELSHAZZAR: Thou, Idolatry, thou that knowest
 All the gods' deep secrets, tell me
 What do these strange letters mean?
 IDOLATRY: These I'm powerless to interpret: 1395
 Even the character I know not.

To VANITY

BELSHAZZAR: Thou, whose genius comprehendeth
 Deepest science-thou, the augur's,
 The magician's, chief preceptress,
 What here read'st thou? Say--What? 1400
 VANITY: Nothing;--
 Here my genius fails to help me:
 These are all to me unknown.
 BELSHAZZAR: Thou, O Thought! dost comprehend them?
 THOUGHT: You have asked a sage at last!
 I'm an ignorant fool, heaven help me! 1405
 IDOLATRY: Daniel, the same Hebrew, who
 Did so well the dream interpret
 Of the statue and the tree,
 He will tell it.

SCENE THE NINETEENTH

Enter DANIEL

DANIEL: List attentive:--

Mané means that God hath numbered,

And thy kingdom's days hath ended; 1410

Thecel, that thou hast completed

The full number, thy offences
Not admitting one sin more;

Pharés, that a waste, a desert,

Will thy kingdom be, when seized
By the Medes and by the Persians.
Thus the hand of God hath written 1415
With the finger thy dread sentence,
And its carrying out hath He

To the secular arm expressly
Delegated. This hath God
Done to thee, because perversely 1420
Thou, with scorn and ribald jest,
Hast profaned the sacred vessels.

For no mortal should misuse
These pure vessels of the Temple,
Which, until the law of grace 1425
Reigns on earth, foreshow a blessèd
Sacrament, when the written Law
Time's tired hand shall blot forever,

If these vessels' profanation
Is a crime of such immenseness, 1430
Hear the cause, ye mortals, hear it!
For in them, life, death, are present

'Tis that he who receives in sin,
Desecrates God's holy vessel.
BELSHAZZAR: In them is there death? 1435

DEATH: There is,
When they are by me presented,
I, the pride-born child of sin,
Of whose dark and deadly venom
He who drinks must surely die.
BELSHAZZAR: Ah! in spite of all my senses, 1440
I believe thee, I believe thee;
For though torpid and dejected,
Through the sight, and through the hearing,

Have thy fearful voice and presence
Penetrated my proud bosom-- 1445
To my very soul's seat entered:--
Save me, O Idolatry!
From this agony.

 IDOLATRY: I am helpless,
For at the terrific voice
Of that Mystery predestined, 1450
Which you have to-day profaned
in these cups that are its emblems,
All my courage I have lost--
All my former fire and mettle.

BELSHAZZAR: Help me now, O Vanity! 1455
VANITY: I am humbled, through Heaven's mercy.
BELSHAZZAR: Thee, O Thought!...

 THOUGHT: Thy greatest foe
Now is in thy Thought presented,
Since you did not wish to heed
The death-warnings it suggested. 1460
BELSHAZZAR: Daniel!

 DANIEL: I am God's decree:--
Yea, He hath pronounced thy sentence!
Yea, the measure is filled up!

THOUGHT: *Nulla est redemptio.*
BELSHAZZAR: All, ah, all in this dread hour, 1465
In this final need desert me!
Who, oh who, hath power to save me
From this horror, from this spectre?--
DEATH: No one:--for thou would'st not be
Safe within the abysmal centre 1470
Of the earth.

 BELSHAZZAR: Ah! Fire enfolds me!
DEATH: Die, thou sinner!

***DEATH draws his sword, and stabs BELSHAZZAR; he then seizes
him in his arms, and they struggle together***

 BELSHAZZAR: This is death, then!
Was the venom not sufficient
That I drank of?

 DEATH: No, that venom 1475
Was the death of the soul; the body's,
This swift death-stroke representeth.

BELSHAZZAR: With death's agony upon me,
 Sad, despairing, and dejected,
 Struggling against odds, and dying,
 Soul and body both together, 1480
 Hear, ye mortal men. Oh, hear!
 What doth mean this fearful message,
 What this *Mané, Thecel, Pharés*
 Of the one Supreme God threatens;--
 He who dares profane God's cup, 1485
 Him He striketh down forever;
 He who sinfully receives,
 Desecrates God's holiest vessel!

*Exeunt DEATH and BELSHAZZAR struggling together, and after
 them THOUGHT*

SCENE THE TWENTIETH

IDOLATRY: Like a sleeper I awaken
 From the dreams of my forgetting: 1490
 And since even Idolatry
 God Himself hath not excepted
 From the crowd of living things
 In the mystic sheet collected,
 Which one day will Christ command 1495
 Peter there to kill and eat of,
 Would that I could see the light
 Of the law of grace, O Heaven!
 Now while reigns the written law!--

*Enter DEATH, dressed as before, with sword and dagger, and a
 cloak covered with skeletons*

DEATH: You can see it represented 1500
 In the fleece of Gideon,
 In the Manna of the desert,
 In the honeycomb the lion's
 Mouth contained, in the unblemished
 Lamb, and in the Sacred bread 1505
 Of Proposition.

DANIEL: If these emblems
 Show it not, then be it shown
 In the full foreshadowing presence

Of the feast here now transformed
Into bread and wine; stupendous 1510
Miracle of God; his greatest
Sacrament in type presented.

*The scene opens to the sound of solemn music; a table is seen
arranged as an altar, with a remonstrance and chalice in the
middle, and two wax candles at each side*

IDOLATRY: I, who was Idolatry,
Who to idols false and empty
Worship gave, to-day effacing 1515
Both their names and mine forever,
Will be Latria, adoring
Thus this sacrament most blessèd.
And at its high feast, Madrid
Celebrates with fitting splendor, 1520
May Don Pedro Calderón
For his manifold demerits

FIND EXCUSE:--His faults and ours
Deign to pardon, and remember
That the poet's works but shadow
What the poet had intended. 1525

. "Belshazzar's Feast." Association for Hispanic Classical Theater, 2026.
<https://www.comedias.org/obras/belshazzars-feast/>