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Don Carlos, Infante of Spain

Friedrich Schiller · *1787* · *R. D. Boylan translation*

At the Spanish court of Philip II, the Infante Carlos, heir to the throne, is sick with a hopeless love for his stepmother Elizabeth of Valois, who was once promised to him and is now his father's queen. His father despises him, and the Duke of Alva has the king's favor. Carlos's one friend, the Marquis of Posa, has a plan for freedom in Flanders. Schiller's tragedy joins court intrigue with a plea for liberty.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can a young man's private love and a friend's public ideal both survive in a court ruled by suspicion and the Inquisition?

Posa tries to make his friendship, a king's trust, and a cause of freedom work together, and he ends by giving his own life to protect Carlos. Philip is shown as a lonely and suspicious ruler who is moved by Posa's plea and cannot act on it. Schiller makes the play a debate on conscience and tyranny, and he does not offer an easy reconciliation. The ending leaves Carlos in the hands of the king and the Grand Inquisitor.

KEY CHARACTERS

Don Carlos
The Infante, heir to the throne.

the Marquis of Posa
Carlos's friend, an idealist of freedom.

Philip II
The suspicious king of Spain.

Elizabeth of Valois
The queen and Carlos's former betrothed.

Princess Eboli
A court lady who loves Carlos.

the Duke of Alva
The king's general.

the Grand Inquisitor
The head of the Inquisition.

Grades 10–12

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01

Aranjuez

ACT I

Carlos confesses to Posa his love for the queen. Posa, back from Flanders, arranges a meeting between them, at which the queen tells Carlos to turn his love to Flanders.

- Carlos's love is hopeless and public.
- Posa returns with a cause.
- Elizabeth's answer is gentle and firm.

02

Princess Eboli

ACT II

Eboli, who loves Carlos, mistakes his message. When she finds the truth she turns against him and sides with Alva and Domingo.

- Eboli's mistake sets off her jealousy.
- Alva and Domingo are the king's men.
- The court's plots begin to close.

03

The King and Posa

ACT III

Posa wins the king's confidence and pleads for freedom of thought. Philip makes him his confidant.

- Posa's plea for freedom is the play's great speech.
- The king is lonely.
- Posa's new position is dangerous.

04

The Letters

ACT IV

Posa lets the king find letters that implicate himself, to protect Carlos. The king and Eboli discover the truth about the queen.

- Posa's self-sacrifice is calculated.
- The truth about the queen comes out.
- Carlos is not told of Posa's plan.

05

Posa's Death

ACT V

Posa is shot in prison and sends his last message to Carlos. The king and the Grand Inquisitor intervene when Carlos tries to flee.

- Posa's last message is a dying charge.
- The Inquisitor is the true power.
- The ending leaves Carlos in the king's hands.

Freedom | Friendship | Power | Love and Duty

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. Posa's speech to the king is the heart of the play. Notice how the king answers.
2. Carlos and Posa are friends. Ask what each wants.
3. Look at the Inquisitor's role. What does he stand for?
4. The play is a mix of private feeling and public politics. See how Schiller joins them.

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