

Life of Gundling Lessing's Sleep Dream Cry

A Horror Story

Heiner Mueller, 1976

Translation: Dennis Redmond © 2001

Translation notes: All material herein is quoted from the 1983 Rotbuch Verlag version of Life of Gundling, including Mueller's original opening notes; as much of the original typesetting and spacing has been preserved as possible. All explanatory notes not in the original text, but necessary for reading comprehension, e.g. words in French, obscure citations, untranslatable puns, etc., are marked by rectangular brackets.

Notes: Frederick II can be played by a woman or, as a prince, by a (young) man, and as a king, by a woman. In the second case the actor playing the prince can also play Kleist in the pantomime. Gundling, the psychiatrist, Schiller, Lessing I (the actor who is made up to look like Lessing) and Lessing 2 (Lessing in America) by the same actor, Lessing 3 (Apotheosis) by the actor portraying Frederick and Kleist.

The successive parts of the Lessing-Triptych should not, if at all possible, be portrayed on a single stage, but should be presented overlapping one another; while the actor is being made up to look like Lessing, the auto cemetery should be constructed; during the recitation of Emilia Galotti and Nathan, the stage-workers (theater-visitors) should pour sand over the Spartacus-torso.

After the madhouse scene the actors can, in a free improvisation, sketch a design for a better world.

LIFE OF GUNDLING

Garden in Potsdam. Dining table. Frederick William with the boy Frederick as lieutenant, officers, Gundling. Beer and tobacco. Moon.

GUNDLING ...and affirms the wisdom of Your Majesty's decree pertaining to the banning of foreign newspapers within the circumference of Your Majesty's realm, on the evident grounds that the world, as created by God, may have, according to reason, but one mid-point, belonging to Prussia, by the grace of God, under the, as it were and begging the Royal permission, Royal Bottom of His Most Merciful Majesty Frederick William.

Frederick William farts. Frederick holds nose demonstratively.

GUNDLING Thus God created the world. Composed at first entirely of gas

FREDERICK It stinks to this day.

FREDERICK WILLIAM Is the stripling putting on airs. I'll teach Him manners, the little Frenchman. Wrinkling His nose before the farts of His father! Has He no respect for His family. You are not in Versailles, where anything goes. Did I turn up my nose when You lay in Your shit? A Prussian honors his family, through thick and thin. Stand up straight. And the hands on the table. Are You playing in your pants again. The hands of a soldier belong at his side, at dinner on the table.

Frederick narrows arms on his breast.

Is the sonofabitch hiding His flute. *Tears the flute from the shirt of Frederick's uniform, breaks it over his knee.* He gets the post, Gundling, 200 thalers a year, he's a patriot. Will he accept? I have a people to feed, I have to scrimp and save. And I've torn 200 from my ribs for him out of love for science.

Gundling puts money on table. Servants bring beer.

To the new President of the Royal Academy, Jacob Paul Freelord von Gundling.

Frederick William, officers, Gundling drink.

OFFICER 1 Does he have only one title, Gundling?

GUNDLING *puts money on table:* I wish I had none. *Beer. Officers drink.*

OFFICER 2 That was the Counselor of Appeals. Where's the Master of Ceremonies.

OFFICER 3 And the Supreme Justice of the Court.

OFFICER 4 And the Privy Councillor.

Frederick William laughs. Gundling empties his pockets on the table etc.

OFFICER 1 Gundling, did his wife run off with someone.

OFFICER 2 Did she read him the riot act because he was drunk again.

GUNDLING The fate of the wise, gentlemen. I only beg to remind you of Socrates, the father of philosophy.

OFFICER 1 So she ran off with the father.

Frederick William covers Frederick's ears.

OFFICER 2 Better the father with the son's wife than the son with the father's. *Officers laugh.*

He who

OFFICER 3 He who dishonors the father isn't worth the mother.

Officers laugh.

OFFICER Gundling, we have a present for him. Is he a man?

GUNDLING *stands up, swaying, reaches for his fly.* I can prove it.

Frederick William covers Frederick's eyes.

OFFICER 1 Here comes his proof.

A bear enters. Its paws have been clipped, the teeth pulled. Gundling runs once around the table, the bear pursues him. The officers hold Gundling at rapier-point. The bear hugs Gundling.

OFFICER 2 The bride has spirit.

OFFICER 3 A skin like peaches and cream.

OFFICER 4 Is he enjoying the loving embrace?

FREDERICK *hopefully:* Will he tear him apart, Papa?

FREDERICK WILLIAM *laughs:* Take this example of how He must deal with the learned. And the art of ruling, which He must learn, when I go to my God, as the Court Preacher says, or into my nothingness. The paws of the people clipped, the beasts, and their teeth pulled. To make the learned sirs [Intelligenz: intellectuals, eggheads] into fools, so the rabble does not get any ideas. Mark well, the good-for-nothing, with His powder-puffery and Greek tragedies. I'll make Him into a man. Chewing on His nails again? I'll teach Him.

Gundling falls from embrace on his back. Bear takes a bow, is led away by servants with a chain.

GUNDLING *on his back:* I wish I were on the dungheap behind my father's barn.

Officers laugh.

In England I partook of Latin disputations with Archbishops. England.

O WHAT A NOBLE MIND IS HERE O'ERTHROWN.

Officers laugh.

Observe, my learned gentlemen students, the majesty of the firmament. And let this be of consolation: this too shall pass. Humanity is an accident, a malignant growth. And what we call life, my majestic sirs, is something akin to the measles, the teething-troubles of the universe, whose true existence is death, nothingness, the void. Forwards, Prussia!

FREDERICK WILLIAM *sternly:* Gundling, is he getting ideas.

OFFICER 1 It's the delirium.

OFFICER 2 I'll pour him another.

OFFICER 3 Too bad about the beer. – Here come the firemen.

Officers piss on Gundling.

OFFICER 4 Nectar and ambrosia. The Lord giveth aplenty in their sleep.

FREDERICK WILLIAM *to Frederick:* You didn't grow one, Prince?

FREDERICK I can't, Papa.

FREDERICK WILLIAM Ha. A Prussian officer and can't piss when his King commands it. Is He a man? Off with his stripes. And unbutton his fly.

Officers tear off Frederick's epaulettes. Frederick cries.

OFFICERS Hahaha. He's pissing from his eyes.

PRUSSIAN GAMES

I

Frederick, his sister Wilhelmina, lieutenant Katte play blind man's bluff. While Katte feels about with covered eyes, Frederick and Wilhelmina exchange clothes. Frederick and Wilhelmina attempt to push each other out of the way, when Katte moves towards one of the other. Sometimes the touching becomes a caress, the pushing away an embrace. Katte moves in Frederick's direction, holds him, touches his (Wilhelmina's) clothes, wig, brow, eyes, mouth.

KATTE *uncertain*: Wilhelmina.

Frederick stands motionless, only his hands tremble. When he reaches for Katte, calls WILHEMINA Wrong, wrong, wrong. I'm here. Runs from behind at Katte and takes off his blindfold, leaning heavily on him.

FREDERICK *Ignoring Wilhelmina, embarrassedly to Katte*: Let's play tragedy. I'll be Phaedra.

Wilhelmina draws back into a corner, also embarrassed, from which she now and then steps forward to smack Frederick or Katte on the hands, whenever either of them try to touch the other.

FREDERICK

Yes, Prince, I pine, I burn for Theseus...

[Text from Racine's Phedre, Act II, 5]

KATTE What do I hear, O Gods!

Etc.

FREDERICK

Lend me Thy sword, if Thine arm will it not.

Give.

Frederick sets Katte's rapier to his breast. Wilhelmina comes from her corner, a crude Frederick-William-mask on her face, in the gait and manner of their royal father and lunges at Frederick and Katte with a staff. Frederick and Katte tie her to a chair with rags of her (Frederick's) clothing. Frederick points Katte's rapier between her bared breasts.

FREDERICK Die, mon cher [French: my dear] Papa!

Laughter of Frederick and Katte.

2

Frederick is led in blindfolded by soldiers, on the other side, with no blindfold but in chains, Lieutenant Katte. Behind Frederick the execution squad for Katte takes position. Between Frederick and Katte, the King (Frederick William) lowers himself onto a chair carried in by two lackeys.

FREDERICK WILLIAM Now He can make His peace with His father in Heaven, son of a bitch. I'll even help Him along, his Commander-in-chief and Royal Father, who God has afflicted me with.

FREDERICK *quaking, softly*: Father you bastard.

FREDERICK WILLIAM Still giving excuses. I'll beat the arsefucking and French-talking out of Him. Stand up straight. I'll make a man and a king out of Him. Even if I have to break every bone in His body to do it.

KATTE My prince.

FREDERICK I see you.

At a sign from Frederick William the soldiers remove Frederick's blindfold. Simultaneously they blindfold Katte.

FREDERICK WILLIAM Show him the festivities.

SOLDIERS I'm Santa Claus. *Tearing Frederick's hands from his eyes, forcing his eyelids open. Shooting of Katte.*

FREDERICK WILLIAM *stands up*: That was Katte.

FREDERICK WILLIAM Sire, that was I.

3

Projection (speaker)

BUT THERE IS NOTHING WORSE THAN HUMANITY; REST ASSURED OF THAT, MY DEAR (Frederick II)

FREDERICK *beating fleeing soldiers back into a battle*. Sons of bitches. Do you want to live forever.

SOLDIERS Our Fredric. Vivat Fredericus Rex Hurrah.

Carnage.

FREDERICK I wish I were my father. – Red snow.

Frederick vomits.

FREDERICK Read to me, Catt.

Catt opens up a folding chair, Frederick sits down, his back to the battle, face to the public.

CATT The Plutarch?

FREDERICK Racine.

Catt, while the battle continues, reads Racine Britannicus IV.

OH HOW GOOD IT IS THAT NOONE KNOWS
THAT RUMPELSTILTSKIN IS MY NAME-O

or

THE SCHOOL OF THE NATION

A patriotic puppet-play

Wall of fire, driving snow in front. Through the snow soldiers march (puppets) in Wehrmacht uniforms, goose-stepping into the fire. To the left in front of the footlights Frederick II is writing grades on a blackboard for the soldiers who hobble crawl are carried back from the battle: 6 (unsatisfactory) for the unharmed or lightly wounded, better grades (4-2) for every serious wound or loss of a limb, 1 (excellent) for the dead.

FREDERICK In meadows so green
Spring flowers dream
Yellow for the piggies
Blue for the kiddies
My dearest love the red
The white for the dead.

On the other side a larger-than-life John Bull and Maryanne carve up the world, by throwing knives pulled from dead Indians and Negroes at a globe. With every hit the winner cuts out a slab and imbibes it. Satiated they sit, occasionally rubbing their (each other's) bellies, belching and farting, watching little Frederick play war-games with his toy soldiers. While the driving snow intensifies and the fire goes out, the scene freezes. The stage transforms itself into a ghost-ship, on which dead sailors nail the captain to the mast. The film runs backwards, then forwards, then backwards. Etc. Through the centuries. Music

THE MUSICAL OFFERING [Bach].

KING OF HEARTS BLACK WIDOW

Projection: Leda with Swan (Rubens).

Frederick gets a Prussian doll with a Frederick-William-mask from a closet, cuddles strokes kisses it in front of the mirror.

FREDERICK My people.

Slaps the doll, throws it to the floor, dances on it. Canaille [French: rascal, bastard].

Throws the puppet back into the closet, sits on a chair, picks his nose. A double-barreled Saxon woman in a black veil stumbles in. Frederick pulls finger from nose and hides the hand behind the chair.

SAXON WIDOW

I am the widow.

FREDERICK *leaps to feet:*

What sort of a widow.

SAXON WIDOW *scratching his back:*

Or the happiest of all women

If His Majesty so desires.

Frederick flees

Majesty doesn't.

SAXON WIDOW *pursuing him through room:*

Specifically my husband, and the father of my children

Eight in all, an officer in the service of Saxony

And by means of a transfer from the stockade to the Prussian service,

A deserter out of love, only because

His heavy heart drew him home to Saxony.

Hand on heart.

For His Majesty gave the order to shoot

This morning according to martial law, thus

I am this widow, if His Majesty

Does not grant mercy before martial law

Wherefore I beg on my knees, or wife, if only

Reaches while throwing herself on her knees for Frederick's legs.

FREDERICK *escaping:*

She is the widow, Majesty will not intervene.

SAXON WIDOW

Oh. *Faints to floor.*

Frederick circles the woman, giving her wide berth.

SAXON WIDOW *recovers, throws arms up:*

Mercy!

FREDERICK *at a distance:*

The Heavens are empty, Madame!

Saxon widow stands up, extends arms towards him.

And I

am the King.

SAXON WIDOW

Do you have a heart?
FREDERICK *statesmanlike*:

And not
for myself.

Pacing through room.

Your husband, for example is
An honorable man, and his honor is Saxon.
So, what does Prussia's honor mean to him
Which my obligation is to oversee, as King of Prussia
Even if it breaks my heart. Madame,
The heart of a king is a wound.

SAXON WIDOW *weeps*:

Your Majesty.

FREDERICK *sings*:

Oh if you only knew Madame
of my lonesome nights.

SAXON WIDOW *steps towards him, arms extended*:

And mine, Your Majesty.

FREDERICK *steps back, drawing rapier*:

Ah

How this breast longs for this consolation! –

Crowned heads! Rotting Europe!

This example to you all of how a king dies!

Intends to set the rapier to his breast, but his arms are too short, the rapier too long, he reaches his midriff.

SAXON WIDOW *taking rapier*:

No, Your Majesty. You mustn't. My husband

FREDERICK

If only I could. You're right: I shouldn't.

I would be the happiest of all Prussians, if

Another could be King of Prussia.

How I envy my victims their death

They are allowed to die, but I must kill.

SAXON WIDOW I am inconsolable, Your Majesty. My husband

FREDERICK If only I were in his place.

SAXON WIDOW *closes eyes*:

Oh, Your Majesty.

FREDERICK A man of honor. He has only one honor.

This is alas Saxon, and of what significance

Is the honor of Saxony next to my glorious Prussia.

They'd screw their mothers against the wall

For Prussia's honor without batting an eye.

And what to me is an honorable deserter

Is to my bold eagles only a Saxon fleck of shame

To be wiped away for a pure Prussia.

If you've never had the opportunity, Madame

You'll soon have it, to witness
An execution. A dreadful spectacle.
Saxon widow howls, Frederick steps in front of mirror.
What an astonishing construction [Bildwerk] is humanity.
Holds face in hands, peers through fingers, turns away from mirror.
If only Nature hadn't created him.

I

brief glance in mirror

and how he looks with twenty bullets.

Enough of that. Humanity has one defect:

The world would be Prussian, if my Prussians

Would stop gorging drinking whoring shitting.

Enough of that. God is a swine, yes?

If He even exists. Are you a believer, Madame?

SAXON WIDOW

I pray.

FREDERICK Better pray quick.

Looks out window/into audience.

A picture of a man.

And here before my window must it be

That it is destroyed.

Takes the veil away from the Saxon widow and lays it over his face.

Was he good in bed

Widow?

Saxon widow howls.

FREDERICK *dancing:*

I am the widow-maker. Making

Wives [Weiber: wife, woman] into widows, woman [Weib], is my trade.

I empty the beds and fill the graves.

Laughs, lets the veil fall.

Now you can play with yourself, widow

Quakes

Until a fresh belly rubs against your belly.

Cries

That I must see it. Here. With these eyes.

Grandly

Should I close my eyes, when my word

Becomes the Law? Were I blind. Ah

Takes the veil and blindfolds himself.

SAXON WIDOW

Poor king.

FREDERICK

Did you say mercy? Do you want the king

To be unable to look into my eyes

And into my Prussians, who risk

Any death for me, run the gauntlet etc.

Into the mothers, who slaughtered their sons for him

And into history, which did not spare him a moment

Of its gaze. Do you want that? Can you
Want that?
Saxon widow shakes head violently.
And yet, what's king what's Prussia
What's history, I'll throw it all away at your word.

On bended knee

Madame, I shall give you my posthumous fame
If you wish, for your small happiness.

SAXON WIDOW

How could I, Your Majesty! My great King!

Lifts Frederick up, takes the blindfold off him, dries his face with the veil, puts veil on again, puts chair in front of the window, in the direction of the audience, sits down with Frederick on her lap, cradles him and sings

HAPPY IS HE

WHO FORGETS

WHAT IS NOT EVER TO BE CHANGED

Drums. One hears the guard march up.

FREDERICK *springing from the Saxon widow's lap:*

Madame, it is time.

Glances through the window/into audience, covers eyes

I can't look.

Permit me.

Crawls behind the Saxon widow, his head peeking out from behind her. The Saxon widow tears the veil back, freezes with wide-open eyes through the window/into the audience. Volley. Simultaneously Frederick jumps onto the woman's back.

FREDERICK *on the woman:*

Did you see that. That stings.

Strangles her with the veil. The Saxon widow throws arms high, falls over with the chair and Frederick.

My royal sympathy.

SAXON WIDOW

My children.

FREDERICK *with mask of eagle: [Adel: eagle, also nobility]*

My cannons need fodder, wench

Why else do you have a sex in your flesh.

Exit Saxon widow quickly.

DEAR GOD PLEASE BLESS ME WELL
BECAUSE I COME STRAIGHT FROM HELL

Prussian madhouse. Crippled soldiers play war-games. Veterans practice goose-stepping and running the gauntlet. Rat-hunt. Man in cage. Child in bandages. Woman in stupor.

WOMAN *sings*:

There once were three rogues
Sweet roses in bloom
Dressed up as three Dukes
Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

They came to the innkeeper's wife
Sweet roses in bloom
Could you rest three dukes for the night
Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

Well the barn and stables were empty
Sweet roses in bloom
Couldn't I keep three Dukes overnight
Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

The first led the horses to the stables
Sweet roses in bloom
The second spread the fodder
Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

The third sprang into the kitchen with water
Sweet roses in bloom
And kissed the innkeeper's daughter
Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

The first said the maiden is mine
Sweet roses in bloom
I bought her a flask of wine
Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

The second said the maiden is mine
Sweet roses in bloom
I bought her a jeweled ring so fine

Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

The third said we're not worthy of the maid
Sweet roses in bloom
So let's divide her up with our blades
Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

They stretched her on a table so wide
Sweet roses in bloom
And gave her seventy cuts astride
Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

And wherever a drop of blood did land
Sweet roses in bloom
There a little angel still stands
Mountain, vale, and icy frost
Sorrow of parting and love long-lost

Professor with students.

PROFESSOR A murderer. From adultery to murder of the spouse, a single step. The spouse was a Supreme Justice of the Court. Her residence in our institution is due to the unfortunate fact that the executioner was drunk. Our magnificent king gave Prussia the potato. And how do his brave country nobles thank him.

STUDENT With potato schnaps.

Students laugh.

PROFESSOR She was given clemency after the third attempt. You see the three scars on her neck. And so she stands before us, an incompleteness.

The woman tears the clothes from her body. Attendants with straitjacket. Struggle.

The straitjacket. An instrument of dialectics, as my colleague from the philosophical faculty would conclude. A school of freedom in point of fact, you need only look, understood as an insight into necessity. The more the patient moves, the tighter he binds himself, he himself, mind you, into his own determination. Everyone is their own Prussian, in the popular dialect. Therein lies the educational value, the Humanum so to speak, of the straitjacket, which could as easily be called the freedom-jacket. The philosopher would conclude, that true freedom lies in catatonia, as the purest expression of the discipline which made Prussia great. The conclusion is beguiling: the ideal state grounded on the stupor of its population, eternal freedom on global stoppage of the bowls. The physician knows: states rest on the sweat of their peoples, the temple of reason on pillars of faeces.

STUDENT In the popular dialect.

Students laugh.

PROFESSOR I must insist that you take a more scientific attitude, gentlemen. Just look at this boy, become an idiot due to masturbation. The ruin of a blooming childhood. *Boy*

sticks tongue out. And the triumph of science: the masturbation-bandage which I developed myself. A simple as well as sensible construction, as you see, whose judicious application reforms, over time, even the most hardened little sinner. *Boy spits. Attendants gag him.* It is adjustable according to size, and may I say this, gentlemen, if you will permit me the patriotic digression: I for my part consider it no accident that my modest little invention is being applied in the enlightened Prussia of our virtuous monarch. A triumph of reason over crude natural drives. This is not to gainsay the daily application of the whip, but merely to note that the moment it is no longer applied, the moment that the disciplining hand of even the best pedagogue tires, for humanity, alas, is not a machine, than the stubborn recalcitrant, without even waiting for the weals of his punishment to scar, reaches for the shameful grasp of the tool which the Creator has reserved for procreation, in Christian marriage of course, for even he is cast in God's image, He created him in His own likeness, as a certain theologian put it. *Students laugh.* I will not name him. *Students laugh.* A blasphemy. Just imagine the Lord God masturbating, deus masturbator.

STUDENT Or a certain theologian.

PROFESSOR *laughs:* After four weeks in the bandages, which function as the, so to speak, mechanically extended and tireless arm of pedagogy, even the most corrupted lecher forgets his sex. May I demonstrate.

Attendants loosen bandage. Boy rubs his numbed arms, his face distorted with pain, tears the gag from his mouth and reaches for his genitals. Students laugh.

Raging: An idiot. – Bind him. – The bandage was too loose. Utter negligence.

Boy is bound, howling.

STUDENT 1 Suggest amputation, Professor.

STUDENT 2 Castration.

STUDENT 3 Better double sewn than once-flown.

Students laugh.

PROFESSOR A cutting suggestion, my dear sir. But as a medical specialist [Humanmediziner] I must insist on my more modest method. All good things in due time, young friend. The knife of the surgeon is the ultima ratio. – Present him again in three weeks.

MAN IN CAGE I murdered my son, my Jesus. Give me the whip. Give me the whip.

PROFESSOR Give it to him. *This is done. Man in cage flagellates himself.* He calls this expiation for the creation of the world. Zebahl, Zebaoth, also called the bloody Baal by the students entrusted to his disciplinary hand. The hand is well-trained, as you see, corporal in the Seven Years' War, a teacher according to the book. Jesus was his favorite, so named by his fellow students, because he didn't take part in their pranks. Perhaps because Zebahl, as gossip has it, had some share in his extramarital production. *Students laugh.* An angel in any case with which the teacher shared his bedroom. *Students laugh.* The rest is in the Bible. *Students laugh.* When Zebaoth inflicted a punishment on his young pupils, Jesus offered to take the blame. He wanted to take the punishment himself, one for all, the lamb of God. His creator, moved to tears by this display of virtue, accepted. And so as not to fall short of his creature in terms of spiritual glory, as well as to double the pedagogic effect, he did more than required, by allowing the sinners to make an example for all. They did so thoroughly: God Zebaoth has no son anymore, the village a new school-teacher, and the history of medicine a high-point: God as patient.

ZEBAHL I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed.

STUDENT 1 I hear you created the world, Zebahl.

ZEBAHL Yes, it's my fault. Everything is my fault. I'm all-powerful.

STUDENT 2 *crosses hands in front of genitals:*

And I'm the Virgin Mary.

STUDENT 3 I'm Jesus.

Arms like wings flying. This is the Ascension.

STUDENT 4 *sticks out belly:*

I'm the Pope in Rome.

ALL FOUR *kneeling before cage:*

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN

Students laugh.

PROFESSOR A madhouse. Which we knew all along. Let us go, gentlemen.

Professor and students exit.

ZEBAHL *whispers:* Yes, I created the world. I am the Fool, I am the Criminal. I can tear my eyes out and still see you. If only I could die. I killed my son. I Filth of my Creation Vomit of my Angels Suppuration in my Harmonies. I am the Slaughter-Rack. I am the Earthquake. I am the Animal. The War. I am the Wasteland. *Shriek. Black angels populate the audience-chamber and fall silently on the theater-goers.*

ET IN ARCADIA EGO [Horace: “And I, too, was in Arcadia”]: THE INSPECTION

Turnip field. Peasant family stoops in furrows. A lectern is placed close to the stage-lights, a marble block next to the field. A boys’ choir takes position, mouths open to sing. A swarm of painters set up their easels. Friedrich Schiller steps behind the lectern, the sculptor Schadow goes to the marble block. Enter Frederick of Prussia with his crooked walking-stick, officials and Voltaire. Officials place two chairs. Frederick and Voltaire sit down. Schiller recites THE PROMENADE, wracked by coughing fits. The sculptor Schadow works the marble block, now and then taking the measure of the peasant woman, when she stands up in the furrow and stretches her back. When she can no longer bend down, because her back is stiff, the male peasant drives her with a blow of the fist back into the furrow. Frederick assumes a royal pose. The painters paint. The boys’ choir sings NO FINER LAND CAN JOY BETIDE / THAN THIS LAND OF OURS SO FAR AND WIDE

FREDERICK gets up, steps forwards, points, always royally, pausing at length for the painters, making an effort due to gout, occasionally repeating a pose or improving it, prepares to speak, glares indignantly at Schiller, who continues to recite THE PROMENADE even though the boys’ choir has fallen silent. Officials empty a turnip sack and pull it over his head. One hears his dull coughing during pauses in the following.

Indeed: no spectacle [Schauspiel: also theatrical play] is dearer to the eye of a king than a blossoming province, populated with the industrious folk of the land, engaged in peaceful toil. Next to the raising of crops, the arts bloom as well... O the meager beauty of my Prussia! I employ the possessive pronoun not as such, my dear Voltaire, but rather in relation to the unity unité [French: unity] of the state and the people, which Prussia is setting as an example for the world. I am the people, if you know what I mean.

Applause of officials.

FREDERICK with megaphone to peasants:

The oranges are growing nicely, aren’t they.

PEASANT ramrod straight, along with his family:

Yes of course, Your Majesty, the turnips.

FREDERICK Did he say turnips.

PEASANT CHILDREN (7)

ONE TWO THREE FOUR FIVE SIX SEVEN

PEASANTS LIVE IN TURNIP HEAVEN

FREDERICK We’ll see about that. Let him try one.

Throws the peasant a turnip. The peasant eats the turnip.

FREDERICK Does he like his oranges, the bastard?

PEASANT spitting teeth: The oranges are delicious, Your Majesty.

Voltaire throws up on the ramp.

FREDERICK to the peasant: Well done. – A peasant dance for our guest from France. They hand him the flute. The officials put rooster-masks on the heads of the peasant, his wife and children. Frederick plays a rebellious peasant dance. Voltaire holds his ears. Peasant family dances in the furrows. Applause, also from Voltaire. The peasants return the rooster-masks to the officials.

To Voltaire: An art-loving people, my Prussians.

To peasants: Try it next year with bananas.

Frederick turns to go. A painter holds up his canvas. Frederick, after glancing at the picture, points with his walking-stick at the statue which has meanwhile taken shape: a female nude Art is beauty. Ten strokes for the buffoon. An official hits the painter over the head with canvas, his colleagues paint his face black. Scene begins to break up.

FREDERICK ET IN ARCADIA EGO. Points to the audience. See the herd, peacefully grazing. Prussia, a homeland for folk and cattle.

VOLTAIRE takes a turnip: A souvenir. The Prussian orange.

All exit. Only Schiller and the peasants remain on the stage. The male peasant crows, topples the statue, and beats the woman and children with his fists to make them work even faster. Schiller, without the lectern, the sack still over his head, coughs at the footlights.

FREDERICK THE GREAT

Rooms converging on narrow door in Sanssouci [palace in Potsdam]. In front the State Council: minions and Councillors, with papers. Heartbeat and breathing of dying king. Whisper-chorus of Councillors, slowly rising: He's croaking He's croaking He's croaking. Heartbeat and breathing stop. Silence. Wind tears papers from hands of Councillors whirling driving across the stage. The State Councillors chase after papers. More papers blow onto the stage, into the audience. Curtain with black eagle [state emblem of Prussia].

HEINRICH VON KLEIST PLAYS MICHAEL KOHLHAAS

Despoiled shore (lake by Straussberg). Kleist, in uniform. Kleist-puppet. Woman-puppet. Horse-puppet. Executioner's block.

Kleist touches face breasts hands sex of the Kleist-puppet. Caresses kisses embraces the woman-puppet. Strikes off the horse-puppet's head with rapier. Tears out the woman-puppet's heart and eats it. Tears uniform from his body, wraps the head of the Kleist-puppet in the uniform's fabric, puts on the horse's head, hacks the Kleist-puppet to bits with rapier: roses and intestines stream out. Throws horse-head aside, puts on wig (hair down to the feet) of the woman-puppet, breaks rapier over knee, goes to executioner's block. Takes off the wig, spreads the woman's hair over the executioner's block, bites his own artery open, holds the arm, out of which rustles sawdust, over the woman's hair on the block. From the flies a grey sheet is thrown over the scene, on which a red fleck quickly spreads.

LESSING'S SLEEP DREAM CRY

1

PROJECTION (SPEAKER)

THROUGHOUT HIS ENTIRE LIFE LESSING FELL INTO AN EXCEPTIONALLY DEEP SLEEP WHICH ARRIVED AS SOON AS HE CLOSED HIS EYES HE OFTEN ASSURED ME THAT HE HAD NEVER HAD ANY DREAMS HE RETAINED THIS PIECE OF GOOD FORTUNE UNTIL HIS VERY END AND SAID SHORTLY BEFOREHAND THAT EVEN WHEN HE HAD SLEPT THE ENTIRE DAY HE STILL LOOKED FORWARDS TO THE NIGHT (Leisewitz)

Actors are made up (Lessing-mask) and costumed. Stage-hands place table and chairs.

ACTOR *reads*:

My name is Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. I'm 47 years old. I have one or two dozen puppets stuffs with sawdust which was my blood, dreamed a dream of theater in Germany and reflected publicly on things which did not interest me. That's all over. Yesterday I saw a dead fleck on my skin, a patch of desert: the dying is beginning. Alternately: it's accelerating. Which is by the way just fine with me. One life is enough. I've seen one new era dawning after another, dripping blood excrement sweat from all pores. History rides on dead horses to its finish-line. I've seen the Hell of the Women from underneath: The woman on the gallows The woman with the slashed arteries The woman with the overdose ON THE LIPS SNOW The woman with the head in the gas-oven. For 30 years I've tried to keep myself from the abyss with words, consumptive with the dust of the archives and the ashes, which blow from the books, choked by my increasing disgust with literature, burned by my ever more intense longing for silence. I've envied the deaf and dumb their silence in the chatter of the academies. As well as the noiseless partaking of the flesh [Beischlaf], in the beds of the many women who I did not love. I begin to forget my texts. I am a sieve. More and more words fall through. Soon I will hear no other voice than my own, asking for forgotten words. *Friends appear, debate soundlessly, sit down on chairs.* For some time now I've start to forget their names. *Friends draw stocking masks over their faces.* To forget is wisdom. The gods forget quickest of all. Sleep is good. Death is a woman. *Actor freezes in Lessing-mask, friends in debating poses.*

2

PROJECTION (SPEAKER)

FROM THE PRUSSIA OF FREDERICK THE SECOND GOLD IN GOOSE-STEP SILVER RUNNING THE GAUNTLET COMES LESSING TO AMERICA LAND OF THE POTATO WHICH WILL MAKE PRUSSIA GREAT AT AN AUTO JUNKYARD IN DAKOTA HE MEETS THE LAST PRESIDENT OF THE USA.

Auto junkyard. Electric chair, in it a robot without a face. In between under the auto-wrecks classical figures of theater and film stars in various accident-poses. Music WELCOME MY SON WELCOME TO THE MACHINE (Pink Floyd WISH YOU WERE HERE). *Lessing with Nathan the Wise and Emilia Galotti, their names on their costumes.*

EMILIA GALOTTI *recites*:

Force! Force! Who cannot resist force? Force is nothing: seduction is true power! I have blood, my father, as warm and youthful as anyone's. My senses too are senses. I'll stop at nothing. I'm worth nothing... Give it to me, my Father, give me this dagger...

NATHAN *recites at the same time the conclusion of Ring-parable*:

Wherefore...

Police siren. Emilia and Nathan exchange their heads, undress embrace kill each other. White light. Death of the machine on the electric chair. Stage goes dark.

STIMME (+PROJECTION)

HOUR OF SUNBURST DEAD BUFFALOES FROM THE CANYONS SQUADRONS
OF SHARKS TEETH OF BLACK LIGHT THE ALLIGATORS MY FRIENDS
LANGUAGE OF THE EARTHQUAKE WEDDING OF FIRE AND WATER
HUMANS OF THE NEW FLESH LAUTREAMONTMALDOROR PRINCE OF
ATLANTIS SON OF THE DEAD

3

PROJECTION

APOTHEOSIS SPARTACUS A FRAGMENT

A pile of sand on the stage, which covers a torso. Stage-hands, dressed as theater-goers, shovel sand from buckets and sacks on the sandpile, while attendants arrange busts of poets and thinkers on the stage. Lessing burrows into the sand, digging out a hand, an arm. The attendants, now in hard-hats, encase Lessing in a Lessing-bust, which covers the head and shoulders. Lessing, on his knees, makes vain attempts to free himself from the bust. One hears his muffled cry underneath the bronze. Applause from the attendants stage-hands (theater-goers).