

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 6, Number 1 (Spring 2016)

Editor: Adam Versényi
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The Mercurian is named for Mercury who, if he had known it, was/is the patron god of theatrical translators, those intrepid souls possessed of eloquence, feats of skill, messengers not between the gods but between cultures, traders in images, nimble and dexterous linguistic thieves. Like the metal mercury, theatrical translators are capable of absorbing other metals, forming amalgams. As in ancient chemistry, the mercurian is one of the five elementary “principles” of which all material substances are compounded, otherwise known as “spirit”. The theatrical translator is sprightly, lively, potentially volatile, sometimes inconstant, witty, an ideal guide or conductor on the road.

The Mercurian publishes translations of plays and performance pieces from any language into English. *The Mercurian* also welcomes theoretical pieces about theatrical translation, rants, manifestos, and position papers pertaining to translation for the theatre, as well as production histories of theatrical translations. Submissions should be sent to: Adam Versényi at anversen@email.unc.edu or by snail mail:

Adam Versényi,
Department of Dramatic Art, CB# 3230,
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3230.

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Editor's Note

As the summer heat and humidity begins to descend upon North Carolina, welcome to the unavoidably delayed Spring 2016 issue of *The Mercurian*. The issue begins with Karen Rosenbecker's new translation/adaptation of Aristophanes' *Wealth*. As she describes in her introduction, *Wealth*, while quite popular with both Jacobean and Victorian audiences, has largely been neglected by modern theatre practitioners and scholars interested in Aristophanes' work. With its emphasis on income inequality *Wealth* is particularly timely for our current presidential race in which a wealthy businessman with no previous governmental experience has captured the Republican Party's nomination. Rosenbecker's version of Aristophanes' comedy also transposes it to a contemporary New Orleans still grappling with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the 2008 Recession, and the consequences of both in widening the gap between rich and poor in the city.

The issue continues with Amelia Parenteau's translation of Alain Foix's *The Last Scene*. The play is a poetic and musical exploration of Martin Luther King's influence on Mumia Abu-Jamal, the Philadelphia activist and journalist currently serving a contested sentence of life without parole for the 1981 murder of a Philadelphia police officer. Foix's play explores the connection between Mumia and MLK through a series of conversations between Mumia and the widowed Coretta Scott King. I first came into contact with Foix's work during the Translation (Re) Convening of The Fence, The Lark and TINT (Theatre in Translation) at the O'Neill Theatre Center in Waterford, CT in January 2015. Both Parenteau and Foix were in attendance and *The Last Scene* received its first workshop readings there.

The Last Scene is followed by Catherine Styles' fresh and highly theatrical new translation of Jean Racine's classic *Phaedra*. Racine's alexandrine rhyme scheme is always a challenge for English translation that doesn't share French's natural ability to rhyme. Consequently, Styles employs what she describes as a "relaxed iambic pentameter" creating in the process, to my mind, a successful mode for conveying Racine's unbridled passion and tragic power.

The Mercurian has always welcomed not only translations of plays and performance pieces themselves, but also production histories of theatrical translation. *Phaedra* is followed by Sara Freeman's article (reprinted from Theatre Historiography.org) "Researching and Directing Guillén de Castro's *The Force of Habit*", which describes Freeman and her dramaturg Hannah Ferguson's approach to directing this Spanish Golden Age *comedia* for a contemporary audience in Kathleen Jeffs' translation. Not only is it a fascinating production history in and of itself, but Freeman's direction of Jeffs' translation also returns us to the early days of *The Mercurian* when Jeffs' article "The Evolution of Translation Values from Pre-Production through Rehearsal" appeared in Vol. 1, No. 4 (Spring 2008).

The issue concludes with Will Harrington's book review of the collection (*A*)pollonia: *Twenty-First-Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage*. Several collections of contemporary Polish drama have recently been published and we hope to review them in future issues of *The Mercurian*.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can be found at: <http://drama.unc.edu/related-links/the-mercurian/>. As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 6, No. 2 (Fall 2016) will be August 30, 2016.

--Adam Versényi

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Wealth
By Aristophanes
Translated by Karen Rosenbecker

**Pre-Modern Austerity Measures:
The Capricious Economy of Aristophanes' *Wealth***

Aristophanes' *Wealth* (Πλοῦτος, often Anglicized as *Ploutos* or *Plutus*) lampoons the endemic poverty suffered by the citizens of ancient Athens after the disastrous end of the decades-long war their city waged against Sparta and her allies. The play's episodic plot involves an average citizen who, upon discovering that the god Wealth has been blinded, hatches a plan to restore the god's sight, so that the deity will be able to avoid the greedy and to dispense riches to the virtuous poor. Of course, given the generic kinship between Aristophanic comedy and satire, it's not surprising that a great deal of the play's humor and social commentary is generated by juxtaposing criticisms of the unprincipled rich with implications that the virtuous poor, once given money, will become avaricious and corrupt themselves. *Wealth* was first performed in Athens in 388 B.C. and although we do not know how the original audience received it, we do know that for most of its history, *Wealth* has been an also-ran in terms of garnering consideration from scholars of Classics. In addition, records of productions of *Wealth* on the Anglophone stage are scarce, especially in comparison to productions of *Lysistrata* or *Frogs*; this dearth also stands in stark contrast to a continuous tradition of production of *Wealth* in modern Greece. In recent years, however, Anglophone theatrical interest in *Wealth* has increased precipitously. Given this burst of modern attention, it is fair to say that *Wealth*, in terms of its popularity, is having a moment on the American stage in particular.

But why is *Wealth* having that moment right now? The simplest answer is that the play's depiction of an economic downturn caused by war hits very close to home for many people in the U.S., because the parallels to the effects of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and to the impact of the Great Recession are so obvious. But there is also a deeper connection between the on-stage world of ancient Athens and the real world of the 21st century U.S. than just the shared background of an economic "crash." This connection has to do with the impulse to imagine our past in contrast to our present. We seem, if only atavistically, to share a collective memory of "the good old days," when things were simpler, when money was not so tight, and when life was easier for everyone. These are rose-colored glasses, to be sure, but it is worth pointing out that in the U.S., we are only two decades removed from the economic boom-years of Bill Clinton's presidency, and yet now more wealth rests in fewer hands than at anytime before the Stock Market Crash of 1929. In this same vein, *Wealth* gives us a look at an ancient Athens that has squandered unthinkable amounts of wealth and natural resources in pursuing war with Sparta, and has thereby condemned her citizens to the poorhouse. As the characters on stage complain about the current poverty and recall the former prosperity, modern American audiences are hard-pressed not to see a reflection of our current situation and our own thoughts about it.

For other nations, this cycle of millennial boom and twenty-tens bust is also a familiar one,

especially—and ironically, in this case—for Greece, which has gone from seeming an economic dynamo to tumbling into a financial abyss all in the span of a decade, and now must also cope with the economic and social pressure of the Syrian refugee crisis. And here I should call particular attention again to the fact that if *Wealth* can be said to have a modern tradition of active performance and translation, it is in Greek theater; moreover, there are also records of a notable presence of the play on the German and Italian stage since World War II, as well. When we consider the comparative lack of productions of *Wealth* on the modern Anglophone stage, its absence is even more notable because early records for performances of *Wealth* show that the play was in fact a favorite in Jacobean England, and that it enjoyed another spike in popularity in Victorian England. How, then, did *Wealth* fall out of “heavy rotation” on the British stage and garner only a small presence on the American one prior to the economic contraction of the Great Recession? Early English adaptations of the play were said to have eliminated the problematic, and at times illogical, relationship of merit to reward that runs throughout Aristophanes’ script; in these adaptations, material wealth came to those who were virtuous, and the play then became a straightforward moral allegory of virtue rewarded. If this is true, those early Anglophone adaptations and performances chose not to include a large portion of the original’s ability to explore the timeless concerns of the human condition, something Greek drama excels at. To be sure, this philosophical level of Greek drama is more obvious in tragedy when, for example, Sophocles’ Oedipus is asked “who are you?”, but Aristophanes is no slouch at finding ways to explore existential conundrums. In particular, *Wealth* raises pointed questions about the reasons for the unequal distribution of material and monetary resources, a line of inquiry foregrounded in the prologue when the main character asks the Oracle of Delphi: “Why do the rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer? Why is it so hard to get ahead, no matter how hard I work? Why do I get punished for playing by the rules while others get rewarded for breaking them?” With so many people world-wide coping with chronic poverty, un/underemployment, and crippling debt, and with our heightened awareness of how the “flat world” of Thomas Friedman links us all in a financial symbiosis, it is understandable that questions of economic justice and fairness feel more urgent to answer than the riddle of the Sphinx. And, in a world in which social media and the 24-hour news cycle connect us with such potent immediacy, it is also harder to maintain the illusion that possession of wealth is a sign of moral virtue, rather than an accident of birth or the result of a corrupt system.

To turn from stage to page, why had *Wealth* been languishing in comparison to most of Aristophanes’ other comedies, in terms of modern scholarly attention? Part of the answer has to do with the condition of the play, part with how different *Wealth* seems from the other comedies, and part with established consensus. Although the text of *Wealth* is complete, it is not whole; the choral odes are missing, including the *parabasis*, the central choral episode that in other comedies introduces Aristophanes’ views on matters ranging from politics, to religion, to pop culture. In addition, *Wealth*, with its focus on post-war poverty, seems to retreat from the larger world of the *demos*, the public sphere, and into the smaller world of the *oikos*, the family home. The play does not feature a prominent or troublesome political figure, like Socrates in *Clouds*, and it seems to eschew criticizing problematic social institutions, like the ineffectual lawcourts of *Wasps*. In terms of 20th century scholarly assessments of the play, American and British scholars in particular level some criticisms so

brief and blunt that they feel ripe for a platform like Twitter; one in particular, that *Wealth* is so weak Aristophanes must have written it after a stroke, remains my all-time favorite. Other discussions point to the play's lack of logic in framing the debate about the merits of virtue and effects of material wealth, to its humor, which feels hackneyed compared to the deft political satire of earlier works, and to the concept of a blind Wealth, which has been judged as uninspired compared to the lively magical realism of other plays.

In part, the relative dearth of treatments of *Wealth*, both on the Anglophone stage and within Classical scholarship, reflects a larger trend in working with Greek drama as a whole. Although the genre of Old Comedy was a major part of theatrical festivals in ancient Athens, only eleven comedies, all by Aristophanes, have made the journey into the post-modern world. Perhaps more importantly, modern translating of Aristophanes in English began in earnest first in the 1960's, with the "Chicago Aristophanes" series helmed by Douglass Parker and William Arrowsmith, and here I should qualify this statement. There are English translations of *Wealth* that date back to the 19th century and beyond, but the revolution of the "Chicago Aristophanes" series was to popularize the comedies, to bring them to a general audience in a format that was accessible to modern readers, and to translate them in a way that reflected their content, even the objectionable elements. Aristophanes' facility with obscenity, with sexual hijinks, and with toilet humor has flummoxed commentators for centuries in part because all the swear words and dick jokes seem so incongruous with the decorous speech of tragedy, but also in part because of the translators' own cultural taboos. As a result, many earlier commentators—and this is true not only for scholarly works in English—simply ignored such humor, some chose to discuss the off-color ancient Greek only in Latin, and others chose to edit out such lines entirely. The effect is not only to neuter the comedy, but also to keep full access to the text in the hands of a small group. I do not think it is a coincidence that the first modern scholarly discussion and analysis of homosexuality in ancient Greek culture and the first systematic discussion of obscenity in Aristophanic comedy were both released after the "Chicago Aristophanes" series popularized an Aristophanes who seemed more a contemporary of Lenny Bruce than of Euripides.

In terms of Anglophone theater, productions of any Aristophanes' play prior to the 60's were infrequent and, when produced, heavily edited. It is even rare to find records for pre-World War II productions of *Lysistrata*, a play that is now regarded as canonical and is widely adapted and performed. And here, again, part of this trend stems from the predominance of tragedy. As a genre, tragedy is accorded an immense amount of cultural and intellectual capital thanks in no small part to Aristotle's *Poetics* and the conceptual framework it provides. We do not have Aristotle's promised work on comedy, and perhaps that is a good thing, because speculative reconstruction of "On Comedy" has it looking like a cut-and-paste of his discussion of tragedy, with key words and phrases altered to reflect funny plays instead of serious ones. But Aristophanes' comedies exhibit many more differences from Greek tragedy than they do similarities. On an Aristotelian level, comic heroes have no character arc; they don't err in word or deed, they don't recognize their mistakes, they don't engage in self-discovery, and they don't help to reveal a poignant truth about the human condition through their downfall. Their jokes hinge on obscenities, taunting, and even ethnic humor; they

often break out the “old chestnuts” from prior plays, lamenting that the audience will groan to hear them and then quickly adding that they will go away disappointed if they don’t. Their debates traverse the space between the mind and the phallus, seguing in flash from sophisticated criticisms, to simplistic talking-points, to “splaining” with their fists. Aristophanic comedy also does not hide behind the veil of myth the way tragedy does. Although the gods appear, comic heroes often best them and are freed from following established mythic storylines, as Agamemnon or Medea must; comic heroes also move in and out of a version of Athens that balances real world concerns with a touch of magic. As a result, they can spout populist rhetoric and contemporary references, all while singing with frogs or dancing with birds. In fact, it’s tempting to suggest that instead of some sort of comic version of Aristotelian catharsis, Aristophanes’ plays hinge on something closer to Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, in which the audience is prompted, through episodic plot structure and the breaking of the fourth wall, to distance themselves from issues and topics, and to engage in active and critical spectatorship. Perhaps another analogy for the holistic structure and effect of these comedies might be an American Vaudeville review, with its interactive and presentational style of performance that swings between set-pieces and musical numbers, all designed to keep the audience entertained, engaged, and in their seats.

Having said all that, I should take a moment to note that *Wealth* is one of the tamer plays in terms of obscenity and sexuality, and even this garnered it criticism from those who prefer the glee with which characters in other plays swear, fart, and fornicate. But there is one facet in which *Wealth* outshines the other comedies, and that is in reflecting the concept of *thalia*. When capitalized, *Thalia* becomes the name for the muse of comedy, but the word itself describes a blooming, an awakening of the earth after the dormancy of winter, the end of one state and the beginning of another. Aristophanic comedy is intimately connected with the idea of rebirth and revolution, with the chaos of change. But *thalia* also implies that change is cyclical, that while spring may be glorious, it also means that winter is coming. In *Wealth*, there are many signs that the poor, in crafting their escape from poverty and redistributing resources, are doomed to repeat it all again someday. That friction undercuts the celebration, problematizes it, and makes *Wealth* more than an allegory about virtue rewarded and deeper than a fantasy about the ancient equivalent of hitting the lottery. Ultimately, tragedy may be more accessible, it may seem more circumspect and wise, but as Aristophanes himself points out in the *Acharnians*, comedy knows what’s right, if you’re smart enough to listen.

When I began adapting *Wealth* for the stage, I knew I wanted to create something that was not a “straight” translation meant to accurately reflect the target language; there are many wonderful literary translations that do exactly this and that are fun to read as well. I also knew I did not want to adapt a script-for-performance that stayed close to the original in terms of its on-stage action, since there is a delightful version that does so admirably. And I made these decisions not because I felt that faithfulness to the original was boring or an unnecessary consideration, but because I felt that to adapt the ideas and themes of *Wealth* into a new culture would sharpen certain aspects of the play’s criticism of what happens to those who control money and to those who do not, and so I chose to “localize” the adaptation, by channeling ancient Athens through post-Katrina New Orleans. The devastation to the on-stage world at the outset of *Wealth*, the topsy-turvy carnival nature of the

action, and concern for basic fairness that is both individual and universal, all these considerations felt to me as if they highlighted an on-stage world that blended two “cities that care forgot.”

Between 2005 and 2015, New Orleans suffered the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, the environmental and economic problems created by the Deep Water Horizon oil spill, and the ongoing fiscal erosion of the Great Recession. These major blows to the city’s economy and infrastructure, along with ongoing concerns about violence in the city and corruption in its administration, have cast New Orleans as a stereotypical and familiar representative for a city suffering the effects of a vicious turn in fortune. But, much as Aristophanes chose to show the effects of the war but not have his characters discuss it, in this *Wealth* the damage to the on-stage Athens-as-New Orleans is signaled by the environment, by the presence of blue tarps, which are ubiquitous in the Gulf South as markers for damaged homes, by the background of boarded-up houses signifying foreclosure or abandonment, and by trash on the stage to underscore that the city had in effect shut down.

However, in re-presenting Athens as New Orleans, I also wanted to foreground two other fundamental aspects New Orleans culture that highlighted important themes in Aristophanes’ original. One was the desire to give voice to the anger and frustration of city’s residents, especially the women who have suffered and continue to suffer a disproportionate level of economic hardship in the wake of these disasters, and who continue to suffer an income equality gap nationwide. When I first began writing the adaptation for the script, I was serving jury duty for the Orleans Parish criminal courts. Jury duty is a universally trying circumstance, but it is perhaps more so in Orleans Parish, which requires eight days of service for criminal court and provides little by way of compensation or amenable setting for such hours. One day, my group was held an extraordinarily long time while a judge and a lawyer played a game of legal chicken as to whether their case would go to trial. As the clock ticked past 5:00 PM, one of my fellow jurors, a woman whose family had been in New Orleans since time immemorial and had weathered the Depression, the Jim Crow South, Hurricane Betsy, and Hurricane Katrina, finally broke. She stood up in the jury-room and with great authority announced, “Enough! I’ve had enough!” She then proceeded to tell her fellow jurors, the jury clerks, and the deputies who leaned in to listen, that she was tired of being punished for doing the right thing while others were rewarded for breaking the rules, that she was tired of being played for a fool as she squandered her time and money sitting here, when others had ignored the court’s summons and were out making money for bills. Her frustration at this lack of basic fairness felt like a rallying cry for Aristophanes’ impoverished characters in *Wealth*, and I adopted her initial expression (“Enough! I’ve had enough!”) as the opening line of the play and as a touchstone for characters throughout. In light of that moment, I also knew that part of the “localization” would be to reverse the genders of many of the characters, taking Aristophanes’ impoverished farmer-men and turning them into underemployed women who were scrambling to make ends meet. This recasting of genders led also to a female goddess Wealth, who begins the play homeless and marginalized, and a male god of Poverty whose penchant for repeating financial talking-points and coining sound bites mark him as a *serviteur* of Adam Smith’s Invisible Hand and a symbol of corporate entitlement. As the characters form their plans and move to defeat Poverty, the audience

is confronted by the income inequality gap that still exists between men and women.

The second aspect was the city's annual ritual of Mardi Gras, which I hoped would be a distinct and accessible modern parallel for the dramatic festivals of Dionysus in ancient Athens. The City Dionysia and Mardi Gras represent, for their respective cities, a time when business ceases, parties abound, and public spectacles involving parades and performances occur throughout the civic space. Like the City Dionysia, Mardi Gras celebrates the idea of *thalia*, the flourishing that will be followed by scarcity (in this case, by Lent), but it also touches at a theme integral to *Wealth*, in particular the idea of reversals of fortune. During Mardi Gras parades, krewe members enjoy an elevated, even superhuman status. Many parades feature extended royal courts, and riders dress in a manner that both adorns their person and conceals their identities, the latter being a point of law. As the ornate and elevated floats roll along, krewe members dispense glittering throws and baubles to the spectators who clamor below. And part of the fun is knowing that today's spectator may be the queen of the parade that will roll tomorrow, that those now dancing on the edge of the crowd will be marching in the center later. Thus it is too with the characters of *Wealth*; as much fun as it may be, their parade will end, and questions as to whether or not they deserve to hold on to their riches, or whether they even deserved them in the first place, are left for the audience to decide.

There are other alterations made in adapting *Wealth*, ones not prompted by localizing the play to New Orleans, that I should mention because they are significant departures from the original. First is the abbreviated quality of the adaptation. The Athenians loved to listen to debate and oral performance; this proclivity is amply attested to by the extended forensic and competitive dialogue in drama. But in adapting *Wealth*, I wanted to emphasize the rapidity of changing fortunes and to highlight the sense that the characters were rushing pell-mell towards a future none fully understood. With this in mind, much of the dialogue is pared down in comparison with the original, and this version of *Wealth* has no intermission and bears a running time of approximately 75 minutes. Second, the other major change is to the content of the *agon*, the formal debate, between Poverty and the main character, Inida. Although I have allowed some of Poverty's points to go unanswered (as they do in the original), I have given Inida a chance for a more organized response than Aristophanes allowed her counterpart, Chremylus. I made this choice because, while I do appreciate the combination of *chutzpah* and fairy-tale sweetness in Chremylus wishing Poverty away so forcefully that the deity leaves, I think that it is important, at this historical moment, to be able to give an accounting of the case against the financial powers-that-be, even if such ideas are contained in comedy and therefore shaped by that consideration. Finally, Aristophanes' love for lists of material things, and especially of good food, has found a convenient parallel in New Orleanians' passion for their favorite restaurants, and here the state of wealth could be no better described than access to one's favorite dishes taken from a laundry list of favorite restaurants. What remains are assorted updates of Aristophanes' penchant for throwing in tired jokes now and then for the audience to roll their eyes at while enjoying them nonetheless, and much breaking of the fourth wall, in part to bring across the metatheatricality inherent in Greek drama, but also to honor the holes in Aristophanes' script, to allude to the idea that the play is a bit undone, and that perhaps even the actors don't quite know where this is all heading or how their fortunes will turn out, not unlike those

of us in the audience.

Karen Rosenbecker
Loyola University New Orleans

Aristophanes (c. 446-386 BC) is the only writer of Greek Old Comedy for whom we have complete plays. He lived and wrote in an ancient Athens beset by the ravages of war with Sparta, but also one in which theatrical performance nonetheless formed the heart of civic celebration and religious ritual. Through a deft mix of social criticism, raucous obscenity, and magical realism, his eleven surviving comedies skewer and satirize the quotidian irritations and monumental failures perpetrated by those who ran his city. His oft-adapted *Lysistrata* has become canonical not only for its ability to speak truth to power, but also for its ability to show the importance of theater within a community.

Karen Rosenbecker holds a Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Pittsburgh and is currently an Assistant Professor of Classical Studies at Loyola University New Orleans. Her work with Aristophanes' *Wealth* also includes an article in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* on Aristophanes' re-presentation of the norms of profanity ("Just Desserts: Reversals of Fortune, Feces, Flatus, and Food in Aristophanes' *Wealth*"; volume 108), and a discussion of staging of *Wealth* in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina ("Currency Exchange: Staging Aristophanes' *Wealth* in New Orleans"; *Didaskalia* 11.5). Currently, she is exploring how one might use film clips from American Vaudeville acts to illuminate performance practices in ancient Greece and Rome.

The following translation/adaptation of Aristophanes' *Wealth* is copyrighted to Karen Rosenbecker 2013.©

Aristophanes' *Wealth*

Characters:

Inida:	A middle-aged woman, her name is pronounced "I need a"
Carry:	Inida's close friend, a younger woman
Wealth:	Goddess in exile
The Working Girls	Three in number
Faith:	Neighbor of Inida
Poverty:	God of Economics
Just Citizen	Who has experienced a reversal of fortune
Mortgage Broker	Who has also had a reversal of fortune
Boy Toy	A former gigolo
Old Cougar	His former employer
Hermes:	God in transition
Priest of Zeus	Who is seeking new employment

A deserted street lined with shotgun-style homes. The one in the middle, Inida's house, is covered with a blue tarp, a familiar sight in the Gulf South for indicating a damaged home. The other houses also look a bit shabby; one is boarded up, its X-Code search marker from Katrina faded but still visible. Overflowing garbage cans wait in front of them at the curb, as if pick up has been delayed, or forgotten.

Wealth enters. She is unappealing, hunched and stooped, wearing grotty clothes. She fumbles through the garbage cans muttering to herself, nothing coherent. There is something feral about her.

From the opposite side of the stage, Inida and Carry enter. Both women are dressed in faded garments and have wilted garlands on their heads. Huddled close to one another and whispering they watch Wealth forage from a safe distance. Eventually, Carry shakes her head, stands back from Inida.

Carry: Enough! I've had enough!

Inida: Shh!

Carry: It's bad enough you drag me all the way to the oracle of Delphi. And look at these pathetic excuses for garlands they gave us! The whole place is like a ghost town now...not even the bars survived. It gave me the creeps, and then....

Inida: Shhhh!

Carry: And then you blow your question to the oracle!

Inida: Shhhh!!

Carry: And now I'm following a crazy lady...no, make that following two crazy ladies, and I've had enough and I'm going home!

Inida: (*whirling around on her, setting a hand on her mouth*) SHH-SHHH-SHHishy Shish! I asked the oracle exactly what I wanted to and now I'm doing exactly what it told me to, and that was to follow the first person I met on the street, and that is her.

Both turn to look at Wealth, who is doing something with her garbage treasures.

Carry: Outstanding. And they wonder why no one goes to Delphi for advice anymore. Think it's too late to get a refund?

Inida: No, it's not that. It's just...*look* at her.

Carry: Yeah, I can see her just fine. I just wish I didn't have to smell her, too.

Inida: I mean, it can't be a coincidence that she's the first person I meet.

Carry: Ok, tell me one more time exactly what you, in your infinite wisdom, decided to ask the oracle.

Inida: Yeah, yeah. I know we agreed I'd ask for the winning lottery numbers, but... But when I got to the oracle and went back into the temple, the outside world seemed to just fall away, somehow. It was like the marble columns came to life and created a path for me back into the holy place. The poets say that, once upon a time, Apollo slew a dragon on that very spot and freed us from the fire and chaos of the elder gods. And for a minute, when I was standing there, I could still feel that power and glory, like it must've felt in days of yore, when it really meant something to stand before a god. And so I wanted to ask a question that really meant something, too.

Carry: Ok, and so what exactly was the really meaningful thing you asked?

Inida: Why do the rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer? Why is it so hard to get ahead, no matter how hard I work? Why do I get punished for playing by the rules while others get rewarded for breaking them?

Carry: And in answer to that, the really meaningful god of yore said, "Follow the first person you meet?"

Inida: Yeah. But hey, it could have been worse, he could have told me I'd kill my father and sleep with my mother.

Carry: Yeah, poor Oedipus. How's he doing?

Inida: I don't know, it's like he wants to disappear...he's even stopped using Snapchat.

Carry: Oh, that is bad.

Inida: Yeah.

Both women turn back to Wealth.

Wealth does something big and comic with her garbage treasures.

Carry: Ok, enough is enough. Let's find out who she is that the oracle sent us to her. Excuse me, ma'am...ma'am?

Wealth: FUCK OFF!

Carry: Well, that's a good start.

Inida: Ma'am, we'd just like to talk with you.

Wealth: AND YOU CAN FUCK OFF, TOO!

Carry: Oh, yeah. This really is the meaningful wisdom of Delphi in action.

Inida: Ma'am, my friend and I are just wondering if we can help you, maybe help you get back to your family? If you tell us your name?

Carry: Wanna bet it's "Fuck Off"?

Wealth: No, no, no! Just go away, leave me be!

She stumbles over a garbage can. Inida and Carry step in to help her up.

Inida: Oh, dear! Here, let us help you.

Carry: Yeah, you really need to watch where you're going...I mean look after yourself...I mean...

Wealth: I know what you mean! And yes, I am blind. Oh, the Sophoclean irony of your comments!

Inida: Please, won't you tell us who you are?

Wealth: Oh, no, no, no...and even if I did, you wouldn't believe me.

Inida: Try us.

Wealth: I...am Wealth.

Carry: What!?

Wealth: I told you you wouldn't believe me.

Inida: You're Wealth? The goddess Wealth?

Wealth: Yes. Now please, just let me go.

Inida: Wealth, the goddess? Living on the streets and blind?

Carry: Hey! I thought Love was blind?

Wealth: Oh, no! That bastard enjoys seeing the damage he does.

Carry: This is crazier than I thought.

Inida: But Carry, don't you see? This all makes perfect sense! Wealth is blind, and that's why she

can't control where she goes! That's why we've all gotten so poor!

Carry: Hey! That would explain a lot.

Wealth: It's true. I've been wandering like this for years. And I've learned the hard way not to trust anyone! Every time some smooth talker lures me into his clutches, I wind up felt up and passed around until I'm all but used up. And the richer they get, the shittier they treat me. Back before the war, the great general Perikles kept me in the women's quarters as his concubine. During the war, his successor Cleon locked me in a chest like a coin collection. And now that everything has gone to Hell, this congress ordered a coffin, and I knew what was in store for me. I just barely escaped with my life.

Inida: Well, now your worries are over. We won't lock you up. We can help you and...

Wealth: Noooo! Oh no, you don't! I'll take my chances on the streets!

Carry: But, don't you want us to help you? You can't possibly want to live like this.

Wealth: But at least I'll be alive!

Inida: I don't understand. What are you so afraid of?

Wealth: What am I afraid of? What you both would be afraid of if you had any sense: The Wrath of Zeus!

There is an audio/visual tag here, something ominous and obvious, like a roll of thunder and a flash of lightning.

Carry and Inida look up and around at the sound. Both are puzzled.

Inida: O...K. Ok, but if we could help you regain your sight...

Wealth: You two are dumber than a barracks full of Spartans! How do you think I got blind in the first place?!

Carry: Was it (*pause*)...the Wrath of Zeus?

Audio/visual cue again. Again they look around.

Carry: (*off to the techs*) Ok, is that going to happen all play, because it's already not funny anymore.

Inida: (*glaring offstage*) I'm not sure it was funny the first time. (*back to Wealth*) What I'm trying to ask you is this: If we can restore your sight, would you visit the poor, the decent, hard-working folk who have suffered so much?

Wealth: Honey, that's why Zeus blinded me in the first place.

Inida and Carry: What?

Wealth: Mmm hmm, he hates mortals.

Inida and Carry: What?!

Wealth: And decent, hard-working ones in particular.

Inida and Carry: WHAT??!!

Wealth: Mmm hmm. Can't stand any of you and hated me for feeling the opposite. (*parsing this next bit carefully*) That's why, in his wrath, Zeus...

All pause for same audio/visual cue, none comes. All look relieved.

Wealth: (*continuing*) That's why he got angry and blinded me. To hurt you, to hurt me. To keep control of all the world's wealth for himself and for people like him.

Inida: Of course! This is why Zeus is the king of the gods! Not because he's the most just, not because he's the wisest or even the most powerful, but because he's got the most money! And how things work here on earth, it reflects that same order! Our leaders, they're not the best, the truest servants of the democracy, they're just the richest. Like the old saying goes, those who have the gold make the rules!

Carry: Well, I'll be damned.

Wealth: And thanks to Zeus, you already are, and you will continue to be. You've only now figured out just how screwed you are. This world of poverty, this is Zeus' plan for you, for me, and for everyone, forever and ever. Now please, just let me go.

Inida: Wait! I think I know how we can change this, undo it, make things make sense again!

Wealth: No, no...it's hopeless!

Inida: Wouldn't you like to see again, to be able to give everyone what they truly deserve?

Wealth: Yes. Yes, child, I would.

Inida: Well then, just leave everything to me. Come on, let's get you off the street and inside my house.

Wealth: But...but I don't know you. How can I be sure you won't abuse me and hoard me away like the others?

Inida: Because you've never had a woman look after you before. And of all the women in the city, you won't find a more clever one than me. My name is Inida.

Carry: But her friends call her Needy.

Wealth: I'll bet they do.

Carry: But Needy, I don't understand. How are we going to...?

Inida: (*bustling Wealth under the tarp and into the house*) Just get the Working Girls together and explain it to them.

Carry: Explain what?!

Inida: Oh, Carry! Don't you see? This is like winning numbers for the lottery. No, it's better than that. It's like all of us having a winning ticket. Because once we restore Wealth's sight, we are all going to be rich!

Exit Inida and Wealth into the house.

Enter the Chorus of Working Girls. They are three in number, dressed in clothes that indicate they are minimum wage workers. They move slowly and are obviously tired. Initially, they are disinterested in conversing with Carry.

Chorus:

- (1) Oh, Lord! I am so tired! How long can this go on?
- (2) That's what I keep asking myself.
- (3) Even through there's never an answer.

Carry: Come on, my sisters in labor. My friends in need? Hurry up! There's no time to lose!

Chorus:

- (1) Huh! Time is all we got! Time to work one job, two jobs, three jobs. Ain't that fun?!
- (2) Except when we lose those, and then there's none. And then again, all we've got is time to find the next run, the next big old pile of shift work.
- (3) But why have you called us? Can't you see we're:
 - (1) on a break
 - (2) heading to the next job
 - (3) going to turn in an application

Carry: But that's what we're trying to tell you. All this can stop now. She has come to set us free. No more endless labor for rewards that never begin!

Chorus:

- (1) What are you talking about?
- (2) What's going on?
- (3) Where's Inida?

Carry: She's inside with HER. She's old and bent and much abused, and you can smell her coming a mile away, I'll grant you that. But, oh, if she is who she says she is, all our troubles are over!

Chorus:

- (1) What the Hell are you talking about?
- (2) Inida's working from home?
- (3) Trafficking in homeless people?

(All) We don't understand.

Carry: As a matter of fact, she reminds me of you! All sour faces and pessimism, not even willing to imagine things could change, not even able to remember that things used to be different.

Chorus: (1) You're one to talk! All you've ever done is hide behind

Inida's skirts!

(2) And encourage her in all those crazy get-rich-quick schemes that never work.

(3) Wait! Is this another football pool?

(All dissolve into crosstalk despairing of the Saints)

Carry: No, it's not about the Saints, it's not about anything like that at all! Oh, you wouldn't guess in a million years!

Chorus: (1) Then quit calling us out here! We've got work to do!

(2) And to look for.

(3) And to dodge.

(They turn to go)

Carry: No, no, no, wait! I won't keep it a secret any longer! Inida's found her, found in the last place you'd expect and by the last person you'd expect, that's for sure But it's her, it's Wealth. Inida finally has found Wealth. I mean the real, honest-to-Olympus goddess Wealth.

Long pause.

Chorus: (All) We have to get back to work...

Carry: But that's what I'm trying to tell you! You don't need to work anymore! You've worked enough and now you're going to be rich!

Chorus: (1) If, if what you're saying is true...

(2) You mean we can really be rich?

(3) We don't have to work like we do?

Carry: No! It will be like it was in the Golden Age, when Old King Cronos ruled! All of humankind at one big perpetual feast! The world in a constant state of celebration! Just picture it! Our tables groaning with food that cooked itself! Cakes that walk up to you and pop themselves right into your mouth! Everything from olives to eels swimming in sauce and washed down with vintage wine! And on our land, fruit that hops off the trees and brings itself in from the orchards! Sheep that herd themselves!

Chorus: (1) A chance to bring in the harvest in peace, seeing our men
stripped to the waist and working the threshing floor...
(2) Not girding up their armor and marching off, or sailing
away to seek fortune on foreign shores...
(3) Oh, to be able to sleep in with your beloved, and then
wake up to find a problem no bigger than an overturned wine
jar and last night's dirty dishes...

Carry: That's it! That's it exactly! You remember!

Chorus: (1) Yes, yes, we do. There was a time when it was fair, when it
was right.
(2) But who, who made it otherwise? Who took that from us?
(3) Those days are gone forever, we should just let them go,
but...
(All) We've got to know.

Carry: Zeus, it was Zeus. He ended the Golden Age with the Golden Rule. He who has the gold...

Chorus: (All) Yeah, we know... "he who has the gold rules."

Carry: So, then, the only question is, what are you willing to do about it?

Pause. The Chorus looks at one another, nodding, coming to agreement.

Chorus: (1) We say, enough!
(2) We've had enough!
(3) Let's hang the jerk who invented work!

Carry: Yeah! Let's us be the bosses!

Chorus: (1) Just like the story of Odysseus with the Cyclops! When he
ground their bones to make his bread, they didn't just take it,
they went on strike! They organized their labor base and
blinded the monster!

Carry: And when Circe tried to co-opt them, to change them into pigs...

Chorus: (2) They didn't give up! They seized her by her means of production, hung her up like a goat, and fed her the same bullshit she fed them!

Carry: And that's what we need to do, too!

Chorus: (3) We're ready! Tell us, just tell us what we need to do.

Inida emerges from the house. The Working Girls immediately gravitate to her.

Inida: Comrades, to thank you for coming sounds too formal, we've been friends for so long, but formality is necessary at the beginning of such an endeavor.

Chorus: (1) We know.
(2) We've heard.
(3) We're with you.

Inida: Every step of the way?

Chorus: (All) To Olympus and back again.

Inida: Then let's hope it doesn't come to that. Come on inside so that you can meet her and we can all...

Carry: Oh, no! Here comes Faith!

Inida: Ugh, that gossipy bitch again? Quick, inside! I'll take care of her.

Carry and the Working Girls push inside the house. Enter Faith. Her clothing, too, is drab, but she herself is painfully perky, even her voice is annoying.

Faith: Hiya, Inida!

Inida: Faith.

Faith: When I heard you call for us, I came just as fast as I could. Zeus knows, I do like to be here when something goes wrong...er...so that I can help my friends, I mean.

Inida: But that's just it, Faith. It's not that things have gotten worse, in fact they're about to get better, to change for the better forever!

Faith: Oh, Needy, is it as bad as that?

Inida: What?

Faith: That you've finally turned to a life of crime. I always knew you were desperate, honey, but I just can't bear the thought of you in the Big House.

Inida: No, it's not that, it's...

Faith: I just want you to know, I've got your back, girlfriend.

Inida: Thank you. Wait...no...

Faith: And when the judge asks me about all this, I'll say, "no, your honor, I had no idea what was going on. Inida was always such a quiet girl, she wouldn't hurt a fly...or so we thought."

Inida: Faith, so help me if you don't shut up...

Faith: Ooh! Do you think you'll do hard time? Be locked up with a bunch of desperate, dangerous, rough men...stuffed into hot, dark, tight cells, their bodies all glistening with sweat from lifting weights in the yard?

Inida has become unfocused and aroused listening to this, abruptly she snaps out of it.

Inida: Wait a second! Faith, you hijack everything! I called you here because it's good news, for once I've got good news to share!

Faith: Oh, well, that's nice too, dear.

Inida: It's better than nice, it's...it's...revolutionary.

Faith: Well, I don't want to get involved with anything too radical. But I guess you've always had less respect for the state than I do. Are you running a sleeper cell or is this theoretical treason?

Inida: No, it's not radical like that, it's...it's...Oh, Faith, I'm going to come right out and tell you. I've got Wealth inside!

Faith: Oh, is that all?

Inida: Is that all? Why, it's more than all, it's everything! Faith, you don't seem to understand.

Faith: Yes, Needy, I think I do. You've had a good month and you don't need to hold a rent party.

Inida: No, I don't need to have a rent party or a plate sale ever again, and neither do you.

Faith: Well, I never have. I just don't pay the electric bill on the months I'm short because legally the city won't let them cut you off before....

Inida: Faith, I've got the goddess Wealth in my house.

Faith: Wealth?

Inida: Yes.

Faith: The goddess?

Inida: Yes.

Faith: In your house?

Inida: Yes.

Faith: I need to sit down.

Inida: And she's going to make us rich, and she's going to make all the decent, hard-working people like us rich, too, and she's going to punish the wicked and...

Faith: And when does she start?! Oh, Needy, I always knew someday one of your crazy schemes would work.

Inida: Thank you.

Faith: I mean, even a broken clock is right twice a day.

Inida: Thank y...hey!

Faith: Of course, honey. Now let's get her out here and start worshipping for dollars.

Inida: Wait, wait, you're still not listening. It's not going to be that simple.

Faith: Uh-oh, here we go. Is this the punchline?

Inida: Faith, I'm not trying to be funny.

Faith: And we really should be, because our director told them this play would be funny and educational.

Inida: Faith, she's blind!

Faith: Who? Our director? Say, that would explain a lot.

Inida: No, you idiot! Wealth! Wealth is blind!

Faith: Oh? Ohhhh! Now I get it! So that's why I've never seen her.

Inida: No! She's *blind*, not invisible! She's never seen *you*, she's never seen any of us. That's why we're poor. That's why she keeps getting kidnapped. She can't see where she's going or who's got her.

Faith: Holy Demeter, that makes sense! Well, at least as much sense as the actions of the gods ever do.

Inida: You know that's right. So, all we need to do is restore her sight and we're in the money, honey.

Faith: Alright, I'm in. Who do we contact first? The head of our local phratry? The demarch in charge of our neighborhood? Ooh! All the way to the assembly? I'm not sure I've got the dress for that anymore.

Inida: No! We are keeping this "in house," just us. This is too good of an idea to...

Faith: No, Inida, that's a bad idea, and I don't mean bad like it's good...

Inida: Oh, Faith, you don't know what's good for bad! We are going to do this ourselves. And first

we need to...

In bursts Poverty; he has all the markings of the business world elite (good suit, tie, new shoes) which stand in sharp contrast to the drab world we've seen so far. His face is made up, there is a sheen about it. The charts and graphs he brings with him are bright, oversized, their graphics nonsensical.

Poverty: Hold it right there, ladies!

He sets up his charts with a flourish.

Inida: Excuse me? Who are you?

Poverty: I'm from Olympus and I'm here to help.

Faith: And I'm outta here.

Inida: Faith, don't leave me. I need you to help me deal with this guy.

Faith: A middle-aged businessman setting up a presentation? You're right you're going to need help...help staying awake.

Inida: More like I'm going to need help getting rid of him, if he is who I think he is.

Poverty: (*finishing adjusting his charts, etc.*) I got here just in time, I see.

Inida: Just in time for what?

Poverty: Why, to save you from yourselves, of course. You ladies are tampering with forces you can't possibly understand.

Inida: Is that right? And who are you that you understand everything?

Poverty: Ladies, I am Poverty.

Faith has been backing up and creeping off stage this whole time.

Inida: Of course you are! I knew it! Why you son of a... (*realizes Faith is edging away*) Faith, get back here! Remember the part about having my back?

Faith: But it's Poverty, the most pernicious, nasty, cruel god of them all!

Inida: Which is exactly why I need you to help me. We can't let him bully us into surrendering Wealth.

Poverty: Ladies?

Faith: But it's *Poverty*! The only thing to do is run and hide from him!

Inida: Does that work? Has that ever worked?

Poverty: Ladies?!

Faith: No, but...

Inida: Then maybe it's time to confront him!

Poverty: Ladies, if I could have your attention.

Faith: Ok, but don't expect any help from me.

Inida: Typical Faith.

They turn towards Poverty.

Poverty: Thank you. Now, it has come to my attention that you two have, by some incomprehensible set of circumstances, managed to locate and detain the goddess Wealth.

Inida: And if we have?

Poverty: If I may finish. And that you two are about to concoct some sort of hare-brained scheme to restore her sight.

Faith: Her scheme, not mine.

Inida: And if we are?

Poverty: Then you should be grateful I am here, just on the off-chance you might have succeeded and thereby ruined the economy.

Inida: Ruined the...?

Faith: Exactly how much worse could it get?

Inida: More to the point exactly how would healing Wealth destroy anything?

Faith: Yeah, wouldn't it do the opposite and fix everything?

Poverty: Why, of course not. In fact, it would create even more problems.

Faith: Oh, so it would do the opposite of the opposite.

Poverty: Exactly.

Inida: Don't listen to him, Faith. He's trying to trick us.

Poverty: No, you ladies misunderstand me and who I am. I have always been and will always be your benefactor, your ally, your patron divinity.

Inida: But a self-appointed one! We don't want you, we don't need you, never have and never will.

Poverty: Alright, alright. I understand that economic theory is sometimes confusing for you people.

Inida: "You people"?! Just what the...

Poverty: So I will make you a proposition, a "deal" if you will.

Inida: I know what "proposition" means!

Faith: I didn't.

Poverty: Debate me. And if I can't convince you that I'm responsible for all the good in both the economy and the world, I will depart willingly and gladly leave you to your folly.

Poverty extends his hand to her by way of sealing the deal.

Faith: Go on, Inida. You can take him.

Inida: I don't know, Faith. They say you can't shake the devil's hand.

Poverty: Well, ladies. Do we have a deal?

Inida takes a deep breath, steps up and shakes his hand.

Inida: You're on. Get ready to get packing because by the time I'm done, no city in Greece will have to tolerate you anymore.

Poverty: I understand you may feel that way because you haven't been properly educated about my importance. Rest assured that once I've broken it all down in a way you can understand, you will be among my most avid supporters.

Faith: Oh, he really does need to have every square inch of his ass kicked. Go get him, Needy.

Inida: Alright, let me "break this down" in a way you can understand. Let's begin with the obvious. It's only fair that the good people should prosper while the wicked experience the opposite. That's all we want. And now we've finally found a workable plan to achieve just that. If Wealth regains her eyesight, she will be able to visit the good people and she will be able to shun the wicked. As a result, everyone will be good because everyone will want Wealth.

Faith: Oh, that's just so smart, Needy. Who could come up with an idea better than that?

Poverty: This is worse than I'd feared. You two have been sold a bill of cut-rate goods and shoddy socio-economic theory. Let's just start with the basics. Under the system you've delineated, who will plow the fields, build the ships, or run the forges and foundries that keep this city going?

Inida: That's nonsense. The same people who always do...the farmers, the shipwrights, the blacksmiths.

Poverty: But they won't. They'll have money, so why will they need to work?

Inida: Well, we'll get it all imported, then. From Thessaly, or Egypt...or from China, if needs be.

Poverty: But that won't work either. Once you release Wealth, you don't think she will only affect the local economy, do you? The world is flat, ladies. Once you put her back in circulation, she will go everywhere.

Faith: I thought the world was round.

Inida: Shhh!

Poverty: And even if you could keep her just in Athens, who would want to run the risk of being in the shipping business? Remember, all the people who now run import companies won't need to anymore. They'll be rich.

Faith: Wow, he sure seems to know his stuff. And look at all those graphs and charts. I don't know what they mean, but they're sure impressive. Maybe we...

Inida: *(to Faith)* Shhh! *(to Poverty)* You about finished?

Poverty: Oh, not at all. Consider what happens when the things you now own wear out. You won't have any bedding, because no one will want to weave it. You won't have any pots, because no one will want to throw them. You won't have any bread, because no one will want to bake it. In fact, it's only thanks to me and what I compel humans to do that anything gets accomplished at all.

Think about it.

Why did the first fire get lit? Because of me.

Why did the first wheel get turned? Because of me.

Why did the first ships ply the seas? Because of me.

Why do humans till the soil? Because of me.

How did Athens become a great state from a tiny city?

Because of me.

The Acropolis, the Law Courts, the Theater of Dionysus, Tragedy and Philosophy, Politics and Comedy, Democracy itself.

It's all because of me.

I, Poverty, am the Invisible Hand that has goaded and guided humankind down from the trees and up off your knees to stand as masters of this planet. Without me, even if you have the world's wealth, you will wind up scratching in the dirt like savages, surrounded by your money and your own filth.

Long pause.

Faith: Needy, I think...

Inida: No, Faith, no, you don't. *(to Poverty)* And you. All you've done is convince me that my plan is not only right, it's morally necessary. Because, men and women want to work. It helps us define ourselves, it gives our lives meaning and dignity. The world of the unchained Wealth will be one in which we work because we enjoy it, because our arts and skills bring pleasure to ourselves and others.

Because we are called to teach,

To preach,

To dance

To paint

To create

To lead

To govern

To inject some virtue into the body politic.

We are at our best when we do what inspires us, and then share that inspiration with others. And that is what we've done all across human history, not because of you, *but in spite of you*. You're taking credit for things accomplished by pride, and by drive, and by love. And you think that because you have been present throughout human history, you've somehow controlled it. But that's like a rooster believing that his crowing brings up the sun every morning. Once Wealth has been restored to us, you'll see how truly inconsequential you are. You'll see, when humanity's natural impulse to create and to share is set free from the shackles of money, when all of us are free to make what we really want, and to take what we really need.

Faith: Oh, wow! That's beautiful, Inida. It's like poetry.

Poverty: Yes, yes! Bravo! It is poetry you're talking. Empty-headed nonsense based on fanciful thinking and divorced from the reality of economics.

Inida: Oh? And just what is economics based on?

Poverty: On the unassailable logic of rational and enlightened self-interest.

Faith: But, if that's the case, wouldn't it be in everyone's enlightened self-interest to be rich?

Poverty: Ladies, please! You're deliberately missing the point!

Inida: No, I think she's right on it. You tell me, what would be the problem with every full-time job paying a living wage?

Poverty: Why, if every full-time job had to provide a living wage, unemployment and underemployment statistics would skyrocket, businesses would go bankrupt, and economic growth would be stifled!

Faith: Sounds like that's what's going on anyway.

Inida: And why is it that women still—even after two wars and decades of economic growth—women still make less than what men do?

Faith: We do?

Inida: Mmm-hmm. 77 obols to his drachma.

Faith: But we work 77 times as hard!

Poverty: Ladies, ladies, please! You have to look at this situation rationally!

Inida: Which is code for “see things my way.”

Faith: Yeah, with him it’s “my way or the highway.”

Inida: Ooh, good one, girl.

Faith: Thanks. I thought it might be a little old school.

Inida: No school like the old school.

They exchange high fives.

Poverty: Enough!!! I’ve had enough!! This world you envision, this land of plenty, simply can’t exist. There can’t be a place of peace and prosperity without there also being a place of conflict and deprivation. Some have to suffer so that others can thrive.

His outburst has been loud enough to bring the Working Girls out of the house.

Inida: Ah, I see. So it’s down to “Are there no prisons, are there no workhouses?”

Poverty: Don’t put your Dickens in my mouth! He was writing about abject beggary and a complete lack of resources. I’m talking about the natural fluctuations of the market. Ladies, there is no easy way out of this economic mess. You’ve got to understand that unleashing Wealth upon an unsuspecting populace is not the solution. Austerity measures are necessary because you have to shrink the economy in order to grow it again. You people at the bottom just need to wait for capital to work its way down the ladder to you. Be patient and remember, a rising tide floats all boats. The market will eventually reward you for your labor.

Chorus:

- (1) And just how does “the market” give me recompense for
the time I’ve missed with my children?
- (2) And how does it pay me back for the pain of sprained
wrists and aching knees?
- (3) And how does it give me back the joy I’ve missed because
I don’t have time for a life outside my jobs?

Inida: You see, neither you, nor your corporate master Zeus, nor the “all-powerful market” can fix any of that. The only one who can is Wealth.

Faith and Chorus: Yeah!

Inida: Only she can set things right. Only she can restore to us what is rightfully ours.

Faith and Chorus: Yeah!

Poverty: Ladies! You're making a mistake of epic proportions!

Inida: Oh, there's no such thing in comedy, honey.

Poverty: You're wrong! You're unleashing forces you don't understand and can't control!

Inida: That's a risk I'm willing to take.

Poverty: But you're taking it for everyone everywhere! Please, try and think. If Wealth makes everything the opposite of what it is now, what will that make you?

Pause.

Inida, Faith, Chorus: RICH!

Poverty: No! Wait! You've got to see that you can't spend your way out of inequality. Money doesn't magically make everything better. Ladies, please, you can't buy a stairway to heaven!

All pause and pull back.

Faith: Did...did he just quote Led Zeppelin?

Inida: Then let's get on with this before someone starts shouting for "Freebird." Time for a little economic stimulus, ladies!

Chorus: (All) Let's take out the trash!

They grab him by the shoulders, the seat of his pants, and rush him off the stage.

Poverty: Nooooo!

Faith follows with his charts, which she gleefully tosses off after him.

Faith: And don't forget to recycle!

Inida: Now all we need to worry about is...

Carry emerges from the house, very excited.

Carry: Inida, Inida! I've got it! I know how we restore Wealth's sight! Listen!

They gather together around the stoop, as Carry narrates her plan.

As all hustle into the house in a huddle of conspiracy, stage hands clean up the garbage. They then remove the blue tarp to reveal not the iconic New Orleans shotgun home, but the façade of a temple with the word "Wealth" carved on the pediment. Audio/visual effects interlude: colored lights flash across the temple, the sound of a slot machine paying out a jackpot.

After a pause, Faith emerges from the house. Her costume has some color to it, as does her makeup.

Carry come running, rushing, stumbling onstage. Her face, too, has color, her costume less drab, the garland she now wears is full of blooming flowers.

Carry: Water, give me water. No, it should be wine! It should be champagne! It should be liquid gold! And soon it will be!

Faith: Carry, here, sit! Deep breaths, honey, deep breaths. Now tell me, what happened?

Carry: Wealth...can see again!

Faith: Oh, Carry! How did you do it? How did you manage it?

Carry: Medicare fraud.

Faith: What? You mean you really?

Carry: Sure. It was easy.

Faith: But isn't that...?

Carry: Brilliant? Visionary? Inspired?

Faith: Lying? Cheating? Stealing?

Carry: Look at it this way: if it helps everyone, is it wrong?

Faith: I guess not, when you put it that way.

Carry: But let me tell you how it worked.

Faith: Ok.

Carry: Picture the Temple of Asclepius, god of healing, high a top the Acropolis.

Faith: Ooh, the one with all the columns?

Carry: All the temples have lots of columns, Faith.

Faith: Oh, ok. I'm picturing it anyway.

Carry: Ok, so there we were, me and Wealth and Inida, lurking behind the altar.

Faith: Waiting for the god?

Carry: No, waiting for the right patient.

Faith: Oh.

Carry: We had just about given up hope. It was a long wait and the temple was slammed...chock full of veterans sick of waiting at the VA, women with the nerve to ask for birth control pills...

Faith: Those sluts!

Carry: But, no one with vision problems. Until, who should tap-tap-tap his way in but Neoclides.

Faith: The blind congressman from the Piraeus district?

Carry: One and the same! Apparently he goes to the temple at the start of every month looking to be healed.

Faith: How can he afford it?

Carry: It's that government health insurance he gets.

Faith: Geez, must be nice!

Carry: So in he tap-tap-taps, bellowing like a sacrificial ox, "Nurse! Take me to the front of the line and help me dedicate this rooster to the god!" But there was no nurse handy, they were all busy with other patients.

Faith: So what did you do?

Carry: So I pop up from behind the altar and pretend to be the nurse! I coo and fuss over the old walrus, telling him what an honor it is to serve him and blah blah blah. All the while I'm spinning him round and round until I've gotten the robes off his back and the rooster out of his hand. Then I tell him the altar's been moved and I lead him to the back of the line!

Faith: No! Then what?

Carry: Then we put the robes on Wealth, stuck the rooster in her hands, and shoved her to the front of the line!

Faith: You line-jumped and no one said anything?

Carry: No. They saw the robes and thought she was Neoclides.

Faith: Sounds like everyone there needed their eyes examined!

Carry: But wait, it gets better! When we get to the altar to sacrifice the rooster...

Faith: You know, we keep talking about roosters and yet no one's made a cock joke.

Carry: Hello, we don't want people thinking we're doing *Lysistrata*.

Faith: Those sluts!

Carry: Ok, anyway, we sacrifice the rooster and poof! The god himself appears in the smoke form the altar, all shining in sparkling white robes, his divine daughters trailing along behind him, and he says, "Neoclides, in return for your faith, I restore the light to your eyes."

Faith: He didn't even notice it was a woman?

Carry: No, you know that HMO's only let doctors see you for like ten minutes now; he didn't have time.

Faith: Those...wait, sorry, wrong line...So he healed her?

Carry: Yes, but that's not the best part. When he worked his way down the line to the real

Neoclides, he didn't recognize him. He saw him standing there in his underwear with no offering and he said, "If you are too poor to respect this temple, it is your manners that need healing, not your eyes." And he gave him a face wash of vinegar and lemon juice. And that only made Neoclides all the blinder!

Faith: But Wealth, what about her?

Carry: Oh, it was magical. When the altar attendants saw that the god favored her, they bathed and dressed her, fussed over her, and then returned her to Inida. They're on their way back now. I came on ahead to warn you. There's quite a crowd coming.

Faith: Really?

Carry: Naturally; once Wealth could see, and everyone could see her, they knew right away how holy she was.

Faith: Oh, look! I see them coming now! Wow, who would have thought there were that many just people in Athens?

Enter Wealth. She is nothing like we remember. Tall in her gleaming white robes, crowned with laurel, her face shines as if lit from within. As she leads the processional, she showers the audience with Mardi Gras coins/throws. She is followed by Inida, likewise in white and garlanded with a splash of color on her face. After them trails along a crowd that includes the Chorus and various extras.

Wealth: (*upon the steps of her temple*) First, I bow to the sun, grateful to see his radiance again, then to the famous soil of Pallas Athena and all the land of Cecrops which has received me, a weary wayward wanderer, come back to her own native shore, to the glory that is Greece and the grandeur that is home.

The Chorus and extras press up to the steps.

Inida: Shoo, shoo! Get back! Don't crowd me! Lord, don't long lost friend and distant relations appear when you're successful! You'd think I was Wealth and not her.

Carry: Well, you might as well be, Inida. You found her, you got us to help you, you fought off Poverty.

Wealth: And so you shall be the first to receive my benefits. I shall enter your home with my sight restored and make it the fountainhead from which all the good and decent folk of Athens receive my blessings. Come, my steward, escort me to your hearth.

Faith: Oh, this is so exciting!

Inida and Wealth link arms and parade into the temple. Maybe this reminds us a bit of a wedding ceremony. Carry and Faith trail up afterwards. Then everyone else.

More audio/visual effects of enrichment play across the temple.

After that interlude, Carry enters from the house, she has a bottle in one hand, her clothes should reflect her

enrichment: she is in more color, her make up more extreme.

Carry: If those of you in the audience haven't had the pleasure of living without expenses, let me recommend you try it. This house is exploding with goodies, even though we've done nothing wrong...well, sort of. Getting wealthy this way has been a piece of cake, which, by the way, Inida lets us eat. Oh, and the wine barrels are full of the dark, sweet stuff. Our purses are so heavy with gold and silver, the straps break. Our well out back is full of olive oil. We've so many bottles of perfume we've started bathing the dogs with the stuff. Our attic is full of figs. Our dishes have become gilt and our whole kitchen is carved from a gigantic piece of ivory. We're now using Athenian silver staters for pieces on our checkerboard, and, and...we've got a gold-plated outhouse with silk on the roll instead of Charmin. Beat that, if you can! And if you can't, you probably deserve what little you've got! Ha, ha, ha...Suckers!

Enter Just Citizen, with a glowing complexion, well dressed and groomed, but carrying a tattered set of clothes and beat-up shoes.

Just Citizen: Oh, noble lady! I am come to visit the Goddess.

Carry: And who are you?

Just Citizen: I once was lost, but now I'm found....

Carry: ...was poor, but now we're rich. Yes, I can tell just by looking at you, you're one of the good ones.

Just Citizen: That's right, and I'm here to thank the goddess for the blessings I've received. You see, I was a paragon of fiscal responsibility. I saved, I scrimped, I budgeted.

Carry: And how did that work out for you?

Just Citizen: It didn't. I did everything they told me I should, and I still never had enough. But then, I was told I could somehow afford a home, and I thought it was a miracle, that all my hard work and responsibility had finally been recognized. But it turns out what they gave me was an...

Carry: Let me guess.

Both: Adjustable Rate Mortgage.

Carry: And then you were ruined.

Just Citizen: Exactly right. And when I went broke, I was naïve enough to think that all the people I helped out when they were broke would return the favor. But oh no, they turned their backs on my, just like I was a stranger to them.

Carry: Bet they gossiped about you, too.

Just Citizen: Oh, you know that's right. It's like they enjoyed seeing bad things happen to me. And so I lost my house, my dignity, my self-confidence, (*tremulous pause*) my sex drive.

Carry: Whoa, now you're over-sharing, pal. But what's up with the dumpster rags?

Just Citizen: These? These are dedications to the Goddess. Just as in times of yore, when sailors were rescued from the chill, indifferent waters, they would dedicate plaques commemorating their salvation to the sea god Poseidon, so too have I brought tokens of my economic survival to the goddess Wealth.

Carry: You wore these?

Just Citizen: Through all the hard times. Now they bear witness to my reversal of fortune.

Enter Mortgage Broker. His power suit is dirty, perhaps looking like he's been in a bar fight and slept all night on the barroom floor afterwards.

Carry: Speaking of which, look at him!

Broker: Yes, look at me! Just look at me! I'm ruined! I'm cursed once, twice, three times over, infinity times over!

Carry: And just what have you suffered?

Broker: You tell me! I've lost everything! My house and my car are gone! My whole portfolio is in the toilet! All thanks to that Goddess who is going to be blind again if I have anything to say about it!

Broker moves menacingly towards the temple; Just Citizen and Carry move between him and the door.

Just Citizen: Whoa, whoa! I think I know what's going on here! Our visitor has lost his wealth, but like the proverbial bad penny, he himself just keeps turning up.

Broker: Where is she?! Where's the one who promised that we'd all be rich if Wealth regained her sight? Because the fact is that she's ruined us instead!

Carry: So, you were one of the unjust, predatory trouble-makers!

Broker: (*pointing at Carry*) And you, you must be the one who has taken all my wealth! My clothes, my house, my car, my fancy things, you've got them all now!

Carry: Aw, what's the matter? Can take it, but you can't dish it out?

Broker: This isn't funny!

Carry: That's what we tried telling the writer, but she wouldn't listen.

Broker: I demand my things back! I demand my money back. You...you STOLE it from me!

Just Citizen: Oh? And did you do any different to us with your complex and vexing contracts?

Carry: Yes, signing things in triplicate, in quautooplicate, adjustable rates, balloon payments, interest reproducing like rabbits....

Just Citizen: Then, when you call for help and explanations....

Carry: You get transferred to some call center in India where it's all Greek to them.

Broker: Don't blame me for your poor judgment. I was doing my job and offering you what the market dictated.

Carry: (*German accent*) You veer just falloving orderz, ja?

Just Citizen: And how many times did you following orders put families out on the street?

Broker: And putting me out on the street makes it all better because?

Carry: It's poetic justice!

Just Citizen: It's all kinds of justice!

Broker: How is any of this remotely just? You all become rich, I become poor, all for no reason other than someone decided that's how it should be?!

Carry: Pretty much.

Just Citizen: Funny how he was fine with it when he was on the other side of the equation.

Broker: Listen, just please, listen. Before the goddess regained her sight, you two were both activists against the ravages of Poverty, weren't you?

Carry and Just Citizen: Of course.

Broker: And you would have said no one deserves to suffer the indignities of poverty, right?

Carry: Of course, sure....

Just Citizen: Living in poverty is a violation of basic human rights....

Broker: Yes, it is. What does poverty do for a city other than produce legions of hollow-eyed children, raised up to be fodder for their own lice and ticks? Other than sit like a stone on the backs of fathers who cannot work hard enough to support their families? Other than hobble our elderly long before Old Age ever catches them?

Carry: A tragedy it is, when Poverty makes your city his home.

Just Citizen: Poverty robs us of joy, dims the fire of our hearth.

Broker: It cripples us all.

Just Citizen: Yes. But Wealth emancipates, gives us wings to be our best selves.

Carry: True dat!

Broker: Then, don't I deserve to be rich again, too?

Carry and Just Man look at each other; long, pensive pause. Then both break into mean-spirited laughter.

Just Citizen: OH, HELL NO!

Broker: Really?! Really?! How am I any different than....

Carry: Because some animals are more equal than others.

Broker: ...But you just said....

Carry: Enough! I've had enough! Get on out of here before I call security!

Carry and Just Citizen move threateningly toward Broker; he hightails it offstage, still sputtering.

Carry: Wow! Who knew poor people could be so annoying? Come on inside, I'll introduce you to Wealth.

She takes the Just Citizen's arm and they enter the temple.

Interlude indicating more enrichment of the house, greater display of colored lights, increased sounds of slot machine ringing up a jackpot.

The Three Working Girls exit the temple with clonmishly big wine cups. They too are dressed to reflect their enrichment—but it is starting to veer towards the tacky, their clothes over-bright, their make up and hair overdone.

- Chorus:**
- (1) So full! Can't possibly eat anymore.
 - (2) Inida conducting a triple sacrifice, a ram, a goat, a pig.
 - (3) So much smoke, so much meat, so much wine.
 - (1) Too much?
 - (2) No, never.
 - (3) Well, at least not yet.

They clink their glasses together and drink.

Enter Old Cougar. She is well dressed and in a way that disguises her age for the moment.

Old Cougar: (*her voice has the affect of youth*) Is this the temple of the New Wealth, or have I made a wrong turn somewhere?

- Chorus:**
- (1) No, you've found it. Welcome to Nouveau Rich Street, conveniently located between Poor Taste and Self-Absorption.
 - (2) But, sweetheart, you're too young to be out here all by yourself. Where's your....

Old Cougar removes her veil and hat, and her true age is revealed.

- (3) OH, MY GOD.

- (1) Where did the young girl go?
 - (2) Is that a monkey in make-up?
 - (3) No, that's an insult to monkeys everywhere.
- (ALL) Inida!!!

Inida: (*enters from temple, she is also tacked-up, bright colors, make up overdone*) What in the name of Wealth the Savior is going on out here?

- Chorus:**
- (1) We don't know.
 - (2) We don't want to know.
 - (3) We're out of here.

All push back into the temple.

Old Cougar: (*finally finished futzing with her clothes and hair, now that her age is revealed, her voice becomes that of a crone, as well*) Are you the one responsible for this?

Inida: You mean, for you being embalmed while you're still alive?

Old Cougar: That's not funny.

Inida: Everyone's a critic!

Old Cougar: Your meddling has cost me everything!

Inida: But you don't look as if you've become poor.

Old Cougar: There are things more important than money.

Inida: Like what?

Old Cougar: Like true love.

Inida: Oh, so your dog ran away?

Old Cougar: No, my boyfriend.

Inida: (*sotto voce*) Would've though they'd be one and the same.

Old Cougar: You've cost me the love of a handsome young man.

Inida: Ah, I think I get it now. He's become rich and....

Old Cougar: And I've become forgotten. But before all this, he used to be banging on my door day and night, wanting to see me.

Inida: Wanting to see you write a check, you mean.

Old Cougar: No, he'd only ask for what he needed.

Inida: And doubtless his needs were specific and highly personal.

Old Cougar: Oh, yes. He knew what he wanted: a team of horses, a fur coat, a trip to Mykonos.

Inida: Yes, it's easy to be decisive with other people's money.

Old Cougar: But this morning, he sent me something odd. A funeral arrangement with a card saying: "The Athenians once ruled the world."

Inida: Well, maybe he thinks your affair is like what happened between Athens and the other cities when they formed the Delian League. Athens came first, the others not at all, and when the money ran out, it was all over but the crying.

Old Cougar: But he and I had a deal. He promised he'd love me until I died, and contrary to popular belief, I'm still alive. How has Wealth treated me justly if she allows him to break our contract?

Inida: Let's ask the man himself.

Enter Boy Toy, drunk and dressed in loud, flashy clothes. He is decked in multiple garlands of flowers and is carrying a torch--the two hallmarks of being in the middle of a komos, the ancient Greek equivalent of a bar crawl.

Boy Toy: *(to the audience)* Whazzup, One Percenters!?

Inida: They say money can't buy taste. Well, here comes your proof.

Boy Toy: *(shudders in shock upon noticing Old Cougar)* Ugh! Damn, baby. When did you become such a butter face?

Old Cougar: What do you mean?

Boy Toy: Well, you got a hot wallet....

Inida: *(getting the joke)* ...but her face!

Old Cougar: Will one of you please explain what's going on?

Inida: I think the wine has sharpened his eyesight.

Old Cougar: No, he's always been keenly observant.

Boy Toy: Mmm-hmm. I always see where she puts her purse, her wallet, her checkbook. But now my love *(turns to tease Old Cougar)*, all I can see is *(brings torch close to her)* how damn many wrinkles you got.

He and Inida laugh and exchange high fives again.

Old Cougar: Ugh! Keep your torch and your insults to yourself.

Inida: She's right. She's got enough make-up and oil on her skin that she'd burn up like the

Deepwater Horizon!

Old Cougar and Boy Toy are shocked. Breaking character.

Old Cougar: Oh my god, really? Really?! Weeks of rehearsal and that's what you're going with?

Boy Toy: Yeah, seriously, what's next? Katrina jokes?

Inida: *(out of character too)* Ok, sorry, my bad...I was just trying, you know...to do some improv...to add more local flavor....

Boy Toy: Besides, you know, all that oil in the Gulf...they've cleaned it all up, now, right? They said they cleaned it up...it's not, you know, still floating around out there....

Inida: No, yeah. I mean, I'm sure it's...it's all fine now...we don't need to pay it anymore attention...just...everything's fine....

Awkward pause and silence

Old Cougar: Ok! Anyway, let's get back to what's really important, the facts of my complaint. I have only one.

Boy Toy: That's also how many teeth she has!

Inida: Ooh, burn!

Old Cougar: You bastard! Would you insult me, expose me in front of all these people!?

Inida: No, by Hades, no! No exposing! Keep your clothes on, madam!

Boy Toy: You know what, dog? She's right. *(to Old Cougar)* You deserve better than this. Which is why I'm giving you to her.

Old Cougar: What?!

Boy Toy thrusts Old Cougar towards Inida.

Boy Toy: *(mock Shakespearean)* Yea verily, greater love hath no man. I yield her unto you. Crush not, dear lady, the darling buds of May.

Inida: *(pushes her back)* But I have no use for her!

Boy Toy: *(pushes her back)* Well, then give her to your brother.

Inida: *(pushes her back)* No!

Boy Toy: *(pushes her back)* Your Uncle?

Inida: *(pushes her back)* No!

Boy Toy: *(pushes her back)* Your Grandfather?

Old Cougar: *(pushing at both of them)* No!!!

Inida: Enough!! I've had enough! By Zeus Almighty, I would have thought Wealth would have made you better people, but since she hasn't, let's settle accounts as they stand. (*pointing at Boy Toy*) You! You still have to pay the bill in the currency you agreed upon in your contract.

Boy Toy: But, but I'm not using the services anymore!

Inida: Well, you used them in the past, and like many bills, this one has turned out to be larger than you budgeted for.

Boy Toy: But when am I going to be done paying it?

Inida: When Wealth stamps you Paid in Full.

Boy Toy: In that case, I'd better get in there and dedicate these garlands to her.

Old Cougar: Let me help you with that.

Boy Toy: (*to Inida*) Think I can restructure my debt, maybe refinance things?

Inida: Not in this economy.

Boy Toy: Man, those minimum monthly payments are the road to ruin.

Inida: You should have thought of that before you took out the loan.

Boy Toy: That's cold, dog.

Inida: That's business, dog.

Old Cougar: (*as she is pulling Boy Toy into the temple*) Come on, sugar. Let momma help you.

Boy Toy: Oh, gods! She's insatiable, like a fury dragging me to Hell!

Inida: (*following them into the temple*) Well, then don't let the door hit you in the ass on your way down.

She shoves Boy Toy in. The door closes. Another interlude of enrichment occurs, more colored lights and a more insistent jackpot sound.

Enter Hermes, dressed in a toga that is wrinkled, stained, and a bit too short. The garlands about his head are withered. He knocks at the door of the temple.

Carry comes out of the temple, large pimp-cup style tankard in one hand. She is now obviously drunk. Her outfit, hair, and make-up much more overdone, veering to clownish, a sort of kevpie doll's face.

Carry: What the...? Who's trying to crash the party now?

Hermes: It is I...the, uh...the god Hermes.

Carry: You mean Hermes, the Errand Boy of his corporate master, Zeus?

Hermes: No, the young and dashing god of Luck and Merchants, and I've come—

Carry: You've got to be kidding! I thought you were gone for good. I haven't seen you since the

crash of 2008.

Hermes: And I've come to tell you Zeus is angry. You and your girlfriends are messing with powers you can't possibly control. Change your ways or you will all feel...THE WRATH OF ZEUS!

Hermes looks around, waiting for the familiar, ominous roll of thunder and flash of lightning to back him up. None comes. Carry, too, waits for the sound, looking unimpressed.

Carry: Looks under control to me.

She starts to go back inside

Hermes: Wait! Please! You don't know what you've done. You don't know what it's like on Olympus now.

Carry: Really? So tell me, how bad are things up on the Big O?

Hermes: It's terrible. No one sacrifices anymore, no one offers anything to the gods. We're ruined, utterly ruined.

Carry: Serves you all right. If you all had taken better care of us back in the day, we might not have abandoned you now.

Hermes: But Carry, baby, I was always there for you.

Carry: Yeah, there to help me get into trouble, but never there to help with the consequences.

Hermes: But honey, it's unseemly for a god to be punished along with his mortal worshippers. That's the way the game is played, you can't blame the player for that.

Carry: Oh, but we can change the rules. And that's just what's happened now. So you better learn the new game or get used to going hungry.

Hermes: Please, baby, come on, please just let me inside to get something to eat. It...it smells like you've got barbeque in there...*(sniffing)* from McClure's *(sniffing)*...or Corky's?

Carry: Yep. Both.

Hermes: *(sniffing)* And...and...tuna searing on the grill, like they do at....

Carry: Yes, indeed. We've got it all: butterfly catfish from Mittendorf's, sweet baby backribs from Rocky and Carlo's, onion rings from College Inn, oyster po'boy's from Guy's, barbeque shrimps from Pascal's....

Hermes: Anything from Coquette?

Carry: Just their salt shaker.

Hermes: 'Bout time someone took that away. But I am ravenous for the rest! I'm dying of hunger...and of thirst! I bet you've got a full bar, too!

Carry: Top shelf all the way round.

Hermes: Oh, by Zeus, this is so unfair!

Carry: Mmmm, it is so good to hear other people have to say that! It never gets old.

Hermes: Alright, alright then, teach me the new rules. I want a job at the Temple of the New Wealth.

Carry: (*affects a recorded voice*) I'm sorry, there are no positions available at this time, and we are no longer accepting resumes or keeping contact numbers on file. We recommend you check back with Human Resources in six months. Good-bye.

Turns to go inside.

Hermes: No, no, no! I can't go back. Zeus will kill me. Please! Where will I go? What will I do?

Carry: Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn.

Hermes: Please, I'm begging you. There's got to be some job I can do. Some way I can earn my keep.

Carry: Hmmmm...ok...stand up.

Hermes: Ahh...ok.

Carry: Turn around.

Hermes: But....

Carry: You want a position or don't you?

Hermes: Well, yes, but....

Carry: Then do it.

Hermes: Umm, ok.

Carry: Nice. Nice. Now, take it off.

Hermes: Whu-what?!

Carry: You heard me. Take it off. I want to see what I'm buying.

Hermes: You can't....

Carry: Oh, but the market can bear whatever it can bear. Now, take it off. Here, I'll make it easy for you.

She throws money at him.

Hermes strips down to his boxers.

Carry: Now get inside and get to work.

She slaps his butt as he walks past her into the temple.

Hermes enters to a bowl of ravenous female catcalls and a stripper's bump and grind track. He burst from the doors in a vain attempt to escape but is pulled back in by an anonymous group of hands.

Interlude, still more enrichment of the house, lights and the sound of a slot machine paying off an enormous jackpot.

Enter Priest of Zeus (PoZ). PoZ has unnaturally combed-over hair, a good suit, brief case, smug attitude, and other self-important trappings of the corporate raider. PoZ knocks officiously at the temple door.

Inida: *(emerging from the house; she too is now clownishly colorful, a full mask of make up)* Well, what in Zeus' name is it now!?

PoZ: Yes ma'am, that's it exactly. I am here in Zeus' name. I am the liaison for all his affairs here on earth. *(hands her a business card)*

Inida: Affairs is the right way to put it. All those poor girls he ruined...and boys, too, come to think of it.

PoZ: And affairs have gone very poorly since Wealth regained her sight, a hostile takeover for which Zeus holds you, madam, directly responsible.

Inida: Well, if he's so upset with me, why didn't he come himself, why did he send you?

PoZ: I can tell you're new to this game. Your beginner's luck can't last long, though. Which is why I've come to offer you my services.

Inida: What!? You're...you're defecting from your priesthood?

PoZ: I prefer to think of it as shopping my talents to a new and rising company with a different vision for the success of the corporate model.

Inida: You can pretty it up all you like, honey, but when push comes to shove, you're deserting your god.

PoZ: Please, you don't know how bad it's been.

Inida: And here we go, again.

PoZ: No one offers sacrifices we can use anymore, and as a result we priests are broke, and starving.

Inida: I can't imagine why you're surprised. Hang on, you said, no one offers sacrifices you can use? Does that mean people are in fact still coming to the temple?

PoZ: Yes, but...but they don't come to offer gifts to us.

Inida: Well, what are they offering?

PoZ: Oh, god. They come in droves, it's incessant....

Inida: But what's driving them to come if they're not...

PoZ: They're using the temple as a bathroom, ok? Get it? They come when they need to go. There, I said it. Happy now?

Inida: Well, it serves you all right. You've been dishing out crap to us for so many years, and now it's finally all come back to you.

PoZ: But that doesn't solve my problem. How am I supposed to make a living when I keep getting handed shit?

Inida: I don't know, but you'd better figure out how. In the world of the New Wealth, you're stuck with what the Goddess has given you.

PoZ: I mean it's not like we can eat it.

Inida: Oh, don't temp me. Well, you've just got to figure out how to turn lemons into lemonade.

PoZ: Ha! There aren't enough lemons and sugar in the world to sweeten this latrine.

Inida: That's it! That's it! Don't you see? You can convert the temple into a public bathroom!

PoZ: Yes...yes! That's so crazy it just might work! Pay Toilets! I know they've fallen out of style in the rest of Europe, but someone has to lead the charge backwards!

Inida: That's the spirit!

PoZ: I can see it now! Multiple locations, frequent dumper discount cards, franchises!

Inida: T shirts, bumper stickers, ball caps, all proclaiming "I 'went' at Zeus"....

PoZ: And we could grow and expand until we were big enough for a, for a...

Both: A theme park!

PoZ: Now I see it. This world of shit, it isn't Wealth's revenge, it's the Promised Land!

Inida: Just remember to stock up on the air freshener!

PoZ: Yes! And...and now that I've seen the light, do you think I might come inside, come in and see her?

Inida: What about your former boss?

PoZ: I can't worry about him.

Inida: Nor should you. He actually snuck in the back door with a bunch of stage hands about two scenes ago.

PoZ: You mean, the big guy himself is inside?

Inida: Sure, who do you think we've got tending bar?

Cue same ominous roll of thunder and flash of lightning; but this time, all nod in agreement at the sound.

PoZ: Well in that case. Is it still happy hour?

Inida: Oh, honey. It's always happy hour now.

PoZ: Then what are we waiting for?

Inida: Let's get you a go-cup because we are just about to escort Wealth along the parade route to the acropolis and then dedicate her as our new Patron Goddess!

Whole cast piles out of the house. All are decked out for a second line/Mardi Gras parade. All are in half-masks, some in candy-colored wigs; feather boas, parasols, and beads abound. Someone hand PoZ a go-cup.

Inida: Everyone settle down, settle down! We need a basket-bearer to get this processional started off right!

Old Cougar: Oh, Miss Inida! I'll lead us as long as you promise my boy will come to me tonight.

Inida: It's all been arranged.

Old Cougar: Then Wealth's will be done! *(She seizes the basket with unseemly haste)*

Inida: *(to the audience)* They say everyone loves a lover, but in this case we'll make an exception.

The iconic parade song, "Do Watcha Wanna," starts to play. The doors to the temple open to reveal the last iteration of Wealth, this time in carnival colors and fully masked, her former beneficence hidden behind the flat white of the krewe rider's mask. Her worshippers turn and bow to her, then all assemble. Wealth leads them off, but this time there are no Mardi Gras throws for the audience, her worshippers dance madly behind her as if in a second line behind a parade or a funeral processional.

The Last Scene
by Alain Foix
Translated by Amelia Parenteau

I first connected with Alain when I was living in Paris in the winter of 2014, working at my old study abroad program, and I leapt at the chance to translate his play. Not only did it celebrate a beloved American revolutionary, Martin Luther King, Jr., but it also revealed an aspect of King's history that was unfamiliar to me and, I suspect, to many others. I was at the tail end of my time in Paris when I was offered the translation job, and it felt like a natural bridge between my two beloved countries, as well as a perfect linguistic transition, as I rewired my brain back to English.

The Last Scene (La dernière scène) was created in July 2012 at the Théâtre de l'Albatros in Avignon, France. In its English version, it had its first workshop readings during the Fence Conference in New London, Connecticut and New York, New York at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center and The Lark, respectively, in January 2015. There, I had the opportunity to refine my translation, working side-by-side with Alain and another Fence member, Neil Fleming.

This play tells the story of the relationship between Martin Luther King's widow, Coretta Scott King, and Mumia Abu-Jamal, an activist and journalist who was convicted and sentenced to death in 1982 after the 1981 murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. Mumia spent 30 years on death row, and is currently sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. Although Mumia was most directly involved with the Black Panthers, and more publicly idolized Malcolm X, this play dramatizes his admiration for MLK, and the ways in which he felt like he was carrying out Martin's legacy through his own activism.

The story weaves between Coretta's remembrances of moments with Martin, Mumia's memories from his childhood and young adult life in Philadelphia, and their encounters when Coretta comes to pay him visits in prison. They discuss love and freedom and activism and family, which Mumia was sorely missing during his imprisonment. Martin is evoked from time to time, through voiceover, lending a ghostly and godly presence to the story.

The focus is not on any grand dramatic action, but rather on the storytelling, and the stories we tell ourselves in order to live, to persist, to keep up the fight. Mumia was known as the "voice of the voiceless" as a radio journalist, and his character embodies that identity in this play, shedding light on his experience in prison. Coretta serves to coax his stories out of him, and to contribute her own memories of time spent with Martin, connecting the legacies of the two activists, one living, one dead, she the only free agent between the two, suffering in her own prison of memories.

Music plays an important role in this production, bridging the free world and the world inside prison, and providing vital doses of hope to an otherwise bleak reality. Although the script does not come with a musical score, the choruses' swelling emotion is evident in its poetry.

It was refreshing to learn about my nation's history through a foreign perspective, and I was impressed by the way this American story takes on such a distinctly French voice, through Alain's

writing. *The Last Scene* offers an almost dreamy depiction of violent realities, and a fascinating window into our past, through a lens of French interpretation.

Amelia Parenteau

Alain Foix is a writer, playwright, and director. His work spans from novels to essays, including biography, children's books and pieces of theater. He primarily publishes with Gallimard et Galaade. His latest works, published by Gallimard, are biographies of Martin Luther King and Che Guevara. A doctor and professor of philosophy by training, he moved towards theaters and cultural organizations such as the National Theater of Guadeloupe, the Prism Theater of Saint-Quentin in Yvelines, near Paris, and The Muse, National Center of Musical Creation for contemporary and electroacoustic music. He finally created his own company, Quai des arts, where he is the artistic director and directs all productions.

Amelia Parenteau is a playwright, journalist, translator, and cultural commentator currently living in Brooklyn and working at the French Institute Alliance Française. She is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College where she studied writing, theater, and French. She has worked with TCG, Ping Chong & Company, The Lark, and The Civilians in New York, and the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut. She is a member of the FENCE and the League of Professional Theatre Women, and she has been published in *Asymptote Literary Magazine* and *American Theatre Magazine*, as well as *Culturebot*, *NITE News*, *Extended Play*, and the *TCG Circle*.

The Last Scene

I

DARKNESS

MUSIC

LIGHTS RISE GRADUALLY

Györgi Ligeti's "Concerto for Cello and Orchestra." Little by little, a face appears behind a window pane. It is Mumia Abu-Jamal. The face shows a series of expressions. Time passes, an infinite amount of time. Little by little, shadows close over the face.

GRADUAL DARKNESS

MUSIC CONTINUES UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF THE NEXT SCENE

II

LIGHTS RISE GRADUALLY

Mumia Abu-Jamal behind the window pane.

In the foreground, Coretta Scott King.

MUSIC ENDS

Coretta: Martin, do you remember the Indian Ocean and the sun setting over Cape Comorin? It was us, the horizon, that vertigo too.

Mumia: This is Mumia Abu-Jamal, coming to you live from death row.

Coretta: There we held above the void, with me entirely in your arms. There we were, on that enormous rock, there where the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Bengal embrace and mix their waters.

Mumia: I'm here to tell you about America's Martin and Martin's America.

Coretta: Do you remember? The ocean sang with the wind and the rhythm of the waves. A song so somber and profound, so profound. And I sang your favorite gospel, Precious Lord, Take My Hand. Do you remember?

Mumia: Today, we celebrate Martin Luther King Day, the only federal holiday dedicated to a black man.

Coretta: Precious Lord, Take My Hand.

She sings.

Mumia: But who really was Martin Luther King? Now would be a good time to find out.

Coretta: We were looking at the blood orange sun as it sank into the dark waters, swallowed up by the black night. You were captivated. And your black eyes, full of shadows, filled with death. Your fear of death, but your desire too. You were speaking with God, Martin. You were far from me. How can I put it? I was jealous of God.

Mumia: Martin brought hope. To us, to the nation. But today he's no more than an idol who hides the truth. If we lose his memory, we plunge into darkness.

Coretta: I looked away and saw the rising moon on the other side. It arose from the ocean just as the sun was sinking into it. I woke you from your daydream to show you this beauty, to drag you from that other drowning night. Do you remember, Martin? You remember that?

Mumia: We need memory to bring back hope. King was not that sugar-coated icon that we try to make of him. There's nothing he can do about it, he's gone. But we can, out of the depths of our nightmare, in the dark of the night, we can. We're still alive.

Coretta: Martin, today is your day. We've forced it out of them. Eighteen years of work. Eighteen relentless years. Now it's done. You have your holiday.

Mumia: At the end of his life, Martin Luther King devoted himself to the poor. His death left them even more profoundly distressed.

Coretta: When the sun sets over the horizon, there is always a moon that rises somewhere.

Mumia: Like Dr. King, most black civil rights leaders come from educated and cultivated backgrounds. They seek power at the highest levels of the State and business. Levels inaccessible for millions of poor black people. Poor black people, they have it the worst of all. The worst public education, the worst housing, the worst relationship with the police, the highest rates of unemployment, of imprisonment. The worst, the worst of everything... Everything has been taken from them and what have they gotten in return? Martin Luther King Day. An image, a false image. We forget that he sacrificed his life for garbage collectors on strike, for workers demanding a decent wage, above all for dignity. Happy Martin Luther King Day! Coming to you from death row, I've been Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Coretta: (*singing a gospel*) Do you remember, Martin? You remember that?

Martin's Voice: I remember, Corie, my Coretta, I remember it all so well. I remember that sun as it went to its death, that anguish of dusk, that foreshadowed death, and the shadows invading my spirit. I was drowned in that night, and you showed me hope. Just when despair descends, there is always a light rising somewhere.

Coretta: But you're gone, Martin. You left me alone on this rock with the void and the vertigo.

Mumia: You're gone, Martin. You split. You let us down.

Coretta: You left me. You abandoned me. You left all neat and clean, well dressed, all put together in your suit and hat and coat, like you were going to a party.

Mumia: You ate everything up. You made us dream. You set the table, a beautiful table, full of promises, and we were starving. But you and your apostles, you gobbled it all up.

Coretta: You went with your dream and left me alone with the night. And these children too, all these children for whom you're nothing now, who are orphans, with nothing but guns in their hands.

Mumia: You fucked off, you left us alone and empty-handed. Nothing to hope for. Nothing but violence, but the beatings, the clubs, and the dogs' teeth, and nothing but hate in the eyes of the pigs.

Coretta: They cried for you, they protested, and they got beat up. Then they took out their guns. Now they're packed into death row by the hundreds.

Mumia: And you spoke of love?

Coretta: Martin? Do you hear me, Martin?

Mumia: And you spoke of love?

BLACKOUT

III

LIGHTS UP

Mumia: Welcome to Pennsylvania's death row. Welcome to my six by ten foot cell. Welcome to the hive of shadows where everyday seventy-eight bumblebees stuck in their cells sip the venom and hatred of the State. Welcome to a world where the sun can only shine two hours a day through the bars. I can't believe it. Condemned to death! They condemned me to death. Maybe I'm naive, or totally stupid, but I thought my sentence would be overturned. I really believed it. I believed my appeals would succeed. I had confidence in the justice of my country. I was a Black Panther, but I was a journalist. It's not justice, it's politics. A Supreme Court judge once said, "Blacks have no rights which the white man is bound to respect." He really said that. Don't wait for the media to tell you the truth. They're in bed with the State. I'll tell you the truth. Even if I have to speak to you from the valley of the shadow of death, I'll tell it. This is Mumia Abu-Jamal, still live from death row.

BLACKOUT

IV

LIGHTS UP

Coretta enters singing and heads towards the piano. She brings flowers that she arranges in a vase. Mumia appears naked, upstage. We hear a voice offstage that says:

GUARD'S VOICE OFFSTAGE: Open your mouth. Stick out your tongue. Are you wearing dentures? Let me see both sides of your hands. Pull back your foreskin. Lift up your balls. Turn

around. Bend over. Spread your cheeks. The bottoms of your feet. Get dressed. Mumia grabs the bundle of clothing at his feet. He gets dressed and we see that he is wearing a Protestant pastor's habit with a soft hat. Martin Luther King exits and heads towards Coretta, who is playing a tune on the piano.

Coretta: You said, "You can't play the piano without admitting that the black keys sound just as good and are just as necessary as the white ones."

Martin: I said that?

Coretta: Yes, sir, you said that.

Martin: I don't know how to play piano.

Coretta: Don't play dumb. Play, play for me like before.

Martin: You know, blind people don't see color. Maybe that's why they play so well (he closes his eyes). So this, this is a white one, is that right?

Coretta: That's right.

Martin: And this is a black?

Coretta: Yes, that's right, go ahead and play, Ray Charles.

Martin: Do you know what Ray Charles said to a journalist who asked him if deep down, in spite of his international success, he wasn't secretly unhappy to be blind?

Coretta: No, tell me.

Martin: "Well, it could have been worse, you know. I could have been black."

Coretta: *(laughing)* Come on, play.

Martin plays "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" to accompany Coretta who sings. Coretta continues to sing a cappella while watching Martin move away. She takes the bouquet of flowers.

BLACKOUT

V

LIGHTS UP

Coretta is seated facing Mumia, on the other side of the windowpane, holding the bouquet.

Mumia: They're pretty. Are you allowed to have them in here?

Coretta: They gave me permission.

Mumia: But I can't take them.

Coretta: I know, it's just for you to see them.

Mumia: I would love to smell them. What do they smell like?

Coretta: Freedom.

Mumia: Girls born of sunlight and water. They were dancing in the wind... The sun... I need the sun. Our skin needs the sun and the whites have thrown us into darkness.

Coretta: Our skin is the color of prison.

Mumia: That's it, Mama. They want to whiten us up like chicory in a root cellar. Don't you think so, Mama?

Coretta: Don't call me Mama.

Mumia: But...

Coretta: Don't call me Mama. I'm not your mother.

Mumia: But Martin is my father. So you're my mother.

Coretta: He wouldn't have wanted to have a son like you.

Mumia: Because I'm shattering his dreams?

Coretta: You're more the son of Malcolm X.

Mumia: Okay, sure. I was born under X. We're all born under X. Orphans of this nation. We're all labeled X. They shut us up in ghettos because they don't want to see themselves in our eyes. Malcolm's glasses were X-rays. They stripped them all naked. So they killed him and shut us in ghettos, in jails, to keep themselves safe from the X-rays. They didn't want to see themselves. They didn't want us to look them in the eye. They didn't want to be seen naked. Yes, I am a son of Malcolm. But of Martin, too. I am not the son of his dreams, no, I know that. His unrealized dreams. Children are never what you want them to be. A child is not a dream. I may be his deviant son, his failed son, but I am his son all the same.

Coretta: Mumia, I am sure that he would love you as a son. And he would love Malcolm, too.

Mumia: Yes, as a gangster son. Malcolm loved and respected him, too.

Coretta: I know, Malcolm told me.

Mumia: Just like me, I love him and respect him. I respect his memory.

Coretta: Mumia?

Mumia: Yes?

Coretta: You can call me Mama.

Mumia: You know, sometimes, I feel like a motherless child.

Coretta and Mumia: (*singing together*) Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.

FADE TO BLACK

VI

LIGHTS UP

Mumia alone in the visiting room.

Mumia: This child, a ray of sunlight in my shadows. She was so little, with her little mouse voice, just like Minnie. She was only a baby when I was thrown into hell. I've never seen her since: she's too young to bring here. Her eyes lit up the darkness of this visiting room! They shone with happiness. She came straight towards me, but like a fly, she bumped into the glass. Stunned. She understood, and her tears poured down. The State separated us with a window. She clenched her hands into fists and she hit at the glass, she hit and hit. "Break it, break it," she cried. Her mother was at her side, she was petrified. But she took Hamida in her arms. She's called Hamida. They cried and my eyes leaked and my nose stuffed up. "Why can't I hug him? Why can't I kiss him? Why can't I sit on his lap? Why can't we touch each other? Why, why, why?" I turned away. I didn't want her to see her father cry. I caught my breath, dried my tears and turned back around. Then I told her with a grimace, "My daughter, how can you breathe with a nose full of snot?" And so, little by little, like the sun coming out from behind a big cloud, I saw her tiny smile break onto her face. It grew and grew. I reminded her how when she was little, she always used to squeeze the cat in her arms until it was choking, and her denial turned into laughter. And all three of us, we started telling all sorts of silly stories. In just a few minutes, visiting time was up. She recited the poem we would always say on the phone, "I love you, I miss you, and when I see you, I'm gonna kiss you." We laughed, they left. It's been five years already, since that visit, but it's as if it were yesterday. Her little fists banging there, her child's rage against that glass, her tears, her rage, her rage! (*He strikes the glass.*)

BLACKOUT

We hear Coretta singing.

VII

LIGHTS UP

Coretta: (*singing a Harry Belafonte song*)

And the song I sing,

I sing for you, sweet Martin Luther King,

And the song I sing,

I sing for you, sweet Martin Luther King.

Martin appears upstage and heads towards the window pane in the foreground. He lights a cigarette.

Coretta: You were happy that day behind the bay window. You looked free. You were going to die, you knew it, you foretold it. It was a beautiful spring day and the birds were singing. The smell of

magnolias was everywhere to cover the stench of Memphis. It was the garbage collectors' strike. You were so happy, Martin, those beautiful Easter days, surrounded by your friends. You played with them like a child in the Lorraine Motel courtyard, playing chicken with Ralph Abernathy, trying to topple Jessie Jackson, riding on the back of Reverend Kyles. It was a Tournament of Reverends, playing like children, and whirling like birds. I wish I could have seen that. And then you went back to Room 306 and you laughed, and you laughed, and you called your mother. Why did you call her, Martin? You never called her when you were on tour. And then you gave her your love for the last time. You knew it was the last time. The sound of a saxophone floated into your room with the scent of magnolias. Ben was playing in the square. He was waiting for you to go to a night meeting. And so you walked by the bay window, you went out on the balcony, and you leaned over to talk to him.

Martin: (*leaning over the balcony*) Hey Ben, don't forget to play Precious Lord Take My Hand tonight, and really play it well.

GUNSHOT

Martin collapses.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS UP

Coretta squatting near him, caresses him and takes out a piece of chalk to outline his shape.

Coretta: Why, Martin? Why did you walk past the bay window? The real world is not a dream. Death is behind the window pane, Martin. Death is behind the window pane. You always said that it could come anytime, anyplace. The sound of a tail pipe made you jump. Kyles thought he heard a car backfiring. It was a mild evening, the night was falling, and the birds were singing, do you remember?

Martin gets up and leaves while Coretta stays near his outline drawn with chalk on the black floor, and she sings:

And the song I sing,

I sing for you, sweet Martin Luther King,

And the song I sing,

I sing for you, sweet Martin Luther King.

BLACKOUT

MUSIC

VIII

MUSIC

Györgi Ligeti's "Lontano." Mumia behind the window pane as if behind a windshield.

LIGHTS RISE GRADUALLY

Mumia: 4 o'clock in the morning, Philadelphia. I'm sick of being a taxi driver. That's five dollars. Good night, sir. Shit, a gunshot. A cop is beating a black man to the ground. Fuck! That's my brother. What did the pigs do to him? It's okay, he's getting up. No more. I don't see any more. No, I see another black man lying on the sidewalk. Fuck, it's me! It's really me! What am I doing there? A cop is slapping my face. I don't feel anything. Three others are coming. They're beating me up, they're punching me. They're handcuffing me and pushing my head against a streetlight. The steel is hard, the steel is cold. My body's bleeding on the pavement. I hear my daughter speaking to me.

- Daddy?/ Yes my darling?/ Why are they beating you like that?/ It's okay, my darling, it's okay, I'm fine./ But Daddy, why did they shoot you?/ It's an old dream of theirs that they've had for a long time, don't worry. Daddy is fine. You see? I don't feel anything.

My father is speaking to me now. Oh, Dad, what are you doing there? You've been dead for twenty years./ How are you, my boy?/ Yeah, I'm fine, Dad./ I love you, son./ I love you too, Dad, but you've already been dead for twenty years.

Blood in my mouth. The siren wails, the car drives off. Trouble breathing. Dad, Dad, you're still handsome. Twenty years you've been dead. They drag me to the station to finish me off, that's what I think. No, they're sentencing me to death because I killed Faulkner. Faulkner? I killed Faulkner? Oh no! The Wild Palms, The Sound and the Fury? I killed a genius?/ Idiot, not the writer, Daniel Faulkner, a cop, that's worse./ I killed a cop? How did I kill a cop? They wanted to murder me! Their bullet pierced my lung. I'm spitting blood./ Your gun, you had it in your hand, you shot him./ My gun? But it never leaves my glovebox./ You killed him, you're fucked, Mumia. Farewell to the Black Panthers, you're going to burn in hell./ I'm not a Black Panther anymore, I gave it up. I don't screw around anymore. I'm a journalist and a taxi driver./ Go burn in hell, nigger.

Fuck! This is not some stupid crime show for couch potatoes. It's me who is behind the screen. Fucking screen. And it hurts, it's hell. Thirty years already. Change the channel. Switch it, change me.

CUT MUSIC

And this fucking TV that feeds us bullshit all day long. We have no fucking choice but to swallow it. And we hold back time, drop by drop, second by second. Because down there, at the end of the hallway, there's another screen, beyond the one in the visiting room, there's a third channel, the rotisserie. So we cling to the fucking TV, we gorge ourselves on it. The world is there, life is there, behind the screen. Of course we can dream about it, but we can't touch it. Hell is a pane of glass with people on the other side. They soften up our brains in front of the TV screen and then they cook them. Brains prepped for the electric chair. But if you want to think, or if you want to write... I want a typewriter. I want a typewriter. I asked for one a hundred times:

LIGHT SHIFT

We see him in his cell.

Mumia: Hey boss, I want a typewriter.

VOICE OFFSTAGE: No metal allowed, too dangerous.

Mumia: But I want a plastic one, battery-operated.

Voice Offstage: No machines allowed, that's the rule. For security measures.

Mumia: And a foot-long piece of glass, that's not a security problem?

Voice Offstage: Where did you find that?

Mumia: You know, on my TV set.

BLACKOUT

IX

LIGHTS UP

Coretta seated outside the visiting room, but she is speaking to Martin Luther King.

Coretta: He's a child, Martin, a child. He's been behind bars for a quarter century. But he's a child. They lock children up and then they kill them. Do you remember '68? Yes, that spring, my love. He celebrated his fourteenth birthday twenty days after your death. He protested against Wallace in the middle of a stadium of white people. Crazy! They beat him up, they stomped on him. On the ground, he saw the pant leg of a police man, and he called to him for help. But the cop's boot on his face shut him up. And so the next day, he joined the Black Panthers. Yes, I know, the Black Panthers... But you're not here anymore, what else could he do? You left us. How do I explain it to them? They did all they could to amp those kids up, and you know young people with their rabid will to live. Black or white, they're all the same. If you want to kill your dog, you say it has rabies. They made them rabid and then they killed them. And these days, you know, even the kids, even the crazy people and the mentally retarded are condemned to death. Mumia is you, Martin. Mumia is like your son. He calls me Mama, did you know that? And he is calling to you for help. He needs to get out of this, Martin, he needs to get out of this. Martin? Martin? Do you hear me? Martin?

BLACKOUT

X

Coretta, a package in hand, in front of the glass, Mumia behind it.

Mumia: What's that?

Coretta: Cookies.

Mumia: Cookies?

Coretta: I made them myself.

Mumia: Can I eat them?

Coretta: Of course, I got permission.

Mumia: I'd like to smell them. Oh, that's so satisfying. You know there are no smells here. Just piss, shit, cum, sweat, and death.

Coretta: We're going to get you out of here.

Mumia: You think so?

Coretta: They won't kill you. Desmond Tutu is with you.

Mumia: Desmond Tutu?

Coretta: Tutu and Mandela, Derrida too, writers' organizations, philosophers, journalists, politicians, intellectuals and Hollywood, all over the world, whole towns. In France, they made you an honorary citizen in Paris and Bobigny.

Mumia: Citizen? I like the sound of that. I can imagine how it smells, but I can't taste it. It's like the cookies behind the glass.

Coretta: You'll taste it soon. Why did you walk past the window, Mumia?

Mumia: What?

Coretta: Why did you walk by the window?

Mumia: What are you talking about?

Coretta: The police officer? You killed him?

Mumia: No.

Coretta: You didn't kill him?

Mumia: No, I told you I didn't.

Coretta: I believe you. Besides, that's not the issue.

Mumia: Not the issue? I've been shut up for centuries, condemned to death, and you're telling me that's not the issue.

Coretta: You had a gun.

Mumia: It was in my glovebox. The cops killed Faulkner because he wanted to denounce them, he wasn't corrupt like them. And so they gunned him down and pinned it on me.

Coretta: But you had a gun, Mumia.

Mumia: Yeah, so?

Coretta: Do you remember what Malcolm said when Kennedy died?

Mumia: What are you doing, Coretta, what are you doing? That's enough. Guard!

Coretta: Mumia, wait, I just want to help you. Answer my question. What did Malcolm say?

Mumia: What did Malcolm say? Who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind.

Coretta: That's right.

Mumia: What are you saying? That it's my fault?

Coretta: I didn't say that.

Mumia: Yes, you did.

Coretta: No, I'm saying that violence doesn't solve anything.

Mumia: Oh yes, that's right. Love. The great philosopher King. The king of black philosophers extolling the love of his enemy. Turn the other cheek. And did you see? Bang! What is a heart against a bullet? They only understand gunshots.

Coretta: Ten against one, Mumia. We were one against ten.

Mumia: But that's war.

Coretta: Mumia, you're an American.

Mumia: American? I'm a citizen of the world.

Coretta: American first.

Mumia: Okay, but so what?

Coretta: So what? It's not a war, well, not a race war, when it's one against ten.

Mumia: There's many more of us than that. It's not our color, it's our cause.

Coretta: Yes, the cause of the poor. Martin understood that, and that's why they killed him. You said that yourself on the radio.

Mumia: Poverty has a color. The color black.

Coretta: And poor whites, what do you do with them?

Mumia: They're thrown into the blackness and they try to climb out like birds in oil. To do that, they hold out their hands to the rich. They're not black, they're blackened. They're in with the white guards here.

Coretta: You're talking about shadows.

Mumia: Yes, shadows, they tell the truth. One against ten in the light, but three against five in the shadows. Shadows tell the truth. The light lies. All right, it's time. I'm going back to my darkness. Guard!

Coretta: Are you mad at me?

Mumia: No, not at all, Mama.

Coretta: Then take my cookies.

Mumia: What color are they?

Coretta: They're nice and dark, but not burnt.

BLACKOUT

XI

LIGHTS UP

Mumia's cell. He eats Coretta's cookies.

Mumia: Mmm... King, Queen of the Cookies. Thank you, Corie, Queen of the Cookies. I could totally sip on a Four Loko right now. What? You didn't know? It's good, it's loco, good and loco, your mother, my brother. Loco, it's loco, loco motha fucka. Fuck your mother. Wine, red wine, grapefruit and lemon for the dog. It's fresh, it stings. It's good when it's hot, with sun on the skin. Sun. On the skin. Mmm... She was so beautiful, that Californian girl, with her nice black skin, nice and smooth, nice and shiny, and her big laughing eyes. There was a jukebox and she put on James Brown. Say it loud.

MUSIC

We hear James Brown sing "Say It Loud" and Mumia dances with his chains. A strange and awkward dance, full of fury. He speaks while he's dancing.

Mumia: It's not me who's dancing, it's the loco motha fucka. I'm drunk, I'm drunk. Don't know how to dance, never learned. Swear to God, a black who doesn't know how to dance. That's me. Hey! Look at that guy. He's black, and he doesn't even know how to dance. What is that, fuck! We've seen everything. A Black Panther and everything. So panthers can't dance no more? It's a pink panther. No wait, a drink panther. Look at him, he's drunk. What the hell kind of dance is that? It looks like a Saint Bernard in cowboy boots doing the Madison, some kind of hippopotamus on point dancing Swan Lake. And the Californian girl just laughs and laughs. I'm irresistible. Yes, irresistible. It's Saturday Night Fever. I am black, I am proud. I say it again and I say it loud: I am black and I am proud.

LOWER THE MUSIC, WHICH CONTINUES QUIETLY

Fuck! Across the street, there's some white guys breaking down the door to our office. I head over there. They're pointing their guns at me, the fuckers! The barrel's so close I can smell the grease. "This isn't a joke, nigger! If you blink an eye, I'm going to blow your fucking brains out." I'm black, but right there, I'm not proud. I'm standing there helpless, looking at all our files in the gutter, our papers flying in the wind like white butterflies. And these Ku Klux Klan sons of bitches giggling like piglets. Fuck! Fucking motha fucka.

MUSIC SURGES AGAIN

BLACKOUT

XII

LIGHTS UP

Coretta is alone, speaking to the outline of Martin on the floor, while we see Mumia pacing.

Coretta: He reads all the time and he speaks well. His heart is full of love, but there's anger there, too. He's like Malcolm X, like the young Black Panthers, the Black Muslims, Black Power, like Huey P. Newton, Eldrige Cleaver, Bobby Seale, Stokely Carmichael, George Jackson, and Angela Davis; he's furious. Like everyone, he has a hard time with your nonviolence and your love. How do I explain it to him? You're not here anymore. They filled the prisons, they locked them in with their own violence, with their color, and their identity is made of hate, rage, and destruction. We closed them up in darkness. We marry them to despair. They can't see a moon coming up, not anywhere in the sky. Martin, how do I explain it to you? I understand them, you know. Your words aren't here anymore, hope is all washed up. I defended your teachings and we argued. I brought him cookies and we argued. Yes, those cookies you liked so much. You know, I should have brought them to your grave the other day. Martin, help me. You left us in the middle of the flood. Why did you walk past the glass door? Why did you lean out over the balcony? Why did you put their violence in the right? I ask myself that question every day. What is love good for? For killing loving people? Love is a loser? Love has to lose to win? Sometimes I have doubts, Martin, I have doubts about this thing called love. And what if these young people are right, out of the depths of their prisons?

MARTIN'S VOICE: I lived all that, in prison. That despair, the taste of blackness. They call them rehabilitation centers, but they're really just there to degrade us. They want to make us into beasts and coop us up in pens of hatred. It's not even worthwhile putting us in jail. Ghettos pump out chains of hatred. They build them like cruel children who play with little animals and stick them in little boxes. They observe them killing each other, then they murder the winner or throw him in jail. Our ghettos are their circuses. Like Spartacus, we have to refuse to fight.

Coretta: But how, Martin. How? Martin? Martin? You hear me.

Mumia: *(on the radio)* It's easy for us, the living, to raise up the icon of Dr. Martin Luther King. It's much harder to take on the work that he would have to do today. How would he have viewed President Clinton's cynical support of the death penalty? What would he have said about the two million people in prison? How would he have spoken to the homeless in the richest nation in the world? What would have been his response to the injustice in these so-called palaces of justice? I would bet that if he were still alive, the good Reverend King would have passionately protested against these injustices and all the others. As we should all do. This is Mumia Abu-Jamal, still coming to you live from death row.

Coretta: He's moving towards you, Martin. You're a lighthouse in his night, and he knows it. But love, your love, to love your enemy, that's difficult, you know.

MARTIN'S VOICE: But that's the problem, and the only solution. There's no other horizon.

Coretta: No other horizon? What horizon is there in a prison? What horizon is there in a prison?

BLACKOUT

XIII

VIDEO

Mumia in his cell. We see an image appear on the wall.

VOICE OFFSTAGE: Mumia, Mumia... Mumia... Mumia, you know what?

LIGHTS RISE QUICKLY & GRADUALLY

Mumia: What?

Voice Offstage: You know, Woolfolk?

Mumia: What about Woolfolk? What did he do now, that shithead?

Voice Offstage: He's dead.

Mumia: What?

Voice Offstage: He hung himself last night.

Mumia: Don't bullshit me, man.

Voice Offstage: It's not a joke, he's dead. They took him away.

Guard's Voice Offstage: Death row prisoners! Fourth, fifth, and sixth floor, we're going to the yard.

Voice Offstage: Fuck, Mumia, I've been in this place way too long.

Mumia: Why do you say that, Running Bear?

Voice Offstage: Because, fucker, I just caught myself talking like a nigger.

Mumia: Well of course you talk like a nigga, Running Bear.

Voice Offstage: And you think that's normal? An Indian talking like a nigger?

Mumia: You're in jail, Running Bear.

Voice: Oh, fuck! I've gotta get out of here.

LIGHTS SHIFT

Coretta enters, walking quickly. Mumia watches her go by, then takes off his prison jumpsuit and becomes Martin in a suit and tie, who catches up with her.

Coretta: And we marched, and we marched, and we marched. Montgomery, Selma, Albany, Birmingham. And our feet kept time, and we sang, and we sang, we clapped our hands, clapped, and split the clouds. The sky opened up. Remember that, Martin? We shall overcome (she sings). And Kennedy sang, and then Johnson sang we shall overcome. And we sang in the prisons, we made the bars tremble, we jumped their barriers, and their dogs barked, and the caravan went by. Nothing could stop us, nothing could shut us in. And the children sang, and the mamas sang, they sang for their children. They told us, “We’re marching for our children.” And their children, they marched, they marched towards the prisons. And the prisons swelled, and the ghettos filled up.

And poverty hungrier than ever, and poverty blacker than ever, and blacker still. And the prisons are even blacker than that, and then comes death, Martin, and death is the blackest of all. Martin, Martin?

THUNDERCLAP, SOUND OF CLOUDBURST

GUARD’S VOICE OFFSTAGE: Back inside.

Mumia: Back inside? But we just got here.

Voice Offstage: Back inside. We can’t leave you out in the storm.

Mumia: Oh, really? Scared we might get fried?

Voice Offstage: Get back inside!

Mumia: I understand, of course. If we get fried out here, you’re out of a job.

BLACKOUT

XIV

VIDEO

Mumia whispers in his cell, with images still being projected on the wall.

VOICE OFFSTAGE: Mumia, Mumia.

LIGHTS UP

Mumia: Yes, Running Bear.

Voice Offstage: Do you remember Horace the Retard?

Mumia: We say, “differently abled,” Running Bear. Dear old Horace, did they finally let him go?

Voice Offstage: Yes!

Mumia: Oh! That’s great, great! I’m so happy. Oh! Yes, very happy. You know, I thought you were going to tell me more bad news. I don’t want anything to do with bad news, not even in here. Nothing at all.

Voice Offstage: He left, he joined his people.

Mumia: His people? He didn't have any relatives.

Voice Offstage: They sent him to the chair. He suffered a lot, but he's gone. He was brave. He bit his tongue so he wouldn't scream. His body pitched forward. White smoke came out of his head, like it was his soul escaping. He turned blue. Blue, like a fucking smurf. After two minutes, the current shut off. It smelled like a roast turkey. But it's not Thanksgiving. The doctor came up and shook his head. Dumb old Horace just didn't want to go. So they gave him another blast. Stubborn bastard! Took another seven minutes for him to go. He's happy now, Mumia. Do you hear me, Mumia?

Mumia: Yes, Running Bear, I hear you.

Voice Offstage: Before they had prisons, they had the prairies. No borders. And my ancestors and their mustangs were as free as the air. They're up there now, them and their prairies. Horace is with them.

Mumia: Yes, Running Bear. He's happy up there, with your great ancestors.

Voice Offstage: You know what, Mumia, I'm going to get out of here. See you soon.

Mumia: Okay, Running Bear. See you soon... Running Bear? Running Bear? Running Bear?

BLACKOUT

XV

LIGHTS UP

Coretta in the visiting room with Mumia.

Mumia: So, what did he tell you?

Coretta: Who?

Mumia: Martin.

Coretta: Martin? But...

Mumia: I know you talk to him. What did he tell you?

Coretta: Love is the only key.

Mumia: Love doesn't unlock prisons.

Coretta: Love is the master key.

Mumia: Coretta, I'm not a Christian.

Coretta: Christians don't have a monopoly on the heart, Mumia.

Mumia: I believe in reason.

Coretta: Reason has a heart, Mumia. You have a heart, you are the voice of the voiceless.

Mumia: Yes, I have a heart, it fights unhappiness. Blacks first. They're the first that they throw in jail, the first they fry in the electric chair. Love, you speak to me of love. King spoke about love, that hasn't changed. We've been talking about love for decades. And the whole time they're out there murdering, while everyone else is chugging down TV and chicken nuggets.

Coretta: There are no other solutions.

Mumia: No other solutions? What did Malcolm X say when he spoke to you in Selma before he died? What did he tell you?

Coretta: Why are you asking me that?

Mumia: Everyone knows what he told you and that you told your husband. He told it to you so the whole world would hear it. You don't remember? All right, I'll remind you. He said, "I want people to know that if they don't listen to the voice of Martin Luther King, they're going to have to listen to our guns."

Coretta: We got that, Mumia, we really got that. Kennedy too, that's why...

Mumia: Yes, Kennedy, he got that. And do you remember what he said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

Coretta: That's it, that's it exactly.

Mumia: And what did he do with that? He sent men to the moon.

Coretta: It's a light that rises at night.

Mumia: But we're walking on the ground, we're wading in the shadows. For every man on the moon, there's a million in the dark.

Coretta: Martin thought that, too. But this light brings hope too.

Mumia: Enough of poetry, enough philosophy, enough! While we're philosophizing, they're building prisons and death machines and burying us alive. There have never been as many blacks thrown in jail and sentenced to death as since your husband died. And you speak to me of love.

Coretta: Of love, yes, that love you have deep down inside, that you've kept alive since they threw you into the mouth of death. Death can't swallow you, Mumia. Do you know why? Because even if you speak to us from the shadows, you send out light, reasons to hope when you speak, when you write, as long as you're alive, you tell us that you love. And do you believe that out there in the light, it's only black people who hear your voice? That it's only black people who feel loved by you?

Mumia: There's no answer to that.

Coretta: You're not just a prisoner, sentenced to death, you are our freedom. As long as you stay on

death row, as long as you are not freed, it's we who are prisoners. You see, the heart has its reasons. Love is freedom. Freedom to think, to speak, to move freely, and to love.

Mumia: I want that kind of love.

Coretta: So we agree.

Mumia: But that doesn't change anything. Love is not enough.

Coretta: You see the shadow growing around you. It hides the light from you. If things are getting darker here, that means the world is changing.

Mumia: Oh yeah, it's the Middle Ages here, time doesn't move. This shadow hasn't moved for centuries. But from within this night, I see the world and the seasons changing, people that I loved dying without the chance to hold them, to tell them how much they meant to me. I see my children growing up, I even see them getting old, while I've been stuck here since I was twentysix. Every second that passes sings me and subjects me to an endless, endless torture.

Coretta: Mumia, Mumia, you know Martin didn't die for nothing. Love won some ground.

Mumia: Where did that happen? I haven't seen it.

Coretta: You can't see it, but it's changing, it's changing. You know, he's going to be elected, I'm sure of it.

Mumia: Who?

Coretta: You know who, the President.

Mumia: A black president? You believe it, you really believe it?

Coretta: Martin predicted it forty years ago.

Mumia: He predicted it? In the name of what?

Coretta: The name of reason and love.

Mumia: And if he were elected, what would that change for me, for us and for the blacks? Would he get me out of here? Would he get us out of here?

Coretta: It's not up to him, Mumia. There have been Nixon, Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter, Kennedy, Johnson, and all the others. I knew them well. Some of them really wanted to get us out of here. But you know, presidents in this country... You know their power... No, he isn't going to get you out of here, but what elects him will.

Mumia: What will elect him?

Coretta: Heart and reason.

Mumia: He isn't even against the death penalty.

Coretta: Do you think you can get elected in this country if you're against the death penalty?

Mumia: Heart and reason, right?

BLACKOUT

XVI

IN THE DARKNESS *we hear Mumia speaking to Coretta.*

Mumia: Coretta, sing me a song.

Coretta: Which song, Mumia?

Mumia: It doesn't matter, one that he would have liked. Sing it to me as if it were for him.

Coretta: Okay, I'll sing this one. *(She sings)*

XVII

LIGHTS UP

Coretta sings again in front of Mumia, who is sitting behind the glass.

Mumia: He liked that one?

Coretta: He loved it.

Mumia: It is pretty. We should sing more in prison. It would make things more bearable.

Coretta: Singing breaks down bars, you know.

Mumia: So don't stop, don't stop singing.

Coretta: Martin said that music is our weapon. The nonviolent weapon. It gets under your skin, it saps your defenses, and it wins.

Mumia: Coretta, I want to get out of here, I want to sing outside.

Coretta: We're going to get you out of here. Give me your hand.

She puts her hands against the glass, Mumia does the same. Their hands leave white marks. They play with them, multiply them, while Coretta sings.

Coretta: You know, Mumia. You're brave. You're like a lion in a cage and you're roaring. Don't stop roaring, it's your song. You have a beautiful mane. I know they want to take it away from you. But your voice, they can't take that away from you.

Mumia: They've wanted to cut my so-called mane for thirty years.

Coretta: You know, in order for young Maasai warriors to become adults, they have to pull on the tail of a lion. It's their rite of passage. You're a handsome Maasai warrior.

Mumia: But that passage is long, much too long, Mama. Thirty years, Mama, thirty years.

Coretta: But you're alive, still alive. You know, Martin was your age when he started the fight, and your age when they stopped him. He was twenty-six.

Mumia: What are you trying to say?

Coretta: Every era has its twenty-six year-old man.

Mumia: What's that mean?

Coretta: He gave his life. There is always something to give. To give or give up, whatever seemed most precious to us. To give in order to gain the essential. What's most essential for a lion? His mane or his voice?

Mumia: You're speaking to me in riddles. What do you mean by that? I don't understand you. Coretta? Coretta?

BLACKOUT

XVIII

LIGHTS UP

Mumia alone in front of the handprints.

Mumia: Yes, Coretta, yes, I am a lion in a cage. I turn in circles, I turn in circles. They wanted my skin, but they won't have it. They shut up my anger, wanting to smother me, drown me in my rage, in my spitting hatred. But no, I have my children, my wife, my family, I have my love, my people outside. That passes through the bars, and it pierces their armored glass. They can't pull out this heart, they'll never get it. Thirty years already, thirty years and I'm still here. Yes, I am a lion in a cage and I roar, I scream at the whole entire universe. People run to me, they listen to me. Even the dead, the tortured get up and come to my cell. Malcolm is my friend. Martin is my friend. Yes, my friends, my fathers, I am their son because they bore me, because I was born of their anger, because I was born of their love. I was born? Was I really born, Mama? Was I really born? Coretta, Coretta, was I really born? They killed my existence. They buried me alive. But I am a root. Winter is long, winter is long, but spring will come. I'll grow back. I will be reborn. I am strength. I am the earth. This hair has held on for thirty years. Thirty years of love. How I loved it. How I took care of it. Look how beautiful it is. Like rays of sun. That upsets them. They want to cut it, they want to scalp me. Like the Indians, right, Running Bear? Like the Indians. Running Bear, why did you leave me? I was your friend. I was an Indian too. Like you. We are Indians because we are Americans. Because the land belongs to us. You wanted to find your ancestors, their prairies. But you know, Running Bear, the Promised Land is not up there. It's out there, on the other side of the glass. No, Running Bear, I will not go with you. Life is there, on the other side, I will not abandon it. I was supposed to be reborn. Do you want my hair? You're demanding my scalp? All right, here you go. I'll give it to you. But my voice, my voice, which speaks for those without a voice, that you will not have. Ever. I will be reborn. We're born without hair, aren't we? And when we die, our hair keeps living. So, here's my

hair. I have it to resell, as long as I have a head on my shoulders. It will grow back from this root. It will grow back at the end of winter. When you pull up flowers, you don't get the bulb. Here's a beautiful bouquet of wilted flowers. Take them. Take them.

BLACKOUT

XIX

LIGHTS UP

GUARD'S VOICE OFFSTAGE: Open your mouth. Stick out your tongue. Pull back your foreskin. Lift up your balls. Bend over. Spread your cheeks. Give us your hair. Give us your hair. Give us your hair. Okay. Get dressed.

Martin walks forward, puts on his hat, and looks at himself in the "mirror." Coretta is facing him.

Coretta: Ready, my love?

Martin: I'm coming, love, I'm coming.

Coretta: We're going to be late.

Martin: We're fine, we're just fine.

He joins her, she adjusts his tie.

Coretta: You're handsome, my Martin.

Martin: And you, you are magnificent, my Corie. Let's go.

As they go, they pass by the outline of Martin's body on the floor.

Martin: What's that?

Coretta: A young man who got too friendly with a streetlight.

Martin: How did that happen?

Coretta: Well, in Philadelphia, streetlights seem to just love young blacks.

Martin: Oh, yes, that type of love, a violent sort of love. He didn't escape?

Coretta: Yes, yes, with some bumps, a trip to the hospital, and a very, very long stint in prison. They sentenced him to death.

Martin: And he's dead?

Coretta: No, he got off death row, but he's still inside. He was twenty-six, Martin, like you.

Martin: I'm not twenty-six anymore.

Coretta: Oh my god, you're right. Time has just flown by.

They approach the piano, Martin sits in front of it.

Coretta: Will you give me the A?

Martin: The A? That's a white one, isn't it?

Coretta: It's a note, Martin, and it's a blue note.

She sings and he accompanies her.

GRADUAL BLACKOUT

Phaedra
By Racine
Translated by Catherine Esther Styles

Although Racine's *Phèdre* is acknowledged as one of the supreme achievements of European literature, it is not often performed in English. Ironically, it is Racine's mastery of 17th-century French dramatic conventions and poetic language that makes the work difficult for English-speaking actors and audiences. Intense emotions are expressed but there is very little action on stage. Conflict and passion are contained in a limited vocabulary of some 3,000 words whereas Shakespeare, who was largely responsible for forming English-language theatrical taste, used ten times the number, happily coining new ones along the way. Shakespeare is direct and robust. His darkest tragedies are relieved by ribald comedy. Racine's language is abstract rather than immediate. There is no hint of humour. English theatre has successfully absorbed Tchekov, Ibsen, Strindberg, Ionesco among many other foreign playwrights. Molière is a standard in mainstream theatrical repertory – the wit sparkles as brilliantly in the second language as it does in French, the satire remains pertinent, situations and characters transfer painlessly into a contemporary setting. Modern-dress versions work supremely well. Later French writers (Cocteau, Anouilh) have taken classical themes and transformed them into dramas compatible with recent taste. Racine's appeal is limited and productions of his work are most likely to be for a selective audience similar to those who respond to the classical Greek dramas from which he derived a great deal of his inspiration.

Phèdre, the last of his secular plays before he returned to his austere religious convictions, is anchored in its century yet the theme—human desire, guilt and suffering manipulated by implacable destin—s as relevant today as it was some 300 years ago. The challenge for the translator, as for the director and actors, is to respect the original while making this relevance accessible to present-day theatre-goers. Like any other play, it needs to be performed, otherwise it will become a museum-piece, still read by admirers of French literature, historically interesting, but no longer fulfilling its purpose. Plays are written for audiences. Any work intended for the stage only fully comes to life in a theatrical setting.

Many translators have rendered Racine's compressed French into English, some with scholarly attention to each word, others with more license. No language remains static. English itself changes from generation to generation. For this reason, there can be no final, definitive version of any work. There can, however, be a version valid for its own time, which may be as short as ten years. Preparing such a translation for the theatre compels the English-language writer to test every line for its 'speakability.' Not only must the meaning be clear to the audience but euphony (or, when called for, the lack of it), rhythm, and dramatic climaxes should be orchestrated so that the actors can feel that the speeches arise naturally from the situations they are in and reflect the psychology of the character they are playing. The words must ring true for them and for their public. This does not imply radical modernization. The formality and poetic diction of French neo-classical drama needs to be conveyed as well. The English writer is faced with not merely translating a play but also transposing one century into another, enriching the present with the past. Racine himself had an

unerring ear for language and dialogue. The lines he wrote run so fluidly in French that they are easily memorized by the actors. This should be the case in English, too. Actors, whose profession is the spoken word, are often the best critics of a playwright.

One of the major challenges for the translator is Racine's use of alexandrines, rhymed in couplets. For English speakers the alexandrine (hexameter) is a cumbersome metre, slow and laborious. There are exceptions. Spenser chose it for the final line in each stanza of *The Faerie Queene* and Keats, in *The Eve of St Agnes*, used it to great sensuous effect. Generally, though, one tends to concur with Pope who, in his own memorable, twelve-syllable line, described the hexameter as “like a wounded snake that drags its sad length along.” This is hardly what is needed in a tragedy noteworthy for the number and length of its *tirades*, the self-exploratory speeches that make up a good proportion of the play. Some translators have chosen to work in rhyming iambic pentameters. The results were considered 'poetic' and were, in fact, apt for their time. English, however, is not as rich in rhymes as French. Today, not only do these older translations sound contrived but English-language audiences have a well-developed sense of the ridiculous. In a tragedy, couplets that grope after rhyme suggest pomposity and invite laughter. At the same time, deftly handled, they add to the bite of Molière's satiric comedies.

Racine's restricted vocabulary and his use of *mots précieux*, which were merely the fashionable poetic euphemisms of the time, offer another challenge. An example is *flamme* (flame), which he consistently used for “love.” Should one try to echo them in English? It's rather like asking whether Bach should be played on a baroque clavier or a 21st-century Bechstein – there are valid arguments for either choice. In practice, a flowery diction would sound ludicrous. I settled on translating into a relaxed iambic pentameter with the occasional use of end line and internal rhyme and a generous sprinkling of assonance and alliteration. I avoided evasive expressions and widened the vocabulary. In so doing, I have, like every other translator, taken the unavoidable audacious step of tampering with Racine. I have entered into a kind of co-authorship. Not only that, but I have become part of a large family of “re-writers.” Any translator faced with a major work is likely to refer back to the decisions and insights of those who have interpreted it before. When I first read this work I was, even then, “translating” in the sense that my “take” on it was particular to me. How far dare one change the basic recipe without the result becoming like those so-called French *croissants* which are sold in Japanese pastry shops without the sugar, with added condiments and are half the size but are claimed to be better than the original? One translates a work so that it can be appreciated by a wider audience but in so doing one cannot avoid reconstructing it.

In 1989 Britain's Almeida Theatre Company enjoyed some success with a version of *Phèdre* by Ted Hughes. He transformed the French into a broken free verse intended to convey the power of the original. His muscular semi-prose, while transmitting the feeling of forward movement, fails to retain the subjective intensity of the *tirades* which are the very essence of the tragedy. The play projects a claustrophobic, hot-house atmosphere. Racine, throughout, uses a repetitive symbolic imagery of light and shade. The queen, descendant of the sun, cannot bear the light of day. The palace of Troezen is a place of shadows and secrets, of self-consuming individual anguish where cruel gods oppress powerless mortals. Racine, like his Greek predecessor, Euripides, was concerned

with intense, suffocating female emotion (one of the 20th-century playwrights who comes closest to him in mood is Tennessee Williams). Hughes lets in too much fresh air. His bluff, no-nonsense version deprives the major speeches of their subtly-winding, self-investigatory nature. Instead of colluding with Racine, he subjugates him. If a text merits transposition into another language, then presumably it should retain the major characteristics which made it great in its own.

It is illuminating to take an actual speech and compare the solutions various translators have chosen. When Hippolytus, presented by the queen with her declaration of love for him, tries to feign incomprehension, she turns on him with the words:

Ah! Cruel! Tu m'as trop entendue!
Je t'en ai dit assez pour te tirer d'erreur.
Eh bien! Connais donc Phèdre et toute sa fureur:
J'aime. Ne pense pas qu'au moment que je t'aime,
Innocente à mes yeux, je m'approuve moi-même,
Ni que du fol amour qui trouble ma raison,
Ma lâche complaisance ait nourri le poison... (lines 671-- 676)

John Cairncross, whose first version was rejected by the BBC in 1957 with the unanswerable comment that Racine was “untranslatable,” finally decided on these words:

Ah, cruel, you have understood
Only too well. I have revealed enough.
Know Phaedra then, and all her wild desires.
I burn with love. Yet, even as I speak,
Do not imagine I feel innocent,
Nor think that my complacency has fed
The poison of the love that clouds my mind...¹

R.C. Knight, in 1981, left out any mention of poison at all although, since the queen later dies by this means, an intimation of what is to happen in the future seems to be what Racine intended. Knight wrote:

Ah, leave your heartless lying.
You understand and you have heard enough.
Very well then, you shall learn what Phaedra is
And all her frenzy. Yes; I am in love.
But never think that even while I love you
I can absolve myself, or hide my face
From my own guiltiness.²

Ted Hughes decided literally to name his poison. His queen comes across as an unlikely mixture of

¹ Cairncross, John. *Phaedra and Other Plays*. U.K.: Penguin Books, 1963.

² KNIGHT, R.C. *Four Greek Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982.

classical *tragédienne* and neurotic sixties' housewife:

Now you torture me worse!
Prince, you have understood me perfectly.
I said enough to show you the truth.
Look at me – see a woman in frenzy.
I am in love.
But do not suppose for a second
I think myself guiltless
For loving you as I love you.
I have not
Indulged myself out of empty boredom.
I have not drunk this strychnine day after day
As an idle refreshment.³

“Strychnine” is metaphorical of course, but it is too strong and too specific a word for the context – apart from the fact that one's reason rebels against the notion that the queen swallows a daily dose of it (she must have an iron constitution). Not only that, but the shrillness of the outburst makes one suspect that Theseus strays out of the palace for a very good reason. The poison she finally does take is a mysterious compound brought by Medea to Athens. It slowly chills her veins and heart. Hughes acknowledges the insidious coldness but chooses to have the effect felt elsewhere, lending a strange banality to her tragic last speech:

I feel my pulses pushing it icily
Into my feet, hands and the roots of my hair.

The daughter of Minos and of Pasiphae dies after having just gone through a spectacularly bad hair day.

I decided that the poison reference in Act II was essential but chose to turn the passage into a series of rhetorical questions:

You misinterpreted!
Torturer! You understood me only too well.
Meet Phaedra at last in her mad ecstasy.
Here she stands, a woman devoured by love.
How do you think I feel in loving you?
Do I admire myself? Did I choose this,
this poison that attacks my very reason?

However, in some other places I have added imagery not found in the original. When Hippolytus says his words preceded his intent to speak them (lines 524-527), I make them “gallop” ahead as an allusion to his love of horses and chariots. The metaphor seems justifiable. The same, however, does

³ Hughes, Ted. *Phèdre*. U.K.: Faber ft. Faber, 1998.

not appear true of Knight's description of the philandering but heroic Theseus as “the butterfly that every beauty lured.” No butterflies hover over Racine's own grim description of the king's presumed descent into the underworld to seduce the wife of the ruler of the dead, and to add them seems to introduce an unwarranted, almost flippant note.

None of the above translations is either “right” nor “wrong.” Each is dictated by the writer's feeling about what Racine meant to say and a poet's meaning is often present in what is not said. Each is an honourable attempt to transmit the spirit of the original. Nevertheless, when translating *Phèdre*, it is advisable to bear in mind the “majestic sadness,” which Racine in his introduction described as “the true pleasure” of tragedy.

The Greek legend of the tortured queen's love for her stepson has been endlessly reworked. It is charged with sexual desire and guilt, both familiar themes today. Racine's version does depend partly on his handling of the original story but its real impact comes from his use of language. “Don't say it, show it,” is the advice often given to playwrights today. In 17th-century France violence and sex on stage were forbidden by law. Happily, Racine's genius for 'saying it' coincided with the mores of the time.

Poetic drama is a genre which loses its reason for existence if too many of the words are pruned away. Yet *Phèdre* is over long by today's standards and does need to be cut. This is a decision which, in my experience, is best left to the extensive and, no doubt, heated discussions which eventually occur between the translator, now in the role of playwright, and the director.

Phèdre can never be itself in a second language yet it is important that a great work be available for absorption into other cultures or, at least, be allowed to impinge on them. In English, of course, the title becomes *Phaedra*. The French vowel, with its lovely flicker of light, vanishes, to be replaced by a long English e. Inevitably, regrettably, something is lost in translation. Much, though, is given a new consubstantive life.

Jean Racine lived in the age of Louis XIV and came to be acquainted with the Sun King himself and the dazzling court at Versailles, but his origins were modest. He was born in 1639 in La Ferté-Milon, a very small town in Picardy, northern France. Orphaned at the age of three, the boy was taken by his maternal grandmother to the abbey of Port-Royal in Paris, a centre for the religious movement known as Jansenism. Chiefly originating from the views of a Flemish theologian, Cornelius Otto Jansen, the controversial doctrine, politically suspect and later defined as heretical by the Catholic church, emphasized original sin and the necessity for lifelong penance. Apart from its religious aspect, the school there offered an excellent education in Greek (unusual at the time), Latin and French, providing a background for the dramatic works which were to make Racine one of its most famous scholars. He then undertook two years of philosophical studies before joining an uncle in the South of France. Efforts to place him in the priesthood proved unfruitful. He was already writing poetry.

Back in Paris, drifting far from the ideals of the Jansenists who disapproved of all forms of human frivolity, Racine formed acquaintances in the theatrical world where the older playwright, Pierre Corneille, was to become his rival and the third outstanding dramatist of the French neoclassical period, Molière, lent friendship and support – until Racine secretly withdrew his successful play, *Alexander the Great*, from Molière’s troupe to give it to another and topped off the perfidy by not only stealing the leading actress but becoming her lover. It was all a far cry from the rigorous moral training of Port-Royal. The rupture with Molière was never mended. Racine’s dealings with his contemporaries on both the political and personal level showed a strong element of pragmatic self-interest.

Ten secular dramas were produced between 1664 and 1677, including one comedy. As Racine acknowledges in his introduction to the published work, *Phaedra*, like others of his tragedies, drew inspiration from Euripides; less mention is made of the Roman writer and Stoic philosopher, Seneca, whose influence is particularly apparent in the words of Phaedra’s avowal to Hippolytus. In its claim to an instructive element in drama the preface also hints at a desire to appease the Jansenists. The tragic queen in his masterpiece, not unlike the playwright himself, was torn between human passions and virtue. Racine left the theatre shortly after, married a strictly religious woman and sired seven children; four of their daughters entered convents. He became historiographer to Louis XIV, lauding the monarch’s military triumphs, and acquired several noble titles. During this period he wrote his *Spiritual Canticles*. His two final dramas, both based on the Old Testament, were conceived at the behest of Madame de Maintenon, the king’s pious wife, for the girls’ school she had founded at Saint-Cyr. His last known work was a history of Port-Royal. At his own instructions he was interred there. Following a papal bull enforced by Louis XIV, the abbey was almost entirely razed and Racine’s remains moved to the church of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, Paris.

Catherine Esther Styles was born in Napier, New Zealand. After studies in her own country and the U.S.A. she lived for many years in France, working as a feature writer for international magazines and a voice actress for French film and television. She is the author of three novels and a successful stage musical, one of the first productions to showcase the talents of Maori actors and singers. Her memoir, *Disraeli’s Daughter*, was published in 2013.

CHARACTERS

PHAEDRA:	Wife of Theseus, daughter of Minos and Pasiphae
HIPPOLYTUS:	Son of Theseus and Antiope, Queen of the Amazons
THESEUS:	King of Athens, husband of Phaedra and father of Hippolytus
ARICIA:	Princess of the blood royal of Athens
THERAMENES:	Tutor to Hippolytus
OENONE:	Confidante, nurse to Phaedra
ISMENE:	Aricia's confidante
PANOPE:	Loyal servant of the court of Troezen
GUARDS	
COURTIERS	

The scene is Troezen, a city in the Peloponnese

ACT I

Scene I

Hippolytus, Theramenes

Hippolytus

That's it! I'm leaving here Theramenes!
Troezen is pleasant but it's time to go.
Six months of doing nothing... I'm ashamed!
Where's my father? What's become of him?
I've no idea where in the world he's hidden.

Theramenes

Then where, my lord, do you intend to search?
In an attempt to calm your well-based fears
I have already scoured the seas that lie
each side of Corinth then along the banks
where Acheron drops to the underworld,
asking for news of Theseus, the king.
I called at Elis, set Tenarus in my wake,
sailed as far as the ocean where Icarus fell,
What fresh hope drives you on to what new place
more likely than the rest? Who knows, in fact,
whether the king would want this mystery solved
or whether, while we anguish for his life,
our hero isn't nicely bedded down
dallying with some new female fantasy,
soon to be discarded like the rest.

Hippolytus

Show some respect Theramenes. The king
is past such youthful indiscretions now.
Phaedra has bridled that old inconstancy.
She has no rivals. No, it isn't lust.
My duty's clear. I have to find the king.
I neither can – nor dare – stay in this place.

Theramenes

Dare not, my lord? Dare not? When have you feared
this gentle land? You loved it as a boy.
It was far dearer to you than the pomp
and endless turmoil of the court and Athens.
What danger, what – misgivings – drive you out?

Hippolytus

Times change. Those days are gone. Everything changed
the instant that the gods brought to these shores
the daughter of Minos and of Pasiphae.

Theramenes

I know the very sight of her offends you.
Your stepmother. A dangerous woman, Phaedra.
You'd scarcely met when she arranged your exile
but now her hatred seems somewhat diminished,
dispersed. Besides what harm can she unleash?
Phaedra is dying, and she wants to die,
racked by some illness which she will not name,
tired of herself, tired of the very daylight.
What mischief can she make against you now?

Hippolytus

I'm not afraid of Phaedra's futile loathing,
I'm running from another enemy,
That girl, the sole survivor of a family
sworn to exterminate mine. Aricia!

Theramenes

What!

So you're in league against her too my lord!
That gracious child, unlike her merciless brothers,
descendants of Pallas, would never stoop to plots.
Do you hate beauty flowering in innocence?

Hippolytus

If this were hatred, do you think I'd run?

Theramenes

My lord, permit me – now I catch your meaning.
So you're no longer the same Hippolytus,
that lofty prince, who sneered at thoughts of love
and mocked the yoke that bore his father down
time and time again. Has Venus won?
Perhaps she's set on vindicating Theseus.
Perhaps you'll offer incense at her altar.
Perhaps you've learnt you're human after all,
brought to your knees like any common man.
Are you in love?

Hippolytus

Old friend, how dare you ask?
You've known me from birth. You know my pride,
do you expect me to discard it now?
I sucked this pride in with my mother's milk.
Amazon pride! Does it amaze you so?
Later, I liked the man that I 'd become.
And you, my loyal Theramenes, told me tales
about my father's exploits and his life.
Sublime, you said, a Hercules come again
to comfort mortals. My very soul devoured
the memories of his heroic deeds –
monsters strangled, bandits put to death.
Those names – Procrustes, Cercyon, Sinis, Sciron –
all routed, and the giant of Epidaurus
slaughtered, his great bones scattered. Crete delivered,
still smoking from the Minotaur's spilt blood.
But when you told me of less glorious things,
promises made and broken many times,
Helen abducted from her home in Sparta,
Salamis, scene of Periboae's tears,
all credulous creatures, victims of his passion,
whose names by now he couldn't even recall –
Ariadne wailing to the cliffs,
Phaedra seduced (hers was a better fate,
he married her) I begged that you would stop.
I wanted to rip those pages from the book
that otherwise spoke of a noble life.
Am I to follow his path? Do the gods
plan to humiliate me? Contemptible cowardice

on my part for I lack his list of triumphs,
I've killed no monsters, I've no excuse to offer
as he had for his failings. If my pride
should weaken, would I choose Aricia? No!
Surely my foolish senses would recall
the unassailable barrier that's between us.
My father's condemned her; his command is clear,
she'll have no heirs, no nephews to her brothers.
He fears that murderous stock may sprout again.
The name dies with the sister. Till she dies,
Subjected to his will, she may not marry.
Should I stand up for her against my father?
An act of madness! Rashly launch my youth...?

Theramenes

Ah, but if your hour has come, my lord,
the gods remain impervious to such logic.
In blinding you, Theseus opened your eyes.
His hate provoked a contrary reaction
and you, rebelling, find her the more beguiling.
Why stay obedient to your self-made rules?
The bravest men are powerless before Venus.
First love! Why not enjoy the sweetness of it?
Why be afraid of love? Hercules wasn't.
You fight the goddess but, where would you be
if your own mother, sworn to chastity,
hadn't most ardently desired your father?
Fine talk is easy but leads nowhere, lord.
Admit – everything's different. Now, for days,
you are less often seen, splendid, aloof,
racing your chariot along the sands or,
expert in the art that Neptune taught,
subduing unbroken horses to the rein.
Less often do our shouts ring through the thickets;
your eyes burn with a slumberous light, grow heavy.
You love! You're smouldering with a secret fire.
Is it Aricia?

Hippolytus

I'm going to find my father.

Theramenes

Will you see Phaedra before you sail from here?

Hippolytus

That's my intent. And duty. Please inform her.

Enter Oenone

What fresh unhappiness does Oenone bear?

Scene 2

Hippolytus, Theramenes, Oenone

Oenone

No grief can equal mine. The queen is nearing
her final moment. Night and day I watch.
She's dying in my arms of an unnamed sickness.
Her thoughts are wild. Her restless heartache drags her
in torment from her bed. She must see daylight.
But you can't watch her suffering, you must leave.
She's coming now.

Hippolytus

I'll spare her the sight of me.

Exeunt Hippolytus and Theramenes

Enter Phaedra

Scene 3

Phaedra, Oenone

Phaedra

No further, Oenone, I've no more strength.
My eyes are dazzled by the light of day.
My legs are trembling. Aah!

Oenone

All powerful gods,
show pity, and relent before our tears!

Phaedra

How heavy these useless ornaments and veils
weigh upon me! Whose interfering fingers
have knotted my hair upon my forehead? How
all things conspire to hurt me.

Oenone

What you say
One moment you will contradict the next.
Just now, abandoning wicked thoughts of death,

you asked me to adorn you. You felt stronger,
wished to appear and see the sun again.
You see it, madam, now you want to hide,
hating the brilliance that you came to find.

Phaedra

Blazing founder of an unhappy family,
you whom my mother dared to name as father,
do you redden to see me as I am?
Great Sun, I've come to look my last at you.

Oenone

What! Can't you forget that cruel morbid longing,
renouncing life, preparing for the grave?

Phaedra

I want to be seated in a shadowy forest.
When shall I see it, the chariot flying by
through glittering dust...?

Oenone

What, madam? What was that?

Phaedra

Madness! Where am I? What did I just say?
I've lost my will, my reason's gone. The gods
have stolen my mind away. You've seen too much.
My face is burning, I cannot stop the tears.

Oenone

Oh, weep and burn if weep and burn you must!
Yes, burn, but do so for your stubborn silence,
which deepens your misery, deaf to our entreaties,
deaf to advice, stubbornly set on dying.
What crazed obsession makes you shorten life?
What spell or poison's at the back of it?
Three days and nights spent sleepless, without eating.
Your body wastes. What evil plan is this?
By what right do you take your life, affronting
the gods who gave it, failing your husband, breaking
your marriage vows, betraying your own children?
That day will place them under a bitter burden,
the very day you die their future dies
but hope glows for the foreign woman's son,
that insolent enemy who hates your tribe,
that boy sprung from an Amazonian dam.
Hippolytus...

Phaedra

Ah...

Oenone

So now I've touched the quick!

Phaedra

The name! You fool, you spoke it! Blabbering fool!

Oenone

You're right to be angry. I am glad to see you shudder at that fateful name. Now, live, for love and duty. Live, unless you want the Scythian's son to rule your own and grind the noblest stock of Greece and of the gods under his arrogant heel. Make up your mind. Each passing second counts. Take life in hand now, while your strength is fluttering to its end, fan up the embers, live, my lady, live.

Phaedra

My guilty life's already far too long.

Oenone

What's this remorse that's tearing you apart? What crime could warrant it? Your hands are free of blameless blood.

Phaedra

My hands are clean enough.
I only wish my heart could be as pure.

Oenone

Then what appalling plot have you dreamt up, so terrible that you fear it?

Phaedra

That's enough.
I'd rather die than speak.

Oenone

Then die, and take your secret with you but find someone else to close your eyes. Your life is flickering out but I'll precede you. Many pathways lead down to the underworld. I'll choose the quickest. My sadness gives me leave. What cruelty, lady! When have I ever failed you? It was I who took you, newborn, in these arms. Remember, I gave up everything I had for you.

Children. Country. And this is my reward?

Phaedra

What good's your anger? My words would horrify you.

Oenone

Great gods, what could be worse than having you
dying before my eyes!

Phaedra

My crime is such,
my fate so heavy, death's inevitable.
Why reinforce the guilt.

Oenone

Madam, I beg you,
here at your feet, release me from my doubts.

Phaedra

Stand up. I'll speak.

Oenone

I'm listening, dearest one.

Phaedra

What shall I tell her? How shall I begin?

Oenone

Stop torturing me like this.

Phaedra

Venus! Your hatred!
The anger of the goddess! It was love
destroyed my mother.

Oenone

Forget it, madam. Silence
conceals her weakness.

Phaedra

Ariadne! Sister!
Love's victim, dying unloved and abandoned
on lonely shores!

Oenone

Come, lady what's all this?
What special anguish makes you turn against
your very blood?

Phaedra

Since Venus wills it so,
I die the last and the most to be pitied.

Oenone

Are you in love?

Phaedra

Love? Passion! Frenzy! Rage!

Oenone

Who is it?

Phaedra

Now the terrible truth will out.
I love... I tremble at the name. I love...

Oenone

Who?

Phaedra

You know him. Son of the Amazon.
That prince I persecute.

Oenone

Hippolytus?

Phaedra

You named him!

Oenone

Gods! My blood runs icy cold.
Oh crime! Oh misery! Oh, accursed race!
Why did we ever sight these dreadful shores!

Phaedra

I was already stricken well before.
I'd scarcely married Theseus. Peace and joy
seemed likely to endure. Then Athens showed me
the man meant to destroy me. When I saw him
I blushed, turned pale, my very being shook,
I couldn't see or speak. I burned and froze.
I knew her then. It was the goddess. Venus!
Venus infecting me with fatal fire,
and Venus would pursue me to the end,
piling her torment on the pitiful remnant
born of the lineage she loves to loathe.
I tried to escape through worship, so I built
a temple in her honour, beautified it,
sacrificed to her. In the slaughtered entrails
I looked for omens, searching for sanity.
Useless sedatives for my feverish love
and useless the incense wafting at her shrine,
useless the vows of adoration uttered
for I loved only one – Hippolytus.
Everywhere, even bowed before her altar,

the incense smoking, it was him I worshipped,
the god whose name I knew must not be spoken.
I fled away from him. Oh, crowning misery!
I found his likeness in his father's face.
Then I acted against my very nature
And forced myself to persecute him – him
my most beloved and worst enemy.
I played the wicked stepmother, railed at Theseus,
begged for his exile, and my endless nagging
resulted in his father driving him out,
away from Athens, far from his father's sight.
Now I could breathe again and now my days
passed peacefully. Only my husband ruled me.
I hid my grief and longing, reared my sons.
Useless, all useless. Destiny struck again.
Theseus brought me to Troezen, where I saw
once more the banished enemy I adored.
The wound ripped open. No longer a hidden yearning
coursing within me, now it's Venus herself,
the carrion goddess fastened on her prey.
My guilt is terrible and terrifying.
I hate life and abominate my love.
By dying I wish to preserve my name and honour,
hide this black secret. Your tears have dragged it from me.
I've no regrets for speaking, only let me
die quietly. No reproaches, Oenone.
Don't bring me back to life with useless kindness.
The greatest kindness is to let me die.

Enter Panope

Scene 4

Phaedra, Oenone, Panope

Panope

Madam, I wanted to keep these tidings from you
but you must hear them. Lady, the king's no more.
Your husband, the unconquerable Theseus,
vanquished by death. You are the last to know.

Oenone

What are you saying?

Panope

All the queen's prayers are useless.
News comes from ships in port. Theseus is dead.
Hippolytus, the prince, has been informed.

Oenone

Almighty gods!

Panope

Athens is divided.
Some stand beside your son but others turn,
in spite of civic ruling, to that boy,
born of a foreign woman. Rumour adds,
a faction moves to crown Aricia and
to place the Pallantides upon the throne.
Hippolytus is leaving. When he lands
in Athens, with the havoc reigning there,
the fickle people well may flock to join him.
I had to warn you...

Oenone

Thank you, Panope.
The queen has heard and she will act on this.

Exit Panope

Scene 5

Phaedra, Oenone

Oenone

I had stopped urging you to live, my lady.
I wanted to follow you into the grave.
I'd no words left but now, this fresh disaster
places everything in a different light.
New rules apply. Theseus, the king, is dead
and you must take his place. You have a son.
Live, and he's king! Die, and your son's a slave.
On whom in his misfortune can he lean?
Who'll dry his tears? Or will his childish cries
set his immortal ancestors against you?
Then stay alive. There's no more guilt. The king,
dying, absolved you. Now you're free to love.
Hippolytus is there and you may see him.
Perhaps he thinks, convinced of your aversion,

he'll raise rebellion and seize Athens. So,
show him he's wrong. Bend him to your will.
Troezen is his by right but well he knows
the law gives glorious Athens to your son.
You share an enemy, the prince and you.
Unite to fight her. It's Aricia.

Phaedra

Yes.
Yes, yes, I'm listening. Yes, I will live on
if it's still possible. Love for my son
may give me strength to face this terrible time.

ACT II
Scene 1

Aricia, Ismene

Aricia

Hippolytus wants to see me?
He wants to meet me here and say adieu?
It's true, Ismene? Are you really sure?

Ismene

This is the first sign of things to come
Now that the king is dead. Be ready, madam –
for soon, from every side you'll find returning
the allies Theseus kept estranged from you.
All Greece will offer homage and Aricia
will realize at last her destiny.

Aricia

So, it's not just a rumour? So, I'm free?
I'm not a slave? I have no enemy?

Ismene

Madam, the gods no longer stand against you.
The ghost of Theseus walks with your dead brothers.

Aricia

How did he die?

Ismene

The stories differ greatly
And most of them are barely credible.
Some say that, chasing after some new fancy
that great philanderer met his death by drowning.

Others go further, here's the latest version –
that, with his friend Pirithous, he went down
into the underworld and strutted there
viewing the sacred river, walking its banks,
parading his living body before dead eyes,
then found that he was trapped, for when one travels
to that grim place there is no turning back.

Aricia

Why would a man, a breathing mortal, go there
before he must? What morbid fascination
enticed the king into the timeless land?

Ismene

He's dead, my lady. Only you still doubt it.
Athens is grieving. Troezen is informed
and, for ruler, chooses Hippolytus.
Here in the palace, desperate for her son,
Phaedra is seeking counsel from her friends.

Aricia

And do you think Hippolytus will be kinder
than Theseus was? He'll treat me more humanely?
Offer more freedom?

Ismene

That's what I do think, madam.

Aricia

What do you know about the callous creature?
What vague, misguided fancy's taken hold?
Hippolytus has no time for women. Why
except me, then, when his contempt's quite clear?
He shies away from female company.

Ismene

Of course I know what other people think,
but I've observed that fine, pretentious prince.
Conscious of rumours of his arrogance
I watched him even closer and he's not
quite what's reported for, when you were there,
he changed. His eyes met yours. His own were troubled.
He couldn't look away. I saw his longing.
He doesn't want to love, his pride resents it.
The words are in his eyes, not on his lips.

Aricia

Dearest Ismene, p'raps it's just surmise
but, oh, I hang on every word! So, tell me,
you know me well, could it be possible
that this poor plaything – it's myself I mean –
jerked by the strings of fate, weeping, embittered,
could ever feel the glorious ache of love,
the madness and the wonder? I alone
survived the horrors of the war. Six brothers,
six! so young, the hope of a great house,
mown down. The earth itself was sickened
by so much blood drunk from our noble line.
As you're aware, a cruel law was written
forbidding any Greek to marry me
so frightened Theseus was that in my children
my brothers' ashes might blaze back to life.
You also know the absolute disdain
I felt for Theseus and his petty rules.
I could have thanked that makeshift murderer –
for love, you know, has never tempted me –
he merely set a seal on my decision.
But that was before I ever saw his son.
No, it wasn't the sight of him entrapped me,
handsome and gracious though he is, a mirror
of everything that's fine, I love him for it
but, more than that, his gentle courtesy
which everyone admires, his modesty
in seeming not to recognize his worth.
There's everything that was admirable in his father
without the weaknesses. I'm drawn toward him
and I admit it, because he thinks he is
invulnerable, remote from thoughts of love.
That is the virtue they define as pride.
Phaedra, the queen, deluded as she was,
felt herself honoured by her master's bed.
I'm no such object. I am proud myself.
Not for me a man who's slept his way
through scores of women too weak to turn him down.
You're listening, Ismene? Here's what I long for:
to meet a man who's certain of himself,
provoke in him a strange uncertainty,

disarray his composure with confusion,
tie him with ropes he wishes were pulled tighter,
an unwilling, willing prisoner, that's my dream,
more than a dream I tell you my... desire.
Hercules gave in to lust too lightly.
It's easy to seduce some men, you know –
one glance! I know I'm saying things I shouldn't.
What dangerous frankness and – I may regret it,
the prince's pride may be too strong. We're built
of the same pride, Hippolytus and I.
Hippolytus in love! Bliss! If it's true...

Enter Hippolytus

Scene 2

Hippolytus, Aricia, Ismene

Ismene

He's here. The prince, my lady, comes to you.

Hippolytus

Princess, before I leave I should inform you
about your future, now the king is dead.
My fears were right. Death, and death alone
could sever him from his triumphs in this world,
great hero as he was, the friend, companion,
acknowledged heir of mighty Hercules.
Although you hated him I trust that you
admit the honour that's my father's due.
My own grief 's tempered by my knowing that
I can release you from your cruel condition,
revoking those stringent laws that I deplore,
allow you to live and marry as you please.
Troezen is my inheritance; once ruled
by Pitheus, my grandfather. Now the state,
unanimous, has taken me for king.
Liberty is yours. You are more free
than I, myself, can ever hope to be.

Aricia

Stop, Prince! Control your generosity,
excessive as it is. You overcome me.
This so-called liberty ties me tighter still

to those restraints from which you say you free me.

Hippolytus

Athens is undecided who should rule
and speaks of Phaedra's son, myself, and you.

Aricia

Of me?

Hippolytus

I've no illusions in this matter,
a grandiose Athenian law excludes me.
My mother was a foreigner. However,
if my half-brother were my only rival
I could oppose that law, assert my claim.
A stronger reason holds me back from this.
Madam, I speak of you. To you I cede –
no, not 'cede' – I restore the Athenian kingdom,
the throne that was given to your fathers' father
long ago in a distant past. Aegeus
inherited it by adoption, then it went
to Theseus, his son, in gratitude
for all he did guarding, enhancing Athens.
Your brothers' rights lay buried in neglect.
Now Athens calls you home. Enough, she says,
of endless quarrels. Blood, and too much blood,
your family's blood, has soaked into her soil,
into the very furrows that gave it birth.
Too much. Too long. Troezen is loyal to me.
The fields of Crete offer a rich reward
to Phaedra's son. Attica is yours.
I'm leaving now to calm divisive voices
and confirm unity on your behalf.

Aricia

Is it a dream? Am I bewitched and dreaming?
Every word you say bewilders me.
Am I awake? Dare I believe in this?
What god, my lord, put such thoughts in your mind?
Oh, now I see why the whole world admires you!
Give up a throne! Do that! For me! Enough,
more than enough simply not to detest me,
not to treat me with hostility...

Hippolytus

Detest you! Lady, has my pride been painted
in such harsh colours? Am I some monster's son?
What frozen malice, hate, stupidity
exists on earth that would not melt away
at the mere sight of you. Could I resist...?

Aricia

My lord!

Hippolytus

The words galloped before me. Now,
I see that, having started, I must go on.
Lady, it's time to tell of secret longings.
Before you stands a prince much to be pitied,
infamous for his attitude to love.
I laughed at love. I mocked its victims. I
was like a shorebound creature who observes,
emotionless, the shipwrecks of his friends but
now I'm just a man. Some freak wave swept me
far out to sea. I'm lost. My pride's submerged
and I've become dependent on another.
A single instant tamed that insolence
then, six months tossed, despairing, on the tide,
helpless, and ashamed of my own weakness,
with love, like an arrow, burning in my side.
I fight against you and against myself.
When you are there, I run, when you are not
I run again to find you. In the woods,
among the leaves, your phantom floats behind me,
day and night I retrace your imagery.
Your loveliness is there where sun and shade
entwine to make a living tapestry.
Everything conspires. This once proud prince
has become a suppliant at your feet.
There's no escape, my life is not my own.
Javelins, bows, horses have no meaning.
The sea god schooled me. I've forgotten him.
I whisper my love to the trees and, those same horses,
wayward and lazy, no longer do my will.
I speak a rough, unpolished language, lady.

It may offend you. What a clumsy offering!
I don't know the vocabulary of love.
What an odd creature you have captured here.
Don't turn aside. These are the words I have.
Without you, I'd be silent...

Enter Theramenes

Scene 3

Hippolytus, Aricia, Theramenes, Ismene

Theramenes

Lord, the queen
wishes to speak with you, I come before.

Hippolytus

To speak with me?

Theramenes

I do not know her mind,
my lord, but since you're leaving...

Hippolytus

What's there to say?
What does Phaedra want?

Aricia

You can't refuse her.
Even an enemy deserves some pity.

Hippolytus

Meanwhile, you'll go and I must sail not knowing
if I have offended the one thing I love.
My life is in your hands.

Aricia

Set sail and follow
The noble inclinations of your mind. Make
Athens my dominion. I accept
all of the gifts you offer, but the prize
of glorious Athens and her territory
is not the one most valued in my eyes.

Exeunt Aricia and Ismene

Scene 4

Hippolytus, Theramenes

Hippolytus

All ready, comrade? But, the queen approaches.
Prepare to sail. Give the signal. Go!
Complete your orders. Hurry back again
and save me from an unwelcome interview.

Exit Theramenes

Scene 5

Phaedra, Hippolytus, Oenone

Phaedra

There he is. When I see him I grow weak
and lose the very words I mean to speak...

Oenone

Remember a son whose only hope is you.

Phaedra

They say that soon you're leaving us, my lord.
I come to mingle my grief with yours, I come
admitting all my fears for my son.
He is now fatherless. The day is near
when I shall die as well. A thousand foes
surround him in his innocence. Only you
can save him from them. There's another fear,
fueled by remorse, which agitates my mind.
I've been an odious mother to you. Now,
your well-earned anger – will it turn on him?
Have I made you indifferent to his cries?

Hippolytus

Madam, my sentiments are not so low.

Phaedra

If you should hate me I would understand.
I did my best to harm you. Lying hidden
were feelings that you scarcely could imagine.
I wanted your dislike, invited it.
In those dim halls the thought of you was unbearable.
Public and privately I mouthed my loathing,

voicing my wish that oceans come between us.
I passed a law your name should not be spoken
within my hearing. What's the outcome now?
If punishment matches injury, hate breeds hatred,
then never was there woman more deserving
of pity, lord, and less of your unkindness.

Hippolytus

I know that second wives are often jealous
of children's rights. Madam, I'm quite aware.
Such thoughts are normal. Others might have done worse.

Phaedra

The gods know, I'm an exception to that law!
A different anguish overpowers my mind,
troubles, and consumes my very soul.

Hippolytus

Madam, calm all such fears. It's possible
Your husband's still alive. Perhaps the heavens,
hearing our pleas, will warrant his return.
Neptune protects him and that mighty sea god
will listen and respect my father's prayers.

Phaedra

My lord, it is not given more than once
to tread upon the river banks of hell.
Since he's already seen that dark decline
in vain you hope some god will send him home –
the ghastly Acheron grasps it's pretty too well.
What am I saying? Theseus isn't dead.
He lives and breathes in you. I see him, hear him,
I'm speaking to him, he is here before me.
It's you. My heart... My lord, I'm torn apart,
half-crazed by passions that I ought not speak.

Hippolytus

I see the grievous outcome of your love:
although he's dead, he's present to your eyes;
your love for him burns on within you.

Phaedra

Yes!

Yes, prince, I burn with love for... Theseus.
I long for him. Not as the underworld knew him,
idoltrous bedder-down of endless women,

cuckolding even the guardian of the dead
but faithful, proud, touched with a certain shyness,
young and delightful, dazzling all around,
a god in his own right – as I see you.
He had your stance, your eyes, your way of speaking,
the same sweet modesty was on his face
when to our Crete he sailed across the sea,
a worthy lover for old Minos' daughters.
Where were you then? Why no Hippolytus
when Grecian heroes gathered their elite?
You were too young. Yet, why weren't you on board
the ship that brought your father to our shore
to save us from the monstrous minotaur?
My sister would have placed the thread of life
in your hand. No! For I'd have been before her.
Inspired by love, I would have led the way.
Phaedra! Myself! Deep in the labyrinth,
unreeling out the winding clew of twine.
A thread was not enough, love would have made me
Equal and companion. Yes, together!
No! I'd have walked ahead, fronting the danger.
What would I have not done for this sweet head!
Sharing the peril, conquering the darkness or,
if I could not, dying by your side.

Hippolytus

Ye gods, what do I hear! Have you forgotten
Theseus is my father, you're his wife?

Phaedra

My memory's intact, my lord, as is
my estimation of my proper worth.

Hippolytus

Forgive me, madam, I misinterpreted
straightforward words. The error and the shame
are mine. Now, I must leave.

Phaedra

You misinterpreted!

Torturer! You understood me only too well.
Meet Phaedra at last in her mad ecstasy.
Here she stands, a woman devoured by love.
How do you think I feel in loving you?
Do I admire myself? Did I choose this,

this poison that attacks my very reason?
Oh, I abhor myself a thousand times
more than the hatred I've aroused in you.
Fate is on the prowl and I'm its victim.
Did I want this lust, this fearful longing?
Call it the gods, or fate, or destiny
or what you will – those gods who are my witness.
What vengeance, what ironic cruel glory
impels them to this act of savagery,
to light this fatal fire in a poor mortal,
pitiless betrayers of my family.
Think back. Remember. Remember all the past:
I fled you, banished you from sight and mind,
vented my rage on you despicably.
I sought your loathing, made myself appear
hateful, inhuman. What's the outcome now?
Where did it lead? Senseless hypocrisy!
You loathed me more, I loved you still. Your suffering
made you even more beautiful in my sight.
Desirable. I wept for my desire,
tears to cool fantasies and quench the...
Look at me. Can you? Look me in the eyes
just once, a moment, if, perhaps...? No chance.
My shameful longing I was forced to pronounce.
I came to defend a child, to plead his cause
but oh, my very soul depends on you.
Theseus' widow loves Hippolytus!
Get rid of me, punish me, kill the hideous queen
who lives for you. Act like your father's son.
Drive a swift steel into the monster's heart,
depraved and willing to admit offence.
Strike! Aren't I worthy? Is my blood too foul
to soil your hands? I'll do it then.

Your sword!

Give me your sword!

Oenone

What are you saying, madam?
Holy gods! Someone is coming. You mustn't be seen.
The shame of it. Quickly, my lady...

Exeunt Phaedra, Oenone

Enter Theramenes

Scene 6

Hippolytus, Theramenes.

Theramenes

Was that the queen?
Why did she leave or, was she led away?
And you, my lord, pale, trembling...
Where's your sword?

Hippolytus

Let's leave this place, I cannot breathe the air.
Phaedra! Great gods, protect me from the thought!
Bury the memory of it! Blot it out!

Theramenes

The sails are set. All's ready. You should know,
however, lord, that Athens has replied.
Ten families cast their votes. The crown has gone
to your half-brother. Phaedra's in control.

Hippolytus

Phaedra!

Theramenes

A delegation awaits your highness
to place the reins of power in Phaedra's hands.
Her son is to be king.

Hippolytus

Almighty ones,
is it her foulness that you recompense?

Theramenes

Meanwhile rumour has it the king's alive.
In Epirus they say they've seen him. But...

Hippolytus

No matter. Question this and everything.
Trace every rumour to its source. If false,
we leave. The sceptre must be placed,
whatever the cost, in hands worthy to bear it.

ACT III

Scene 1

Phaedra, Oenone

Phaedra

Remove these royal trappings. Let me be.
Why do you want to display me? Better to hide me.
Stop trying to comfort. I have said too much.
Madness unleashed! Words that should never be spoken.
Gods! how he listened, how he turned and parried,
feigning misunderstanding, eager to leave!
His blushes deepened my shame. Why did you stop me?
I wanted to die. His sword was at my heart
and did he flinch, force it aside? Not he!
My hand had grasped it, so it was unclean.
To touch it would have soiled his spotless hands.

Oenone

Enough. This endless stirring of the embers
serves to stoke a passion you should quench.
Stand tall, daughter of Minos. Find your peace
governing your kingdom. Forget the ungrateful wretch.
Control the realm. Act like the queen you are.

Phaedra

Me, a queen! Me control a realm
When I can't even rule my own weak senses?
When I have lost the empire of my mind?
When I can barely breathe for weight of shame?
When I am dying?

Oenone

Then leave.

Phaedra

I cannot leave him.

Oenone

You dared to banish him. Dare to avoid him.

Phaedra

Too late. He knows my insane longings now.
Broken, the bounds of modesty. I bared
my shame to him, my conqueror. There was hope,
some little hope that crept into my heart.
You put it there. You rallied me from death.
My very soul was trembling on my lips.

You called it back, soothed me with honeyed words.
You said this love was possible. It was you!

Oenone

I'd have done anything and more. If ever
there was offence against you, look at him.
Can you forget his absolute contempt,
the scornful stare, the blank and terrible coldness,
with you half prostrate. Cruel, odious pride.
If Phaedra could have seen him with my eyes...

Phaedra

But he could change, Oenone, shed this pride.
He's like the forest that bred him – untamed, wild.
His life has made him hard. The words he heard
today, the words of love, the first he's known,
may have surprised him, silenced him. Perhaps
we are too harsh.

Oenone

He had a barbarian mother.

Remember.

Phaedra

Amazon, barbarian.

And yet, she loved.

Oenone

He hates all women.

Phaedra

Then,

I'll have no rival. It's too late for counsel.
Cater to my madness, not my sense.
He's closed to love, so find another weakness.
Kingship seemed to appeal. Athens aroused him.
He couldn't dissemble. Oenone, quickly, go!
The prows of his ships were pointed there, sails spread.
Quickly, quickly, find him, Oenone.
Work on his ambition, dangle the crown
in all its glittering glory. He shall have it,
the sacred diadem upon his head.
I'll place it there myself, yield him the power
I cannot keep and then he'll teach my son
to be a man and rule. Maybe a father...
maybe he'll be a father to him. Yes!
mother and son subjected to his delight!

Try everything. Weep, plead, come from all sides.
Your words will have more strength than mine. Be brazen.
Grovel. Implore. Describe how Phaedra's dying.
I shall support you. Quickly, quickly, go.
Quickly return. My hope, my fate's with you.

Exit Oenone

Scene 2

Phaedra alone

Phaedra

Great Venus, you who see my shame, have I
sunk low enough? Your triumph is complete.
Cruelty can go no further. Every dart
struck home, you pitiless queen of love. But if
Your appetite for victory's unappeased,
turn on a tougher foe. Hippolytus
Spurns you, ignores your altars and your anger,
rejects your sacred name. Take your revenge.
Our causes are the same. Oh, make him love me!

Enter Oenone

You're back? Wouldn't he listen? Does he still hate me?

Scene 3

Phaedra, Oenone

Oenone

Madam, you must forget this impossible yearning.
Summon your courage. The king, whom we thought dead,
is here. He's coming. Theseus is alive.
The people are rushing to greet him. I obeyed
your wishes. I was searching for the prince
when a great shout went up...

Phaedra

Theseus! Alive!
More than enough! I bared my guilty lust
and, doing so, defiled my husband's name.
The cup is full.

Oenone

Madam...

Phaedra

I told you so.
You wouldn't hear me. I stifled my foreboding.
Your tears prevailed. This morning I was still worthy
of honest mourning but I listened to you
And now I die dishonoured.

Oenone

Die? Today?

Phaedra

Today. This day. What have I done this day?
My husband's coming and his son is with him.
I'll face the object of my adulterous love.
He'll watch to see how I approach his father.
My heart still aches with sighs, my eyelids brim
with tears he'd not confront. So, do you think
he'll overlook my passion and betray
his people and his king? That he'll contain
the absolute disgust he feels for me?
No point in silence: I know what I've done.
I'm not one of those ruthless, wanton women
who mask their infidelity with a smile.
I admit my lust. The very walls recall it.
These vaulted ceilings if only they could speak
would thunder Phaedra's guilt, to him, my husband.
Oh, let me die! Let me escape from it.
To die. To cease to be. Death holds no fears
for those who suffer. All my fear is for
my reputation. What a foul bequest
to leave my sons, descendants of the line
of Jupiter. That godly lineage
may lend them courage. No matter how great their pride
a mother's crime will cripple them. Perhaps
one day they'll hear the story, the terrible truth,
turn their reproaches on that shameful mother
then, broken by the weight of odious knowledge,
never again look mankind in the face.

Oenone

Your fear is rightly founded. So, why expose them?
Why turn against yourself? The world will say
that guilty Phaedra fled her outraged husband.
She killed herself rather than face the man she wronged.

Hippolytus should be pleased to have you die;
in doing so you'd strengthen his position.
Who would listen to me? Who'd want my version?
I'd have no voice against him. Think, imagine,
how he'll proclaim his triumph, your disgrace
To all the world. I'd rather flames devoured me.
But madam, I must know, do you still love him?
How do you feel about Hippolytus now?

Phaedra

Monstrous. Terrifying.

Oenone

Then grant no victories.

Dare to accuse him of the very crime
He holds against you. Strike first – who'll contradict you?
The evidence is there. It points to him.
His sword that by good luck stayed in your hand;
your former anguish, your present agitation;
your outbursts in the past that forced his father
to banish him...

Phaedra

I? Lie? Defame a man

who's innocent?

Oenone

Do nothing. Silence alone
is what my loyalty asks. Like you, I'm trembling,
like you, I feel remorse. I'd rather face
a thousand deaths. Without this remedy,
a harsh one, I shall lose you and you mean
more than the whole world to me. I will speak.
The king will rage but settle on banishment.
An angry father still remains a father.
The punishment will be light. If innocent blood
is, however split, what does it count
against your honour? Your good name has no price.
This must be what dictates your actions, madam.
Everything must be sacrificed – truth and virtue
if need be.

They're coming and I see Theseus.

Phaedra

I see Hippolytus. Those stony eyes
foretell the worst. Do as you will for me

for there is nothing I can do myself.

Enter Theseus, Hippolytus and Theramenes

Scene 4

Theseus, Phaedra, Hippolytus, Theramenes, Oenone

Theseus

Good fortune has returned, my dearest one,
and in your sweet embrace...

Phaedra

Stop, Theseus! No!
Don't profane love's greeting, I'm not worthy.
You have been wronged. The gods were jealous of
your happiness and turned upon your wife
while you were absent. I'm unfit to love
or even to approach you. All that's left
is that I hide myself from this time on.

Exeunt Phaedra and Oenone

Scene 5

Theseus, Hippolytus, Theramenes

Theseus

What does this curious greeting mean, my son?

Hippolytus

Only Phaedra knows what lies behind it.
For my part, sir, I beg your consent to leave
And see no more of her. She makes me tremble.
I cannot live where she is. Let me go...

Theseus

You, my son, leave me?

Hippolytus

I never wanted to know her.
You brought her to these shores and it was here
in Troezen, that you left her and Aricia
in my safe-keeping. Enough. That duty's done.
No other holds me. I misspent my youth,
wasted it, chasing useless game and now
I long to turn my spear to better ends.
You were younger than me when you'd killed tyrants
and many a monster perished under your hand.

You cleared the seaways. Travellers were safe.
Hercules laid his mantle on you. I,
weak son of such a glorious sire – and mother –
fell into indolence. Now let me test
my courage, let me bring a worthy offering...
If any monster has escaped your sword
I'll lay it at your feet and, if I die,
let all the world say I died fittingly,
remembering me as worthy to be your son.

Theseus

What's this? What dark, insidious horror here
is driving away my family? If I return,
So dreaded, so little wanted, gods in heaven,
why did you release me from my prison?
I had a friend whose foolish lust induced him
to force himself on the consort of the tyrant
of Epirus. I helped him. Mindless folly!
Vindictive fortune blinded both of us
to what ensued. The tyrant fell on me.
I was unarmed. And I was forced to watch,
powerless, the end of Pirithous, my companion,
flung living by this monster to the maws
of foul and nameless beasts which he regaled
with helpless human flesh. Myself he took
and threw into a cave, a prisoner,
locked in darkness, buried deep in the earth
on the very frontiers of hell.
Six months before the gods remembered me.
So I escaped. I seized the ravening demon
and fed him to his brutes. Then, with what joy
I turned again to everything that's dear,
spared to me by the gods, my soul, restored,
yearning to be with all of you. My welcome?
Fear and hiding, rejection of my love,
and I, aware of the terror I inspire,
would rather be back in prison. Phaedra says
I've been dishonoured. Who betrayed me? Speak!
Why was I not avenged? And, is it Greece,
Greece that I've defended with all my strength
so many times, that shields the criminal?

Silence.

Is my son, my own dear son in league
with enemies? Let us go in. My mind
reels with these intolerable doubts.
Speak out! Who is the criminal? What's the crime?
Phaedra must tell me where her troubles lie.

Exit Theseus

Scene 6

Hippolytus

Hippolytus

What was the ominous meaning behind his words?
Will Phaedra, half-crazed, turn and accuse herself?
How will the king respond? What lethal poison
love has filtered in through all his house.
Myself, alight with a passion he's bound to detest,
no longer what I was but what I've become.
Such dark presentiments occupy my mind.
Yet, innocence knows no fear. Come, let me try
to find the way to win back his affection
and tell him of a love he may condemn
but which, for all his power, he can't prevent.

ACT IV

Scene 1

Theseus, Oenone

Theseus

Aaah! What's this I hear? A damnable pervert,
intent on fouling his own father's honour?
Fate, you're closing in and I don't know
where I am, I don't know where I'm going.
Tenderness, kindness, here's your recompense!
Unthinkable actions! Unspeakable designs!
And he used violence – the very sword I gave him!
I recognized it. He drew it in his frenzy,
a weapon that was meant for nobler ends.
The ties of blood, couldn't they have prevailed?
Where's Phaedra in this? Why does she stay silent?

Why protect a rapist? I ask you, why?

Oenone

Phaedra wanted to spare you as a father.
Phaedra was ashamed to be the object
of such unnatural lust. And she'd have died
by her own hand. Ended her innocent days.
I ran and seized that hand and so I saved her
for you, because you love her. Now, pitying
your fears and her distress, unwillingly
I find myself driven to explain her tears.

Theseus

The treachery of it! I saw how he turned pale
from fear when I drew near. I saw him quake.
I was astounded by his joyless looks;
his stilted embrace chilled mine. So, for how long
has this incestuous lust been gnawing at him?
Had it begun in Athens?

Oenone

Remember, lord,
the queen's complaining. This unlawful passion
aroused her hatred for him.

Theseus

And, in Troezen,
he started it again?

Oenone

I've told what happened.
Permit me to withdraw. I cannot leave
the queen alone in mortal agony.

Scene 2

Theseus, Hippolytus

Theseus

Ah! There he is! Great gods, what princely bearing!
Who wouldn't be deceived by it as I was?
How can an adulterer's face carry the mask
of perfect radiant virtue such as this!
A sign – surely some sign should warn us of
the evil hidden within a human heart!

Hippolytus

May I inquire, my lord, what troublesome thoughts

have clouded your mood? Will you confide in me?

Theseus

Confide! How dare you flaunt your loathsome face?
Why weren't you struck by lightning? I thought I'd purged
the earth of such vile creatures. You're the last.
And, after your abominable lechery
has even thrust it's way to your father's bed,
you think you'll play the hypocrite with me!
Parading where the very crime took place!
Why aren't you in some country, far away,
under an alien sky, where Theseus' name
has never reached. Get out! Don't taunt my fury!
Don't tempt my hand to strike! Enough for me
the ignominy of having sired a criminal
without the shame of slaughtering him, bespoiling
my reputation, sullyng the memory of
a glorious past. Out! Out! Unless you're asking
me to exterminate you like that other vermin.
I want these lands purged of your filthy presence.
Never return. Never, beneath the sun
that warms us, set your feet upon these shores.
Mighty sea god, Neptune, hear me now!
Remember how I cleansed your coasts of villains.
Recall your oath: one wish is my reward.
Throughout my suffering in that accursed dungeon
I did not call on your immortal power,
I saved that wish for greater need. The time
has come. I lift my voice to you today.
Avenge a grief-stricken father! Let your wrath
strike down this traitor. Blood! Let his own blood
choke his obscene desires. Theseus will thank you.

Hippolytus

Phaedra accuses me of obscene desires!
So many unexpected blows! I'm numb.
It sickens me to the soul. I cannot speak

Theseus

Did you imagine Phaedra would cover up
your hateful insolence in craven silence?
Then, better not to have dropped your sword which now,
in her hands, helps convict you. Or, perhaps,
You should have finished off the deed and killed her –

a single stroke to wipe out speech and life.

Hippolytus

Lies! Lies! Infamous lies! I should speak out.
I won't, my lord. This secret touches you.
Trust the respect with which my lips are sealed
and don't add to your torment. Observe my life!
Think who I am. Crime isn't sudden. Minor
misdemeanours lead to greater evil.
A man who crosses the lesser moral bounds
may end by violating more sacred laws.
Vice, like virtue, grows greater by degree.
Never have reticence, timidity, been known
suddenly change to utter depravity.
A day's not time enough for an honourable man
to turn into an incestuous murderer.
My mother's purity was legendary.
I've not betrayed upbringing and origins.
Pitheus, who was revered throughout the earth
as greatest among sages, deigned to teach me.
I do not wish to paint too fine a picture
but if some of their qualities are mine
foremost among them is the hate I've shown
towards the very acts with which I'm charged.
For this Hippolytus is known in Greece:
virtue so austere as to be harsh;
rigorous, inflexible discipline.
My heart's as pure as daylight. And they claim
Hippolytus is lascivious...

Theseus

Yes! That pride,
That very pride condemns you! Oh. I see
what lies behind this assumed frigidity.
Your eyes lusted for Phaedra, no other woman.
Chaste love didn't tempt you. You disdained it.

Hippolytus

No, father! It's not so. My heart—I can't
conceal it from you – has not disdained chaste love.
Here at your feet I own my true offence.
I love! I am in love against your choice.
Aricia rules my very mind and being.

I worship the daughter of the Pallantides.
My disobedience is that I 'm consumed
with love for her. Aricia.

Theseus

Mighty heaven!
You love her! What transparent lie is this?
Lay claim to one crime to cover up another?

Hippolytus

For six months I've avoided her, yet I love her.
I came in trepidation to tell you this.
What, then! Can nothing make you see the truth!
What fearful oath is needed to convince you?
I swear by the firmament, by earth, by nature...

Theseus

Scoundrels always turn to perjury.
Stop! Enough! Spare me this nonsense. Does
your counterfeit virtue have no other prop?

Hippolytus

To you I may seem false and devious.
Phaedra, in her heart, does me more justice.

Theseus

Your arrogance is driving me out of my mind!

Hippolytus

How long will my exile last? Where's it to be?

Theseus

Beyond the edge of the world,
and still too close for comfort.

Hippolytus

Accused by you of the fearful crime
you name, thrown out by you, what friends will I find?

Theseus

Find them among the scum who wallow in incest,
applaud adultery: treacherous, lawless,
honourless men. They are fit company
for such a depraved character as you.

Hippolytus

Incest, adultery, you keep repeating.
I hold my tongue. Yet, Phaedra had a mother!

Phaedra comes from a line as you well know
whose blood is tainted by more crimes than mine.

Theseus

What!! Have you lost all hold on your own reason?
For the last time, out! Get out of my sight. Don't wait
until I have you thrown out headlong.

Exit Hippolytus

Scene 3

Theseus, alone

Theseus

Go, wretch, to your irrevocable doom!
Neptune swore by the sacred river of death,
terrible even to the gods themselves.
His word cannot be broken. A god of vengeance
pursues you. You have no way of escape.
I loved you. Even now in spite of this,
my very entrails ache at what's to come.
You forced me to it. No father was more wronged.
Oh righteous gods who see my hideous grief,
How did I father such an obscenity?

Enter Phaedra

Scene 4

Theseus, Phaedra

Phaedra

Terror brings me to you for I heard
your shouts. I was afraid that violence
might follow on your threats. If there's still time,
spare your child, respect your family line.
Save me from the horror – I beg – of hearing
that blood scream out. Don't submit me to
perpetual memories, knowing it was I
who raised a father's hand against a son.

Theseus

No, madam, my own hand hasn't bathed in blood.
Yet the villain won't escape. Immortal
hands are charged with his destruction. Neptune
owes it to me. You will be avenged.

Phaedra

Neptune owes what? What? What prayers are these?

Theseus

Are you afraid they won't be listened to?
Join in them, madam; they are justified.
Tell me again what happened: let me have it,
your full account. Incite me to utter madness.
I've been too slow, too kind, too lenient.
You don't know all. He vilifies you, he speaks
of falsehoods and deceptions. Yours. Then claims
he loves Aricia.

Phaedra

Loves...

Theseus

Here, to my face!
But I see through his facile trickery.
Justice, direct from the god, will strike him down.
I go to Neptune's altar to exhort
The swift enactment of his irrevocable oath.

Exit Theseus

Scene 5

Phaedra, alone

Phaedra

What did he say? What was it that I heard?
That stifled love stirs up in me again.
Cruel, savage news! Great heaven, I came to save
his son! That was my purpose, so I tore
myself from Oenone's frightened arms and followed
my tortured conscience. Who knows what I'd have done?
Perhaps condemned myself by spilling out
the ghastly truth before my voice was silenced.
Hippolytus can feel, but not for me!
Aricia has his heart. She has his pledge.
Aricia! Oh gods! While I was kneeling, pleading
and he stood hard and cold with that glazed stare
another had already shackled his pride,
another had charmed his eyes. Perhaps his heart
is easily stirred by anyone but me.
I am the only creature he despises.

And I was going to save him! Save him?

Enter Oenone

Scene 6

Phaedra, Oenone

Phaedra

Oenone!

Hear this!

Oenone

You left me trembling. I was afraid
you meant to harm yourself.

Phaedra

Who would believe it!

Listen, Oenone! I have a rival!

Oenone

What?

Phaedra

Hippolytus is in love! Oh yes, it's true!
That shy wild enemy, that untamable tiger
who filled me with dread, turned away my lament,
sneered when I wept, repulsed my courtesy,
is tamed, is trapped, defeated, beaten down.
Aricia did it.

Oenone

Aricia?

Phaedra

Oh, unbearable!

What further suffering lies ahead of me?
All the old hopes, the fear, the ecstasy,
guilt, and remorse, the burning agony,
The insults – they are nothing to this pain.

Oenone

What good's it to them? They'll never meet again.
It's futile.

Phaedra

Ah! But they will love forever.
Even as I speak – excruciating thought –
they care nothing about my demented ravings.
Exile may force them apart – in spite of it
they're exchanging a million vows to be together.

I cannot stand their happiness, Oenone.
It mocks me. Pity my jealousy. She must die.
Theseus must be raised against her. Her crime
outstrips that of her brothers. The punishment
has to be extreme. What am I saying?
Am I indeed mad? Am I jealous? Me?
Beg Theseus? Theseus, my husband lives
and my whole body and soul lusts on. For whom?
What do I want? Every word I utter
makes my very hair stiffen in terror.
This is the summit and surfeit of all my guilt.
I reek of lies and incest. These murderous hands
long to plunge themselves in innocent blood.
Misery! And still I live and look into
the sacred eye of the sun, my ancestor,
the ruler and the father of all the gods.
My forebears crowd the skies and fill creation.
Where can I hide? Let's fly to the night of hell.
Not there. My father clasps the fatal urn,
which destiny placed with him, in pitiless hands.
My father, Minos, judges the newly dead.
Ah, how that phantom will start up in horror
when I appear – his daughter – forced to reveal
so many vile offences, some, perhaps,
unheard of even in the underworld.
What will you say, my father, when I stand
before you? I see the urn roll from your grasp.
I see you weighing new punishments to execute
with your own hand upon your daughter. Forgive me!
A merciless goddess has brought destruction. Vengeance
has struck your daughter and your family.
Witness it in my madness. Misery!
My broken heart never took pleasure in
the galling evil, the shame of which persecutes me
and will, until, with my dying breath, I abandon
a life led in wretchedness, ending in torture.

Oenone

Come, lady, there's no need for this. Consider.
Yours is an understandable weakness. It's fate.
So, you're in love...! You cannot fight against
what destiny decides. Who among us

hasn't felt this frailty? It's a part
of being human and you are merely human.
It's your lot. Why, even the gods themselves,
the peerless Olympians, who penalize misled mortals
with so much bluster, have done no less than this.
They've had their moments of illicit love.

Phaedra

You dare to speak like this? You dare drip in
this poison to the end? You canting sorceress!
That's how you caused my downfall. You dragged me back
to face the sunlight. Your fawning malevolent tongue
made me forget my honour. Hippolytus
I stayed away from. You made me see him. Why?
Why did you do it? Why did your mocking mouth
incriminate him and bring his life to ruin?
Perhaps he'll die. The sacrilegious prayer
torn from his tormented father may
even now have been answered. Silence! No more!
Leave me, you demoness, you queen of fiends,
she-devil! My fate's my own. On you I call
heaven's justice. May its swift retribution
be a warning forever to those who ladle
wheedling words in princes' ears to entice them
to follow their weaknesses and ease them on
down the slippery slope of their desires.
Squealing sycophants! The most noxious gift
that hostile gods can inflict upon a crown!

Oenone

She is my life. I gave up everything.
Here is my reward and... I deserve it...

ACT V

Scene 1

Hippolytus, Aricia, Ismene

Aricia

The danger's extreme, and still you won't speak out?
Your father loves you. You'd let him believe this falsehood?
What cruelty! If my words mean nothing to you
and you can leave me forever without a thought,

then, go! Farewell! Forget Aricia but
at least save your own life, defend your name.
Force your father to retract his curse –
there's time yet. What fastidious sense of honour
motivates you to leave a liar triumphant?
Tell Theseus the truth.

Hippolytus

Have I not done so!
Should I strip bare his bed? Should truth presume
to go so far as humiliating my father,
holding him up to ridicule? Only you,
the gods and you, know what has happened here.
Judge how I love you. I have shared with you
secrets I'd rather never have known myself.
Remember our pact of silence. Forget what I've told you.
The tale's too sordid, Aricia, for your sweet lips.
Let's put our trust in the justice of the gods
whose task is to defend me. Sooner or later
Phaedra will be punished. She can't escape
their judgement. I ask one courtesy: stay silent.
In everything else my anger's paramount.
Aricia, dare to leave this slavery.
Dare to come with me, forget this doom-filled palace
where even the air reeks of dishonesty.
My downfall's caused confusion. Profit from it.
I'll plan your flight. Here, the few guards we trust
are mine but powerful allies stand abroad.
Argos awaits, Sparta welcomes us.
Let's call upon our friends. Phaedra must not
feed upon our inheritance, must not
construct an empire on our shattered rights,
assume our thrones, seat her son and make him
heir to stolen glory. The moment's here.
Why do you hesitate? Come! What holds you back?
This is for you! For you, Aricia! Why
when I'm ablaze with hope do you turn cold?
Are you afraid to share an outcast's fate?

Aricia

Oh, what joy, to link my life with yours
and live with you, forgotten by the world!

But we're not bound in marriage. How can I...?
Honour forbids. I know in strict observance,
I can escape the king. He's not my father.
Flight from a tyrant's not a moral crime.
Your love... My name...

Hippolytus

No, no! I wouldn't ask it.
I cherish your reputation. I've higher motives.
Escape your enemies and follow your husband.
Free! Fate makes us free! It's to each other
we'll pledge our faith. The two of us. You and me.
No ceremony. No torches. No one there.
Outside the gates of Troezen, among those tombs,
the ancient burial place of royal forebears,
there stands a shrine no perjurer dare approach,
a place where mortals cannot swear false oaths
for liars meet certain death, lies can't exist.
There, if you trust me, let us go together
to seal our ever-lasting love with marriage.
The deity of that temple will be our priest
and we shall pray he'll take a father's place.
I'll call on the sacred names of the highmost gods –
majestic Juno, Diana fleet and chaste,
all of them who look tenderly on my love
and they will hear my promise and grant their blessing.

Aricia

The king! Go! Quickly! I'll stay a moment here
to quieten his suspicion. Send me a guide,
a faithful one, to lead me to your side.

Exit Hippolytus

Enter Theseus

Scene 2

Theseus, Aricia, Ismene

Theseus

Gods! Give me a glimmer of light to find
the truth that's buried somewhere here!

Aricia

Be ready

to leave at once.

Exit Ismene

Scene 3

Theseus, Aricia

Theseus

I see you're startled, madam.

You're changing colour. What did Hippolytus want?

Aricia

He came, my lord, to say a last farewell.

Theseus

Are those the eyes that toppled that lofty spirit?

And his first sighs of love, are they for you?

Aricia

I can't deny the truth, my lord. He's not

inherited your misguided prejudices.

He has not treated me like a criminal.

Theseus

No.

I understand! He swore eternal love.

Don't build your hopes on that unstable nature.

Eternal love! He's sworn the same to others.

Aricia

He has?

Theseus

You should have steadied him. Disgusting!

How can you share him with another woman?

Aricia

And how can you tolerate those... disgusting... lies
contaminating his life? Do you know him so little?

Can't you tell good from bad? Why, in your eyes

and yours alone, he's evil, when everyone else acknowledges his perfection? No, it's disgusting to let him be castigated by venomous tongues. Stop it. Take back your murderous oath, my lord, lest the implacable gods hate you enough to honour it. Often when they are angered they give us what we ask but this is merely another form of punishment.

Theseus

Words, words!

Mere empty words! No, you're covering up. You're blind with love. But I have witnesses, scrupulous, unimpeachable. I've seen tears shed without deception.

Aricia

Be careful, sir.

Those powerful hands have rid the world of monsters, many monsters, but one of them survives. Your son, my lord, forbids me to say more. Knowing how he respects you, I won't go on. Were I to do so... Not possible. He's silent and so am I. I'm leaving to guard my silence.

Exit Aricia

Scene 4

Theseus, Guards

Theseus

What's she hiding? Words, stopping and starting. Are they in league together, plotting fresh mischief? I know I'm in the right but deep inside me a plaintive voice is calling and questioning. Some secret remorse is tugging at my heart. One last time let me question Oenone. I need to know more. Bring the woman in. Bring her alone.

Exeunt Guards

Scene 5

Theseus, Panope
Enter Panope

Panope

I've no conception, lord,
what the queen intends. She's white as death,
violently agitated. Oenone's left.
She chased her away, disgraced, and Oenone
has flung herself from a cliff-top into the sea.
How can one know her motives? The vast ocean
covers her.

Theseus

What?

Panope

Oenone's death has not
Quieted the queen, only made her more desperate.
Sometimes, to calm herself, she holds her children,
weeping with love then, suddenly seized with horror,
rejecting love, she pushes them away.
She strays through the palace. She recognizes no one.
Three times she's written letters and three times
she's torn them up. You have to see her, sir.
Agree to see her. Help her.

Theseus

Almighty heavens!
Oenone dead and Phaedra wanting to die!
Call my son back. Let him defend himself.
Let Hippolytus speak. I'll listen.

Exit Panope

Neptune!
Great Neptune, hold your hand, delay your vengeance.
I want no vengeance. Return my son to me.
Perhaps the witnesses lied and I believed them.
I acted too quickly. I called on you too soon.
These hands... that cursed my son... If it's too late...
Despair!

Enter Theramenes

Scene 6

Theseus, Theramenes

Theseus

Theramenes. Where's my son? Where is he?
I entrusted him to you when he was only a child.
Why are you weeping? Why? My son...?

Theramenes

Too late.
Your grief is useless. Hippolytus is dead.

Theseus

Aaah!!!

Theramenes

I have seen the death of the finest man,
sweetest, most lovable on all the earth
and I will add, most pure of heart, my lord.

Theseus

Dead? My son dead? While I am stretching out
these arms to hold him, the gods tear him away?
So soon! What? How?

Theramenes

We'd barely passed the gates
of Troezen. Hippolytus in his chariot
stood silent, pensive, with his guards around,
equally silent, catching his sombre mood.
He took the northern road towards Mycenae.
The reins lay slack. Those noble stallions, once
so mettlesome, eager, attentive, nodded along,
dull-eyed, heads hanging, as though responding to
the rhythm of his thoughts. A ghastly roaring
swelled up from the very depths of the ocean floor.
It numbed the air. A resounding answering groan
issued from the bowels of the earth.
The horses' manes bristled. Our blood froze in our veins.
Upon the back of the ocean there heaves up

a churning mountain of water. It moves closer.
It rolls towards shore. The towering crest grows taller.
It breaks in thunderous foam and vomits out
a gross misshapen monster, a hideous beast.
The enormous menacing head is armed with horns.
The whole of its croupe is plated with yellowish scales.
A thing half slaving bull, half raging dragon.
The hind part lashes and twists in slimy coils.
Its bellowing shakes the ground. The sun stands still.
The earth beneath our feet shudders and rolls.
The air is foetid, thick, unbreathable.
The wave which had carried it draws back aghast.
Courage is useless. We flee, to take refuge in
the little temple standing near. Not all.
Hippolytus alone, more than worthy
to be a hero's son, reins in the horses,
seizes his javelins, charges, and launches his weapon
with an unswerving aim. A yawning hole
opens there in the monster's side. Howling with rage
and agony, the creature hurls itself,
moaning and writhing towards the terrified horses,
opening cavernous jaws, a fiery gulch
spewing forth flame and blood and putrid vapour.
The horses plunge aside. They're out of control.
Bridle and voice mean nothing. Their master's powerless.
Red spume froths from their mouths. Some say they saw
amongst all this, a supernatural shape,
the outline of a god, goading them on
to greater frenzy, stabbing their lathered flanks.
They gallop in wild-eyed terror towards the rocks.
The axle screeches. It snaps. The splintered chariot
flies into fragments. So Hippolytus fell,
bravest of princes, tangled in the reins.
Forgive me. The pain's too great. I can still see it.
I'll see it forever. This grief will never fade.
I watched. I watched your helpless son, my lord,
dragged behind the horses his hand had fed.
He tries to call them. His voice startles them more.
They gallop. They're galloping on. His broken body
is jerked behind them, one great living wound.
The plains ring with our cries. The frenzy lessens.

The horses slow and stop by those ancient tombs
where his forebears sleep the chilly sleep of death.
I run. The guards follow me. I choke with tears.
We follow a trail of blood. It stains the rocks.
Flags of his hair and flesh hang from the brambles.
I'm there. I call him. He stretches out his hand.
He opens his dying eyes. They close again.
He speaks: "The gods have snatched an innocent life.
My dear old friend, when I am dead, take care
of sad Aricia and if, some day, my father
learns the truth, and mourns a son who died
accused unjustly, tell him, to appease my spirit
To treat his prisoner gently. Give her back...'
My arms held the dead hero – now nothing more
than a poor, disfigured corpse, a pitiful creature,
a trophy to the anger of the gods.
You yourself, sire, would not have recognized him.

Theseus

My son! Dear hope that I myself destroyed!
Inexorable gods who served me only too well!
Henceforth my life is everlasting sorrow.

Theramenes

I saw Aricia. She was running from you.
She and the prince were to marry before the god.
She's there. She sees the grasses steaming, red,
and then a sight too terrible to be looked on,
Hippolytus, her lover, a mangled mass
of broken bone and formless lifeless flesh.
What a gift for a bride! She can't believe it.
She doesn't know him. She's calling out his name.
Where is her lover? Where's Hippolytus?
What's this before her? Slowly the truth sinks in.
Moaning, swaying, half dead herself, she falls.
Ismene brings her back to life or rather
She brings her back to face the inevitable truth.
And so I've come, abhorring the human condition,
to report honestly his dying words.
I've told you his last desire. My duty's done.
Your son was a hero. Here comes his enemy.

Scene 7

Theseus, Phaedra, Theramenes, Panope, Guards

Theseus

You win! He's dead! I have my own thoughts, madam.
I was right in my fears, right to suspect,
right to listen to that inner voice.
But he is dead. Glory over your victim,
just or unjust. My eyes are closed to facts.
I'll not peer into corners, hunting for signs
that might add to my grief. It is enough.
Nothing can bring him back. Now let me go
far from this place and you and the image of
my beautiful broken boy. Hounded by memory,
let me be banished from the universe.
Nature screams out injustice. What's a name?
My precious name adds to this hell. Without it
I'd be an easier thing to hide. The gods!
I hate their murderous favours. No more prayers!
I'll not plague them with useless prayers again.
Whatever they've given me, what they have taken
is greater. My son! They've taken away my son.

Phaedra

No Theseus, listen. My silence is not honest.
I've come to say your son was innocent.
Hippolytus did no wrong.

Theseus

And I'm his father!
His father listened to you. His father killed him.
Vixen! Do you expect forgiveness...?

Phaedra

Hear me.
Every moment is precious. Listen, Theseus.
Hippolytus was pure and chaste and loyal.
I lusted after him incestuously.
It was the gods, the gods who kindled me.
Oenone, detestably, did the rest.
She was afraid. She thought Hippolytus
who knew my passion, and loathed it, might reveal it.
Making excuse of my weakness, she came to you
and blurted out her tale. Now she is punished.

The waves are far more gentle than my rage.
To end all this I should have chosen a sword.
That would have left Hippolytus in doubt.
I needed to speak to you, confess my guilt.
More slowly I descend to the land of the dead.
I have taken... coursing through my veins...
a poison brought to Athens by Medea,
my sister. The mist is thickening. I barely see
the sky. Nor you, my husband, Theseus,
whom I betrayed. Darkness gathers. Death,
dimming my eyes which sullied the living day,
gives back at last the glory of the sun.

Panope

She's dying, my lord.

Theseus

May all of this die with her.
Come, you who understand my fatal error,
let us go together to mourn my son,
honour what little remains. He earned these honours.
My oath was madness. Let him lie in peace.
Whatever her brothers' treason, now I say
Aricia shall be my daughter from today.

The End

Researching and Directing Guillén de Castro's *The Force of Habit* By Sara Freeman

If, as a theatre historian and director, you teach in a program where part of the department goals are to present a variety of shows that allow students and the community to experience theatre of diverse style, content, and form from a variety of historical periods (love that bulletin copy), there comes a time to plan to do a classical show. Inspired by a translation evaluation assignment I had been doing with my first year seminars where we evaluated multiple English-language versions of a play from the Spanish Golden Age, I decided to direct a Spanish *comedia* in the fall of 2015.

This article tells the tale of several pieces of scholarship that had a deep impact upon our show, in the spirit of demonstrating the richness theatre history and historiography incorporate into a show process. In our rehearsal, theatre scholarship was deeply influential not because we were aiming for a reconstruction of period practices, but because historical and literary critical scholarship gave us the vocabulary and imagery to name and develop many of our impulses and turn them into production decisions. I want to describe how those pieces of research shaped our blocking, character interpretation, and revision of the play's ending.

But first, I must admit that I don't read or speak Spanish. My research language is French. Like the theatre generalist I am in my program, I primarily use *Fuente Ovejuna* and *Life is a Dream* when teaching literature from the Spanish Golden Age. I knew if I wanted to direct a Spanish play, however, I would need someone with the language to be my right hand collaborator. And, when I had a student in class emerging as a dramaturg who had the Spanish and excelled at doing that very translation evaluation assignment, I realized: this is my chance! Hannah Ferguson became my dramaturg and collaborator.

In our year-long arc of development, rehearsal, and performance, the four scholarly sources that most galvanized us were:

- "Marriage and Subversion in Comedia Endings: Problems in Art and Society" by Catherine Connor (Swietlicki) from *Gender, Identity, and Representation in Spain's Golden Age*, edited by Anita K. Stoll and Dawn L. Smith (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2000).
- "The Power of Transformation in Guillén de Castro's *El caballero bobo* (1595-1605) and *La fuerza de la costumbre* (1610-15): Translation and Performance" by Kathleen Jeffs from *The Reinvention of Theatre in Sixteenth Century Europe*, edited by T.F. Earle and Catharine Fouto (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, Legenda, 2015).
- "Gender Politics in Guillén de Castro's *La Fuerza de la Costumbre*" by Kathleen Jeffs from *On Wolves and Sheep: Exploring the Expression of Political Thought in Golden Age Spain*, edited by Aaron M. Kahn (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).
- "*Lición de llevar chapines: Drag, Footwear, and Gender Performance in Guillén de Castro's La fuerza de la costumbre*" by Harry Vélez Quinones, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 14:2 (2013): 186-

Already this list reveals that we chose to stage a relatively lesser-known play, *The Force of Habit* by Guillén de Castro, rather than one of the plays I had been working with in my seminars and theatre history classes. We didn't start with *Force of Habit*. Hannah and I had begun by digging in to *Life is a Dream*. That seemed like where we were going to go, though we wondered where our mutual interest in gender was going to find its best match: in Lope de Vega's wronged Laurencia from *Fuente Ovejuna*, or in Calderon's disguised, honor-protecting Rosaura?

Then we met Kathleen Jeffs.

Kathleen is a dramaturg, scholar, translator, and director who teaches at Gonzaga University. She persuaded us of the queer potentials of the vastly underappreciated storehouse of Golden Age *comedias* and shared her translation of *Force of Habit* with us. Moreover, she encouraged us to take her workshop adaptation of the script apart, and gave us permission to cut it or rearrange it as suited our needs. Kathleen and Hannah and I agreed that we wanted to do a production alive to our struggles about gender and identity and that that might mean reworking the play.

Going outside the canon of well-known and frequently translated plays from the Golden Age meant that the scholarship we read was even more pointedly exciting: we didn't have any baselines with this play. We had so much to discover. Kathleen shared with me that her perspective is deeply shaped by this source:

- *Role-Play and the World as Stage in the Comedia* by Jonathan Thacker (Liverpool, Liverpool UP, 2002).

Thacker introduced Kathleen to the play during her graduate work, and encouraged her to make her translation. His chapters titled "Patriarchy in Action: Guillén de Castro's *La fuerza de la costumbre* and the Distribution of Roles" and "Patriarchal Excess and the Emergence of the Desiring Self" represent the most uncompromising scholarship we encountered in terms of detailing the way this play represents the gender politics of its period.

Overall, we found a spectrum of scholarship about *Force of Habit*, especially on the topic of the playful possibilities the play might allow in performing gender. Thacker represents one polarity that sees little evocation of liberation in the representation. Kathleen's own scholarship rests in the middle point, suggesting that stage business makes this play much more complex in terms of gendered behavior. The work of my colleague Harry Velez Quinones, who is a Professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Puget Sound, sits at the other end of the continuum, explicitly queering the play in its analysis. I can't adjudicate these different approaches as a scholar of the period, but as a director, it was very fertile to engage with the perspectives.

Force of Habit predates Castro's best-known work, *Las mocedades del Cid*, the play that Corneille later adapted and which caused a furor at the French Academy. It follows the typical three-act *comedia* structure and smartly employs the character types typical to the form. It directly embodies the gender anxieties and pieties of its day, presenting a story about a brother and sister separated from each other in their infancy whose parents choose to raise the children dressed in the gender opposite

to the sex each child was designated at birth. So, father Pedro, exiled from their hometown with baby Hipolita, raises her as a boy and transforms her into a soldier so she might live with him more safely during his twenty years fighting battles in the Netherlands. Constanza, meanwhile, shut up in her father's house, dresses baby Felix in women's clothing and keeps him indoors like a woman to protect him from sword-fighting and honor culture duels, the things that killed her brother and caused her to be separated from Pedro.

The play begins when the family is reunited and Pedro declares that everyone can go back to their proper gender and they can resume life as a normal family. But it is soon clear that there is no going "back" for these young adult children because the reality there is to "resume" is the actuality of their lives as man-woman and woman-man. Felix and Hipolita experience their proper gender as aligning with the social habits and behaviors they were raised to present, not with the information provided by their secondary sex characteristics.

The play mixes comedy and seriousness as it tracks the collisions between Pedro's demands and the new sense of self most of the characters must develop, but it emphasizes the comic. It is full of physical shtick about the difficulty of learning to use a sword or walk in high heels. It features budding romances. Conveniently, a brother and sister from a prominent family in town find Felix and Hipolita enchanting exactly because of their hybrid gender identities. A *gracioso* amps up practical jokes and intrigues. There's also a set of double-crossings and duels that must be fought to preserve Felix and Hipolita's honor.

It's a high context premise played out in an over-laden plot, and, most complicated for us as contemporary artists, it seems to resolve in an uncomplicated way. By the final scene, everyone is clearly defined as a man OR a woman and the play ends with a firmly heterosexual marriage for both Felix and Hipolita. Though we were intrigued by the potential in performing this play, our very first challenges were to come to terms with that ending, or to shatter it. And here's where the scholarship first supported us and freed us.

The question of genre and the question of the ending dominated our early conversations with Kathleen. One approach would be to reframe the comic business so that it showed and intensified the characters' suffering with trying to master various technologies of gender, and to emphasize the tragic themes about identity and social oppression running beneath the surface of the play. This would be to focus primarily on showing the "patriarchy in action" as Thacker frames it. Thinking this way, Hannah described the play as a tragedy demonstrating the awfulness of conversion therapy. That's not where my heart was, however, and that became completely clear to me when I read Connor's article on marriage and subversion in the ending of *comedias*.

Connor's analysis of the meaning of conventional wedding scenes and her explication of "hard" and "soft" approaches to the narrative closure provided by weddings allowed me to articulate that I wanted to honor the combination of tragedy and comedy typical in *comedias* and have the final sequence be a marriage that doesn't foreclose subversion. Connor voices the way that feminist criticism "seems uncomfortable with the presumed defeat of the formerly subversive heroine by the forces of the patriarchal order, tradition, and stability" represented by traditional wedding endings.

She advocates accounting for the difference between the past and the present in both literary and material history rather than collapsing our understanding of Golden Age theatre directly into our own signifiers (23). She investigates how a female spectator in the Golden Age might have interpreted wedding endings of *comedias* and concludes that they would have reacted to them as representing variegated, compelling negotiations of complex social options.

Connors writes: “For the spectators of any culture, weddings are extremely important socio-cultural markers of change, transition, and new foundations in the lives of individuals and their immediate society” (25). Connors helped me name the way I see weddings (on stage and in life, in fact, I would describe my own wedding this way) as “symbolically central” and “essentially ambiguous” social rites of passage (27-29). Working with concepts of law and temporality as well as gender and drawing on documentation about married women’s work in the 17th century, Connors does a masterful job arguing that that weddings provide ending structures that are open even as they are closed. Rather than simply restoring order, Connors suggests wedding endings represent the creation of new orders still open to the indeterminacies in life and in art.

Using the idea of social rite of passage, it became my goal to stage a wedding at the end of *Forve of Habit* that opened identity options even as it closed the narrative. Planning this production across the summer of 2015, as the United States Supreme Court handed down its decision removing federal barriers to same-sex marriage, I went to the costume designer with my developing plan. What if, I said, we ended with a big, queer wedding? What if everyone got to re-dress onstage, and ended up in gender mixed outfits? Felix could wear a skirt and doublet. Hipolita could have a veil and a codpiece and her sword (which she gives up, painfully, in Act I of the play). This wedding, like weddings in contemporary culture, could be about self-fashioning. About making a version of sex-gender-partnership with a beloved that suits that particular union: a narrative closure that is also an opening.

Soon we expanded the range. We aimed to out-*As-You-Like-It As You Like It*. I wanted the play to end with not just two weddings, but with four. We’d have Hipolita and Luis, Felix and Leonor, but also a marriage between Luis’s two best friends Marcelo and Otavio, and a marriage between Galvan, the clown, played by a woman in our production, and Ines, Leonor’s maid. Everyone would change clothes on stage, fashioning their preferred combination of male and female clothing. Then we pushed it to five couples because it became imperative that Pedro and Costanza be included. We established their official wedding in Act II—because their terrible shame, the reason for Pedro’s exile, is that they were only “secretly” married in their youth, and had been hiding their relationship and children.

Therefore, in our production, at the end, Pedro and Costanza also changed habits and wore both male and female clothing, at the request of their children. This plays against the text, which ends with Pedro declaring he is glad he returned everyone to their own nature. Instead, everyone was transformed in our production, and we adjusted Pedro’s line to celebrate everyone “turning” to their own nature. That turning happened in different directions for different characters.

In short, we flipped the dynamics of Castro’s finale. Instead of the children transforming themselves

because of the father's demands and hardening the existing social order, the parents transformed themselves because of their children's discoveries. Onstage, space opened for a renewed and transformed social order because the characters were able to change. Kathleen's article on the "power of transformation" argues that *comedias* use language and create stage business that shows love transforming the characters confirmed and affirmed this interpretive pathway. Kathleen's point about Leonor's cruel enforcement of masculine heroics onto Felix starkly made us reconsider her character and pushed us to truly articulate the ways that each of the characters had to be understood as working both within and against the gender norms they had inherited.

As we chose to create a transformative wedding, replete with high-stakes character decisions and sexy connections, we also frankly acknowledged that the story we were telling exploded the temporal bounds of Castro's work. We weren't trying to indicate that the wedding we presented represented the historical reality of Golden Age Spain, though both Kathleen and Harry's research provided us with examples of much more complicated public and private gender identity than official representation might allow. Because he is here, it was a great joy to that Harry could join us in rehearsal for a discussion of his article about the lesson of the *chapines* (the platform footwear women wore outside at the time). In his presentation, Harry shared knowledge about hidden histories of sexuality in the Golden Age, and told us, among other things, about the dildo collections of Spanish nuns.

This was somewhat how our research worked: we encountered the past in all sorts of strange and delightful specificity, but we also had to wrestle with the "official line" about gender and marriage from social tracts and dogma from the day that the most powerful characters in *Force of Habit* reiterate. Hannah, the dramaturg, was helping Kathleen on a soon to be published facing-pages Spanish/English version of *Force of Habit* during our pre-rehearsal research and during our rehearsal period. Because of that, she started working with a 17th century Spanish dictionary that she found quite marvelous in its strangeness and the way its entries relied as much on Catalan and Latin as they did on what she recognizes as Spanish. One of our favorite resonances from the dictionary was a definition of habit—a word we had been thinking of in terms of repeated behaviors, clothing, and Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*—that linked the word to menstrual cycles.

Across our summer preparation, we developed our notion that in our production, we started telling a story set in 1610, but by the time we ended the story, we were in a place of conversation between the past and the present. I wrote in my program note about how we were having a "new-old" experience staging the play because of this conversation across time, and also because our process resembled doing new work (working from manuscript pages, revising and adjusting the script) at the same time it needed the techniques for staging classical plays (voice and text work for elevated language, dancing, sword fighting, working in a presentational word-driven style).

Our decision about time allowed the story to journey to the wedding at the end and the way we used dance mattered to that too. We added three dances to the action. First, we used a slow, period tarantella that Pedro and Costanza performed in a very formal fashion when they first saw each other again. The early phases of the play where we were more fully in the past moved in a more

stylized way, slower, with deeper breath. For a medial moment, Marisela Flietes Lear created a solo for Hipolita to a spare flamenco beat known as the *martinete*. Hipolita danced this during her frustration with learning to walk in the *chapines*. The measured pace but intense energy of this dance and the way Hipolita rebelliously ripped off her costume's sleeves and shoes during it helped index our temporal quickening. At the end, as a finale everyone danced a traditional *sevillanas* to a pop music version of the form by the contemporary band Las Ketchups called "Sevillanas Pink."

Once we figured out how we wanted the end to work, we had to move backward through the script to set up how we got there. We wanted to create a subtextual relationship between Marcelo and Otavio, and were fascinated to hear from Kathleen and Harry about same-sex couples in the Golden Age. We needed to allow Felix and Hipolita to struggle with how they are asked to change their habits (literally and figuratively) and emerge as people acting with agency rather than leaving them as social ciphers. Kathleen had already edited the full English version when she made the performance translation we were working from. We made choices to streamline the action even further in Act II and III to reduce the double-crossing plot complications and allow Marcelo and Otavio's roles more time to breathe.

As we built their relationship, we brought the final duel between Otavio and Felix onstage, instead of leaving it only narrated as it is in the original play. We created its storytelling arc as one that wasn't only about Felix establishing his manhood, it was also about him using his own fluidity as he bested Otavio. The fight ended when Felix disarmed Otavio and then kissed him before reclaiming Leonor's glove from him (our Felix grabbed Otavio's hat then tore the glove out of the hat with his mouth and held it in his teeth, growling). Otavio fell to the ground when Felix took his hat and Marcelo rushed to him and, relieved he was unhurt, kissed Otavio as well. What was hidden was revealed.

The duel kisses were one of several such moments of instability and revelation, including the moment when Hipolita emerged in breeches for the wedding and Luis admired her codpiece. We aimed to be both serious and playful about gender, identity, and representation in our performance. We had performers with Latino and Asian-American backgrounds in the cast. We had cast members who prefer they pronouns to describe themselves. Our choice to cast a female performer to play Galvan also meant we asked whether or not the character was a man, or a woman, or, in one tradition for fools and soothsayers, both and neither. Hannah and I knew that our Galvan's talent for physical comedy and rebellious antics meant that nothing she (the actor) was doing played by the class rules of Golden Age Spanish society, but we embraced the character (he/she/they) as an eruption of the carnivalesque in the space. The costume designer dressed her in a parti-colored skirt and breeches with codpiece that featured an embedded squeaky toy, which Galvan honked for emphasis whenever a prank went well.

These types of choices traded on the play's investigation of interiority and exteriority, the relationship of social roles and inner self that Kathleen's articles imagine into possibility. Our set designer, my colleague Kurt Walls, created a set that referenced the architecture of *corrales*, but also added a curved ramp to the front of our stage that encouraged and allowed our direct interaction

with the audience. Galvan was always talking to the audience and hiding on the ramp. This sense of projecting out into the audience space contributed to our decision to interpolate four speeches from *Life is a Dream* into the proceedings to give the main characters time and words to reflect on the monumental decisions facing them. Castro provides fewer of those moments in his text, though his great speech for Hipolita when she surrenders her sword is a heart-breaker and her speech about needing to take revenge on Luis when she thinks he's betrayed her won applause every night.

In Kathleen's article about *Force of Habit* and *El Caballero Bobo (The Foolish Young Gentleman)*, she notes the thematic and intertextual resonances between *El Caballero Bobo* and *Life is a Dream*. Some scholarship she cites suggests that Calderon knew of Castro's play and borrowed details. Flipping that idea on its head, Hannah and I imagined what would happen if Castro's characters got to read Calderon's play. What parts would speak to their hearts? We also talked with Kathleen about the choice, and, as a collaborator, she challenged us to create more moments using blocking and business to increase Hipolita and Felix's accessibility to the audience, and to see if, after exploring the text as written first, we still felt the need to add the interpolated text from *Life is a Dream*.

Heeding that prompt, we took a blocking suggestion from Kathleen's other article very seriously. This article, about gender politics in *Force of Habit*, considers the interplay of words and staging extensively. Kathleen proposes that one effective way of foregrounding what's at stake for Hipolita and Felix is to have them directly exchange as many of the clothes they are wearing as possible when they are first asked to change "back" into men's clothing and women's clothing in Act I. We went after Kathleen's ideas about staging and stage business with gusto. Our Felix and Hipolita indeed exchanged key pieces of clothing as they changed onstage in a moment of Brechtian *gestus* demonstrating what it takes to construct a man and construct a woman with clothes.

Then, following up on an important comparison Harry made, we maximized every bit of awkwardness and complication that we could about their complete failure to adapt to the new clothing or to attain the new skills they are supposed to master to be a good man or good woman. Harry's brilliant article points up several things about how gender gets performed in *Force of Habit*, and one key insight is that Golden Age *comedias* abound with gender disguising/cross dressing, but that *Force of Habit* uses the convention differently. First, Felix and Hipolita are not disguising themselves in order to get something.

Second, in many *comedias*, when the main character disguises himself or herself, usually they are depicted as immediately being masterful at portraying the "other" gender. Seamlessly, they can sword fight, or dance, or walk like a lady, and they are convincing to others on this front. Felix and Hipolita, however, can't do anything well except what they are used to doing; and the whole first and second act show the work it takes to get anywhere near being mediocre at new gender skills, especially the cursed walking in high platform shoes. These sequences must have made *Force of Habit* funny at its first performance, and it's still wonderful and poignant stage business today.

Finally, Harry enumerates, typically once the character is disguised, he or she becomes overwhelmingly sexually attractive to other characters, so the woman disguised as a man gets pursued by other women relentlessly and vice versa for the man disguised as a woman. This type of

set-up evokes and offloads homoeroticism and also suggests that gender fluidity has romantic potency in ways that are hard to pin down. On this front, Hipolita and Felix don't so much fail as present a unique case study. Because they are not in disguise, the characters who fall in love with them have to be "open" in some ways about being attracted to them exactly because they are gender fluid. We found this to be very powerful in performance. "I never thought there could be anyone like her," enthuses Luis in the script, and his status silences Marcelo and Otavio when they want to give him a bad time for his desire.

Working with Harry's scholarship also opened for us the script's implications about Pedro and Costanza's youthful transgressions of gender norms and that was extremely generative for moments at both the beginning and the end of the play. In the opening scene of the play, Costanza tells Felix about his father and explains their hidden affair, noting how Pedro snuck into her room from the balcony. A scene later, when she meets Hipolita, who is dressed in men's clothes, she reacts by describing Hipolita as a mirror image of herself at that age. For Costanza as a youth to look exactly like Hipolita at that moment would mean for Costanza to be dressed in male clothing as well. Harry's close read of this moment helped us create a character biography about Costanza disguising herself in men's clothes to sneak out of the house, and made us wonder about Pedro disguising himself as a woman to get in.

We were working imaginatively rather than historiographically at that point, of course, creating character biography in dialogue with Harry's provocations (and one of the scholars he most directly takes on is Thacker). What was most important to telling our version of this story was that we were spurred to wonder about what other ways the parents too could be fluid and playful and desperate about gender, in ways that paralleled the younger generation. This made the moment we created when Pedro takes a skirt from Hipolita and puts it on before the play's envoi speech feel very connected. In short, Harry's scholarship helped us situate the play in a much sexier, more subcultural world than its surface text about gender might suggest.

Though I will stop here, there's much more to consider about how we grappled with this text and what informed us. We produced the play in the midst of national and local discussions about the representation of transgender identities that impacted us, though our approach did not frame Hipolita or Felix as transgender in our current sense of the word. We also struggled with what the Golden Age emphasis on sexual purity and honor/shame mean in a time when college campuses are consistently thinking about rape and consent.

And, in a matter of performance technique, it was only when the student actors unlocked how to do the asides that the play truly began to work. That made me want to read more scholarship about asides as a matter of actor training, actor-audience relationship, and as indicators about historical shifts in the nature of dramatic storytelling and live performance. Perhaps that will be my next scholarly quest, when the calendar cycle turns and its time to do a classical play once again. In this process, the foundational and bold scholarship we read became utterly central to the performance experience we created.

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Sara Freeman is Associate Professor of Theatre at the University of Puget Sound. She coedited *International Dramaturgy: Translation and Transformations in the Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker* and *Public Theatres and Theatre Publics* and has published chapters in *The British Theatre Company 1980-1994*, *Decades of Modern British Playwriting: The 1980s*, *Working in the Wings: New Perspectives on Theatre History and Labor*, *Readings in Performance and Ecology*, and *Querying Difference in Theatre History*. She currently edits *Theatre History Studies*.

As a director, she most recently staged the Spanish Golden Age classic *Force of Habit*, *Spring Awakening* the musical and *In the Next Room (or, the vibrator play)* at Puget Sound. Past favorite directing projects include Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*, Shakespeare's *Love's Labors Lost*, Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*, Susanna Centlivre's *Bold Stroke for a Wife*, and Caryl Churchill's *Blue Heart*.

**Review: *(A)pollonia: Twenty-First-Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage*
By Will Harrington**

(A)pollonia: Twenty-First-Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage (Seagull Books, 2014) attempts to accomplish a great deal. In Joanna Klass' Preface the anthology is given a grand mission statement to work as a series of texts that "would resonate with a global readership." English was chosen as the language of translation because of its role as the "most international language we have now." Poland, in this anthology, becomes the international everyman. Alongside this universal ambition is another goal—also articulated in the preface—that "the plays collected in this anthology aim to break stereotypes about Polish people, history, culture, and expose the contradictions of the national psyche." This second goal is perhaps smaller in many ways than an attempt to appeal to Universal Human Experience, but it is also more difficult. Asking the question What is Poland? also demands asking corollaries: What was Poland? Where is Poland going? Who is Polish? While the trials and truths of the universal can be complicated, the questions and many answers are still familiar. For many Westerners, Poland has been frequently as alien as the surface of Mars. Today, twenty-five years after the fall of communism, Poland has changed so much so quickly and answering these questions becomes an even less stable enterprise.

In its quest to describe Polish identity, the book is organized into four groups of plays. "Polin" is the pair of plays about the Holocaust. "Transpolonia" are plays thematically linked around post-World War II German-Polish relationships. The importance of this section can be partially gleaned from the knowledge that post-war refers singularly to post-WWII—it is *the* war. "Postpolonia" are works reflecting and coping with the post-1989 transition from communism to capitalism and democracy through the complicated use of the politics of the body and physical identity. And lastly, "Lack-of-Polonia" are three plays depicting the move to free-market capitalism and globalization and the social and domestic stresses effecting change unto national identity, historiography, and other facets of culture. With eleven plays in total, the works are separated only loosely into these groups; there are no section headers or chapters. The works appear one by one, speaking for themselves. Every script was written and premiered in the last decade, the earliest in 2005 and most between 2009-11. They are at the vanguard of what Poland is and is creating right now.

What the plays investigate, however, is quite a bit more than just the four aforementioned themes. There seems to me to be a fifth, underlying theme of the Polish diaspora, framed by a historical and global, post-colonial context. This anthology is also in translation and is thus an anthology aimed not at a Polish-speaking audience, but for English-speakers abroad. "Polonia," a word historically designating Polish diaspora, appears in the headings of the sections, but never alone. In Krystyna Duniec and Joanna Krakowska's introduction, there is reference to Polonia as "the established historical narrative about Poland, a conceptualization of the Polish national identity that was born and nurtured in subjugation." Yet there is no reference in the introduction to the diaspora Polonia. They appropriate the term to refer to historic Polish narratives about national identity and culture. In this new usage, Polonia is the classical culture of myths of uprisings, anti-colonial struggle, and

Catholicism. While attention must be paid to what the plays have to say about Poles in Poland, Poles abroad who are not Polish have a vast influence. Both America's wars abroad are fought in part by Polonia heritage communities, and the English supermarket chain Tesco—serving a nation populated perhaps by as many a million members of Polonia—makes functional and symbolic appearances in the texts of *(A)pollonia*. All these works are by Poles, and so representation of those who have returned in the post-communist era or the foreign cultures Polonia has embraced become of special interest. The two questions a non-Polish reader should ask before reading this anthology are: What does Poland think of itself? and, What does Poland think of the rest of the world?

The first two plays, *(A)pollonia* by Krzysztof Warlikowski, Piotr Gruszczyński, and Jacek Poniesyalek and *The Mayor* by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk are collected as representative of "Polin," the Yiddish word for Poland. Taking vastly different approaches to the topic, they both sensitively approach themes of guilt and denial, grief, and the almost total destruction of an entire way of life. The first play, *(A)pollonia* toys with the ghosts of the past, mixing Jewish memory with the mythology of ancient Greece, blending narratives across cultural and historical boundaries. The second play, *The Mayor* takes an alternative route of exploration; it is solidly grounded in fact and research. It is the theatrical extension of Professor Gross' 2001 book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne*. These two plays yield vastly different explorations of what the Holocaust means to Poland.

(A)pollonia is the title work of the collection and the one that deals most directly with Old Polonia, the historical narrative mentioned by Duniec and Krakowska. Agamemnon, legendary leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War, is transformed into a philosopher of war, decrying the evils of war and conflict seemingly so glorified in the romantic myth of Polish Messianism. He becomes a spokesperson for the inhumanity of conflict and the Holocaust in particular. Using one estimation of the number killed in the "Final Solution" Agamemnon performs a set of cruel arithmetic, possibly one of the darkest moments in all of contemporary theatre,

Agamemnon: [...] The conflict with the USSR lasted from June 22, 1941, at 3:00, until May 8, 1945, at 23:01, which adds up to 3 years, 10 months, 16 days, 20 hours and 1 minute, or 46.5 months, or 202 weeks, or 1,417 days, or 34,000 hours, or 2,040,241 minutes. For the program known as the Final Solution, we'll use the same dates. That results in 572,043 people killed per month, 131,410 people killed per week, 18,772 people killed per day, 782 people killed per hour and 13.04 people killed per minute.

Adding to this, upon further reflection of his own role in war, "Like most people I never asked to become a murderer. I would have liked to play the piano." Drawing on the mythology of an additional historic war accomplishes a freedom to blur the lines: Agamemnon appears as a neutral observer. Uninvolved in the Second World War, his reflection on it gives him the ability to see all sides. He is able to take his experience and expertise and objectively observe WWII with no cultural bias. For him, a death is a death, "the only difference between the Jewish child gassed or shot and the German child burned alive in an air raid is one of method; both deaths were equally vain." This walks a fine line in the Western mind. My immediate reaction is one of lip-biting—although the

bombing of civilian targets was controversial, it seems yet another step to compare *anything* to the Holocaust. And it is this feeling that makes the play a success; it's been 70 years, can we start humanizing the Nazis? It forces a serious level of reflection and even if one concludes that we can't or shouldn't rethink the *people* of Hitler's Germany, it reminds us to remember why we believe that.

Perhaps it is this complicated penance and guilt that is at the heart of the so-called Nova Polska, the new, post-communist, democratic and capitalist Poland. *The Mayor* approaches the problem of guilt in Poland even more directly than the preceding *(A)pollonia*. The source material, *Neighbors*, chronicled the extermination of the Jewish population of a town by its non-Jewish populace, and was met by controversy and denial. Its non-fiction roots ground *The Mayor* in a more personal layer than the mythology of *(A)pollonia*. By grabbing onto the murder by all sides, Allied and Fascist, the role of Poland is normalized, pooled with that of others. As the Mayor Before asks, "Do you want the guilty to perish alongside the innocent?" In war, there are killers and the killed, and in peace there are the killers retired and their children. By accepting the death of Nazi Germany's children in the bombing of Dresden alongside the murder of the Jewish population of Europe, Poland is able to absolve itself of special responsibility. A shift has occurred from the Lamb of God to the priest in confessional box—hearing all sins instead of dying for them.

It is also in *The Mayor* that the first serious mention is made of the world *abroad*. The Jews who were not killed by the Germans "scattered all over the place. They're happily settled in America, mostly. That's what we heard from those of us who've been abroad." Here the opposition appears: the townspeople. The Poles of the village whose forefathers were guilty in the town's murder of its Jewish population become the "us." The Jews are the "they," and America is "abroad." In this first mention of the world beyond Poland it is cast as an oppositional force—it is home to the Jewish population, the memory of which is now causing so much trouble back in Poland for this small town. Perhaps America, across its ocean is Heaven, or maybe Hell? The Mayor of NYC appears after the rising of the Jewish dead in Poland, to declare that in his city "the buildings scrape the sky so hard that it's full of holes! In the clearings you can see God blessing America." *The Mayor* also matters to a Western audience because it deals with the West. It seems to offer the possibility that Poland is no longer the mythological Polonia of old—the eyes of God have turned West to follow the movement of people to America. The two plays of the Polin section are powerful in their exploration of not only the death and destruction of old Poland and the transformation of the whole world, they also fit as a good introduction because they display the opening of Poland's eyes to the wider world, beyond Russia and Germany.

The next three works, grouped under the heading of "Transpolonia," succeed in continuing this artistic inquest into Poland in the wider world. The first of the three plays is *Transfer!* by Dunja Funke and Sebastian Majewski and is almost untransferable to another stage. The difficulty of a cast performing this work stems from the fact that the monologues that make up most of the play were spoken by narrators who had lived the events. They were presented in native languages by the survivors of tumultuous moments who spoke their hearts out and would "often forget lines or even change stories from one night to the next." The authenticity would be almost impossible to replicate. They are also joined by a Stalin-Churchill-Roosevelt rock band, playing Joy Division covers, which

accompanies the monologues of "displaced Germans and Poles who told their life stories". The shift East of Poland's borders becomes a decision played out between sets by the Big Three rock band at Yalta (a 1945 conference in which the post-war fate of Europe and the control of small nations by the larger powers was discussed) becomes a horror for the neighbors. If *The Mayor* absolved Poland by reminding the audience of the whole world's guilt, *Transfer!* reminds the globe of the worldwide suffering of the innocent. Everybody became both a killer and a victim.

Following *Transfer!* is *Trash Story* by Magda Fertacz. Set in a house once occupied by a Wehrmacht Stalingrad veteran but now home to the descendants of an Auschwitz survivor and a PTSD-afflicted son who served in Iraq, the family is haunted by the ghost of the daughter of the Wehrmacht soldier, hung by her own mother in the face of the advancing Red Army to spare her the violence and rape they brought with them. America's War, Iraq, becomes a modern vessel to connect with the suffering of past generations on all sides. As the people suffered under the thundering armies of the East, so they must have suffered as the Polish sons do in Iraq. It would be simplistic to say as America's General Sherman did that "War is Hell" because Hell is a distant world. Here, America, once so distant in *The Mayor*, is brought home with the veteran as are the sufferings of those who conduct it. They are joined by the ghost of the civilians, not in Hell where the dead may be, but still here on earth. One side may be victorious, but no person wins a scenario begot of violence.

Rounding out "Transpolonia" is *right left with heels* by pilgrim/majewski, the entire postwar transformation of Poland and Germany told by the right and left heels of a pair once owned by Magda Goebbels, spouse to the Nazi propaganda minister. Through repetition and subtle transformation the shoes tell their story of travel eastwards and their place in the transforming society across 60 years before their end with Krystian, the transvestite owner who is brutally beaten and lies "there fucked-up/on the square/john paul ii square." The pair of shoes is a constant in its xenophobia and general bigotry. It is an anchor by speaking of the opinion of the "old" against the transformations that have been seen across Polish struggles for progress against fascism, communism (Solidarność), and homophobia.

The next group of plays, "Postpolonia" is particularly difficult and sensitive because of the topics they address. Like the previous *right left with heels*, *Foreign Bodies* by Julia Holewińska also approaches the acceptance (or lack thereof) of transgender identity in Poland. *In Desert and Wilderness After Sienkiewicz and Others* by Bartosz Frąckowiak and Weronika Szczawińska dreams of a Polish-African empire in the vein of England, France, and Portugal. Finally, *Small Narrative* by Wojtek Ziemilski addresses psychic disembodiment in the face of memory of national struggle.

It is difficult for any writer to fairly address as taboo a topic as transgender identity, and especially so in as socially conservative a nation as Poland. However, *Foreign Bodies* is one of the great honesties of the collection because of its unforgiving depiction of Poland today and how in some ways it has not changed. The play flirts occasionally with what appears to be a dangerously clichéd depiction of the process of discovery and hiding and denial in the transgender community. In a non-linear telling the scenes in the play that happen under communism depict how the transgender protagonist, an anti-communist pamphleteer, is discovered and outed to his circle of activists. The communist

government does not invent transphobia in the community but simply uses its existence in the current power structure to its own ends—intra-alienation of enemies. The other scenes of the play, set some twenty years later in capitalist Poland are no better; the woman's grandchild-to-be is illegally aborted for fear that transgenderism could be genetically inheritable. The fear of a transgendered child is enough to overwhelm any equally conservative prohibition against abortion. Even though she is surgically transitioned and open in her daily routine, she is as equally ostracized by the wider world. Poland may be modern, but some things never change.

Equally challenging is *Desert and Wilderness* and its treatment of race and historicity. In some remote dream world, a young Pole longs for an empire—but one based on co-operation between Poles and Africans. This work attempts to play with the notion of solidarity between white Poland and black Africa because aside from racial barriers, "You were colonized? We, Poles, were also!" Khartoum and the rebellion against the English is akin, in this telling, to Poland's uprising against its partitioners. Muhammad Ahmad is Tadeusz Kościuszko. As Kościuszko rebelled against Russia and Prussia, Muhammad briefly liberated Sudan from British colonial rule in the 1880s. It is a careful tightrope to walk, and while the work does it, it slips at times. Colonialism is about more than just borders and occupation—but race too. While it is something Poland dealt with as a largely Slavic nation, it confronted the issue in a different way than did black Africa during European empire building. When the play calls for several "not-quite-genuine African" men and women and a member of a "not-entirely real tribe," it may unintentionally cross a line of comfort for race-sensitive audiences in America. The freedom of white writers, regardless of their own history, to so openly blur race and its role should not go unchallenged. Translation is cultural as well as linguistic, and to an audience unfamiliar with Poland's history of oppression the text may not be successful.

But still a line that's telling! Poland, post-1945, has very few minority populations. We first read the plays of Polin and Transpolonia to understand the homogenizing process that now defines modern Polish demographics. The book is well structured in the ordering of its plays because we are also reaffirmed of the world as Polish. While the themes of the plays may attempt to be universal, the plays are nonetheless still set in Poland and this book is a Polish undertaking. The last work of Postpolonia, *Small Narrative*, is a short work written by the relative of a famous performer outed after the fall of communism as a collaborating agent for the secret police. This personal monologue provides some situations of what out of Polish culture can rob one of security and certainty of body. The ex-informer suffers from uncertainty about the past and future feeling trapped in his mind and memory and not his body. Opposite him plays the narrator, telling of his cultural homelessness, raised abroad and with an uncertain name, his identity blurs from one culture to the next. He is "betwixt and between" with uncertain footing in multiple world. In America the narrator is called Tony and who "spoke English, [who] thought in American," in Portugal Tony is not Tony, nor his first name Wojtek, but instead it "Vvoitek" (he inserts the second "v" to mimic the visual of the "w" while sacrificing the Polish orthography for that of Portuguese). The problem of Polish communist trauma does not translate abroad, and neither do the names of the protagonists. Poland situates itself abroad by situating itself *separate* from abroad. Anywhere else just seems to not be quite *Poland*.

The final group of plays, "Lack-of-Polonia," ends, but does not conclude the work. *No Matter How*

Hard We Tried by Dorota Malowska, *Diamonds Are Coal That Got Down to Business* by Pawel Demirski, and *I Love You No Matter What* by Przymyslaw Wojcieszek cannot possibly provide a conclusion because they are so immediate as to be lived on a daily basis. They are so prescient that they feel at times more like documentary than drama. Together, they present the contemporary cultural uncertainty of transformation in the overwhelming age of globalization. For instance, *No Matter* sarcastically questions the Polish interface with the wider world:

Gloomey Old Biddy: I remember the day the war broke out.

Little Metal Girl: The Cola war?

Poland has been expanded to include the terms and canon of the other culture, America's war is Iraq and the Cola's. Tesco and IKEA are now household names and Poles are "not Polish, just European." The wild collage and confusion of the contemporary era continues in *Diamonds are Coal* with the possible end of Polish Catholicism—"prayer and the lottery have failed him"—and its replacement with the religion of free market capitalism "this new economic system" and money. By twisting its source text, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, questions of fate and repetition begin the end of the anthology by seeming to ask why humans keep so persistently at living if it is already known. If cycles of winning and losing are so repetitive, cannot the future simply been known by looking back over the shoulder? But of course not, because we are human and so we trust our agency and never lose hope.

This is exactly why *I Love You No Matter What* perfectly ends the anthology. There is memory of the trauma of war carried by and embodied in the protagonist's (Magda) brother, a veteran of Iraq, who wraps his tears in the white and red flag. There is the Western world represented by Sugar Kowalczyk, who is named after Marilyn Monroe's character in *Some Like it Hot*. But most importantly there is love. It is a guiding force of continuity. Through each characters struggles, the question of what they love and how to enact their feelings becomes a potent force, guiding decisions and setting goals. And like this work, what brings everybody home in the preceding ten works is some love of life. It is much easier to take blind steps into the unknown future when your hand is being held by another, when the blindness is from the light of hope and not the darkness of uncertainty. Thus, because *I Love You No Matter What* is the play most clearly and openly about Love, it is the most hopeful play in the work and leaves a reader of the anthology with faith in the ability of art to connect humanity. If *Diamonds are Coal that Got Down to Business* asks the terrifying question Why do we act as if we are alive and *special*? *I Love You No Matter What* proposes to answer the question with the declaration that we do it because we have love and love is something which by itself is enough to keep going.

(A)pollonia succeeds in addressing and exploring the uncertainty of all eras; past, present, and future. It is a sprawling tribute befitting of the expanding meaning of what it is to be alive in the 21st century. Collected together under the general notion of "Poland", these plays find their place on a global stage because we all, like Poland, are confused. National identities are not weakened today, but they are faced with challenges of plurality and foreignness that deeply complicate them. Many of the problems associated with being Polish in relation to other countries should not be out of place

for those wondering what it means to be American, British, Australian, or any of the other English-speaking nations this fresh translation hopes to target.

Will Harrington
Harvard University

Will Harrington is a senior at Harvard University where he concentrates in Slavic Languages and Literatures, focusing on 20th-century Polish literature and poetry, and is currently writing on Żeromski's *Popioły*. He also has a secondary in Folklore and Mythology where he works with online culture and communities. His other interests include theatre and forgotten American writers.