

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 6, Number 3 (Spring 2017)

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:

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Table of Contents

Editor's Note	3
<i>A Fiery Young Man: Or, an Incendiary Lover</i> By Enrique Zumel Translated by Christopher Kidder-Mostrom	5
<i>When Five Years Pass (Legend of Time)</i> By Federico García Lorca Translated by Luigi Salerni	29
Review: <i>Tabrir Tales: Plays from the Egyptian Revolution</i> By Kristin Johnsen-Neshati	86

Editor's Note

Blossoming trees and flowers, along with the attendant pollen they bring to allergic eyes, noses, and throats, demonstrate that Spring has come to Chapel Hill. That also means that it is time for the Spring 2017 issue of *The Mercurian*.

This issue contains translations of two Spanish plays, Enrique Zumel's *A Fiery Young Man* from 1865, and Federico García Lorca's *When Five Years Pass* from 1931. Christopher Kidder-Mostrom's introduction to his translation of *A Fiery Young Man*, "Of Mummies and Mustard," describes some of the challenges he encountered when translating a play whose humor depends upon puns based upon an understanding of the nineteenth-century chemistry that was part of the apothecary's art. Luigi Salerni's introduction to his translation of *When Five Years Pass* details an experienced stage director's search for a translation that would capture the rhythms of Lorca's poetry in a forcefully theatrical fashion. Both translators have found effective and theatrically rich solutions to the problems that they faced. I am also pleased to be able to publish Juan González beautiful paintings alongside the translation of *When Five Years Pass*. These paintings were created in response to Lorca's play and were commissioned as a complement to the Meadows Museum of Art in Dallas, TX 1992 exhibition of Lorca's own drawings. As Salerni describes, the projected performance of the translation utilizing González' visual images in conjunction with the Meadows Museum of Art's exhibition never came to pass. While no substitute for such a performance, readers can at least get a feel here for how the visual images and the play combine. Both these paintings and other examples of González' stunning work can be found in Irene McManus' *Dreamscapes: The Art of Juan González* (NY: Hudson Hills Press, 1994).

The issue concludes with Kristin Johnsen-Neshati's review of the book *Tabrir Tales: Plays from the Egyptian Revolution*, edited by Mohammed Albakry and Rebecca Maggor. Johnsen-Neshati's review of these ten translations builds upon the publication of Roger Allen's translation of Sa`dallah Wannus *Soiree for the Fifth of July* in Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 2014), and *The Mercurian's* desire to bring more Arabic theatre to our readers.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can be found at: <https://themercurian.wordpress.com/index/>.

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. 4 (Fall 2017) will be September 30, 2017.

--Adam Versényi

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A Fiery Young Man: Or, an Incendiary Lover
By Enrique Zumel
Translated by Christopher Kidder-Mostrom

**OF MUMMIES AND MUSTARD: ADDRESSING SCIENTIFIC TERMS IN ZUMEL'S
*UN MANCEBO COMBUSTIBLE***

Being married to a chemist, I spend what some may consider an unhealthy amount of time contemplating puns about chemicals (specifically) and science (generally). So, when I first discovered that Enrique Zumel's *Un mancebo combustible* was set within the walls of an apothecary shop, I was certain that I'd found an appropriate outlet for my comedic experimentation. Translating a pun can be difficult. Translating a pun based on outdated scientific practices, well, that is something special.

The play's titular character, Casimiro, is indeed a fiery young man. He is also an apothecary's apprentice, and as such he spends much of the play pulverizing materials with a mortar and pestle. The activity allows for some humorous moments to grow out of the pounding motion of the work. At times it is used to punctuate moments of anger; at others it simulates sexual intercourse. These moments of physical humor resonate no matter what language the piece is in.

However, it is within Casimiro's first monologue on the first page of the play that the translator is confronted with a pun that works in Spanish, but not so well in English. The curtain rises on Casimiro grinding *mostaza* (mustard). He closes his monologue by saying, "*¡Oh vamos á pesar mostaza? Mi destino es vivir amostazado.*" He suggests returning to weighing out the mustard, then he states that his destiny is to live a life full of bother and annoyance. The challenge was to find a similar pun in English that reflected the wordplay between *mostaza* and the verb *amostazar* (to bug, to annoy, to pester). My first attempt was to search for another chemical or medicinal herb that might have a similar feel. But nothing that I found could quite cut the mustard (sorry). So, instead I returned to the substance at hand, mustard.

While not well known at the time of this play, sulfur mustard or $C_4H_8Cl_2S$ (known commonly as "mustard gas") had already been discovered by Fredrick Guthrie, who first synthesized it in 1860. Written in 1865 and set in that time's present day, it is possible that a pharmacist at the cutting edge of his field would know about that chemical. However, as we know, mustard gas did not become weaponized (and thereby world-famous) until 1916, when it was used by the German armed forces in World War I. Given the depth of knowledge Casimiro and his mentor Nicasio exhibit during the play, I could not imagine that these two individuals would know about mustard gas. But, my twenty-first century audience assuredly would. So it is that with a dash of sarcasm, Casimiro is able claim "After all, my life is such a gas." The chemistry-based pun is perhaps anachronistic, but it is there. And, it carries a similar meaning to the original.

Much has changed about the field of chemistry in the last hundred fifty years. Weights and measures have altered greatly. Early in the play Casimiro talks of a customer ordering 200 *dracmas* of a substance. Initially one might suppose that is 200 Greek coins' worth. But, in reality the *dracma* was an archaic Castilian unit of weight that is equivalent to 1/16 of an ounce. One of my favorite things about translating is learning such things. The dramaturgical research that informs the translated work is always quite rewarding in my opinion.

For instance, did you know that people used to ingest a powder produced by grinding up desiccated human corpses? In English, that substance was called *mumma*, or mummy powder. In Spanish, it was simply termed *momia*. About halfway through the play, Nicasio declares “*Estoy becho una momia*,” in order to show his dedication to his wife. Without some knowledge of old time cure-alls, that line would seem a bit of a non-sequitur, at the very least. However, knowing that by 1865 anyone making mummy powder had to have robbed a grave to accomplish the task (the powder was originally obtained by grinding up actual Egyptian mummies, hence the name), does shed some light on what measures Nicasio would take to prove his devotion. Sadly, conveying that information within the text isn’t really possible. Due to the line being a single thought within a rapid exchange between Nicasio and his mother-in-law, Ursula, its potential significance should be explored in the rehearsal room.

Each of the above examples involved researching the science behind the phrasing, yet the implementation of the knowledge gained during the research is what is most important. Studying and learning was fun, but the work of taking scientific and historical facts and fitting them into the final work took place in a workshop setting with two full casts of actors.

When I translate a piece (or when I write an original play, for that matter), most of the characters sound a bit too much like me at first. So, in 2005 I devised a system of workshopping based on the physical acting methods of Michael Chekhov, Jacques Lecoq, and Rudolf Laban, paired with a heuristic exercise borrowed from psychological counselling pedagogy. After a multiple-week workshop, the characters of the play each take on unique voices that speak less like the translator, but still maintain the essence of the meaning of their lines. Each of the previous examples benefited from this process to varying degrees: mustard most, mummy powder least. In the workshop setting the actors were able to play with the potential puns that I’d found (or attempted to find) that were similar to the *mostaza/amostazar* wordplay. It was discovered through the workshop process that none of the proposed solutions flowed as well, or conveyed the right tone, when in the mouths of our Casimiro actors. And it was through play during the workshop that the option of mustard gas evolved to being the correct solution to the problem.

With regard to *dracmas*, the process was less involved, but through improvisational exercises around that segment, it became clear that explaining what a *dracma* was would kill the scene’s momentum, and that referring to milliliters and kilograms (modern units of measure in chemistry labs) would sound clunky and anachronistic, so the imperial unit of ounces was chosen and fitted into the script. Similarly, the treatment of mummy powder was not elaborate. Once it was established that the scene’s momentum would be greatly hindered by defining *momia*, I decided to allow the lines surrounding it to carry the scene forward.

I’d like to close by taking a moment to return my wife’s involvement in this process. Not only was her day job a catalyst for my choosing this play, but her role as Ursula within the workshop assisted in the synthesis of many solutions used in the final product. Though the inclusion of scientific terminology in this play presented some of its biggest translation challenges, the work is made richer through the application of research into with world of the 19th century chemist. If applied correctly, I hypothesize that *A Fiery Young Man: or, An Incendiary Lover* will have a positive effect the audience’s dopamine and serotonin levels.

Enrique Zumel was a prolific and oft-produced playwright in Spain during the 19th century. His playwriting career spanned over 40 years beginning in 1849. In that time he wrote over one hundred twenty plays (as well as a couple of novels and some poetry). Zumel is best known for breathing new life into the Spanish dramatic form *comedia de magia*, a type of play that heavily featured the special effects of the day: puppetry, trap doors, rigging, smoke, mirrors, quick changes, transformations, and disappearances. Among his works there are also many light comedies, historical dramas, melodramas, zarzuelas, and farces. A native of Málaga (born 1822), he did much of his early writing there, prior to moving to Madrid in 1859. In Madrid he continued to write, as well as working as the editor of *La España Artística*, a local newspaper. Zumel died in Madrid in 1897.

Christopher Kidder-Mostrom is a Chicago-based playwright, director, and actor. He received his MFA in Playwriting from the University of New Orleans, whose low-residency program (then based in Madrid, Spain) led him to start translating plays for the stage. Kidder-Mostrom's plays have been seen in Chicago, New York, Minneapolis/St Paul, Los Angeles, Cincinnati, Iowa, and Washington, DC. From 1999 to 2016, he was the Artistic Director of Commedia Beauregard, a theatre company dedicated to performing translated works. His own translations include "The Young Lady's Consent" (*El sí de las niñas*) by Leandro Fernandez de Moratín and "The Mandrake" (*La Mandragola*) by Niccolo Machiavelli. Additionally, Christopher has the odd distinction of having written the only full-length play ever produced in the constructed language of *tlhIngan Hol*: "A Klingon Christmas Carol."





A Fiery Young Man or, An Incendiary Lover

Translated from "Un mancebo combustible" by Enrique Zumel

CHARACTERS:

Doña Ursula

Irene

Casimiro

Don Nicasio

SETTING:

Albacete, Spain. An apothecary shop.

TIME:

1865

SCENE 1

An apothecary shop. There is a door in the center of the rear wall which leads to the street. On each side of the door is a pedestal table. Both tables are laden with the tools and paraphernalia of the druggist's profession. On the left pedestal is a lamp. Next to it, a bowl of sugar. The sales counter is Down Stage Right. On it is a balance scale, some paper bags, a few tins, some glass bottles, and a box, among other things. There is a small table and a chair Down Stage Left of the counter. Upon the table is a mortar and pestle. A door on the left wall is far upstage. It leads to the laboratory. In the middle of the right wall is a door to the interior rooms. Next to the doors and the main entrance are jugs of chemicals, an armchair, and a stool.

AT RISE: CASIMIRO stands behind the counter. He makes a large cone/funnel out of a sheet of paper. He measures mustard into it.

CASIMIRO: Oh! The life of a pharmacist! Nobody understands just how difficult it is to practice chemistry and manipulate drugs. It takes an ardent soul! Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I have an ardent soul. I have burning passions. And yet, I don't have the position! That is what my passions lack: the right position! But, never mind that for now. Such thoughts! This is Doña Ruperta's order. She wants one hundred grams. But what does she know if there are ten or twelve grams missing?

(He puts his hand on his heart)

I can't believe that my boss, Don Nicasio—that lowlife scum—is married to the most precious woman. And he thinks he can keep her all to himself!

(Comes from behind the counter)

No! I adore her! And if she feels the same, then I could find the right position for my passions! Ugh. Shall we return to weighing the mustard? After all, my life is such a gas.

CASIMIRO returns to his place behind the counter.

SCENE 2

NICASIO enters carrying a cup and saucer filled with Café con Leche.

NICASIO: Good morning, Casimiro. You're already at work? You are a model employee.

CASIMIRO: Yes, sir. You had a good night?

NICASIO: I slept like a dormouse.

CASIMIRO: You don't know how happy I am! I wish you were always sleeping.

NICASIO: *(Aside)* This boy! He loves me!

(To Casimiro)

This is my mother-in-law's coffee. I see to its precise preparation myself. I roast it. I grind it. I boil it. She drinks it. Nevertheless, she is ferociously mean to me.

CASIMIRO: That's horrible! To treat you in such a manner! After all you do for her! And she never lifts a hand—

NICASIO: If she did nothing more than lift it, that would be fine. It is far worse after she brings it back down.

(Makes a slapping gesture)

If only we had not agreed at the wedding that she could live with us!

CASIMIRO: You were reckless accepting your mother-in-law as a burden. She's a heavy bundle. Like a millstone around your neck!

NICASIO: Yes, well, when it comes down to it, my mother-in-law lives under my roof.

CASIMIRO: She's a snooper. Always spying over her daughter's shoulder.

(Aside)

Perhaps he can kick her out of the house!

NICASIO: I'm going to take this coffee to her. Ah! I forgot the sugar! But, there must be some around here!

NICASIO sets the cup down on the counter. HE goes to a high shelf and stands on a chair to search for the sugar. As he does so, his back is to the counter.

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) Aha! A bolt of inspiration! I'm going to sweeten it with mustard.

(Puts quite a lot of mustard in the coffee)

That might get her to go away.

NICASIO: Here it is.

(He gets down off the chair with sugar in his hand. He stirs it into the coffee with a spoon.)

There we go! If she's not happy with this... Achoo! Wow, that's strong. It makes me sneeze!

SCENE 3

IRENE enters through the Stage Right door.

IRENE: Come on, Nicasio! Where's Mama's breakfast?

CASIMIRO: (*Very excited*) It's her!

NICASIO: Here it is.

IRENE: She is losing her patience!

NICASIO: Really? Can't you see that I'm bringing it already?

IRENE: And her sweet bun?

NICASIO: Right. Casimiro— But, no! She always wants me to be the one who brings it. I'm going! Oh! The syrup is still heating on the stove, too! Oh!

NICASIO sneaks out the door.

SCENE 4

IRENE: I'm going to tell Mama you'll be there soon.

CASIMIRO: Señora! Señora!

IRENE: What is it?

CASIMIRO: Please, please stay! My goodness! I have no more than a moment to say it...

IRENE: You've already said it a hundred times. And I can't say it back. My place in this household forbids me.

CASIMIRO: You would keep that from me? Monster! Tell me at least one word of comfort!

IRENE: I... I... What do you want me to say?

CASIMIRO: Tell me that you love me!

IRENE: Such nerve! What gall!

CASIMIRO: You wish me dead!

IRENE: No, that's not it! But there are some conditions...

CASIMIRO: That's your problem, for I am conceding nothing.

IRENE: I have no concessions to give.

CASIMIRO: Is that so? Go on. What if you had?

IRENE: That's not what I'm saying.

CASIMIRO: Your hand! So small, so white, so soft. I must kiss it!

IRENE: Never!

CASIMIRO: You want me to die!

IRENE: Come on! Have some sense!

CASIMIRO: Sense! You make my life bitter as wormwood! I shall terminate my existence. Loving you has already obliterated it. You will regret this—but too late—when you see me here, laid out lengthwise.

IRENE: Señor Casimiro, it is undignified how you're always tormenting me!

CASIMIRO: Nothing more than a kiss on the hand... One teeny-tiny—

IRENE: Go! Leave me! My husband!

CASIMIRO grabs the pestle and starts pounding the mortar in a grotesque rage.

SCENE 5

NICASIO enters carrying a baked roll.

NICASIO: Here is her bun!

CASIMIRO: *(Sotto voce. Brandishing the pestle.)* I'd like to knock you on your buns!

IRENE: So get a move on. Get on with it. Mama still has her stomach cramps.

NICASIO: Look, you take it. Your mother is scary when she has cramps.

IRENE: Oh no, she is very nice.

NICASIO: *(Aside)* Oh, to be single!

(To Irene)

I have not said otherwise. But my nerves... come on, take her breakfast and give it to her. Tell her that I prepared it myself.

IRENE: I will tell her so.

IRENE exits off Right with the cup and pastry.

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) If this makes her leave... Ha! Nicasio doesn't scare me, and with her gone... Perhaps this can set the stage for my lover's tryst.

SCENE 6

NICASIO: I'm afraid that the coffee cooled off too much. It's not hot anymore!

CASIMIRO: (*Working at the mortar*) Taking it cold, it will agitate less.

NICASIO: Horrible woman! When I hear her footsteps—the sound of her voice—my legs start to tremble... Casimiro! Can I give you some advice?

CASIMIRO: (*Moving downstage*) Don't hold back, boss.

NICASIO: When you marry, choose a woman who never, ever had a mother.

CASIMIRO: I was already thinking that. Although frankly, on the point of weddings, I'm not selfish: I prefer to let others do the marrying.

URSULA: (*Off*) This is outrageous! Disgraceful! A horror!

CASIMIRO returns to his work.

NICASIO: Listen. What is that?

CASIMIRO: You've already guessed it.

NICASIO: She's furious!

CASIMIRO: The coffee may be cold, but she's feeling the burn!

(Aside)

The mustard had its effect!

SCENE 7

IRENE and URSULA enter furiously with the cup of coffee.

URSULA: Where is he? Where is that loathsome—? What did you put in here, monster?

NICASIO: In the coffee?

URSULA: I should throw it in your face!

NICASIO: Could it be that it's not hot?

URSULA: You must be trying to kill me!

NICASIO: It can be reheated.

URSULA: You are a bandit!

NICASIO: But, señora! Have you gone crazy?

URSULA: Me crazy?

(She slaps him)

Take that!

NICASIO: *(Gently touching his face)* And two hundred more!

CASIMIRO: *(Pounding away. Sotto voce.)* This scene amuses me greatly!

URSULA: Villain! I've already divined your plans!

NICASIO: But, what have you been given? The coffee is exquisite! Where could you even get better coffee than this?

(Takes a gulp. Chokes. Sputters. Gestures wildly.)

Blech! Horror! This coffee—that tastes like—it scorches my esophagus!

CASIMIRO: I know! I know what it is!

NICASIO: You know?

CASIMIRO: You put it down there by the mustard, and since coffee absorbs the flavor of everything—

NICASIO: How foolish of me! That's it!

URSULA: Stop making excuses! Just say what you really want to do: to throw me from this house!

NICASIO: Not at all. But if you are not content here, you need not feel duty-bound to us.

URSULA: I won't give you that pleasure.

(Preparing to leave)

It would make you so happy.

CASIMIRO: *(Sotto voce)* This makes me even more happy!

IRENE: Don't go, Mother!

NICASIO: You stop your mother, when you see how she treats me! I am her victim!

URSULA: You have got some nerve! There is no bigger victim here than my daughter!

NICASIO: Her? I am completely devoted to giving her pleasure in everything.

URSULA: You do not deceive me. You make her unhappy!

NICASIO: Irene! Say something... Are you unhappy?

URSULA: I believe she is! Well, is she not always somber? Melancholic? Is it not true, my child, that you are unhappy?

IRENE: Yes, mother. Much more than you'd believe.

(Shooting an admonishing look at Casimiro)

I am bothered. I am harassed. And, I haven't a moment of peace.

URSULA: Now you hear it, Hottentot!

NICASIO: I made mummy powder.

URSULA: Don't play the saint! You don't deceive me. Yesterday we were supposed to go to the theatre. Irene was done up beautifully. She wore a low-cut dress that showed off her graces. I went searching for her, expecting her to be fully dressed, perfectly becoming in a turban that was topped off with a bright red bird of paradise. And what did I find? My daughter was undressing!

CASIMIRO: *(Aside)* I can see it now. It was going to display her whole back.

CASIMIRO leaves the mortar and crosses to the counter.

NICASIO: Well, I didn't object to the outing.

URSULA: As if I didn't know it: You say yes with your mouth, while sending signals that you want to say no.

NICASIO: I didn't send any signals.

URSULA: I'm too clever not to understand the iniquities of tyrants like you. You are a tiger pretending to be a sheep to hide your claws.

NICASIO: But—Dammit! If my wife does everything she wants to, and if I don't contradict her at all, where are these claws?

URSULA: You deny it? Fine. We'll try this today: Let her go to the painter's house. He wants to paint her portrait.

CASIMIRO: *(Anxiously)* A painter!

URSULA: Are we going? Will you allow it?

NICASIO: Absolutely! I encourage it with all my heart and soul. I would go crazy if I could get my hands on a picture of my Irene!

URSULA: But, do you speak truth?

NICASIO: You will see. If necessary, I will swear it.

URSULA: I am skeptical, for you are the Pedro the Cruel of the pharmacy.

NICASIO: Señora! That is an abuse of the history of Spain!

URSULA: Oh! If everyone knew you as I do!

NICASIO: They would know me as the most affable and peaceful man in the world; as an apothecary, famous for his cold cream and his depurative syrup... Which reminds me! I put it on the fire and it is likely burning! I hope I can get there in time!

NICASIO exits.

URSULA: Move along, charlatan! Judas of the pharmacists!

SCENE 8

IRENE: Mother, you are too hard on him.

URSULA: Hush, poor lamb! What do you know? But now that he is busy, we shall take advantage of his momentary distraction to go to the painter's gallery.

IRENE: Of course you would like to...

URSULA: And you, too! It isn't every day that we have an artist of such caliber in Albecete!

CASIMIRO: *(Leaving the counter area)* Is it Raphael?

URSULA: I believe him to be far superior in his own genre.

CASIMIRO: Oh! It's some painter from the time of the Goths.

URSULA: He is not old at all.

IRENE: Right. He is a young man.

URSULA: A young man that has studied in Madrid.

IRENE: Heavens! A young man!

URSULA: All the ladies are mad for him, and besiege him so that he might paint their portraits.

CASIMIRO: *(Angrily)* How magnificent!

URSULA: *(Exiting)* Quiet, jackal!

(To Irene)

I'm am going to go get dressed before you change your mind.

CASIMIRO: *(Aside)* This painter makes me quite suspicious!

SCENE 9

IRENE goes to follow her mother. CASIMIRO stops her, throwing himself at her feet.

CASIMIRO: Señora! In heaven's name, I beg you not to go! An artist, a young painter! He is a soldier of love's fortune, armed with palette and brushes: do not trust the painter's brush!

IRENE: Don't worry about me. You are mistaken.

CASIMIRO: I am certain!

IRENE: Besides, I would like to have my portrait in oils.

CASIMIRO: When I think of you there with him giving you a thousand compliments, while I will be here pounding...

IRENE: Good Lord! If until now I have not shattered your illusions, it is because I have pity for you. But, you're asking too much. I tell you that I have made promises to my mother and my husband...

CASIMIRO: And there you go!

IRENE: I cannot stand another moment.

CASIMIRO: And that's your final word?

IRENE: Yes, sir!

CASIMIRO: Well then, señora, you are free to go! You have pronounced my sentence.

IRENE: What did you say?

CASIMIRO: When you return to this pharmacist's home, it will be too late! Here you will find a different picture! Here will be my ashes!

IRENE: Leave me in peace with your threats.

CASIMIRO: Why must I love you? I am jealous as a Turk! Do you know who the Turks are?

IRENE: Do I? No.

CASIMIRO: Some men who smoke pipes.

IRENE: Enough, sir! You should bear in mind that I am married.

CASIMIRO: Don't bother me with details!

IRENE: It is funny that you are jealous and that my husband is not. He, at least, has the right to be.

CASIMIRO: And you know why I despair!

IRENE: And the poor thing receives rejection's blast.

CASIMIRO: As if from a cannon.

IRENE: And my mother torments him!

CASIMIRO: You pity him! You tell me that you love him more than me!

IRENE: Now you see!

CASIMIRO: I don't want to see! What a shame! To love a husband! A Nicasio! A man who would not be able to kill himself for you!

IRENE: For which I am glad.

CASIMIRO: A man who calls himself Apothecary, but who doesn't have the courage to carry poison in his pocket!

(Pulls out at bottle)

Here you have it. I am never separated from it—neither night nor day.

IRENE: You're just trying to scare me!

CASIMIRO: Do you doubt my resolve?

IRENE: Undoubtedly.

CASIMIRO: You doubt! Well, for me it is already done! Goodbye, mother!

CASIMIRO goes to drink. Frightened, IRENE stops him.

IRENE: Stop! You bastard!

SCENE 10

NICASIO appears with a sizable bowl of cold cream and a large spoon. CASIMIRO goes to the mortar.

NICASIO: My god! What was that I just heard?

IRENE: *(Aside)* My husband!

CASIMIRO: *(Aside)* Fatal cannon blast!

NICASIO: What is that bottle that you're hiding?

IRENE: It is nothing.

NICASIO: *(Putting the cold cream on left-most small table)* Come on! The bottle. I can see it. Give it to me.

IRENE: What for?

NICASIO: I command you!

IRENE: *(Giving it to him)* Do not be angry. There you go.

NICASIO: What does it contain?

CASIMIRO: *(Tragically. Ceasing work at mortar.)* A potion.

NICASIO: And for what use?

CASIMIRO: For stomach pain.

NICASIO: What nonsense! I want to know why my wife took it from your hands, exclaiming in a penetrating voice: "Stop! You bastard!"?

CASIMIRO: Look, you have it already! That's that...

NICASIO: No. You seem distraught.

CASIMIRO: Very well, boss. Since you want to know the truth, I will tell you. I wanted to go to a better place.

NICASIO: And how do you know that it will be better there?

CASIMIRO: Because, it cannot be worse.

NICASIO: And for what reason do you want to destroy yourself?

CASIMIRO: Do you really want to know?

IRENE: *(Aside)* What is he going to say?

CASIMIRO: Because life has wrecked me. Because it is full of thorns for a sensitive heart like mine.

NICASIO: Perhaps you are in love?

CASIMIRO: Yes, my beloved employer! Ardently in love! I feed a fatal passion, which knows no equal on Earth, or its heavenly neighbors.

IRENE: *(Sotto voce)* He is going to confess it!

NICASIO: And the object of this love, it is a woman!

CASIMIRO: You have guessed it! What insight!

NICASIO: Do I know her?

CASIMIRO: Too well.

IRENE: *(To herself)* My God!

NICASIO: Say it! This moment! Her name!

CASIMIRO: Do not ask that of me!

NICASIO: Her name, Casimiro, her name!

CASIMIRO: Since you insist, it's...

(Seeing that IRENE is caught in a moment of terror)

Doña Ursula, your mother-in-law.

NICASIO: *(Attempting to hold back his laughter)* Get out of here! You're pulling my leg.

IRENE: *(Aside)* Jesus! I feared that my honor would be compromised.

CASIMIRO: I understand the beastliness, the absurdity. But, in disgrace, that is how it is. No more, no less.

NICASIO: And for that you want to commit suicide?

CASIMIRO: As you may well know, the heart does what it wants. It cannot be commanded or controlled.

NICASIO: But, does she not reciprocate your love?

CASIMIRO: I would have taken my secret with me to the tomb, had your wife not grabbed my arm.

NICASIO: Then, my mother-in-law does not know?

CASIMIRO: Oh! She does not know! And I beg you to not tell her. Please, do not reveal my guilty inclination.

NICASIO: (*Aside*) Through my apprentice I could be rid of my mother-in-law! What a deal!

SCENE 11

URSULA: (*Entering, overly made-up*) Let's go, I'm ready now.

NICASIO: And very beautiful! Look, Casimiro, doesn't she look good? Like Venus coming out of her sea shell.

URSULA: How gallant you are today, my son-in-law!

NICASIO: On my honor, you seem to be the sister of your daughter.

CASIMIRO: (*Moving to the counter*) Younger sister.

URSULA: Him, too!

NICASIO: Oh, I should say so! He is especially game—

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) What I especially want is the end of this game.

URSULA: Enough flattery. We must occupy ourselves with the portrait of Irene. But, what have you been doing? You're not dressed yet!

IRENE: Pardon me, but I've thought better of it—

URSULA: What's that?

IRENE: I don't want my portrait done without my blue dress, and the seamstress hasn't finished it yet.

CASIMIRO: She is an angel!

URSULA: The blue dress! That is an excuse this rogue has suggested to you!

NICASIO: Señora! I would not be mixed up in such a thing!

URSULA: You would so! You have turned her into a sheep! I don't trust you, you see. Because you are a jealous, fierce tiger!

NICASIO: (*Goes to the small table, picks up the cold cream and stirs with the spoon*) Oh, I am all sorts of fierce! Especially when I'm preparing a thing so smooth as cold-cream!

URSULA: Oh, how I pity you, my child! You are forced to lie to your mother!

(*To Nicasio*)

Hypocrite! You think that I have given you my daughter to martyr her? To crush her soul as you do your compounds?

IRENE: (*Aside to Casimiro*) Another scandalous scene because of you!

NICASIO: If there is a martyr here, it is me. You have turned my home into a Hell! You are the serpent in this paradise!

URSULA: Ruffian! You dare call me a serpent!

CASIMIRO: *(Sotto voce)* A rattlesnake!

URSULA: You insult me!

NICASIO: I defend myself! I will no longer keep my mouth closed.

URSULA takes the spoon from the bowl of cold cream. She loads it up, then shoves it in NICASIO's mouth and smears the cold cream all over his face.

URSULA: No? Take that!

NICASIO: I must learn to keep my mouth closed.

IRENE: Mother, I can assure you that you are wrong.

URSULA: Don't you defend him, because that just makes me even more angry with him! March yourself over to your hat and put it on. You have to accompany me on a visit.

CASIMIRO: *(Alarmed)* A visit?

IRENE: To the painter's gallery?

URSULA: No, señora. To the lawyer's office: a separation is essential.

NICASIO: What? Irene and I? Separate?!

CASIMIRO: Not that.

NICASIO: First of all, señora, you and I must have a very serious chat. Casimiro, march over to the house of Doña Ruperta, and give her this bill.

NICASIO gives CASIMIRO a folded piece of paper.

CASIMIRO: I leave this moment.

(Whispering to Nicasio)

My God, Boss! Do not let this separation be carried out!

CASIMIRO exits.

NICASIO: *(To Irene)* You go get dressed.

IRENE: Very well.

IRENE exits.

SCENE 12

URSULA: You'll wear yourself out if you try to bend me with your words. I warn you, my resolution is fierce.

NICASIO: It keeps you beautiful.

URSULA: What?!

NICASIO: You captivate unsuspecting hearts!

URSULA: What farce is this?

NICASIO: You inspire a vehement passion!

URSULA: What is this? Monster!

NICASIO: No, señora, not a monster. Casimiro.

URSULA: Are you making fun of me?

NICASIO: Certainly not. Casimiro feels a violent passion for you.

URSULA: He has said nothing to me. Are your words more reliable than his own, Nicasio?

NICASIO: He doesn't dare declare it. And today, if not for Irene—

URSULA: And that— that is what he told you?

NICASIO: I arrived at the moment he was going to poison himself.

URSULA: Suicide! Go on, tell me everything!

NICASIO: I walked into the room with my bowl of cold cream, then suddenly I heard my wife screaming at him: "Stop, you bastard!"

URSULA: So, she yelled "Stop, you bastard"?

NICASIO: There's more. She ripped this bottle of poison from his crazed grasp.

URSULA: So, you're saying that my daughter...

NICASIO: The poor thing was so touched! You see, this young man attempted suicide! I skillfully interrogated him, and he confessed that he was in love.

URSULA: You wanted to know with whom?

NICASIO: Rightly so. But, he kept his secret as closed as a tightly corked bottle. Yet, the corkscrew of my questions revealed a name: Doña Ursula.

URSULA: That's all the evidence you got?

NICASIO: Isn't it enough? Tell me, how shall I answer that poor boy?

URSULA: I will answer him myself.

NICASIO: Will you marry him?

URSULA: Who knows?

NICASIO: (*Aside*) How happy I would be!

(*To Ursula*)

You will live so happily with your husband... in his house!

URSULA: We shall see.

SCENE 13

CASIMIRO enters, bill in hand.

CASIMIRO: Señor, as I have gone, so I return.

URSULA: (*Aside*) He's not the sharpest tack, is he?

NICASIO: And, Doña Ruperta's account?

CASIMIRO: Don't you see? She hasn't paid. She wants a discount.

NICASIO: A discount? She owes a pittance, a mere ten duros!

CASIMIRO: She says she won't pay more than ten reales.

NICASIO: And you didn't take it? Don't you know that's still a profit of five!

URSULA: You should really cease being an apothecary.

CASIMIRO: If you want me to go back...

NICASIO: No. You will go tomorrow. Stay.

(*Whispers*)

I was talking to my mother-in-law. It is all set.

CASIMIRO: (*Whispers*) You demon! I suffer your indiscretion!

NICASIO: (*Still whispering*) It's for your own good. You came off as very tender, very gallant. She will make you very happy.

NICASIO exits.

SCENE 14

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) A fine mess that dimwit's put me in!

URSULA: (*Aside*) Let's see if this rascal can get out of trouble!

(*To Casimiro*)

Casimiro, is it true what has been revealed to me by my son-in-law?

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) What a mess! I'll encourage the mood. If I don't, I'm found out.

URSULA: (*Coquettishly*) Is it true that you find my dubious charms—

CASIMIRO: Dubious, señora! Your charms fascinate and captivate! I would have tried to bury my secret! Because, after all... I am no more than a simple apprentice... of an apothecary!

URSULA: So it is true. I'd thought those day were gone when I could inspire such passion!

(*Tenderly*)

Casimiro! Casimiro!

CASIMIRO: Oh my! Such tenderness!

URSULA: You love me?

CASIMIRO: Deliriously! Rabidly!

(*Sotto Voce*)

Damn Nicasio!

(*To Ursula*)

Like a volcano, my love is combustible, terrible, and irresistible!

URSULA: Hush, hush! Your words fascinate me. Your eyes scorch me. I burn.

CASIMIRO: I'm giving it my best shot.

URSULA: What did you say?

CASIMIRO: I'll feel as if I've been shot, if confronted by your contempt.

URSULA: Casimiro, what you have wished for, will come to be! My breast also holds a hidden fire. My son-in-law's lips blew on the coals, and it has become a voracious inferno!

CASIMIRO: It is true! My mentor was the bellows!

(*Indicating his chest*)

I burn.

URSULA: Do you want us to marry?

CASIMIRO: (*Sotto voce*) Geronimo!

(*To Ursula*)

Someday, when I am well—established.

URSULA: I am not so needy, and I am ready to make you happy.

CASIMIRO: Wait... You pity me... You give me your hand in compassion, and that—

URSULA: No, it is not just compassion. Didn't I just say that my breast-fire smoldered?

CASIMIRO: It's true. But, still the flames have not been fed in such a long time.

URSULA: Must I just come out and say it this once? I love you!

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) The spark is ignited! The chase begins!

URSULA: I can't wait to send out the announcements! We'll tell everyone at church this Sunday!

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) There is no escape!

URSULA: But, as the interests of my daughter will suffer, if God were to grant us numerous offspring...

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) I can see a clearing!

URSULA: We must have her consent.

CASIMIRO: Irene will never consent.

URSULA: Who knows? You should ask for my hand.

CASIMIRO: Who? Me?

SCENE 15

IRENE: (*Enters*) Mother, I am dressed now.

URSULA: My dearest daughter, before we go, Casimiro has something to ask you.

IRENE: Him? What does he want?

CASIMIRO: I don't dare. Perhaps later...

URSULA: No! It must be done now. And since he does not dare, I shall do the talking.

CASIMIRO: (*Sotto Voce*) Oh! I wish you hadn't started talking!

IRENE: I'm listening.

URSULA: Casimiro has declared that he is deliriously in love with me.

IRENE: With you? Him?!

URSULA: Him. With me. Furthermore, he is impatient for us to be married.

IRENE: You're going to marry him? Is it true, Casimiro?

CASIMIRO: Yes... I mean, no... yes! Damn! I'll explain... in... forty or fifty years.

URSULA: (*Exploding*) There is no need to explain anything, you Jezebel! Fool! You thought you'd deceived me!

IRENE: What?

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) I'm screwed.

URSULA: I know everything! I picked up the thread of the plot! I'm not blind!

IRENE: I swear, mother, that I am innocent!

URSULA: Do you hear that, rogue?

CASIMIRO: Well then, yes. I love her. We adore each other.

URSULA: You fraud!

IRENE: Believe it or not, Mama! He is the one who hounds me, the one who pesters me.

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) She's good at the cover up!

URSULA: Señor Casimiro, you can pack up your chest and go elsewhere.

CASIMIRO: I'll leave when I am dismissed by the master of the house.

URSULA: He has nothing to do with it.

CASIMIRO: He is my boss, and I do not obey anyone other than my boss. You are a nonentity here. Nothing.

URSULA: I'm nothing?

(Slaps Casimiro)

I'll show you nothing!

CASIMIRO: Well! Lady, that was something!

IRENE: My mother is right. You can no longer live in this house.

CASIMIRO: (*Whispered to Irene*) You want me dead!

IRENE: I want you to leave.

CASIMIRO: Fine! I am going to obey you.

(Pulls bottle from his pocket. Shows it to her.)

I still have another bottle.

IRENE: Another!

URSULA: So, drink it, and leave us in peace!

CASIMIRO: When I get back, you'll know! You'll know.

CASIMIRO exits.

SCENE 16

URSULA: Thank God! We are rid of him!

NICASIO: (*Entering*) So? What's the news? Are we having a wedding?

URSULA: (*Aside*) Poor, blind fool! There are some obstacles in the way of that. I have always looked at you wrong, and today—

NICASIO: Hello! What? Am I no longer a fierce tiger?

URSULA: A tiger? You never were. You are an unfortunate man. Isn't that true, daughter?

IRENE: Oh, mother! He is the best of husbands.

URSULA: Come, I want to give you a hug.

NICASIO: (*Aside*) Is the monster on her death bed? Whatever Casimiro said, he must have said it well, for love has tamed the beast!

(*To Ursula*)

When is the wedding?

URSULA: What wedding?

NICASIO: Yours and Casimiro's.

SCENE 17

CASIMIRO enters carrying a chest.

NICASIO: Where are you going with that?

CASIMIRO: (*Dropping the chest near the front door*) I don't know yet. I shall go where fortune takes me.

NICASIO: Calm down, man! You are going to marry my mother-in-law!

CASIMIRO: My innocent mentor! She dismissed me. She banished me. She threw me out into the street like a dog that tried to eat her chops.

NICASIO: How can you be so cruel to a young man in love? One who has turned to poison!

URSULA: He scares me. He horrifies me. And that's precisely why he must get the hell out!

IRENE: My mother is doing the right thing.

CASIMIRO: (*Whining*) Oh, Señor! How sorry I am to leave you all!

NICASIO: (*Ridiculously touched*) Then don't leave us!

IRENE: What?! You stop him?

URSULA: When I have dismissed him?

NICASIO: Dismiss my apprentice? A young man so good at his job that he could replace me?

CASIMIRO: They have already seen that I can, señor.

NICASIO: So, not only will you not go, but I will increase your salary.

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) The tables turn!

URSULA: Nicasio, you are an...

NICASIO: And you are an...

BOTH: Animal!

NICASIO: Señora! We're back where we started, eh?

IRENE: Casimiro! You are to blame for all of this! You should have gone already!

CASIMIRO: I cannot. I love my boss so much.

IRENE: Go! I beg you... I command it!

CASIMIRO: Fine. So, I must abandon this place forever. Goodbye foils, cans, and bottles! Goodbye, my ever-constant mortar! The same to you, master pestle, witness to—and victim of—my furor! You will see me lying among you for all eternity.

CASIMIRO takes out the small bottle and drinks its entire contents. NICASIO rushes to his side and grabs the bottle.

NICASIO: Such disgrace! You women have assassinated this unfortunate man!

NICASIO stumbles to a chair and sits down. CASIMIRO convulses about on the floor.

IRENE: Oh, my lord!

URSULA: He did it! Well, this got ugly fast.

IRENE: Quickly... quickly, Nicasio! Do something!

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) It's going to be okay. They want to save me.

(Aloud, while twisting and making gestures)

Oh!... Uff!... Ugh!... Ow!... Here!... Here!

IRENE: (*To Nicasio*) Quickly! Before his spirit takes flight!

NICASIO: The first thing to know is the kind of poison. I'm going to try it...

NICASIO takes a bit of the poison onto a small dish and observes it.

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) Uh-oh!

IRENE: Do you know what it is?

URSULA: This young man was crazy!

NICASIO: This is licorice syrup.

URSULA: How's that?

CASIMIRO: (*Aside*) I am caught.

CASIMIRO gets up off the floor.

URSULA: You despicable—You were mocking us!

IRENE: You had me so frightened!

URSULA: Out you go, into the street!

IRENE: Out you go!

NICASIO: A desperate ploy to capture your heart! Poor fellow!

URSULA: You are a poor fellow!

IRENE: Once again it is clear that Casimiro cannot remain here any longer.

CASIMIRO: Very well, I am leaving.

NICASIO: Where will you go?

CASIMIRO: To Almansa. Don Justo recently offered me a good job, but my love for you...

NICASIO: Don Justo? My colleague in Almansa has much keeping him busy these days, for he just got married...

CASIMIRO: What? That old man!

NICASIO: To a gorgeous young lady!

CASIMIRO: Hello! Life is beautiful!

NICASIO: The gossips say that she's quite the flirtatious coquette!

CASIMIRO: I'm going there this instant.

IRENE: Men!

NICASIO: And are you really capable of abandoning us?

CASIMIRO: To my regret! But, you must see: a new boss with a new wife, good prospects, and a chance to replace him someday...

NICASIO: I cannot be selfish. It is good for you.

URSULA: Thank God. He convinced you.

CASIMIRO: I will come to visit you sometime.

URSULA: No. Don't ever return. Be gone.

IRENE: I must ask the same.

NICASIO: Well, I am counting on you to keep your word.

CASIMIRO: *(To the audience)*
Through that terrible crone's interfering,
I move on from this place empty-handed.
From your hands we'd like to be hearing
Applause as the room you are clearing,
If pleased you "A Fiery Young Man" did.

BLACKOUT

When Five Years Pass (Legend of Time)

By Federico García Lorca

Translated by Luigi Salerni

HISTORY OF THE TRANSLATION AND ITS CHALLENGES:

The Meadows Museum of Art in Dallas scheduled a major exhibit of Lorca's drawings in 1992. As a complement, the museum also commissioned Cuban-American painter, Juan Gonzalez, to create a new work to become a part of the museum's permanent collection. Having me direct a stage production of one of Lorca's plays was proposed as an extension of the Lorca/Gonzalez exhibition. I was familiar with and admired Lorca's poetry, many of his short plays, and his rural tragedies (*Blood Wedding*, *Yerma*, and *The House of Bernarda Alba*). But the scale of the short plays seemed wrong somehow in partnership with a major exhibit of Lorca's remarkable drawings, and I felt that the rural tragedies were so specifically steeped in rural Spanish culture that they could never quite fully translate to an American audience. Being aware of other Lorca plays that were not familiar to me, I proposed investigating to see if one of them might align with my own artistic interests and strengths. In my search, I located two existing English translations of *Así que cinco años* (*When Five Years Pass*), read them, and knew instantly that it was a play that I wanted to tackle. Reporting back to the museum's director, he agreed that my proposal would be a project that the museum could support in partnership with the Meadows School of the Arts. During our conversation, he shared a collection of 35mm slide images of the work of the painter, Juan Gonzalez including visual responses to Lorca's rural tragedy *Blood Wedding* that had become the inspiration for a production of the play at Great Lakes Theater Festival. I fell in love with the artist's haunting vision. Knowing that the museum had commissioned Juan to create a new work for it, I asked if Juan's commission for the museum had already been determined. It had not. I floated the idea that it be a visual response to *When Five Years Pass* and that suggestion was met with unexpected enthusiasm. The next step would be to speak with Juan to see if the project proposal met with his own artistic interests and to discover how the two of us might be able to collaborate successfully using his visuals as inspiration for the physical production of the play. Juan was hesitant. "What would you want me to do?" he asked. "Respond to the play as you feel inspired," I answered. "We can figure out how to relate the visuals to a production later." We agreed to meet in New York in his beautiful light-filled apartment where he also worked. We talked about our lives, our art, about whatever we felt like sharing with one another. There was instant rapport. I discovered that Juan was a devotee of Lorca's poetry and knew it intimately. I furnished him with the two existing English translations of *When Five Years Pass* that he read after first reading the play in Spanish. I felt that the existing translations were literal and academic but not particularly performance-friendly. Something essential was missing: the poetic personality of Lorca's other writings. Juan agreed and that placed us on an even higher plane of shared perception than we were already on. It was at that moment that the real challenges began.

If we were going to perform *When Five Years Pass*, we wanted a new translation of the play. Would Juan take on that task? He declined, saying that his artistic vocabulary was visual, not literary, not dramatic, and that he was not a theatre artist. How could we best move forward, if at all?

As a theatre director, my habit is to read as much available material as I can find on a play and playwright for any project I undertake. If the play's original language is not English, I read all of the various translations to find one that "speaks to me."

I grew up in a Spanish-speaking and Italian-speaking extended family and understood what was spoken to me, but I did not speak Spanish or Italian. What might I discover if I read Lorca in Spanish with very good dictionaries at my side? I had the advantage of knowing Lorca's writing in terms of themes and metaphors, recurring images, and phrases, and so I had a surface awareness of those essential elements of Lorca's work. That might be a place to start that could lead to a meaningful discovery or convince me that I should abandon the project altogether and let Juan's six visual responses to the play rest on their own. And so...I began.

Word by word, image by image, phrase by phrase. Slowly, methodically, I was arrogantly attempting another translation of the play where there were already two in print by people who spoke Spanish. But I needed to see if I could find the equivalents in English of the poetry of the text and the unique Spanish rhythms that were so much a part of it. What became clear from reading the text aloud to myself in Spanish, even though I did not understand much of what the dialogue was communicating, was that the text was a piece of music. Melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo were as much a part of the meaning of the text as a literal translation of its dialogue. Beyond the obvious deficiency of my command of Spanish was the more difficult challenge of protecting the rhythmic integrity of the poetry sections of the play. And even that was more complex because the play is subtitled *Legend of Time*—a subtitle suggesting time as fluid, often simultaneous. Past, present, and future are not always linear in the play. They are sometimes even juxtaposed or overlapping, so tenses shift and with them, the perception of time. There is tangible reality *and* dream reality holding hands and dancing in partnership all the time.

Making a literal word-by-word translation, I tried to be careful in protecting metaphors because a literal translation doesn't always do that. Then I scored the beats to find the closest approximation to the play's poetic structure without compromising the imagery and meaning. The translation took eighteen months while Juan created six brilliant images inspired by the play. And then I went back to New York to view Juan's collage paintings and to share my translation of the play with him. Again, we met at his apartment joined, this time, by his friend Teresa Gaos, a linguist from Barcelona who, like Juan, was a devotee of Lorca's poetry. Did my translation reflect the original play in a meaningful way? Sitting on the living room floor, Juan and Teresa read the play speech by speech in Spanish followed by me reading each speech in English. When done, there was a conspicuous tearful silence from Juan and Teresa. I thought I had offended them and that I had rendered the original Spanish version of *Así que cinco años*, an insulting disservice. Beginning to apologize for my obvious transgression, I was stopped in my tracks. "No, no, no! Luigi, you don't understand! The translation is beautiful."

I hoped then as I hope now that that is true.

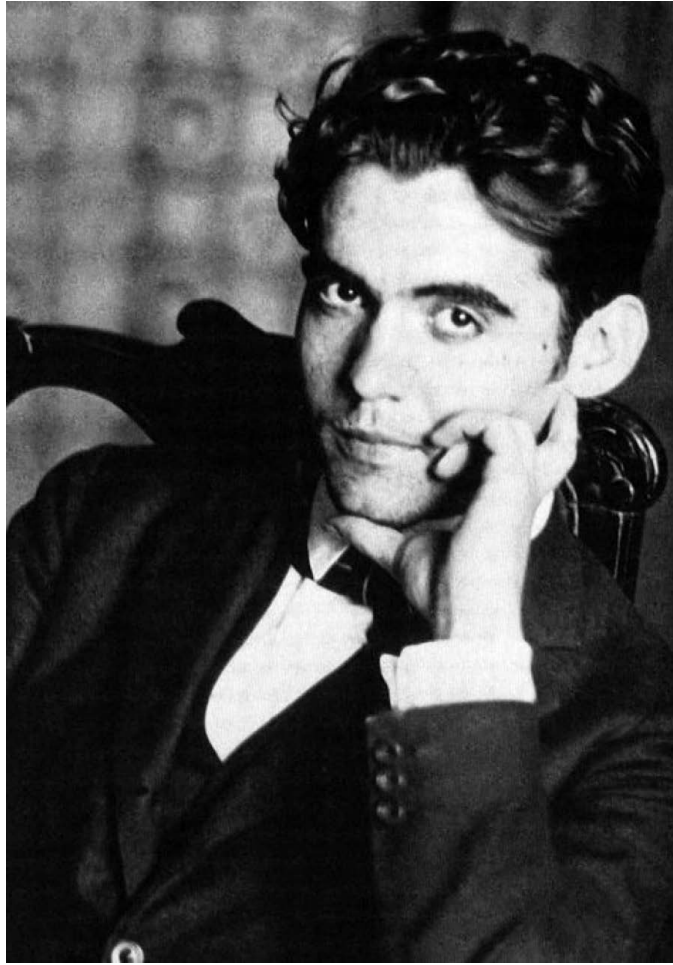
EPILOGUE:

The dual exhibit of Lorca's drawings and Juan's paintings was mounted at the Meadows Museum of Art in Dallas in 1992 as originally scheduled. However, the performance of *When Five Years Pass* was not a complementary part of the exhibit. Offended by Lorca being gay and the exploration of sexuality and repression within the thematic core of the play, the Dean of the Meadows School of the Arts withheld promised funding for the production.

The translation was not staged until 2003, where using Juan's imagery as a background frame for the performance, it premiered in festival format as part of a celebration of *Theatre, Culture, and the Arts in Lorca's Spain* in Los Angeles. Juan had died ten years earlier from complications from AIDS, so he did not share in the joy of that moment with me. I miss his friendship still.



A later production of When Five Years Pass, was directed by me at the University of Illinois—Chicago. One of Juan's collage paintings can be seen in the background.



Federico García Lorca was born in 1898 in Granada, Spain to become the leading Spanish playwright and poet of the 20th century. His most famous works were his poetry collections and his three rural tragedies *Blood Wedding*, *Yerma*, and *The House of Bernarda Alba*. His most personal play and the one he believed was most reflective of his artistic soul was *Así que cinco años* (*When Five Years Pass*) written in 1931.

Lorca was a member of a group of aesthetically diverse artists and poets known as the Generation of '27. The group's connective tissue was the embrace of the avant-garde and a rejection of traditional forms of artistic expression. Among the group's members were Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí.

In 1929, Lorca said: "We must think of the theatre of tomorrow. All that now exists is dead. We either change the theatre completely or it will die away forever. There is no other solution." In response to his declared aesthetic, Lorca wrote three "impossible" plays: *When Five Years Pass*, *The Audience*, and *Play Without a Title*. When he began to write *When Five Years Pass*, he was in New York City where he was influenced by the experimental theatre he saw during 1929 and 1930. He also saw Black music hall reviews in Harlem and wrote enthusiastically about them. Making final revisions of *When Five Years Pass* at his family's home near Granada for the scheduled 1936 premiere of the play in Madrid, he was arrested and shot on August 19, exactly five years to the day after he had completed the play. He was 38 years old. His body was never found.

Although there were many international personal and artistic influences on Lorca's life and art, he remained essentially a Spanish poet, tied to the rhythms, colors, textures, and music of his native country. Because his theatre writing was primarily imagistic—a synthesis of sound, movement, color, and texture—and because it was uniquely composed from fragments of Spanish place and personality, I felt it essential for me to have first-hand exposure to place and culture in order to translate and later to direct his work with fidelity to his intentions and to their geneses. I traveled to Spain to experience the complete geographical life journey of Lorca, visiting all of the places where he traveled and lived, listening, watching, absorbing. What I saw and heard in Spain over an extended period of time became the defining center to the many challenges facing me as translator and director of Lorca's most personal play, *Así que cinco años* (*When Five Years Pass*).

Juan Gonzalez was born in Cuba in 1945. He came to America in the early 1960s, earning his M.F.A. from the University of Miami and shortly after moved to New York City. His works are included in many public collections, among them the Carnegie Institute, Chase Manhattan Bank, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Glenn C. Janss Collection, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Art, Newport Harbor Art Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, Meadows Museum, and Florida Museum of Art. He died in 1993 from complications from AIDS and before the translation's premiere of *When Five Years Pass*. Large color plates of his major collage paintings including all of his visual responses to *When Five Years Pass* [luigisalerni.com] are contained in *Dreamscapes, The Art of Juan Gonzalez*, posthumously published by Hudson Hill Press in 1994. The book also contains excerpts from Luigi Salerni's translation of the play.

Luigi Salerni is recipient of multiple awards as director, writer, actor, and Master Teacher. His professional artistic life has been dedicated to the nurturing and development of contemporary actors, writers, and directors.

Formerly Artistic Director of The Cricket Theatre in Minneapolis—an Actor's Equity company dedicated to the creation and performance of new American plays—he led the theatre to receive more “Kudos” (Theatre Critics Circle Awards) in all aspects of performance and production than any other theatre in the region.

As stage director, his work has been performed in venues throughout the United States, Europe, and Africa including Carnegie Hall, Denver Theatre Center, A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle, Wisdom Bridge Theatre in Chicago, Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Focus Theatre in Dublin, Theatre of the Open Eye in New York, the Dallas Theatre Center, Painted Bride Art Center in Philadelphia, among others.

His translation of Federico Garcia Lorca's dreamplay *Así que pasen cinco años* (*When Five Years Pass*) premiered in Los Angeles at the international arts festival "Theatre, Culture, and the Arts in Lorca's Spain" partnering with Cuban-American painter Juan Gonzalez and Argentine-American composer Gustavo Leone. He served as dramaturge for the new opera, *Propeller: The Urge to Fly*, premiering in St. Paul, and completed development of a new translation and adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's masterwork, *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. His stage adaptation of David Huddle's novel *The Story of a Million Years* was

completed in 2016. He is actively engaged as editorial consultant for the novel-in-progress *Marriage Genius* by Marisha Chamberlain, the award-winning poet, playwright, librettist, and novelist. Their ongoing artistic partnership also includes the current development of a folk opera, *Amoskeag*, in collaboration with composer Marc Mellits.

As a Master Teacher, he has earned five excellence-in-teaching awards including three Council of Excellence in Teaching and Learning Awards (CETL) at the University of Illinois at Chicago, including the prestigious Award for Excellence in Teaching (AET) in 2012—one of only four across the entire university.

Note: The following images come from: McManus, Irene. *Dreamscapes: The Art of Juan González*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1994.

When Five Years Pass (Legend of Time)

CHARACTERS

YOUNG MAN

OLD MAN

DEAD BOY

DEAD CAT

JUAN (a servant)

FIRST FRIEND

FRIEND 2

SECRETARY

FIANCÉE

MANNEQUIN IN THE WEDDING DRESS

FOOTBALL PLAYER

MAID

FATHER OF THE FIANCÉE

CLOWN

HARLEQUIN

GIRL

MASK

CARDPLAYERS 1, 2, and 3

ACT ONE



Library. The YOUNG MAN is wearing blue pajamas. The OLD MAN is in a gray cutaway coat, with a white beard and huge golden spectacles.

YOUNG MAN: I'm not surprised.

OLD MAN: Excuse me...

YOUNG MAN: With me, it's always been the same.

OLD MAN: *(Inquisitive and friendly)* Really?

YOUNG MAN: Yes.

OLD MAN: It's just that...

YOUNG MAN: I remember....

OLD MAN: *(Laughing)* Always, "I remember."

YOUNG MAN: I...

OLD MAN: *(Eagerly)* Don't stop...

YOUNG MAN: I used to save candies in order to eat them later.

OLD MAN: They always taste better that way. I used to do the same...

YOUNG MAN: I remember one day when...

OLD MAN: *(Interrupting forcefully)* How I savor the word 'remember'. It's so "alive"...so succulent...so...like rivulets to a spring.

YOUNG MAN: *(Brightly, with enthusiasm)* Yes, yes, but of course! We must fight against even the *idea* of decay. I sometimes get up in the middle of the night just to pull the weeds out in the garden.

OLD MAN: Because one must remember. But—

YOUNG MAN: —only what's bursting with life—the passion that burns only when everything is perfectly whole.

OLD MAN: Yes. One must remember into tomorrow. I mean... *(Secretly)* one must remember...but remember *before*.

YOUNG MAN: Before?

OLD MAN: *(Deep in thought)* Remember the past into tomorrow.

YOUNG MAN: Into tomorrow.

A clock strikes six. The SECRETARY crosses the stage, silently crying.

OLD MAN: Six o'clock.

YOUNG MAN: And still so hot. What a beautiful sky. All those gray storm clouds.

OLD MAN: In other words, you...?

YOUNG MAN: *(Fanning himself)* I wait, still.

OLD MAN: With confidence?

YOUNG MAN: You know me.

OLD MAN: Have you met her father?

YOUNG MAN: Never.

OLD MAN: I used to be a good friend of the family. Especially him. He's interested in astronomy, you know. That's good, no? *(Pointing to the passionate sky)* Astronomy. And what about her?

YOUNG MAN: I don't know very much about her, really. But it's not important. I'm certain she loves me.

OLD MAN: But of course!

YOUNG MAN: When they went on the long trip, I was almost happy...Such things take time.

OLD MAN: *(Brightly)* Absolutely!

YOUNG MAN: Yes, but...

OLD MAN: But what?

YOUNG MAN: Nothing. Nothing. For now, it's just not possible...for reasons I can't explain. I cannot marry her...until five years pass!

OLD MAN: Very good!

YOUNG MAN: *(Seriously)* How so?

OLD MAN: Why, because...is this room not beautiful?

YOUNG MAN: No.

OLD MAN: Doesn't the hour of her parting make you miserable? What might happen, what's about to happen this very moment...?

YOUNG MAN: *(overlapping)* Yes, yes. But I don't want to talk about it.

OLD MAN: *(overlapping)* What's going on in the street?

YOUNG MAN: Noise, noise and more noise. Heat. Dust. Terrible smells. Why should I let those wings of the street into my house, where they attack my senses?

WOMAN'S WAIL: *(off)* My son! My son!

YOUNG MAN: Juan! Shut the window.

OLD MAN: She's young?

YOUNG MAN: Very. Fifteen.

OLD MAN: She has lived for fifteen years and so they are what she is. Why not say that she's fifteen snowfalls, fifteen winds or fifteen sunsets? It doesn't matter. Why is it you don't run, fly, open the arms of your passion to the sky!

YOUNG MAN: *(Sitting down and covering his face)* I love her too much!

OLD MAN: *(Standing; with conviction)* You might just as well say you have fifteen roses, fifteen wings, fifteen grains of sand. Why are you afraid to let your love become an open wound into your heart?

YOUNG MAN: I know how you operate. You just want me to stay away from her. But I'm in love, and I want to be in love—as much in love with her as she must be with me. I can bear to wait five years for the night when all the world is asleep and I can wrap her shining braids around my neck.

OLD MAN: Permit me to remind you that your fiancée...has no braids.

YOUNG MAN: I know that. She cut them without my permission, naturally, and that... *(Miserably)* alters my image of her. I know she hasn't got braids! So why do you have to remind me? *(With sadness)* Still, she has five years for them to grow again.

OLD MAN: *(With enthusiasm)* More beautiful than ever. Such braids she'll have...

YOUNG MAN: *(With a sense of delight)* Has now, has now.

OLD MAN: *(Condescending)* With such braids, you could live on their perfume and never miss bread or water.

YOUNG MAN: I am nourished by the thought!

OLD MAN: You fantasize!

YOUNG MAN: About what?

OLD MAN: You dwell so much on it that....

YOUNG MAN: My flesh is alive. Burning. Inside.

OLD MAN: Here, drink this.

YOUNG MAN: Thank you.

OLD MAN: Here, drink this.

YOUNG MAN: Thank you.

YOUNG MAN: When I begin to think on my little girl, my child...

OLD MAN: Try saying, my fiancée. Dare to be bold!

YOUNG MAN: No.

OLD MAN: And why not?

YOUNG MAN: You know that as soon as I say fiancée I will see her (against my will) shrouded in the sky tied up in enormous braids of ice. And her nose will have become chiseled and the hand she carries on her breast will have transformed into five green stems where snails slide up. No. She is not my fiancée. (*Pushing away the image*) She's my child, my little girl. When I begin to think of her...

OLD MAN: Go on, go on...

YOUNG MAN: I see her in my mind's eye: I draw her; I sculpt her—white and warm; then, suddenly, her nose changes or her teeth begin to crack, and she turns into someone else. She's all in rags, monstrous, floating through my mind as if seen through a funhouse mirror. Who has she become?

OLD MAN: Who? I can't believe you ask *who*. What we dream changes faster than what we recognize below our foreheads. Water coming toward us down the river is completely different from the water that flows on passed us. Who can recall the details on a map of the desert sands...or, for that matter, the face of a friend?

YOUNG MAN: Yes, yes! What's inside is more real—though it also transforms. The last time I saw her, I could hardly look at her because she had two little wrinkles on her forehead. If I'd blinked my eyes—you understand?—they could have stretched over her entire face making her old. So I had to keep my distance, you see, so I could sculpt her intact—that's the word!—in my heart.

OLD MAN: Then the moment you saw her old, she became yours completely?

YOUNG MAN: Yes.

OLD MAN: (*Excited*) So, if at that moment she confessed that she had deceived you, that she didn't really love you, those wrinkles would become the most delicate rose in the world?

YOUNG MAN: (*Excited, too*) Yes.

OLD MAN: And for that reason alone you would have loved her all the more?

YOUNG MAN: Yes, yes!

OLD MAN: So? (*He laughs*)

YOUNG MAN: So... it is very difficult to go on living.

OLD MAN: That's exactly why you should fly from one to another until you're lost. If she is fifteen, she could just as well be fifteen sunsets or fifteen skies. Onward and upward! Fly! What is inside you is more alive than what's exposed to wind and death. That is why we are not going to go, why we are going to wait. For the alternative is to die—right now. And it is better to dwell on the future as if it were a hundred golden horns lifting the sun like a curtain until it bursts through the clouds.

YOUNG MAN: (*Taking his hand*) Thank you! Thank you. Thank you for everything!

OLD MAN: I will come back again.

The SECRETARY appears.

YOUNG MAN: Have you finished writing the letters?

SECRETARY: (*Tearfully*) Yes, sir.

OLD MAN: What's the matter with her?

SECRETARY: I want to leave this house.

OLD MAN: That's easy enough to do, isn't it?

YOUNG MAN: (*Troubled*) You think so?

SECRETARY: I want to and I can't.

YOUNG MAN: (*Kindly*) I'm not the one who's keeping you. You know very well there's nothing I can do. I've asked you more than once to wait, but you...

SECRETARY: But I'm not going to wait; I'm sick of waiting!

OLD MAN: And why shouldn't you be? To wait is to believe and to live.

SECRETARY: I won't wait because I don't feel like waiting. And still, I can't seem to leave.

YOUNG MAN: You're behaving irrationally!

SECRETARY: What reasons are there? There is only one, and that is...I love you! I have always loved you. (*To the OLD MAN*) What are you looking so shocked for, old man? When he was little, I used to watch him at play from my balcony. One day he fell down and his knee bled. (*To the YOUNG MAN*) Remember? Well, that blood remains alive like a red snake between my breasts.

OLD MAN: That can't be. Blood dries, and what's past is past.

SECRETARY: So, is that my fault?! (*To the YOUNG MAN*) Please pay me what you owe me. I wish to leave this house now.

YOUNG MAN: (*Irritated*) Very well. It's not my fault surely. You know perfectly well that I belong to another. You may leave anytime you wish to.

SECRETARY: (*To the OLD MAN*) Did you hear? He's throwing me out. He doesn't want me in his house.

OLD MAN: (*Secretly to the YOUNG MAN*) That woman is dangerous.

YOUNG MAN: I'd love her if I could. It's like being thirsty at a fountain. If only I could.

OLD MAN: Well, you can't. And even if you could, what would you do tomorrow? Eh? Think about tomorrow!

FRIEND: (*Entering in an uproar*) It's too quiet in this house! What's going on? Water, please. With anise. On the rocks! (*The OLD MAN exits*) A cocktail.

YOUNG MAN: I hope you aren't going to break the furniture.

FRIEND: A man alone, a serious man, and in this heat!

YOUNG MAN: Can't you sit down?

FRIEND: (*Spinning the YOUNG MAN around, chanting*)
 Ring around the rosies
 Pocket full of posies!
 Ashes, ashes, all fall down!

YOUNG MAN: Will you knock it off? I'm not in the mood for your jokes.

FRIEND: Ohhhhhh. Who was the old guy? A "friend" of yours? So where are the pictures of the *girls* you sleep with then? (*Moving closer*) I'm going to grab you by your lapels, smear rouge on those virgin cheeks of yours...and scrub your innocence away like this...

YOUNG MAN: (*Irritated*) I said to knock it off!

FRIEND: ...and throw you out into the street with a cane.

YOUNG MAN: And what am I supposed to do there? Whatever you rant on about? It's confusing enough just listening to the racket of the cars and the hordes of people.

FRIEND: (*Stretching out; groaning*) Ayyyyyy! I, on the other hand—with three conquests yesterday, two the day before and one today—marry no one because I haven't the time for it. I was with a girl...Ernestina. Would you like to meet her?

YOUNG MAN: No.

FRIEND: *(mocking)* "Noooo, and that's final." If you'd only look at her. Fabulous figure...! No, Mathilde has a much better one, but, then again... *(Impulsively)* My God! Look on her; she's a waist custom-made for every pair of arms and so delicate you'll want to have a tiny silver hatchet to *(makes the appropriate sound)*—slice it up.

YOUNG MAN: *(Distracted)* I'm going upstairs.

FRIEND: I have no time, no time for anything. Everything's a blur. Because, just think on it: I have a date with Ernestina—lips so full and braids down to here, tight and jet black—and, then..."Ernesti-ti-ti-ti-tina"... (I say sweet things just with her name until her tits are covered with the T's so that they hurt her and I have to take each one of them off with my lips, with my fingers, with my eyes)...

During the previous speech, the YOUNG MAN impatiently drums with his fingers.

YOUNG MAN: I can't even think with you around!

FRIEND: So, what's there to think about?! Okay, okay, I'm going. Even though...what... *(Looking at his watch)* I'm already late. It's horrible—always the same thing happens. I never have enough time, and I feel bad for it. I was supposed to go out with this ugly woman, you know? *(Laughing)* So ugly...but adorable. A dark passionate woman. The kind you begin to miss on a summer's day. And, besides, I like her because she is like a trainer of stallions.

YOUNG MAN: Will you stop?!

FRIEND: Don't be such a boring prude, man. A woman can be very ugly and still be a beautiful trainer of stallions, and vice versa, and...who knows?

YOUNG MAN: No one.

FRIEND: Would you mind telling me what's the matter with you?

YOUNG MAN: Nothing's the matter with me. Nothing. You know how I am.

FRIEND: I don't know how you are. I don't understand you at all. But I'm not going to be so serious. *(Laughing)* I'll kiss you like the Chinese. *(Rubs his nose against the YOUNG MAN'S)*

YOUNG MAN: *(Smiling)* Stop it!

FRIEND: Come on, laugh! *(Tickles him)*

YOUNG MAN: *(Laughing)* Barbarian. *(They fight... It has a sexuality in it.)*

FRIEND: A tumble.

YOUNG MAN: Not with you, I'm not.

FRIEND: *(Catching his head between his legs)* Got you!

OLD MAN: *(Entering; FRIEND and YOUNG MAN break apart.)* Oh, pardon me...
(Emphatically looking at the YOUNG MAN) I am going to forget my hat.

FRIEND: *(Amazed)* What?

OLD MAN: *(Furious)* Yes, sir! I am going to forget my hat... *(Mumbling)* I mean...I have forgotten my hat.

FRIEND: Ohhhhhh!

There is the sound of loud thunder.

YOUNG MAN: *(Full voiced)* Juan! Shut the windows!

FRIEND: It's only a little storm. I wish it were a big one!

YOUNG MAN: Well, I don't want to hear about it!

FRIEND: You're still going to hear the thunder with the windows closed!

OLD MAN: *(To the FRIEND; mock shock)* Oh, no!

FRIEND: Oh, yes!

YOUNG MAN: What happens outside is not important. But inside this house is mine, and no one gets in here.

OLD MAN: *(Indignantly to the FRIEND)* That is a truth which cannot be denied.

Distant thunder.

FRIEND: *(Passionately)* The entire world can enter, not here, but under your bed.

Closer thunder.

YOUNG MAN: *(Shouting)* But not now. Not now!

OLD MAN: Bravo!

FRIEND: Open the window. I'm hot.

OLD MAN: It will open soon enough!

YOUNG MAN: Soon...but not now!

FRIEND: *(Indicating screen)* In the meantime, let's go behind the screen...

More thunder. The lights dim and a blue storm light washes over the scene. The three characters go behind a black screen covered with stars. The DEAD BOY and the CAT enter. The BOY is dressed in white, as

though for his first communion, with a crown of white roses on his head. His face is like wax and his eyes and his lily-dry lips stand out against it. He holds an ornate candle with a giant golden bow. The CAT is blue with two large bloodstains on its gray chest and head. The DEAD BOY leads the CAT by one paw.

CAT: Meow.

BOY: Shhhhhhh.

CAT: Meooooow.

BOY: I'll give you my white kerchief.
I'll give you my white halo.
Don't cry anymore.

CAT: The children hit me all over.
It hurts me so.

BOY: And I have a terrible pain inside my heart, too.

CAT: Why is your heart aching?

BOY: Because it's not working...
Yesterday it gently stopped,
A nightingale on my bed.
Oh, such terrible noise outside. If only you could have seen it...! They laid me
out
With this crown of roses in front of the window.

CAT: And how did it feel?

BOY: I felt springs of water and bees in the parlor.
They tied my hands together, ...badly!, you know...
and the children looked in through the windowpanes.
There was a man with a hammer who pounded
paper stars all over my coffin in rows.
But no angels appeared to me, cat.

CAT: Please don't say cat.

BOY: No?

CAT: I'm a girl.

BOY: You're a girl?

CAT: (*Fondly*) Well, you should know.

BOY: How?

CAT: By my voice of silver.

BOY: *(Gallant)* Won't you please be seated?

CAT: Thank you, yes.
Those children hit me with ten rocks.

BOY: *(He takes a white rose from his headband)* Would you like one?

CAT: *(Excitedly)* Oh yes, please.

BOY: With your tiny spots of wax, white rose,
you are like the center of a broken moon, shimmering
like a fainted fawn lying in a bed of glass.

He gives the rose to the CAT.

CAT: What are you doing?

BOY: Playing. And, you?

CAT: Playing!
I went walking light-footed on the roof,
then I placed a mirrored-jewel on my little button nose.
In the morning,
I went to the edge of the water to fish,
and at noontime,
I slept by the rose tree climbing the wall.

BOY: And at night?

CAT: I was alone.

BOY: With no one?

CAT: In the woods.

BOY: *(Joyfully)* I was there too, little button-nose cat!
Smelling the tree blossoms and eating
the blackberries and apples there.
And, later, at the church, I went with my friends
to play The Goat.

CAT: "The goat"?

BOY: Sucking off the studs on the door.

CAT: And were they tasty?

BOY: Like sucking on coins.

Distant thunder.

(Tearfully) I don't want them to bury me.
With studs and glass decorating my casket;
I would rather sleep
among the reeds in the water.
I don't want them to bury me.
Let's leave here quickly.

CAT: We're going to be buried? When?

BOY: Tomorrow.

In two dark holes.
Where everyone wails or everyone's silent.
And then all depart. I've seen it happen.
And you know what else happens?

CAT: What?

BOY: They come to eat us.

CAT: "They"?

BOY: Mr. and Mrs. Lizard,
with all of their brood of little kids.

CAT: What parts will they eat?

BOY: Our faces,
our fingers *(lowering his voice)* ...and our peepees.

CAT: *(Offended)* I haven't got a peepee.

BOY: Then they'll eat your paws and whiskers.

Very distant thunder.

Let's get out of here.
We'll go from house to house
until we find where the seahorses graze.
It won't be heaven but solid enough ground
where grasses sway
and crickets chirp
and slingshots shoot stones
and the wind's like a sword
with the clouds all floating by.
I want to be a boy! A boy!

He crosses toward the door

- CAT:** The door will be locked.
Let's try the stairs.
- BOY:** They'll see us on the stairs.
- CAT:** Wait.
- BOY:** They're already here to bury us!
- CAT:** How 'bout the window?
- BOY:** *(To self)* We'll never again see the light of day
or the clouds floating by
or the crickets in the grass
or the wind like a sword

Crossing his hands

- Oh flower of the sun!
Sunflower of fire!
Oh flower of the light!
- CAT:** Oh carnation of the sun!
- BOY:** The sky has vanished,
Leaving only a coal-black sea,
And a broken dove lies dead on the sand
with a flower clasped in its beak.

He recites

- "And in the flower an olive,
and in the olive a lime..."
How does it go? I don't know. How does it go?
- CAT:** Oh flower of the sun!
Sunflower of dawn!
Oh flower of the light!
- BOY:** Oh carnation of the sun!

The light dims. The BOY and CAT grope about in the dark.

- CAT:** I can't see. Where are you?
- BOY:** Be still!
- CAT:** Do the lizards come now?

BOY: No.

CAT: Did you find the exit?

The CAT moves to the door as a huge hand comes on and takes the CAT off.

CAT: *(In anguish)* Boy! Boy!
(Off) Boy! Boy!

The BOY advances in terror, stopping with every step.

BOY: *(In a soft voice)* A hand came and took her below.
The hand of God.
Don't bury me! Wait a few minutes...
while I pull the petals off this flower!
I'll go then...so slowly and alone.
Only let me see the sun once more...
Just one small ray will be enough for me.

Pulling off the petals

Yes, no, yes, no, yes.

BOY: *(his voice reverberating)* **NO!**

The hand returns and takes the fainting BOY off. When the BOY disappears, the light returns to normal. The OLD MAN, the YOUNG MAN and the FRIEND reappear from behind the screen. They are hot and agitated. The YOUNG MAN holds a blue fan, the OLD MAN a black fan and the FRIEND a red fan. They fan themselves.

OLD MAN: There will be more of such things later.

YOUNG MAN: Yes. Later.

FRIEND: It's more than enough already. I don't think we can escape the storm.

WOMAN'S VOICE: *(Off)* My son! My son!

YOUNG MAN: What an afternoon! Juan, who is that wailing?

JUAN: *(He speaks with a smooth voice and is, as always, on tiptoe)* The concierge's boy has died and they are on their way to bury him. His mother is crying.

FRIEND: That is natural.

OLD MAN: Yes, yes; but what's past is past.

FRIEND: But it is passing now! *(They argue)*

JUAN crosses the stage as if to exit

JUAN: Sir, may I have the key to your bedroom?

YOUNG MAN: Whatever for?

JUAN: The children have killed a cat and thrown it onto the awning in the garden. It needs to be removed.

YOUNG MAN: *(With annoyance)* Here. *(To the OLD MAN)* You'll never convince him!

OLD MAN: I couldn't care less.

FRIEND: That's not true. He cares plenty. The one who doesn't care is me, because I *know* that snow is cold and fire burns hot.

OLD MAN: *(Ironically)* Well, that depends!

FRIEND: *(To the YOUNG MAN)* He's got you bluffed.

The OLD MAN stares at the FRIEND, while squeezing his hat.

YOUNG MAN: *(With determination)* He hasn't the least influence on my character. I'm who I am. It's you who can't understand how someone could wait five years for a woman and be filled with a burning love that grows stronger every day.

FRIEND: All I said was that it makes no sense to wait!

YOUNG MAN: You think I can break through a brick wall and destroy everything in my path without hurting people.

FRIEND: You come first—before other people!

YOUNG MAN: But when you wait, the knot untangles and the fruit gets riper.

FRIEND: I prefer to eat it green, or better still, to snip the blossom of the flower and wear it in my lapel.

OLD MAN: You're ridiculous!

FRIEND: You're too old to even know what it's like.

OLD MAN: *(Severely)* All my life, I have fought to light a lamp in the corners of darkness. And if anyone ever tried to break the neck of a dove, I stopped him and helped the bird escape.

FRIEND: And of course, the hunter died of hunger!

OLD MAN: Blesséd are the hungry.

The FRIEND 2 enters. He is dressed all in white: impeccable wool suit of extreme cut with enormous blue buttons and a vest and tie of ruffled lace.

FRIEND 2: Blesséd indeed, so long as there's toasted bread and olive oil in heaven. A never-ending dream. I overheard you.

YOUNG MAN: How did you get in here?

FRIEND 2: Any way you wish. Through the window. Two children—friends of mine—helped me by lifting me up by my feet. I met them when I was very little. It's going to pour, you know. The same beautiful way it poured this same time last year. There was so little light that my hands turned yellow. *(To the OLD MAN)* You remember, don't you?

OLD MAN: I remember nothing.

FRIEND 2: *(To the FIRST FRIEND)* And you?

FIRST FRIEND: Me neither.

FRIEND 2: I was very little, but I remember every detail.

FIRST FRIEND: Look...

FRIEND 2: That's why I don't want to see it this time. Rain can be beautiful. At school it would get into the patios and make the tiny naked women who live in raindrops appear against the walls. Have you never seen them? When I was five years...no, when I was two..., not true! One. Only one. It's beautiful! Don't you agree? One year old. I caught one of those tiny rain women and kept her for two days inside a fishbowl.

FIRST FRIEND: *(Sarcastically)* And did she grow?

FRIEND 2: No! She got smaller, younger, just like she should, as was right, until there was nothing left of her but a single drop of water. And she recited a poem:

I'll comeback for my wings,
Please let me return!
For I want to die at
the break of day!
For I want to die now,
yesterday!
I'll come back for my wings,
Please let me return!
For to die like a drop
in a fountain or spring,
I must die far removed
from the law of the sea!

OLD MAN: *(Irritated, to YOUNG MAN)* He's completely insane.

FRIEND 2: Insane? Because I don't want to be full of aches, pains and wrinkles like you? Because I want to live a full life before it's taken from me? I don't want to know you, or to even be near you or anyone like you.

FIRST FRIEND: All of that is only a fear of dying.

FRIEND 2: No it isn't. Just now, when I came in, I saw a boy about to be buried with the first drops of rain. That's how I'd like them to bury me. In a coffin that small. My face belongs to me but it's being stolen from me. Now there's an old man like him—walking around inside of me with two or three masks at the ready to take over. *(Covers his face with his hands)*

OLD MAN: But we must press on.

FRIEND 2: Oh, please don't say that!

OLD MAN: *(Enthusiastically)* Houses sink into the earth.

FIRST FRIEND: *(Emphatically and on the defensive)* Houses do not sink into the earth.

OLD MAN: *(Undaunted)* The eyes grow dim and a razor-sharp mower cuts down the reeds along the banks of the river.

FRIEND 2: *(Serenely)* But of course! Much more time will pass before any of that happens!

OLD MAN: On the contrary. It *has passed* already.

FRIEND 2: In four or five years, there is a well into which we all must fall

OLD MAN: *(Infuriated)* Oh, be quiet!

YOUNG MAN: *(Trembling; to the OLD MAN)* You hear what he's saying?

OLD MAN: I've heard enough. *(Exits quickly)*

YOUNG MAN: *(Following)* Where are you going?

FRIEND 2: *(With a shrug)* He's old. You, on the other hand, don't protest.

FIRST FRIEND: I didn't notice that I asked for your opinion.

FRIEND 2: *(In fear)* I'm not trying to convince you of anything...

He sits with his knees drawn up to his chest

JUAN enters delicately and on tiptoe. It begins to rain.

FRIEND 2: It's raining. *(Looking at his hands)* What an ugly light.

YOUNG MAN: He'll return tomorrow. I need him.

The SECRETARY enters

SECRETARY: Do you need me?

YOUNG MAN: *(Closing his eyes)* No. I don't.

The SECRETARY exits, crying.

FRIEND 2: *(In his dream)*

I'll come back for my wings,
Please let me return.
For I want to die now,
yesterday!
For I want to die at
the break of day!

It rains.

YOUNG MAN: It's getting late. Juan, turn on the lights. What time is it?

JUAN: Exactly six, sir.

YOUNG MAN: Good.

FRIEND 2: *(In his dream)*

I'll come back for my wings,
Please let me return.
For to die like a drop
in a fountain or spring
I must die far removed
From the law of the sea.

The YOUNG MAN absently drums his fingers, gently.

Slow curtain

ACT TWO



Turn of the century bedroom. The walls are painted with clouds and angels. Agitated honking of a car horn is heard. The FIANCÉE bolts from the bed wearing a splendiferous long-trained dressing gown.

FIANCÉE: *(At the balcony)* Climb up! Quickly! My fiancé is coming—the old one, the poet. I need you to hold me.

FIANCÉE: Come to me. It's been two days since I saw you last.

The FOOTBALL PLAYER says nothing. He just smokes his cigars. He embraces the FIANCÉE and kisses her passionately.

FIANCÉE: Your kiss seems different today, my love. You're always changing. Even though I didn't see you yesterday, I did go to see your white stallion. He's so handsome: standing with white hooves of gold in the manger. But not as handsome as you; you are a dragon. *(He embraces her.)* I think you could break me in two with your arms, because I am weak, because I am frail like the frost—like a miniature guitar burnished by the sun, but you *don't* break me.

The FOOTBALL PLAYER blows smoke in her face.

FIANCÉE: *(Her hands roving over his body)* Behind all this darkness is a maze of silver bridges stretching over me and sheltering me like a tiny little bee that has suddenly entered the throne room. Isn't that so? Isn't it? I'll come with you. *(Rests her head on his chest.)* My dragon! How many hearts have you claimed? I drown in the raging river of your breast. I'll drown... *(Looking up at him)* and then you'll leave me *(Cries)* ...leave me spent on the shore.

The FOOTBALL PLAYER puts another cigar in his mouth, and the FIANCÉE lights it for him.

Oh! *(Kissing him)* Such white coals. Such ivory fire pouring out from your teeth! My fiancé had teeth of ice. When he kissed me with those lips of death, tiny withered leaves would sprout there. I cut off my braids because they pleased him, the same as I go barefoot because you like me to. That's true, isn't it? *(The FOOTBALL PLAYER kisses her.)* And so I'll go with you. My fiancé is coming.

MAID: *(At the door)* Miss!

FIANCÉE: Go away! *(Kisses him)*

MAID: Miss!

FIANCÉE: I'm coming! *(Softly, to the FOOTBALL PLAYER)* Goodbye, my dragon!

The FOOTBALL PLAYER lifts her arms over his shoulders and kisses her.

MAID: Please, Miss!

FIANCÉE: *(Affected voice)* Hold your horses!

The FOOTBALL PLAYER exits whistling.

MAID: *(Shocked)* Oh, miss!

FIANCÉE: What miss?

MAID: Miss!

FIANCÉE: What?

MAID: Your fiancé has arrived!

FIANCÉE: So, what's the problem?

MAID: *(Tearful)* Nothing.

FIANCÉE: Where is he?

MAID: Downstairs.

FIANCÉE: With whom?

MAID: With your father.

FIANCÉE: No one else?

MAID: An old man wearing glasses. They were having a terrible row. *(Teary)* Oh, miss!

FIANCÉE: *(Irritated)* What miss?!

MAID: Miss!

FIANCÉE: *(Annoyed)* What!

MAID: Your fiancé is very handsome.

FIANCÉE: Then you marry him.

MAID: He seems so happy.

FIANCÉE: *(Ironically)* Does he?

MAID: I see he brought you a bouquet of flowers.

FIANCÉE: You know I hate flowers. Throw them off the balcony.

MAID: But they're so beautiful...!

FIANCÉE: *(Authoritarian)* Throw them out, I said!

MAID: Yes, Miss...Oh miss!

FIANCÉE: *(Furious)* What miss?

MAID: Miss!

FIANCÉE: Whaaaaaat!

MAID: Think about what you are doing! Reconsider. The world is large. But people like us are small.

FIANCÉE: Oh, what do you know?

MAID: I do know. My father was in Brazil twice...and he was so small he fit into a suitcase. Things can be forgotten, but the bad is always remembered.

FIANCÉE: I told you to keep quiet about it.

MAID: Oh miss! What are you going to do?

FIANCÉE: Whatever I please!

MAID: A man so good! With so much hope. Having waited so long. Five years! Five years!

FIANCÉE: Did he shake your hand?

MAID: *(Happily)* Yes; he shook my hand.

FIANCÉE: And how did he shake it?

MAID: Very delicately, without any pressure at all.

FIANCÉE: So, you see? He didn't squeeze your hand.

MAID: I had a fiancé once who was a soldier. And he crushed my rings between my fingers until they bled. That's why I left him!

FIANCÉE: *(With sarcasm)* Really?

MAID: Oh miss!

FIANCÉE: *(Irritated)* What dress shall I put on?

MAID: You look pretty in red.

FIANCÉE: I don't want to look pretty.

MAID: How about green?

FIANCÉE: No.

MAID: The orange?

FIANCÉE: *(Loud)* No.

MAID: The tulle.

FIANCÉE: *(Louder)* No.

MAID: The autumn leaf print.

FIANCÉE: I said no! I'll wear a dirt-colored habit for that man; a habit of stone with an old rope as a belt.

The horn honks.

But with a jasmine collar at the neck and my entire body wrapped tightly in a veil made damp by the sea.

MAID: Don't let your fiancé know!

FIANCÉE: He's bound to know sooner or later.

MAID: You're mistaken!

FIANCÉE: Why?

MAID: Your fiancé is looking for something else. A young man who lived in my town used to climb up into the tower of the church and stare at the moon, and his fiancée left him.

FIANCÉE: She was right to do it!

MAID: But he used to say he saw his fiancée's face in the moon.

FIANCÉE: *(Pointedly)* And so you think he was right?

MAID: Yes, I thought he was right. The young man loved her so much. When I broke off with the bellboy...

FIANCÉE: You broke off with the bellboy? But he was so handsome..., so handsome..., so handsome...!

MAID: Oh, yes. I gave him a bandana I'd embroidered, myself, with: "Love! Love! Love!" And he lost it.

FIANCÉE: Leave me, now.

MAID: Shall I close off the balconies?

FIANCÉE: No.

MAID: The wind will burn your skin.

FIANCÉE: I want it to. I want to turn black. As dark as a boy, and not bleed if I fall down and not get hurt if I pick blackberries. Everyone is walking as if they were on a tightrope with their eyes closed. I want to have my feet planted firmly on the ground. Last night I dreamt that little children grow up by chance and that the power of a kiss can kill them all. A knife, a pair of scissors lasts forever but my breast only lasts a little while.

MAID: *(Listening off)* Your father is coming.

FIANCÉE: *(Secretly)* Pack all of my colored dresses in a traveling case.

MAID: *(Trembling)* Yes.

FIANCÉE: And bring the car keys to the garage.

MAID: Yes, Miss.

The FATHER OF THE FIANCÉE enters. He has the appearance of being fragile and myopic. Distracted, he has a pair of binoculars around his neck.

FATHER: Are you ready?

FIANCÉE: *(Irritated)* Ready? Ready for what?

FATHER: He's arrived!

FIANCÉE: So?

FATHER: Well, since you're engaged and concerned about the rest of your life—your happiness—it's only natural you should be happy and firmly resolved.

FIANCÉE: Well, I'm not.

FATHER: What say?

FIANCÉE: I'm not happy.

FATHER: But, daughter, what will this man say?

FIANCÉE: Whatever he wants to say!

FATHER: He's here to marry you. You wrote him the whole five years we were travelling. You wouldn't dance with anyone on the ships; you weren't interested in anyone. What's the matter with you?

FIANCÉE: I don't want to see him. I want to live. He talks too much.

FATHER: Ay! Why didn't you say this all before now?

FIANCÉE: I didn't exist before now. The earth and the sea existed, but I slept sweetly against the bolsters on the train.

FATHER: The man will insult me with good reason. Oh, my God! It was all arranged. He's already given you a beautiful wedding gown.

FIANCÉE: I don't want to talk about it.

FATHER: And what about me? Don't I have the right to some peace and quiet? Tonight there's going to be an eclipse of the moon. I won't get to watch it from the terrace now. When I get upset, the blood rushes to my eyes and I can't see. What are we to do with the man?

FIANCÉE: Whatever you want to. I don't want to see him.

FATHER: *(With determination)* You are going to keep your promise!

FIANCÉE: No I'm not!

FATHER: You have no choice!

FIANCÉE: No.

FATHER: *(As if to strike her)* Yes!

FIANCÉE: NO.

FATHER: Everyone is against me. *(He looks up at the sky)* The eclipse is about to start. It will be so beautiful! They have extinguished the street lamps. *(In anguish)* I've waited so long for this and now I'm not going to see it. Why did you mislead him?

FIANCÉE: I didn't mislead him.

FATHER: Five years, day after day. Oh my God!

The MAID enters.

MAID: They're arguing!

FATHER: Who?

MAID: He's come in. *(Exits quickly)*

FATHER: *(Overlapping)* What is this?

FIANCÉE: *(Overlapping)* Where are you going? Oh!

The YOUNG MAN enters. He smooths his hair. As he enters, the stage lights bump up. The three characters stand motionless, looking at each other.

YOUNG MAN: Excuse me...

Pause

FATHER: *(Embarrassed)* Please, come in...

The MAID enters nervously with her hands over her breast.

YOUNG MAN: *(Taking his FIANCÉE'S hand)* Such a long journey it's been!

FIANCÉE: *(Looking at him squarely and without pulling her hand away)* Yes. A cold journey. It's snowed so much these past few years. *(Releases his hand)*

YOUNG MAN: And also...in the street below, I had to keep a group of children from killing a cat with stones.

FIANCÉE: *(To the MAID)* A frozen hand. A disembodied hand of wax.

MAID: He'll hear you!

FIANCÉE: And a lifeless gaze. A gaze that splits in two like the wings of a dried butterfly.

YOUNG MAN: *(To FATHER)* As I was climbing up the stairs, all of the songs that had vanished from my memory suddenly came back to me and I wanted to sing them all at once. Her braids...

FIANCÉE: I never had braids.

YOUNG MAN: Then it must have been the light of the moon. It must have been the wind shaped into lips to kiss your head.

The MAID moves to a corner. The FATHER crosses to the balcony to look through his binoculars.

FIANCÉE: Didn't you used to be taller?

YOUNG MAN: No.

FIANCÉE: Didn't you have a twisted smile like a thin claw on your face?

YOUNG MAN: No.

FIANCÉE: Didn't you play football?

YOUNG MAN: Never.

FIANCÉE: *(With passion)* And didn't you take a horse by the mane and kill three thousand peasants in a single day?

YOUNG MAN: Never.

FIANCÉE: No?! Then what are you doing here with me? *(She slaps him hard)* My hands were covered with rings. Where is there a drop of blood?

YOUNG MAN: I will bleed, if it pleases you.

FIANCÉE: *(Emphatically)* Not your blood! Mine!

YOUNG MAN: Now no one will be able to take my arms from around your neck!

FIANCÉE: They're not your arms! They're mine! I am the one who wants to burn in a different fire.

YOUNG MAN: There is no fire but mine. *(Embraces her)* Because I waited for you and I now win my dream. And your braids are not a dream because I shall weave them myself with your hair. And your waist, where my blood will sing, is not a dream because I will slowly earn it through the flowing of my rain. And so, the dream is mine.

FIANCÉE: *(Pulling away)* Let go of me! You could have said anything but dream. I don't want to dream. Here, no one dreams.

YOUNG MAN: But someone loves!

FIANCÉE: No one loves either. Go away!

YOUNG MAN: *(Frightened)* What are you saying?

FIANCÉE: Go find another woman to weave braids for.

YOUNG MAN: *(As if suddenly waking)* NO!

FIANCÉE: How could I take you to my bed when another has come before you?

YOUNG MAN: Oh! (*He covers his face.*)

FIANCÉE: It's only been two days and I already feel bound by chains. I hear the cry of a child pursuing me even in the mirrors and in the lace on the bed.

YOUNG MAN: But my house is built. With walls formed with my own hands. Who will live there, the wind?

FIANCÉE: And is that my fault? You expect me to go with you?

YOUNG MAN: (*Dejected*) Yes, yes, come.

FIANCÉE: A mirror, a table would be closer to you than I could ever be.

YOUNG MAN: What am I to do now?

FIANCÉE: Love.

YOUNG MAN: Who?

FIANCÉE: Search. In the streets, in the fields...

YOUNG MAN: (*Emphatically*) No, I won't search. You can't shut the door on me, because I'm wet with five years of rain. And because then there is nothing, because then I can't love, because then it would all be finished.

FIANCÉE: Let me go!

YOUNG MAN: It isn't that you betrayed me that hurts. You are nothing. You mean nothing. It's my lost treasure, my love without its object. So you will come!—

FIANCÉE: I won't!

YOUNG MAN: (*Without a break*) —So I won't have to start over again. I feel as if I'm losing the capacity to speak.

FIANCÉE: I won't go!

YOUNG MAN: Come so I won't die. Do you hear? So I won't die!

FIANCÉE: Leave me alone!

MAID: (*Entering*) Miss! Sir!

FATHER: What's going on in here?

FIANCÉE: Nothing.

FATHER: (*Looking at the YOUNG MAN*) My friend...

YOUNG MAN: (*Dejected*) We were just talking...

FIANCÉE: *(To her FATHER)* You must return his presents... *(The YOUNG MAN is shaken.)* All of them. It would be wrong...all of them..., except the fans..., since they're broken.

YOUNG MAN: *(Remembering)* Two fans.

FIANCÉE: One blue...

YOUNG MAN: With three sunken gondolas...

FIANCÉE: And the other white...

YOUNG MAN: Which had the head of a tiger in the center. They're broken?

MAID: The last sticks were taken away by the coal man's boy.

FATHER: They were good fans for all that...

YOUNG MAN: *(Smiling)* It doesn't matter that they're gone. At this very moment their breeze burns on my skin.

MAID: *(To the FLANCÉE)* The wedding gown too?

FIANCÉE: Of course.

FATHER: *(To the YOUNG MAN)* If I could only...

YOUNG MAN: It doesn't matter.

FATHER: In the meantime, make yourself at home.

YOUNG MAN: Thank you.

FATHER: It should have started by now. Please excuse us... *(To the FLANCÉE)* Are you coming?

FIANCÉE: Yes. *(To the YOUNG MAN)* Goodbye!

YOUNG MAN: Goodbye!

They exit.

ECHO OF THE YOUNG MAN'S VOICE: Goodbye!

YOUNG MAN: What is this hour that's come that I don't recognize? What am I to do with it? Where am I to go?

The lights dim, taking on a blue aura. From the balconies moonlight enters which increases in intensity to the end of the act.

WOMAN'S VOICE: *(Off)* My son! My son!

YOUNG MAN: Who's there?



The MANNEQUIN enters wearing a splendid white wedding gown with a long train and veil. She has a gray face with lips and eyebrows gilded like a mannequin in a chic store window.

MANNEQUIN: Who shall wear these clothes—so pure and white
 If not the dark-haired bride?

The sea shall wear my bridal train
The moon my jasmine crown.

My ring, my ring, my golden ring!
Is sinking in the mirror's sand.

Who'll wear my wedding gown for me?
When the river's mouth marries the sea.

YOUNG MAN: What poem is that?

MANNEQUIN:

A poem

Of death that holds no end
to the ache of an unused veil,
Of weeping silk and feathers made.
And under which are frozen leaves
like ice beneath the sparkling foam.
Flesh, like a fabric-covered sea,
at last turns passion murmuring
to fall in time like bodies rained.

Who shall wear these clothes—so pure and white
If not the dark-haired bride?

YOUNG MAN:

The shadowed wind shall put them on
With satin garters for the reeds
and silken stockings for the moon.
Let spiders have the pure white veil
to tangle doves into its folds,
And wrap them up and eat them there,
so helpless in the satined cloak.
No one shall wear your pure white gown,
in light that sparkles bright.
For silk and frost are built so frail
they vanish like the night.

MANNEQUIN:

The sea shall wear my bridal train.

YOUNG MAN:

And the moon your jasmine crown.

MANNEQUIN:

My soul yearns for the wedding night.
And my nightgown longs to know
the warmth of searching hands
cinched tightly 'round its waist.

YOUNG MAN:

I, too, want to know. Be still.

MANNEQUIN:

You lie. You are to blame.
For me you could have been
an iron horse, a foaming colt,
the wind broken by your neigh,
and the sea wed to your loins.
But instead you are a stagnant pond,
where leaves and moss hang dead
around you like a cloak,

while my dress decays.
Where is my ring,
my ring of ancient gold?

YOUNG MAN: It sank into the mirror's sand!

MANNEQUIN: Why didn't you come before now?
She waited there naked with hardened nipples,
writhing like a snake in the wind.

YOUNG MAN: Will you be quiet!
Just go away and let me be
Or I'll go mad,
and rape the flower of innocence
from beneath your silk-covered throat.
Go into the street if you want
some night virgin's shoulder to drape
or guitars to weep you a song
of six long wavering sighs.

MANNEQUIN: I shall be with you forever.

YOUNG MAN: Never!

MANNEQUIN: Let me talk with you!

YOUNG MAN: There is nothing to say!
I don't want to know.

MANNEQUIN: Listen and take heed!

YOUNG MAN: At what?

MANNEQUIN: A little suit
I took from the sewing room.

Holding up a child's pink suit

The ribbons on my skirt burst
with the joyful thought of him growing (*Indicates her belly*) here
the shape of him beneath my clothes.
And he your son!

YOUNG MAN: (*In anguish*) My son, yes:
If impulse falls into tortured sleep
And marries instead
the sweet smell of convention.

MANNEQUIN: Who, then, shall wear my wedding gown?

YOUNG MAN: *(With positive enthusiasm)* The woman who waits by the sea.

MANNEQUIN: She who waits, waits always. Remember?
She has stayed unnoticed in your house.
Go quickly now and find her,
and bring her naked to me so
thread by thread and one by one
my silken rose may open to unveil
concealed inside her belly
a flesh as pure as gold.

YOUNG MAN: I want to live.

MANNEQUIN: No need to wait!

YOUNG MAN: My child sings in his cradle—
a child of snow waiting
for warmth and love.

MANNEQUIN: While you take her for your own,
I'll sing a lullaby
to the tender folds in the clothes.

Kisses them

YOUNG MAN: Where is she?

MANNEQUIN: In the streets.

YOUNG MAN: Before the blood of the eclipse
can wash over the moon,
I will bring her to you
naked and trembling with love...

By now the light is an intense blue. The stage returns to its normal light.

YOUNG MAN: *(Startled)* You!

OLD MAN: *(Appearing very agitated, he carries a silk handkerchief)* Yes! I!

YOUNG MAN: I don't need you anymore.

OLD MAN: More than ever! You have wounded me. I knew this would happen.

YOUNG MAN: *(Sweetly)* What's the matter?

OLD MAN: *(Emphatically)* Nothing. Nothing's the matter with me. I am wounded, but..., blood dries, and what's past is past. *(The YOUNG MAN starts to exit)* Where are you going?

YOUNG MAN: *(Brightly)* To look for her!

OLD MAN: For whom?

YOUNG MAN: For the woman who loves me. You saw her in my house once, don't you remember?

OLD MAN: *(Severely)* I don't remember.

FATHER: *(Entering)* Where are you? My child!

The sound of the car horn.

FATHER: *(Going to the balcony)* My child! Wait! Wait! *(Exits)*

YOUNG MAN: I am going too! I long for the flowering of my blood!

OLD MAN: Don't leave me wounded here! Wait!

YOUNG MAN, FATHER AND OLD MAN: *(Voices echoing)* Waaaaait!



I'll even fetch him for you.

GIRL: You can't fetch him.

HARLEQUIN: *(A shout like a circus barker)* And now! Mister Man!

A splendid sequined CLOWN appears. His head looks like a skull. He laughs in great bursts.

HARLEQUIN: Take this little maid...

CLOWN: To her bridegroom
In the sea.

Rolling up his sleeves

Fetch a ladder.

GIRL: *(Frightened)* Yes?

CLOWN: *(To the GIRL)* To go down.
Good evening to you!

HARLEQUIN: Bravo!

CLOWN: *(To the HARLEQUIN)* You. Look here!

The HARLEQUIN laughs as he turns

So, play! *(He claps his hands.)*

The HARLEQUIN plays on a large, flat white violin that has two gold strings.

CLOWN: *(Keeping time with his head)* Marvelous!
(Conjuring:) Oh bridegroom, where are you?

HARLEQUIN: *(Faking the voice of the YOUNG MAN)*
Through the fresh seaweed
I have gone off to hunt
huge seashells and lilies of salt.

GIRL: *(Crying out, fearful that it is real)* I don't want to!

The HARLEQUIN laughs

GIRL: *(To the CLOWN)* We'll go to the sea some other time.

Exiting in tears, jumping rope.

Who can say what's happened?
Who can say what will be?
For I lost my maiden's garland,
Like a thimble with no finger...

HARLEQUIN: *(Melancholic)* If you'll only turn 'round
Toward the wind and the sea...

The GIRL is gone.

CLOWN: *(Pointing)* Over there.

HARLEQUIN: Where? Why?

CLOWN: To act a little boy
who wants to change
his bits of bread
into flowers of steel.

HARLEQUIN: *(A little skeptical)* It can't be true.

CLOWN: *(Harshly)* It's true nevertheless.
I lost my rose and curve
I lost my neck's embrace
But in ivory newly formed
I have found them in this place.

HARLEQUIN: *(Adopting a circus barker posture and calling off as if desiring the boy to hear)* And now!
Mister Man! Come forth!

CLOWN: *(In full voice, as well — looking into the forest, ahead of the HARLEQUIN)* There's
no need to yell. *(To Audience)* Good day to you!

In a soft voice

Let's get out of here!

In full voice

Play this.

HARLEQUIN: What should I play?

CLOWN: A waltz.

The HARLEQUIN starts to play.

(To Audience) Ladies and Gentlemen:
you are about to witness... You are about to witness...
The turning wheel that changes the wind and the sea.

The hunting horns are heard. The SECRETARY enters wearing a tennis costume, with an intensely colored beret. In addition, she wears a long cape made out of a single layer of gauze. She is accompanied by the MASK who wears a bright yellow dress with a long train, circa 1900. The upper bodice of the dress is covered with golden sequins. The MASK has long hair of yellow silk falling like a mantle, a plaster-white mask and elbow-

length white gloves. On her head is a yellow hat. The effect is that of a sudden flame seen against a background of the blue moon. She speaks with a slight Italian accent.

MASK: *(Brightly; referring to music)* Enchanting!

SECRETARY: I had to leave his house. There was a terrible summer storm that afternoon and the son of the concierge died. When I entered the library, he said: "You called for me?", and I responded by closing my eyes: "No", I said. And when I crossed to the door, he said: "Do you need me?" and I said: "No. I don't need you."

MASK: *(Referring to story)* How beautiful!

SECRETARY: He always stayed up all night to see if I would make an appearance at the window.

MASK: And did you, signorina Secretary?

SECRETARY: No, I didn't. But...I watched him through the cracks...perfectly still...such powerful eyes! The wind cut like a knife, but I couldn't bring myself to speak to him...

MASK: Why not, signorina?

SECRETARY: Because he loved me too much.

MASK: Oh, dear God! It's the same as with the Count Arturo di Italia... Oh, love!

SECRETARY: Yes?

MASK: In the foyer of the Opera de Paris are enormous balustrades that open onto the sea. Count Arturo, with a camilia between his lips, would arrive in a small boat with his boy — the two having been abandoned by me. But I drew the curtains closed and threw them a diamond. Oh! What sweet torment, dear friend! *(Crying)* The Count and his boy went hungry and slept among branches with a greyhound that had been given to me by a Russian nobleman.

(Energized supplication) Can you spare a tiny scrap of bread for me? Can you spare a tiny scrap of bread for my son? For the boy Count Arturo left to die in the frost...? *(Agitated)* And later I went to the hospital where I learned there that the Count had married a Roman grande dame...and since then I've had to beg and share my bed with the men who unload coal on the docks.

SECRETARY: What do you mean? What are you talking about?

MASK: *(Calming down)* I mean, Count Arturo loved me so much that while he'd be crying behind the curtains with his boy, I—like a silver half-moon—was seen

amidst the binoculars and gaslights that glitter under the dome of the Grande Opera de Paris.

SECRETARY: How delicious! When will the Count arrive?

MASK: And when will your friend arrive?

SECRETARY: Later. It is never right away.

MASK: Arturo will also be later, right away. On his right hand he has a scar where he was cut with a dagger..., over me, so it happens. *(Holding out her hand)* Can you see it? *(Pointing to her neck)* And another here, see?

SECRETARY: Yes! But why...?

MASK: Why? Why?! How could I be without wounds? Whose are the wounds of my count?

SECRETARY: Yours, of course. It's true! He's waited five years for me, but how beautiful it is to wait, knowing the moment to be loved will arrive.

MASK: And it's certain!

SECRETARY: Oh, yes! So let us be happy! When I was little, I used to save candies to eat them later.

MASK: *(Laughing)* Yes, they taste better then, don't they?

The sound of the hunting horns

SECRETARY: *(Beginning to exit)* If my friend should come...so tall...make as if you don't recognize him.

MASK: Of course! My friend! *(She gathers up her train.)*

The YOUNG MAN appears.

HARLEQUIN: *(Entering)* Hey there!

YOUNG MAN: What?

HARLEQUIN: Where do you think you're going?

YOUNG MAN: To my house.

HARLEQUIN: *(Ironically)* Are you sure?

YOUNG MAN: Of course. *(Starts to go)*

HARLEQUIN: Hey! You can't go that way.

YOUNG MAN: Has the park been fenced off?

HARLEQUIN: That's the way to the circus—

YOUNG MAN: As you wish.

HARLEQUIN: —full of spectators who are particularly still. *(Sweetly)* Don't you want to go there, sir?

YOUNG MAN: *(Shaking)* No!

HARLEQUIN: *(Emphatically)* The poet, Virgil, constructed a fly out of gold, and all the flies that had poisoned the air in Naples dropped dead: over there, in the circus, there's soft gold, sufficient to make a statue the same size...as you.

YOUNG MAN: Then, is the street for selling guns closed, too?

HARLEQUIN: There are circus wagons and cages with snakes there now.

YOUNG MAN: Then I'll go back where I came from. *(Starts to exit)*

CLOWN: *(Entering from the opposite direction; laughing)* And where is that?

HARLEQUIN: He said he was going home.

CLOWN: *(Giving the HARLEQUIN a circus slap)* Here's home!

The HARLEQUIN falls to the ground, screaming.

HARLEQUIN: Oh, that hurt me! You hurt me!

YOUNG MAN: *(Irritated)* Would you please tell me what kind of joke this is? I was on my way to my house, I mean, not to my house; to another house to—

CLOWN: *(Interrupting)* In search of.

YOUNG MAN: —because I needed to. To look for...

CLOWN: *(Cheerfully)* To look for?... Then turn halfway 'round and you'll find what you seek.

THE VOICE OF THE MASK: Where are you going, my love, my life,
with the wind and the sea in a glass?

The CLOWN signals to the HARLEQUIN and while the YOUNG MAN faces away from them they exit dancing on point and with fingers to their lips, while keeping their eyes fixed on the YOUNG MAN.

The stage lights increase in intensity.

YOUNG MAN: *(Amazed; to MASK)*
Where are you going, my love, my life,
with the wind and the sea in a glass?

SECRETARY: *(Entering joyfully)* Where? Wherever I'm summoned!

YOUNG MAN: *(Embracing her)* My life!

SECRETARY: *(Embracing him)* With thee.

SECRETARY: What is that I hear so far away?

She buries her head in anguish in the YOUNG MAN's chest.

YOUNG MAN: Love,
the blood in my throat,
my love!

SECRETARY: Forever thus, forever,
awake or asleep.

YOUNG MAN: *(With energy and passion)*
Never like this, never!
Come, we must leave this place at once.

SECRETARY: But wait!

YOUNG MAN: Love waits for no man!

SECRETARY: *(Breaking the embrace)*
Where are you going, my love, my life,
with the wind and the sea in a glass?

On a video screen we see a miniature version of the library in Act I but in softer tones. The yellow MASK appears there in CLOSE-UP carrying a lace handkerchief. She is crying.

VIDEO MASK: At this very moment I have finished with the Count forever. He's behind there with his boy.

Video image: JUAN is seen crossing in front of the other video characters—on point as always.

VIDEO SECRETARY: *(To the video image of Juan)* If the master comes, let him in.

ON-STAGE SECRETARY: Even though he won't come until he must come.

Video image: alternating CLOSE UP of the YOUNG MAN and the SECRETARY.

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: *(On the small stage, passionately)* Are you happy here?

VIDEO SECRETARY: Have you written the letters?

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: Upstairs is better. Come!

VIDEO SECRETARY: I have loved you so much!

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: I love you so much!

VIDEO SECRETARY: I shall love you so much!

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: I would die without you. Where would I go if you left me? I remember nothing. No other exists for me but you, because you love me.

VIDEO SECRETARY: I have loved you, love! I will always love you, love.

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: Now...

VIDEO SECRETARY: What do you mean by "now"?

The OLD MAN enters the main stage. He carries a large, bloodstained handkerchief. He alternately holds it to his chest and to his face. He appears to be very disturbed as he watches with rapt attention all that happens in the video.

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: I was waiting and dying—

VIDEO SECRETARY: I died waiting for you.

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: —but the blood throbbled in my temples with its fists of fire. But now I have you with me.

VOICE OF THE MASK: *(On the video)* My son! My son!

Video image: The DEAD BOY approaches the SECRETARY and YOUNG MAN from a depth distance stopping when his image becomes identifiable.

OLD MAN: My son?

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: *(Voice over)* A little light for my son! Please! He's so small! He presses his face against the glass of my heart, but he can get no air!

MASK: *(Appearing on the main stage)* My son!

Video: alternating CLOSE-UP of the SECRETARY's and YOUNG MAN's mouths

VIDEO SECRETARY: *(With authority and precision)* Have you written the letters? It's not your son, it's me. You wanted to leave, but, at the same time expected me to love you. Am I wrong?

Video CLOSE-UP: YOUNG MAN

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: *(Impatiently)* No, but...

VIDEO SECRETARY: I knew you would never love me. But I offered my love to you anyway and changed you, and I have seen you in the corners of my house. *(Passionately)* I do love you; but you are so far away from me now!

OLD MAN: *(To on-stage SECRETARY)* For, if he is twenty, he could just as well be twenty moons.

SECRETARY: Or twenty roses, or twenty northern snows.

Video: profile facial close-up of Young Man and Secretary; his hands cup her face.

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: Be still. You will come with me now. Because you love me, and because I need to live.

VIDEO SECRETARY: Yes; I love you. But much more: you have no eyes to see me naked, nor lips to kiss my body which has no end. Leave me. I love you so much it's impossible to even look on you!

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: Let's go!

VIDEO SECRETARY: Love! You're hurting me!

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: That's how you're going to feel me!

VIDEO SECRETARY: *(Sweetly)* Wait...I'll go with you...forever.

They kiss.

Video image freezes.

OLD MAN: She'll go. So, sit down, my friend. And wait.

YOUNG MAN: *(In anguish)* NO.

SECRETARY: *(Embracing him)* I am here now. Why did you leave me? I was dying of cold and was forced to look for love where no one dare go. But I'll stay with you now. Only let me come to you a little at a time.

The CLOWN and the HARLEQUIN appear. The CLOWN has his guitar and the HARLEQUIN his white violin.

CLOWN: Some music.

HARLEQUIN: Of old.

CLOWN: Moon and seas without beginning.
What remains behind?

HARLEQUIN: The shroud of the wind.

CLOWN: And the music of your violin.

HARLEQUIN plays.

YOUNG MAN: *(Emerging from a dream)* Let's go!

SECRETARY: Is it possible that this is really you? It seems so sudden! Without having savored such a lovely idea as "wait until tomorrow"? Won't it make you ashamed of me?

YOUNG MAN: Upstairs, there's a kind a nest. Where you can hear the nightingale singing there...and even if you don't listen, even if a bat should fly against the window...!

SECRETARY: Yes, yes, but...

YOUNG MAN: Your mouth! *(He kisses her passionately.)*

Video image unfreezes.

VIDEO SECRETARY: Later on...

VIDEO YOUNG MAN: *(Pursuing)* It's best at night.

Video image freezes.

SECRETARY: I'll come!

YOUNG MAN: Without delay!

SECRETARY: I want to!

YOUNG MAN: Let's go!

SECRETARY: But...

YOUNG MAN: Yes?!

SECRETARY: I'll come with you...!

YOUNG MAN: Love!

Video image unfreezes.

VIDEO SECRETARY: I'll come with you...

VIDEO SECRETARY and ON-STAGE SECRETARY: *(Simultaneously)* ...when five years pass!

YOUNG MAN: *(Bringing his hands to his forehead)* Oh!

OLD MAN: *(In a soft voice)* Bravo!

Video image: CLOSE-UP: the SECRETARY looking triumphant. Camera pulls back to reveal JUAN on point placing a large white cape over her shoulders.

CLOWN: Some music?

HARLEQUIN: Of old.

CLOWN: Moons and seas without beginning.
What remains behind is—

HARLEQUIN: —the shroud of the wind.

CLOWN: And the music of your violin.

They play.

YOUNG MAN: *(Desperately, to the CLOWN)*
The exit, where is it?

VIDEO SECRETARY: *(As if in a dream)* Love! Love!

Video image freezes

YOUNG MAN: *(Shivering)* Show me the door!

CLOWN: *(Ironic; pointing right)* Over there!

HARLEQUIN: *(Ironic; pointing to video)* Through there!

Video image unfreezes.

VIDEO SECRETARY: I will wait, love. I will wait.

YOUNG MAN: *(To the video image)*
I'll smash the cages and the webs that snare.
I know how to scale the wall.

OLD MAN: *(To YOUNG MAN)* We'll go nowhere, but we'll go anyway.

YOUNG MAN: I want to change! Let me change!

HARLEQUIN: *(To Audience)* But the wind remains!

CLOWN: Like the music of your violin!

Curtain

ACT THREE
FINAL SCENE



The same library as in Act I. The wedding gown is now on a mannequin without head or arms. There are various open suitcases about. Enter JUAN and the MAID.

MAID: *(Amazed)* Really?

JUAN: She's a concierge now, but she was once a great lady. She lived for a long time with a very wealthy Italian count, the father of the boy they had just buried.

MAID: The poor little darling. He looked so sweet!

JUAN: That was when she became completely mad and spent everything she had on the boy's clothes and casket.

MAID: And on the flowers! I sent a small bouquet of roses, but it was so tiny they didn't even put it in the room.

YOUNG MAN: *(Entering)* Juan.

JUAN: Sir.

YOUNG MAN: Didn't the window used to be bigger?

JUAN: No.

YOUNG MAN: It seems amazing somehow to find it so narrow. I had remembered my house with an enormous patio where I used to play with my little horses. But when I was twenty, I went back and it seemed so small I couldn't imagine how I could have flown around in it so much.

JUAN: Are you feeling all right, sir?

YOUNG MAN: Does a spouting water fountain feel well?

JUAN: *(Smiling)* I can't say...

YOUNG MAN: When the wind blows, does a turning weather vane feel well?

JUAN: The Master poses some examples...but I might inquire, if Master will permit me..., does the wind feel well?

YOUNG MAN: *(Curt)* I feel fine.

JUAN: Did you sleep well after your journey?

YOUNG MAN: Yes.

JUAN: I'm very pleased to hear it.

Begins to exit

YOUNG MAN: Juan, are my clothes ready?

JUAN: Yes, sir; they are in your bedroom.

YOUNG MAN: Which suit?

JUAN: The tails. I've layed them out on the bed.

YOUNG MAN: *(Agitated)* Well, remove them at once. I don't want to go up and encounter them lying on the bed, so large! so empty! I don't know who thought to buy it. I used to have a small one, remember?

JUAN: Yes, sir: the one of carved walnut.

YOUNG MAN: *(Brightly)* That's it! The one of carved walnut...so wonderful to sleep in! I remember, when I was little, I saw a gigantic moon rise up from the footboard..., or was it from the iron railings on the balcony? I'm not sure. Where is it?

JUAN: You gave it away, sir.

YOUNG MAN: *(Trying to remember)* To whom?

JUAN: To your former Secretary.

Lost in thought, the YOUNG MAN pauses.

YOUNG MAN: *(Indicating to JUAN that he may depart)* That's fine.

JUAN exits.

YOUNG MAN: *(In distress)* Juan!

JUAN: *(Formally)* Sir.

YOUNG MAN: Put out my patent leather shoes.

JUAN: The pair with the black silk laces.

YOUNG: Black silk...no... Find a different pair. How come the air coming into this house always seems so heavy? I think I'll cut down all the flowers in the garden and those weeds that spring up in the middle of the night...

JUAN: They say that windflowers and poppies can give you a headache at certain times of the day.

YOUNG MAN: That has to be it. Oh, and take the wedding gown and put it in the attic.

JUAN: As you wish. *(Exits)*

YOUNG MAN: *(Timidly)* And leave me the patent leather shoes. But change the laces.

The doorbell is heard

JUAN: *(Re-entering)* The society gentlemen have arrived to play cards.

YOUNG MAN: *(Annoyed)* Ah!

JUAN: It will be necessary for you to change, sir.

YOUNG MAN: *(Exiting)* Yes. *(Exits almost like a shadow)*

Enter three CARDPLAYERS wearing tails and floor-length white satin capes.

CARDPLAYER 1: That was in Venice. A bad year for games. But that boy could really play. He was pale, of course, so pale, in fact, that in the last hand, he had no choice but to play the *as de coeur*: his own heart so filled with blood. So, he played it, and when I went to claim it... *(Lowering his voice and looking around him)* he had an ace of cups*overflowing its brim, and after drinking from it, he ran off to the Grand Canal with a couple of trollops.

- CARDPLAYER 2:** You can't trust pale people, or people who are bored. They play, but without passion.
- CARDPLAYER 3:** In India I played with an old man once, who, when there wasn't a drop of blood left except on the cards themselves, and I was about to take him, he suddenly splattered red dye over *all* the cups⁺ and made his escape through the trees.
- CARDPLAYER 1:** We play, and we win; but what a job! The cards absorb the tasty blood from their hands, and it's hard to distinguish between them.
- CARDPLAYER 2:** Still, I think that with this one...we are not mistaken.
- CARDPLAYER 3:** I'm not so sure.
- CARDPLAYER 1:** (*To SECOND*) Will you never learn to know your clients? Like *this one*, for example. Life veritably shoots out from his eyes and soaks everything blue from his lips to the front of his shirt.
- CARDPLAYER 2:** Yes, but remember the boy in Sweden who played with us almost at death's door? The blood spurting out of him like to blinded us.
- CARDPLAYER 3:** (*Taking out a deck of Tarock or Tarroc cards; to CARDPLAYER 1*) Would you like to shuffle the cards?
- CARDPLAYER 2:** We've got to go very gentle with him so we don't scare him away.
- CARDPLAYER 1:** I don't think it will occur to the *other* woman or the lady Secretary to come around here again when five years pass, but if they should come...
- CARDPLAYER 3:** (*Laughing*) If they ever do come.
- CARDPLAYER 1:** (*Laughing*) It wouldn't be a bad idea to play a quick game.
- CARDPLAYER 2:** He's guarding an ace.¹
- CARDPLAYER 3:** A young heart, too, so the arrows will probably just slide off.
- CARDPLAYER 1:** (*Bright and profound*) No way! I picked-up some arrows at a shooting gallery...
- CARDPLAYER 3:** (*With curiosity*) Where?
- CARDPLAYER 1:** (*With a sense of humor*) At a shooting gallery where they not only go through the hardest steel but the finest gauze, too, and that is really hard! (*They laugh*)
- CARDPLAYER 2:** (*Laughing*) Well, that's the end of it, then.

¹ References to Tarot cards. Note that Rider deck images correspond to references made, although there may be others of equal or superior validity.

The YOUNG MAN enters in his tails

YOUNG MAN: Gentlemen! (*Shakes their hands*) You've arrived early. It's quite hot.

CARDPLAYER 1: Not too!

CARDPLAYER 2: (*To the YOUNG MAN*) Elegant as always!

CARDPLAYER 1: So elegant you must never undress again.

CARDPLAYER 3: There are times when clothes fit so well that we have no desire...

CARDPLAYER 2: (*Interrupting*) There is no way to wrestle them from the corpse.

YOUNG MAN: (*Annoyed*) You're too kind!

JUAN enters

YOUNG MAN: Shall we begin?

CARDPLAYER 1: As planned.

CARDPLAYER 2: (*In a soft voice*) Look sharp now!

CARDPLAYER 3: You're not sitting?

YOUNG MAN: No..., I prefer to play standing.

CARDPLAYER 1: Standing?

CARDPLAYER 2: It will have to penetrate much deeper.

CARDPLAYER 1: (*Dealing the cards*) How many?

YOUNG MAN: Four.

CARDPLAYER 3: I fold.

YOUNG MAN: Such cold cards! Nothing. (*To the entire group:*) And you...?

CARDPLAYER 1: (*Gravely*) Nothing. (*Deals again.*)

CARDPLAYER 2: Nothing. (*Looking at his cards*) Wonderful!

CARDPLAYER 3: Nothing. (*Looking nervously at his hand*) We shall see what happens.

CARDPLAYER 1: (*To the YOUNG MAN*) Your play.

YOUNG MAN: (*Brightly*) My play! (*Throws a card down*)

CARDPLAYER 1: And mine!

CARDPLAYER 2: And mine!

CARDPLAYER 3: And mine!

YOUNG MAN: *(Excited, with a card)* And now...?

The three CARDPLAYERS each play a card. The YOUNG MAN hesitates and bides his in his hand.

YOUNG MAN: Juan. Serve a liqueur to these gentlemen.

CARDPLAYER 1: *(Gently)* Will you be so kind as to play your card?

YOUNG MAN: *(In anguish)* What kind of liqueur would you like?

CARDPLAYER 2: *(Sweetly)* The card...?

YOUNG MAN: *(To CARDPLAYER 3)* I bet you'd like anise. It's a drink...

CARDPLAYER 3: If you don't mind..., the card...

The three CARDPLAYERS freeze with their cards in their hands.

Or cognac...?

CARDPLAYER 1: *(In a soft voice, concealing from JUAN)* The card!

YOUNG MAN: *(Anguished)* Cognac is a drink for men who know how to resist.

CARDPLAYER 2: *(Forcefully but quietly)* Your card!

YOUNG MAN: Or would you prefer chartreuse?

JUAN exits.

CARDPLAYER 1: *(Rising)* Be good enough to play.

YOUNG MAN: Right away. But first let us drink...

CARDPLAYER 3: You must play!

YOUNG MAN: Yes, yes. *(Calling to JUAN)* A little chartreuse! Chartreuse is like a great night under a green moon, at a castle where there's a young man in gold socks.

CARDPLAYER 1: *(Commanding)* You must play your ace.

YOUNG MAN: *(Aside)* My heart!

CARDPLAYER 2: Because one must either win or lose... Come on, now. Your card!

CARDPLAYER 3: Go on!

CARDPLAYER 1: Make your play!

YOUNG MAN: *(In pain)* My card!

CARDPLAYER 1: The final one!

YOUNG MAN: My play!

He places the card on the table as a giant ace of hearts is projected onto the bookshelves. The CARDPLAYER 1 draws a gun and soundlessly fires an arrow. The ace vanishes and the YOUNG MAN clasps his hands to his heart.

CARDPLAYER 1: One must live!

CARDPLAYER 2: One shouldn't wait!

CARDPLAYER 3: Cut! Cut well.

With a pair of scissors, the CARDPLAYER 1 makes a few cuts in the air.

CARDPLAYER 1: *(Softly)* Let's go!

CARDPLAYER 2: Quickly!

CARDPLAYER 3: One must never wait! One must live! *(They exit.)*

YOUNG MAN: Juan! Juan!

JUAN enters with a lighted candelabra

YOUNG MAN: I have lost everything.

JUAN: I have lost everything

YOUNG MAN: My love...

JUAN: My love.

YOUNG MAN: *(his voice echoing)* Juan.

The YOUNG MAN dies. The clock strikes twelve.

END OF PLAY

Review: *Tahrir Tales: Plays from the Egyptian Revolution*, Edited by Mohammed Albakry and Rebekah Maggor. Seagull Books. ISBN 978-0857423412

By Kristin Johnsen-Neshati

With these ten translations of Egyptian plays, Mohammed Albakry and Rebekah Maggor have significantly advanced the field of Arabic theater studies and extended the influence of Egypt's revolutionary voices to new audiences abroad. Each play provides a distinct perspective on the protests arising from—but also extending beyond—Tahrir Square in 2011. In clear, playable language, characters from across the anthology describe actual events witnessed collectively, but experienced personally, such as the police and military attacks with fire hoses, tear gas and gunfire, and the deadly large animal stampede, known as the Battle of the Camel. Stories throughout the collection remind us of unparalleled acts of courage, generosity and camaraderie from those days, as well as feelings of guilt for some, and for others the end of fear.

They Say Dancing is a Sin by Mohamed Abdel Mu'iz

In this one-person show, a professional belly dancer addresses the audience in her dressing room, having just finished a performance. She's about 40 years old and speaks casually about her friendships with women, relationships with men, and her disgust with arrogance and hypocrisy. Touching on themes of freedom, morality and self-worth, the Dancer suggests that these are luxuries for people like her, who worry about basic survival. The Dancer describes a predicament that might apply not only to her own search for validation, but also to the plight of Egyptian artists at large.

The Mirror by Yasmeen Emam

A young woman described as “The Girl” appears in her bedroom, studying herself in the mirror as she tries on outfits and rehearses what she'll say at her cousin's engagement party. The Girl repeats, questions and responds to the conflicting advice she receives from important figures in her life. The voices disagree on whether a woman should be bold or submissive, strong or delicate to win a man's interest. Written as voice-overs, but playable live, these opinions build to a crescendo of confusion over celebrating another's happiness while longing to find one's own.

Tahrir Monologues by Sondos Shabayek and Members of the BuSSy Project

An ensemble of twenty performers share the monologues of protestors and observers who submitted their accounts of the Egyptian uprising to the BuSSy Project via Facebook and the Tahrir Monologues website. Beginning with a headline from April 19, 2010, this piece moves swiftly through pivotal events from the protests in Cairo, Alexandria and Suez, including the ongoing vigil at Tahrir Square, the

Central Security Forces' use of tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition, Christians and Muslims taking turns protecting each other as they prayed, and the news of Mubarak's stepping down. Through eloquent, stirring monologues, a powerful refrain emerges, marking the moment when ordinary citizens became patriots, and in so doing, put an end to fear.

The Window by Said Solaiman

Hamid lives cooped up at home with his wife and daughter Sara, terrified of the old man and woman, sheikh, policeman and other "personalities" who watch them from beyond the window. Sara yearns to go out, and Hamid's wife begs him to join them on excursions. He is paralyzed, however, by fears of surveillance and the judgment that goes with it. Described as a "Drama with Movement in One Act," *The Window* depicts how the paranoia of contemporary urban life in Egypt can yield unexpectedly to revolt.

Comedy of Sorrows by Ibrahim El-Husseini

Signs of upheaval in the play's physical world reflect the chaos, both internal and external, suffered by the characters whose poetic soliloquies ground this impressionistic ensemble piece about revolution and its aftermath. Characters speak in two modes (reflecting the formal and colloquial registers familiar to Arabic-speaking audiences), described by the translators as "heightened formal English, arranged in free verse, for the soliloquies and colloquial American English for the dialogue." Characters deliver poignant speeches blending everyday experience with the surreal. Their accounts of abandonment, sadism, degradation and loss seem both contemporary and eerily detached.

In Search of Said Abu-Naga by Ahmad Hassan Al-Banna

Said Abu-Naga has gone missing in the days following the killing of an unarmed man in Alexandria on January 28, 2011. Clashes have broken out in Tahrir Square between protestors demanding regime change and police and military forces. Said's mother and fiancée watch news reports, eager for word about the young man. Tensions arise, however, as Said's mother and fiancée reveal competing hopes. The young woman longs for Said's return so that the couple can marry, while the Mother prays her son will choose his father's path.

Report on Revolutionary Circumstances by Magdy El-Hamzawy

A shoeshine kid overhears customers discussing the revolution taking shape in Tahrir Square. Hoping to secure himself an education, the kid joins the revolution and quickly takes part in every event at Tahrir Square. Written for a larger ensemble, this piece examines the revolution through the eyes of the poor and disenfranchised, whose voices risk getting lost in the clamor of general protest.

The Visit by Muhammad Marros

Kamal is a middle-aged businessman who sits in the dark, waiting for his wife to return each night from Tahrir Square. Tahaya has developed an admiration for “the boys” and their impassioned protest, but it’s these “thugs” that Kamal blames for his tourism business going under. Tahaya invites one of the protesters, a photographer named Hisham, to their home for lunch, and their awkward encounter proves as volatile as the scene unfolding on the streets outside. The truth is slow to emerge in this play about loyalty, heroism and choosing sides.

Sorrowful City by Ashraf Abdo

Inspired by actual events affecting Egypt’s largest Christian minority, *Sorrowful City* depicts the betrayal and disillusionment of the Coptic community in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution. With the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power, Copts sought to flee the country in large numbers. The army and security forces attacked them repeatedly when they protested the demolition of a Coptic church in Aswan, and later when a riot broke out in the Port Said Stadium, killing over 70 people and injuring hundreds. Emigration and death emerge as key themes in this symbolic work about charting a course forward and leaving the past behind.

Taxi by Khalid Al Khamissi

Khalid Al Khamissi’s novel featuring 58 vignettes from the lives of Egyptian taxi drivers was adapted for the stage by the Thousand Tongues Theatre Company. Originally performed by an ensemble of six, the play shifts swiftly from one Cairo location to another, combining storytelling in the present with re-enactments from the characters’ past. The result is a motley collection of entertaining tales dedicated to the ubiquitous Cairo taxi and the people who spend their lives in them.

Albakry and Maggor have translated most of the works, usually with at least one other partner. Although the plots and characters vary considerably, the plays share a consistent accessibility of language and idiomatic style. One of the great strengths of this collection is the care with which the editors have established political and cultural contexts for these works. Albakry’s essay, “Translating Egyptian Drama for the Stage,” provides illuminating examples of how a translator approaches re-envisioning an Egyptian source text in English. Maggor’s introduction provides a fascinating account of how the Egyptian theater community merged with the protests, offering details about the events, artists, titles and venues that would shape this turbulent period in revolutionary theater. Several production photos accompany the texts, along with generous footnotes that expand on points without dominating this handsome collection. Nehad Selaiha’s brilliant essay, “The Fire and the Frying Pan: Censorship and Performance in Egypt,” illustrates both official and societal forms of censorship, their

Several production photos accompany the texts, along with generous footnotes that expand on points without dominating this handsome collection. Nehad Selaiha's brilliant essay, "The Fire and the Frying Pan: Censorship and Performance in Egypt," illustrates both official and societal forms of censorship, their roots in colonialism, and the dire result when these forms overlap. Written with her characteristic elegance and precision, and paired nicely with the editors' introductions, Selaiha's remarks provide a crucial political context for Western readers and call to mind her special place as Egyptian theater's great champion.

—*Kristin Johnsen-Neshati*
George Mason University

Kristin Johnsen-Neshati teaches courses in world theater, dramatic literature, dramaturgy and translation for George Mason University's School of Theater. Her special interests include theater practice of the Middle East and North Africa. In 2011, she received a Fulbright grant to interview working professionals and scholars on the rise of Egypt's independent theaters. She has translated four of Chekhov's major works and, most recently, co-wrote and co-directed *Gogol's Nose & Other Strange Tales from the City* with David Gaines.