

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
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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 Versenyi at anversen@email.unc.edu or by snail mail: Adam Versenyi, Department of Dramatic Art, CB# 3230, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3230. For translations of plays or performance pieces, unless the material is in the public domain, please send proof of permission to translate from the playwright or original creator of the piece. Since one of the primary objects of *The Mercurian* is to move translated pieces into production, no translations of plays or performance pieces will be published unless the translator can certify that he/she has had an opportunity to hear the translation performed in either a reading or another production-oriented venue.



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Table of Contents

Editor's Note	3
The Station By Olexandr Viter, Translated by Anatole Bilenko	4
Staging Identity Through Art By Margarita Vargas	66
Collected Works By Juan García Ponce, Translated by Margarita Vargas	85
Brandy Blues By Carlos Semprun-Maura, Translated by Phyllis Zatlin	178

Editor's Note:

This winter issue of *The Mercurian* is comprised of three plays: the prolific Ukranian playwright Olexandr Vitor's existential drama *The Station*, translated by Anatole Bilenko; Mexican playwright Juan García Ponce's Pirandello-esque *Collected Works*, translated by Margarita Vargas; and the late Spanish writer Carlos Semprun-Maura's comedy of menace, *Brandy Blues*, translated by Phyllis Zatlin. In addition, we are pleased to reprint Vargas' article on *Collected Works*, "Staging Identity Through Art," first published in *Centennial Review*. *The Mercurian* is immensely gratified by the support of its readers and contributors. Without you we truly would not exist. We seem to have been around long enough that in both this issue and last we feature translations by prior contributors, Anatole Bilenko, Phyllis Zatlin, and Caridad Svich, respectively. We welcome future contributions from both new and old friends alike. Keep those cards and letters (digital or otherwise) coming, folks!

As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 2, No. 4 will be April 30, 2010.

--Adam Versényi

Olexandr Viter

THE STATION
A play in two acts

Cast:

Tania

Olga

Irene

ACT I

Scene 1

Interior of a small provincial railroad station. Sitting on a bench in the passenger lounge is a woman (TANIA) about 35 years of age.

Tania: *(looks at her watch)*. Twenty minutes left, a merest trifle compared with eternity. *(Pause)*. But oh how slowly these twenty minutes creep along. It seems that somewhere a vicious gnome holds time by the throat and doesn't let it go. *(Takes a look at her watch again)*. Nineteen minutes. Thank you, gnome, for letting one-minute escape from your clutches.

Another woman (OLGA), about 25 years of age and fashionably dressed, enters the railroad station

Olga: (*takes a look around*). Whew! I made it at last. Not much of a station, I'd say. Oh well, I've seen something like that before, although this dump seems to beat them all. (*Notices the other woman*). Hail to the natives! When's the arrival of the train?

Tania: In eighteen minutes.

Olga: Eighteen minutes and I'll be on my way home for a hot bath, red wine, and a soft bed. Good Lord, how much I want to get home!

Tania: Seventeen.

Olga: What?

Tania: I said that seventeen minutes are still left.

Olga: Wonderful! By the way, does this station have a name?

Tania: Probably not.

Olga: What do you mean by "probably"? There has to be a name. Everything in the world has some name.

Tania: It's simply a station without a name.

Olga: All right, let it be without a name. By the way, where is the ticket office? I don't seem to see it anywhere.

Tania: There's no ticket office.

Olga: Of all the places to hit the shit. No station name, not ticket office. Where am I supposed to buy a ticket to get out of this wretched backwoods?

Tania: Why wretched? There's a beautiful forest around here.

Olga: Oh, I've had enough of that beautiful forest when I was slugging between its pine trees for four hours! I'm surely knee-deep in a thing!

Tania: You shouldn't be in such a stew. If you want to leave so much, you'll leave.

Olga: Of course I want to leave. No doubts about that. It's the greatest desire I have right now.

Tania: We'll see.

Olga: See what? This provincial wretchedness or your fairytale forest? Oh well, there's no use talking about it. *(Pause)*. Oh, how I feel cold! Is there any snack bar here?

Tania: No. But if you like tea, it's in a jug kettle on the table over there.

Olga: *(Picks up the kettle and pours some tea into a cup)*. Really, it's hot tea and smells super.

Tania: Strawberries.

Olga: What?

Tania: It smells of strawberries. I add it to the tea for the aroma.

Olga: Does it mean that you're the boss around here? Why didn't you say so right away? I thought you were waiting for a train just like me.

Tania: I am.

Olga: And still, where can I buy a ticket?

Tania: You won't need any.

Olga: How come?

Tania: You'll understand eventually.

Olga: Sure, I will, when the train wheels away without me on board. Seriously, what should I do about the ticket?

Tania: I told you: you won't need any.

Olga: That's a bit thick. I have to get out of here as fast as I can. Tomorrow I've got a course credit test in English. Once I'm through with yet another two credit tests and an exam, I'll be a certified specialist. I simply don't believe I can get out of here for a song!

Tania: Ten minutes.

Olga: Ten what?

Tania: Ten minutes left before the arrival of the train.

Olga: All right, damn that ticket. I'll come to terms with the conductor. Thank God I've got some money about me. Are you a cleaning woman in this place?

Tania: A cleaning woman and everything else. I double as a manager and subordinate.

Olga: A manager you say? Why then are you taking me in about the tickets? You can't even tell me the name of this station.

Tania: But I told you – the station doesn't have a name. It's simply THE STATION, a stopping place.

Olga: Oh well, talking with you is about the same as preaching to the wind. I'll go around and have a good look myself. (*Walks around the railroad station*). Now here's the arrivals and departures schedule. Arrival at 17:40 p.m., departure at 17:45 p.m. No name of the station in sight. Then there's an arrivals and departures schedule of ships. Now what the – . Is this a railroad station or a seaport?

Tania: It's a railroad station.

Olga: (*reads*). Arrival at 9:00 a.m., departure at 9:15 a.m. Now tell me what kind of a seaport can there be in this hole and in winter besides?

Tania: A usual seaport, just like any, if, of course, there'll be any passengers in winter.

Olga: Are you by any chance earning anything additionally at the seaport?

Tania: Yes.

Olga: I see that you're heaped high with duties around here. Good, now let's take a look at this schedule. What, for passenger airliners? Well, I'll be jiggered! Does it mean that you also have a local airport?

Tania: Yes, though a little one.

Olga: And now you'll tell me that you hold a job there, too.

Tania: Yes, I do.

Olga: In what capacity? Where is your boss?

Tania: I told you – I'm the boss and the subordinate all wrapped into one.

Olga: I see. Isn't this place some sort of a loonybin? Looks so very much to me.

Tania: No need to be so angry. I told you that this is THE STATION, written with capital letters.

Olga: If it's written in capital letters that makes my guess very close to the truth.

Tania: One minute left.

Olga: Thanks for reminding me. You can stay at your mysterious THE STATION, but for me it's time to make myself scarce. (*Runs out of the passenger lounge*).

Tania: Just let it happen today! Please, please, let it happen. There's still ten seconds. Nothing! It didn't happen.

Enters Olga

Olga: Brr-r-r, it's so cold out there! Is the train late or what? I'll better stay here where it's warm.

Tania: The train won't arrive today.

Olga: Did I hear you right?

Tania: Yes, the train won't arrive.

Olga: How do you know? Did you know it in advance?

Tania: No, I hoped it would arrive.

Olga: How d'ye like that? She hoped. So who's the boss here then?

Tania: I am.

Olga: So tell me where did the train disappear?

Tania: It did not arrive.

Olga: That much I noticed myself! The question is why didn't it arrive?

Tania: Because you didn't want it.

Olga: I didn't? What are you chattering about? Do you realize how much I have to pay for my studies? You won't earn such money in thirty years!

Tania: In real fact you didn't want to study.

Olga: That's none of your business.

Tania: Sure, it's not, but the train didn't arrive for you?

Olga: For me? Is it supposed to be my personal train? Maybe I'm worried for no reason at all. The train might simply be late.

Tania: No, it's never late. It either arrives, or it doesn't.

Olga: Splendid! What a fix I'm in. Just why did I have to visit that idiot?

Tania: What idiot?

Olga: The freak who invited me to his dacha. At first everything seemed to be fine. I was treated to good food, drinks, nice music, an erotic video film ... we began kissing each other and then followed what usually happens in such cases. Once we were spent, he drifted into dreamland and raised a typhoon of snoring. Much as I tried to wake him I failed. I felt ditched and it cut me to the quick. I rushed outdoors to my car and tried to start it – no deal, the frost had chocked it off. Then I saw a road sign reading "The Station. 10 kilometers" and walked in that direction right into the forest.

Tania: Why didn't you stay at the dacha until morning?

Olga: If I did, that freak wouldn't live to see it. I would have strangled him. Besides, I had to take a course credit test that morning.

Tania: Doesn't make much of a difference now. You're still here.

Olga: Thanks for reminding me. As the manager of this station, you owe me an explanation. What the hell is going on in this place?

Tania: Nothing unusual.

Olga: Where's the train then? How will I get out of here?

Tania: There'll be no trains today. Wait for an airplane tomorrow morning.

Olga: At what time?

Tania: At 10.

Olga: At ten, you say. My course study test is at half past eleven. The flight time is half an hour at the most. Seems I'll make it.

Tania: If only the airplane arrives.

Olga: If what? Are you really the boss here?

Tania: I am, but the arrival of the airplane doesn't depend on me.

Olga: Now that's too much! I'm sick and tired of all this mess. First it's that freak of a stud, and now it's you! (*Speaks under her breath*). Go to hell, all of you. I'll just walk back home along the tracks.

Tania: You'll hardly make it. It's too cold.

Olga: Thanks for the optimism. (*Looks out of the window*). Maybe you're right. I'd run the risk of freezing to death on those tracks. Goodness gracious, why did I land in this dump? Do you have a telephone at least?

Tania: None at all.

Olga: A railroad station without a telephone? Incredible.

Tania: There's no need for it.

Olga: No need for a telephone? Well, well, that's nonsense of the highest order.

Scene 2

That instant a frightened and tearstained woman (IRENE) runs into the passenger lounge. She looks around and crumples onto a lounge bench from exhaustion.

Irene: What a rat!

Olga: Who's that supposed to be?

Irene: What? Oh, it's nothing, just one of my latest problems. (*Pause*). Thank God I reached this place where there are people.

Olga: Now don't tell me that you're a manager of this station as well.

Irene: No. I simply... I want to get home.

Olga: Unfortunately, getting home from here won't be that easy.

Irene: No tickets available?

Olga: No tickets, no ticket office, and, as a matter of fact, no trains. The last hope is an airplane that's supposed to arrive next morning.

Irene: Is this an airport?

Olga: It's not only an airport, but also a seaport. And it's all under the management of..... What's your name?

Tania: Tania.

Olga: All this is managed by this here Tania. At least that's what she says and tries to convince everybody that it's an unvarnished truth.

Tania: Would you like some tea?

Irene: Yes, if I may.

Some minutes later Tania brings the tea.

Irene: *(drinks the tea)* Splendid, real lime-flower tea. I don't remember when I drank it the last time.

Olga: Lime-flower tea? Let me taste it. *(Tastes the tea)*. Tania, you poured it out of the same kettle as my tea. I saw it with my own eyes. But mine was a strawberry tea.

Tania: She simply wanted lime-flower tea, so she got it. Do you want some honey besides?

Irene: Oh yes.

Tania: I'll bring it right away. (*Leaves the passenger lounge*).

Irene: Do I feel fine! It's warm, I'm among people again, and I'll have lime-flower tea with honey.

Olga: Listen, lady, let's have a good talk while she's away.

Irene: A talk about what?

Olga: About this fishy place. What's going on here just doesn't make any sense.

Irene: Exactly what?

Olga: Everything! This here railroad station, airport and seaport managed by one person. The trains ignore all schedules. There's no telephone. And this Tania is surely off the beam.

Irene: To me she seems like a very nice woman.

Olga: Nice you say? And her gibberish is nice too? As far as I can make out, she's as much a manager as I'm a minister.

Irene: A minister of what?

Olga: Of everything. Never mind what. The main thing – she's not a manager.

Irene: So what is she then?

Olga: A usual crackpot of the quiet variety.

Irene: And what can we do about it?

Olga: At this stage I don't know, I really don't know.

Irene: (*bursts into sobs*). How can we get out of here?

Olga: Stop whimpering first, and let's set our brains to work. Getting to the next station on our own is out of the question – we'll freeze on the way. This crazy dame is living here somehow which means she's getting her food and clothes from somewhere. So we have to find out from her where we are and what kind of a place this is. Only then we'll understand how to make a break for it.

Irene: What if we fail to learn anything?

Olga: That might be a horny dilemma. Wait a minute. I've got an idea. She might be lonely in this place and so she spins her funny yarns for us, her grateful listeners. Let's reverse the situation to a point when she'll itch to get rid of us.

Irene: How?

Olga: Very simply. We'll tell her, for instance, that you broke prison camp where you did time for murder. At large now, you're looking for a hideout. And this station is the best imaginable option.

Irene: Somehow I don't want to pull anyone's leg.

Olga: And what about wanting to stick around here God knows for what purpose? You need to understand that she won't let us go just like that. Well, do you agree with my idea?

Irene: Seems I have no other choice.

Enters Tania

Tania: Here's the honey. Buckwheat honey, the best you can have with tea.

Olga: As far as I know, Irene would prefer it with something else.

Irene: With what? Perhaps with coffee?

Olga: No, Irene holds *chifir* in greater respect?

Tania: A what?

Olga: *Chifir* is an incredibly strong brew of tea that has about the same effect as pot. (*Turns to Tania*). It's adored in prison camps, isn't it?

Irene: Oh yes, *chifir* is just the right stuff.

Tania: Did you pull time in a prison camp?

Irene: Yes... seems like it.

Olga: (*quietly, secretively*) She'd be doing time to this day (*whispers to Tania*) hadn't it been for a fortunate chance. She's on the lam now. (*To Irene*). Right?

Irene: Yes... seems like it.

Tania: So you broke loose from a prison camp?

Irene: Yes... seems like it.

Tania: I would've never suspected it, judging from your looks.

Irene: Outwardly I seem to be a quiet chick, but in real fact ...

Olga: Beware of a silent dog and still water. Let me introduce you to the notorious Irene the maniac. Have you read about her in the papers?

Tania: No, never.

Olga: She's got five murders to her credit! Life imprisonment! And she's on the wanted list of Interpol.

Tania: You really did all that?

Irene: Yes... seems like it.

Tania: How interesting. I've never seen a live murderer before.

Olga: (*takes Tania aside*). Interesting you say, eh? You'd better realize that for her killing a witness is as easy as stepping across a little puddle.

Tania: I don't understand what you mean.

Olga: It's we who are the witnesses. One corpse more or less doesn't make any hell difference to her.

Tania: Is she bent on killing us? What for?

Olga: Who knows. This here is a quiet place. You see, she can't afford having any witnesses. After she bumps us off she'll sit it out in this station until the hue and cry peters out.

Tania: (*to Irene*). Are you really a murderer?

Irene: Sure, and a rapist besides.

Tania: Staggers my imagination.

Olga: Small wonder it does. First she kills and then rapes her victims!

Irene: Well... not always. Mostly I like it the other way around. But sometimes after a good rape I'm not in the mood to spill blood.

Tania: At first sight you look so quiet and modest.

Irene: I go at it just as quietly and modestly, without ruffling the calm. Noise immediately attracts crowds and creates a greater danger to be nabbed.

Tania: But you look so frail. Or is it only the women you're after?

Irene: Nothing of the kind. There's absolutely nothing wrong with my orientation, and I prefer men.

Olga: She's saying so out of modesty – it's men, and women, and anyone else she can lay her hands on.

Tania: What happens when she comes across a really strong guy?

Olga: She's a sambo freak, or what's called....

Irene: Karate... black belt.

Olga: Yes, that's it. She can break a brick with one finger.

Irene: Well, one finger is an exaggeration. But with two I can do it.

Olga: One or two makes no difference. The main thing is that she's got the power – it's under wraps, so to speak.

Tania: You know what? I've got an idea. Stay here. We'll be living together. This is a quiet place, way out in the backwoods. The Interpol will never reach us.

Irene: Aren't you afraid of harboring murderers? It smacks of a long stretch in a slammer.

Tania: Damn it all! Well, are you staying?

Irene: I don't know...

Tania: That's about the same as an agreement. This calls for a celebration. I'll be back with some wine in a jiffy.

(Tania runs away)

Olga: We blew it!

Irene: Wasn't it your idea of her itching to get rid of us? My foot she will. Now she won't let us get away for sure.

Olga: I had not way of knowing that she had such a twisted mentality. We're in a pretty pickle.

Irene: What do we do now?

Olga: (*walks up to the schedule of arrivals and departures*). This schedule looks real enough to me.

Irene: Does it matter whether it's real or unreal?

Olga: It means that we still have a chance to get away, if an airplane or ship arrives.

Irene: So what?

Olga: Stop your so-whats! The main thing is to endure until morning, and then...

Tania arrives with a bottle of wine

Tania: Red wine here, as sweet as honey. (*Pours the wine into three glasses*). Come on, let's drink for all our dreams and wishes to come true!

Olga: I, for one, have three dreams: to be rich, to have a child from a man I love, and ... and...well, that's too intimate and will hardly come true.

Irene: Tell us, it's interesting to know.

Olga: No, I can't.

Irene: *(enters into her imaginary role of murderer).* Spill the beans or else I'll give you a deep-six.

Olga: All right, simmer down. I want to try being a man, but that will hardly be ever possible.

Irene: Yes, hardly. What about the other dreams?

Olga: With the money it's a blank. It's the same with a kid of my own. As to a man, a psychiatrist I know told me that it's the sublimation of my utopian fantasies expressed in a pathological form.

Tania: Let's drink then for our utopian fantasies to come true.

Everyone drinks the wine

Irene: I feel tired.

Tania: I'll make a bed for you. Have a good night's sleep until tomorrow morning.

Irene: Thanks a lot.

Olga: Thanks for being considerate in our trouble.

Tania produces pillows and blankets from a box close by and puts them on a bench

Tania: Good night.

Irene: Good night. (*Tania leaves*)

Olga: Irene.

Irene: What's up?

Olga: If you'll go on the rampage of raping and killing tonight, don't disturb my sleep.

Irene: All right, I won't. Sleep well.

Scene 3

Night

Irene: (*to Olga*). Get up!

Olga: What's happened? What do you want?

Irene: Get up, I said!

Olga: Did the airplane arrive?

Irene: No, it didn't.

Olga: Why the hell are you waking me up then? (*Looks at her watch*). Merciful heavens! It's only three o'clock after midnight!

Irene: Here, read this. (*Gives her a newspaper*).

Olga: At three o'clock? You must be really a maniac to be reading the press at such a time of day.

Irene: Just read what it says.

Olga: And then you'll leave me in peace?

Irene: Just read it.

Olga: All right, let's have a look. So ... Weather forecast... abundant snowfalls... Is that what excited you so much? Or didn't you see snow in your lifetime?

Irene: Read what's printed higher up.

Olga: "Chronicle of Criminal Events."

Irene: That's what I mean. Read it.

Olga: "Irene Bulakhova, the maniac murderer who's serving a life sentence, escaped from a high security prison camp yesterday ... The Interpol has been engaged in her search."

Irene: It's about me, Irene Bulakhova!

Olga: Just a minute! Does it mean that you're the lamster?

Irene: Exactly. Take a look at the picture.

Olga: *(takes a closer look at the page)*. God Almighty! It's really you!

Irene: Who else?

Olga: Which means that the story I made up about you isn't an invention at all! *(Runs into a corner of the passenger lounge)*. Now keep away from me.

Irene: Do you really believe that I'm a murderer?

Olga: I don't believe in anything, in anything at all. I'm leaving this place right now as fast as I can. I didn't hear anything, I didn't read anything, I didn't see anything...

Irene: Are you really afraid of me?

Olga: No... not at all... I'm not afraid...I simply...

Irene: All this doesn't make any sense.

Olga: Exactly. Since it doesn't make any sense, I haven't seen you and I haven't heard anything about you. My imagination simply played a trick on me.

Irene: Listen, I'm not a murderer!

Olga: Exactly what I say – not a murderer. You did the right thing to give the slip to your jailers. Decent people shouldn't be mixing with jailbirds.

Irene: I wasn't mixing with them. Never! I'm a hairdresser.

Olga: I'll buy that too. A decent person can always be useful in a prison camp in one way or another.

Olga tries to run out of The Station

Irene: (*shouts*). Stay where you are!

Olga: (*frightened*). All right, all right, I just

Irene: Sit down!

Olga: (*sits down*). All right, I'm sitting.

Irene: Now listen and keep your mouth shut!

Olga: As you say.

Irene: My name is Irene Bulakhova.

Olga: A nice name.

Irene: Shut up! I'm a hairdresser. Never in my life have I broken the law! Now get this straight – I've never been in a prison camp.

Olga: But you yourself said that

Irene: This is no more than a doltish mistake.

Olga: And what about the newspaper?

Irene: I don't know who fed them that gibberish. But on second thought there seems nothing so strange that such a newspaper should appear at this station.

Olga: Do you want to say that it's a fake printed by that fake of a manager? (*Sweeps her eyes around the station*). Seems unlikely, although in addition to an airport she also might run a print shop. So if you're telling the truth...

Irene: Of course it's the truth.

Olga: Then there's something real behind all the weird happenings in this place.

Irene: What do you mean?

Olga: There must be a connection between the newspaper and The Station.

Enters Tania

Tania: Folks, I see you're already up. I invite you to join me.

Olga: What for?

Tania: To admire the Aurora Biorealis, that is the Northern Lights. They say it's an unforgettable sight. I dreamed so often of seeing it.

Olga: The Northern Lights here, of all of places?

Tania: Where else? Join me. Not in the mood? All right, I'll have a look at it myself.

Tania leaves

Irene: Did you see that? Are you still digging for an explanation about the newspaper?

Olga: This joint beggars description.

Irene: And what's that to mean?

Olga: Remember what she said just now about her dream to see the Northern Lights?

Irene: So what?

Olga: When you weren't around yet she told me that the train I was expecting did not arrive because I didn't want it to arrive.

Irene: I still don't see the connection.

Olga: To tell you the truth, yesterday I really didn't want to go through that course study test.

Irene: Whatever you say it's a disjointed explanation about the non-appearance of the train, the more so about the appearance of this fake newspaper.

Olga: Probably I'm about to say something crazy, but I'm under the strong impression that we are gradually going to crack at this station. You, for one, wanted your invention to be true, didn't you?

Irene: Yes I did.

Olga: Well, your desire came true.

Irene: It's ridiculously absurd, if you ask me.

Olga: Now recall the tea you were served. It came from one and the same kettle, but your tea was different from mine. Each of us got what we wished.

Irene: Still it's absurd. Do you want to say that our desires come true at this station? No, I don't agree with that. I'm a normal, grownup person who ceased believing in fairytales a long time ago!

Olga: But your desires are coming true.

Irene: So you think that they are coming true right away?

Olga: Exactly.

Irene: All of them?

Olga: I don't know. Logically, all of them, at least the ones that are real.

Irene: We can check that right away.

Olga: How?

Irene: Yesterday you said that you had three dreams. Remember?

Olga: Yes, but

Irene: I remember quite well what you said. As concerns the money and child, that's difficult to check...

Olga: I wouldn't say so about the money – you either have it or you don't. I practically hadn't any... (*Looks into her handbag and sees some strange money in it*). Hey, what's that? Who put it in my bag? Was it you?

Irene: What a question to ask a church mouse.

Olga: This here money looks weird, with some hieroglyphs on them, and there's a hell of a lot of it.

Irene: They are Japanese yens.

Olga: How do you know?

Irene: Is that supposed to be a secret? Nowadays everyone knows what a yen looks like. But I don't understand what makes you so sore about it. The money wasn't stolen from but given to you.

Olga: What am I supposed to do with those yens in this dump, eh? Shove them up my asshole? I can't exchange them, buy anything in a store, put them in a bank, nothing...

Irene: You wanted the money for some reason, and you got them. Why the yens – well, that's something you should know better than anyone else.

Olga: Hey, I remember it now. I dreamed of traveling to Japan. Mind you, Japan but not some banal Italy, France or the United States.

Irene: See, you've got the answer: your dream came true.

Olga: What if that station rat shoved the money into my bag? It might as well be forged.

Irene: If you don't believe in this dream having come true, let's check on your last dream.

Olga: About what?

Irene: You said that you wanted to try being a man. Does this wish still stand?

Olga: Sort of. But it's impossible, about the same as squaring the circle. You're saying that... Hey, put the brakes on. It's the last thing I'd want now!

Olga abruptly touches her body. Moments later her hands drop helplessly

Olga: What a horrible stunner. Goodbye to my former self. No wonder I had such a strange feeling. Now I'm a woman only from the waist up, what's from my waist down is the dream come true with a vengeance.

Irene: What about your dream of having a child? You seemed to have wanted it so much as well.

Olga: Yes, I did. Not just any child, but from a man I really would love. I haven't seen the one I loved for about two months and will hardly see him again. We had a horrible row and parted, looks like forever.

Irene: Because he jilted you in favor of another woman?

Olga: Yes ... a homey type who was supposed to be good at cooking, making a cozy home, wanting a child, unlike me thinking only about my future career and exams. It would have probably made a difference if I had been pregnant at that time. He could have relented or... Wait a minute; I feel nauseated. What could it mean?

Irene: Maybe you're ...

Olga: If so, it's the craziest combination. Can you image a gynecologist's eyes popping out of their sockets at the sight of my dreams come true? He'd be begging in vain to be admitted to a loonybin, while I to a cabinet of curiosities.

Irene: Now take it easy. You shouldn't be overexcited in such a state.

Olga: You can afford being an admonishing angel, although the future of the two of us is not that bright. While the prison camp is crying for you, for me it's a cabinet of curiosities.

Irene: It could be a maternity for men instead... You'd better think about something pleasant. About money, for instance.

Olga: What the hell would I need it for, if I don't even know who I am?

Irene: Everyone needs money. A hermaphrodite is also a human who wants to live decently. That'll also be true for you even if you're an IT.

Olga: I'm not an IT!

Irene: So who is that IT then?

Olga: I don't know.

Irene: We can find it out.

Olga: How?

Irene: Very easily. If you are a man you should be behaving accordingly.

Olga: In what way?

Irene: As if you didn't know how men react to women.

Olga: So what do you intend to do?

Irene: I'll striptease.

Olga: Go ahead.

Irene performs a striptease

Olga: O-o-oh!

Irene: What's the matter?

Olga: It's so funny.

Irene: What's so funny?

Olga: I've got an erection. I feel great. Go on dancing.

Irene: No siree bob! I'm not ashamed doing it before a woman, but before a man it's something else.

Olga: Why the hell do you hold me for a man? I've been in that skin only for a couple of minutes. Besides, I'm probably a pregnant man! Which means that I'm a mother and a father at one and the same time.

Irene: I've got a suggestion.

Olga: To keep on dancing?

Irene: Oh no. Both of us realize that all this is utter madness, don't we?

Olga: Certainly.

Irene: For some reason I'm afraid of doing or saying anything. Our each step pulls us ever deeper into this madness. So let us say a prayer, hit the sack, and sleep it over. In the morning it might prove to be no more than a horrible nightmare. Agreed?

Olga: You might be right. What about dancing some more? It was so cool having an erection.

Irene: Stop that, lady or whatever you are, or you might get horny beyond relief.

Olga: All right, all right. But it's still so cool having that thing!

Fall asleep on a lounge bench. Fadeout

ACT II

Scene 4

Enters Tania in a swimming suit, a towel over her shoulder

Tania: Time to get up, folks!

Olga: What the... Where am I?

Tania: Time to get up! Morning is the best time for a swim. Get up or you'll miss the pleasure.

Irene: What swim, and where?

Tania: In the sea. At this time of day the water is surprisingly warm. The gulls are wheeling low above the water. In the distance the ships are bobbing up and down in the swell. It's a wondrous sight to behold. You walk slowly into the sea, inhale its briny smell, and surrender to its soothing embrace. Do you want to miss all this delight?

Olga: Cut out that lyrical crap. In the morning the sea is always cold. And what sea are you talking about if it doesn't exist in this place? What I saw was only a stream without a name and a snow-covered forest.

Irene: Swimming in the sea in January? The weirdest suggestion I ever heard.

Tania: If you want it to be in January, you'll have it.

Olga: Please stop for a while. I just remembered my wish! (*Pats her body*). Strange, but there's nothing at all.

Tania: Nothing what?

Olga: I had it last night.

Tania: What did you have?

Olga: A desire that came true. It must have been in my dream.

Irene: You have that thing in mind?

Olga: What else? Since you also know about it, it wasn't a dream.

Irene: Must be so.

Tania: What are you talking about?

Olga: Oh, I was just wondering what I should put on – a swimming suit or swimming trunks?

Tania: Whatever your heart desires.

Olga: Now my heart desires that you drop dead.

Tania drops to the floor

Olga: Hey, stop kidding me. I was just joking.

Irene touches Tania's body

Irene: She's cold.

Olga: Clay-cold?

Irene: Absolutely. My congratulations, lady. Now you and I are colleagues, so to speak.

Olga: But... but I didn't even touch her so much as with a finger.

Irene: You must have scared her out of her wits – and her heart failed.

Olga: What do we do now?

Irene: As a pro, I'd advise to cover up your tracks.

Olga: Are you serious?

Irene: Serious or not, but I don't know what to do. These puzzles make me feel pumped out. Today should have been the first day of my family life!

Olga: Which means?

Irene: Yesterday I should have been married.

Olga: Married?

Irene: Yes, it had to be a super wedding party. The bridegroom was extra class – with money, a splendid car and all the other things that make life easy. Although he was a bully and cad, I believed it to be of little importance, what with my meager income of an ordinary hairdresser.

Olga: Small wonder you're so unusually dressed.

Irene: We were going to the wedding ceremony in a car together with his friend. All the time my future husband was approving of my beauty and intelligence. At first it was nice to hear the compliments. But then he switched over to irksome details and said that my boobs were the best in the world. His friend had a ready tongue and blurted out that his girl's boobs were much better. That triggered off a bitter argument. They were so neck-deep in it that they forgot about my existence. I held my tongue until my chosen one began pulling down my dress to prove his point. I got so mad that I slapped his face and jumped out of the moving car. I was fortunate to land in a high pile of snow. The incident got me off balance and I ran into the forest without a second thought. After I had cried my eyes out I retraced my steps only to see an empty road and a ten-dollar bill tucked under a stone, along with a note reading "Waiting for you at the wedding ceremony." That was the last straw. I went again into the forest and hoofed it until I reached this station.

Olga: A sad story indeed.

Irene: Probably not as sad as the circumstances we're in now. What should we do with this so-called manager? She seems to have blinked out for good.

Olga: Let's try artificial breathing.

Irene: No, that's good for the drowned, but hardly for anyone who's been scared out of her wits.

Olga: I've seen a first-aid set in this place. Let me have a look. Here it is. What about analgen?

Irene: No, this lady won't have a headache anymore.

Olga: Something for gastric disorders?

Irene: No good.

Olga: For cardiac disorders?

Irene: No good as well.

Olga: Against death?

Irene: Against what?

Olga: (*reads*). "Ointment against death. Apply to the skin of the deceased three times a day right after death. No side effects have been detected. Approved by the Ministry of Health."

Irene: Are you serious?

Olga: Here, read it yourself.

Irene: (*Reads*). Yes, that's what it says. Well, if it's approved by the Ministry of Health then...

Olga: Are you sure she gave up the ghost?

Irene: Hard to tell, but the ointment won't make things worse than they are.

Irene and Olga apply the ointment to Tania's skin. Tania opens her eyes and then gets to her feet

Tania: Oh, what happened to me?

Olga: You seemed to have died. Now you've risen from the dead.

Tania: It happens...

Olga: Do you want to say that nothing unusual occurred? That everything is all right? If so, someone of us has really a loose screw. Do you understand this?

Tania: So you're not joining me for a swim in the sea?

Olga: Let your sea go to hell! I want to understand at last what's going on here!

Tania: Nothing! Absolutely nothing. We'll, I'm off to the beach.

Tania leaves The Station

Olga: Did you hear that? By the way, what time is it?

Irene: Ten minutes to nine. Why do you ask?

Olga: The ship is arriving in five minutes. Let's hurry, maybe we can get on board in time.

Irene: I'm not going anywhere.

Olga: What do you mean?

Irene: Just what I said.

Olga: But why?

Irene: Because if I return it'll strip me of my last self-esteem. Or perhaps that creep will want me to strip to my birthday suit to prove his point again. I won't let him and his friends derive such satisfaction.

Olga: So send him to hell.

Irene: That's what I did already when I reached this station.

Olga: Do as you like, but I'm leaving.

Leaves at a run. Enters Tania

Tania: And where is ...

Irene: She rushed to the ship.

Tania: I wish she makes it.

Irene: You want her to leave? I thought you didn't.

Tania: Oh no. I wish her success. I wish it very much.

Enters Olga

Irene: Well?

Olga: Nothing.

Irene: You were late?

Olga: No, the ship simply did not arrive.

Tania: I guess there's nothing to be done in this case. What about a pleasure cruise on a schooner?

Olga: What schooner are you talking about?

Irene: An old schooner with snow-white sails and an old seadog for a captain.

Olga: Why didn't you tell us about the schooner before? How much would your old seadog charge for giving us a lift to the nearest city?

Tania: Nothing at all.

Olga: How come?

Tania: The schooner is not intended for transporting passengers but for pleasure cruises only.

Olga: I can't stand it anymore, really. This absurdity is like a sucking mire. I insist on knowing where we are and what's going on in this place.

Tania: Are you sure you want to know it?

Olga: Without a shadow of doubt.

Tania: First of all you're at The Station.

Olga: That much I know? Where is The Station located?

Tania: That's what I don't know myself.

Olga: Listen you screwball, if you'll carry on like that I'll... No, that won't change anything; you'll rise from the dead anyway.

Irene: Don't get in a flap, Olga. (*Turns to Tania*). Better tell us how you appeared here?

Tania: Now where should I begin? Let me say it in a way you all know since childhood. Once upon a time there lived a woman. She wasn't rich, but she wasn't poor either. She graduated from a university, landed a job of shuffling papers from nine a.m. to six p.m., and received a tolerable salary that made life bearable...

Olga: What about the private part of your life?

Tania: I had boyfriends all right, but it didn't lead to any marriage. Thank God I haven't any children, because I haven't met yet the one and only I could be love-sick with. Soon I realized that there was something wrong about a life without any bright yesterdays and bright tomorrows...

Olga: At what stage did The Station come in?

Tania: One fine morning a stranger phoned me and offered the job of manager at this station. I agreed in the belief that I'd start a new life, have new friends and... I couldn't have foreseen the outcome. I arrived here exactly as you did without the slightest idea what this place was like. At first I thought it was someone's peculiar joke, then the idea of madness came to my mind. Everything here seemed to be genuine: The Station itself, the schedules of arrivals and departures, the apartment I got along with the job, the refrigerator crammed with every kind of food I wished, and a wardrobe with clothes for every occasion. But...

Olga: But what?

Tania: There wasn't a single soul around. Moreover, not a single train, airplane or ship ever arrived at this destination. I got really mad and decided to leave by following the railroad tracks wherever they would lead me.

Irene: Did you have your way?

Tania: No. I walked and walked until I could hardly stand on my stumps. Then regret got the better of me and I wished to be back at The Station and – lo and behold! I simply walked into it without much ado.

Olga: Moving around a vicious circle, didn't you?

Tania: Not at all. I just wished to be back and the next moment I was here again. That's when I understood what The Station was all about.

Irene: What exactly?

Tania: A place where your dreams and desires come true, just any one that's sitting deep inside you. You want pineapples – help yourself, you want gold – take it as much as you want.

Irene: But that's impossible. It's nothing more than an illusion or drug addiction.

Tania: Neither the one or the other. Everything here is for real, and you can have absolutely everything. There's but one wish that doesn't come true. It's getting out of here.

Olga: But why?

Tania: Because in every one of us there lurks a little nasty worm that's feeling cock-a-hoop with such a way of life. And you yourself don't have the guts to say that you'd want to leave this place. A lot of people arrived here, but only a few managed to get out.

Olga: A lot you say? Where did they all go then?

Tania: To one place or another to build their own worlds and live in them, each to his own desire.

Irene: But that's great?

Tania: You think so?

Irene: How else? I don't understand why it irks you.

Olga: (*to Tania*) Aren't you kidding us? Say that you are.

Tania: Didn't you see enough yourselves?

Olga: How does it happen?

Tania: I don't know. It just happens.

Irene: Let me see what I'd want now. I want... I want... (*closes her eyes, then starts*). Hey, what's that? It's so cold (*pulls out a pack of ice cream from under her dress*). Look, it's ice cream. Who of you stuffed it under my dress?

Tania: You did it yourself, because it was your wish.

Irene: But I didn't say anything... I didn't even think about it...

Tania: A desire is at times not what you say and even not what you think. Your desires here come true spontaneously without you mentioning them, understand? Now and then you don't even realize it. (*Takes away the ice cream and puts it aside*). Say, what ice cream do you like?

Irene: Strawberry ice cream. Why do you ask?

Tania: (*picks up the ice cream and gives it to Irene*). Read what's written on the wrapper.

Irene: Strawberry ice cream.

Olga: (*also reads what's on the wrapper*). Fantastic, but I don't understand why anyone would want ice cream so much in winter.

Tania: It's a normal human trait. In summer we want it to be winter, while in winter we miss ice cream.

Irene: (*leaves the ice cream on the bench, paces up and down along the bench deep in thought, somebody walks past her – and the ice cream disappears*). Did I really want it that much? Strange ... (*Looks*

around and sees that the ice cream has disappeared). Hey, who took my ice cream? Olga, was it you? If you wanted one, you could have just wished it!

Olga: No, I didn't take it. I, for one, don't like fruit ice cream. I prefer vanilla. Was it you who took it, Tania?
(*Tania smiles ironically and remains silent*).

Irene: It vanished just like that. Oh, now I understand. The moment I realized that I had craved such a trifle as ice cream I didn't want it anymore.

Olga: (*to Tania*). Did you understand anything of what she said?

Tania: Of course I did. She began understanding the mechanism.

Irene: Hurrah! Long live The Station (*begins to run around, skips and jumps, and then rushes out of The Station*).

Olga: What's the matter with her?

Tania: It's the first phase.

Olga: Is this to mean that she's off her head?

Tania: It's euphoria, a normal reaction of anyone during the first phase of staying at The Station.

Olga: And what's the second phase?

Tania: The second phase is depression.

Olga: Caused by what?

Tania: It's difficult to explain. You'll feel it yourself soon. The first phase does not last long.

Olga: Don't see others only through your eyes. Maybe you have a shortage of fantasies, but mine are legion.

Tania: Fantasize then to your heart's content. Nobody's hindering you from devising any fantasies you want.

Olga: For some reason they melt away in your presence.

Tania: (*ironically*). Are they that intimate?

Olga: That's none of your business. (*Turns sharply on her heels and leaves, returns some moments later*). I'm sorry for the outburst. I simply cannot concentrate. My wishes don't measure up to any standards, but they're not intimate.

Tania: All right, fulfill my wish then.

Olga: What is it?

Tania: Leave me alone. You're pestering the life out of me.

Olga: As you wish. (*Leaves. Tania is alone, she wraps her hands around her body, probably weeping quietly or swaying*).

Scene 5

Irene runs into The Station. She wears a nice dress and hairdo (wig?), hat and jewelry, whirls around the passenger lounge, looks at herself in an imaginary mirror, while Tania watches listlessly

Irene: How do you like it? It's from Versaci. I saw something like it in a magazine. Why do you keep mum? Doesn't it fit me?

Tania: *(indifferently)* It does.

Irene: What about the hat? Or should I take it off?

Tania: Take it off if you want.

Irene: *(takes off the hat, but then puts it on again).* The hat should go with the dress. How do you like my high-heeled pumps? They sit smugly on my feet and I could even dance in them. What about some music?

Tania: Just wish and you'll have it.

Irene: Oh, I forgot. *(Closes her eyes and sweet music fills the air).* Do you like it?

Tania: Oh yes.

Irene begins to dance to a slow rhythm

Irene: Come on, join me ... *(Tania begins to dance. Irene stops abruptly).* It's too slow. What about making it livelier? *(Irene closes her eyes again and concentrates. The music accelerates to a throbbing rhythm).* Super, that's just it!

Both women continue dancing to a maddening rhythm

until they drop onto a bench from exhaustion; the music subsides

Tania: Did you like it?

Irene: Immensely. I don't remember the last time I had such fun. What about you?

Tania: It was a wonderful way of shattering solitude. At first I longed for it and felt snugly comfortable being alone, but when there's nobody around to speak to it becomes unsettling.

Irene: Didn't you have any friends?

Tania: Oh yes, my colleagues at work, neighbors, friends from my school days. But they all got married, started families, some of them went abroad... Probably that's not interesting for you. Do you really like being here?

Irene: Yes, so far. Why are you asking?

Tania: Judging from what I see, you behave like a child and your desires are that of a child – fancy dresses, ice cream, dancing...

Irene: You see I grew up without a father, while my mother was very strict. As long as I can remember myself I suffered from tonsillitis. So ice cream was a rigid taboo. As to fancy dresses, there was never enough money. A visit to a discothèque was another taboo imposed by my mother. She believed unshakably that if I were to go to a discothèque I would be inevitably raped, killed and buried under a bush. Believe me or not, but when I worked already I still did not buy any ice cream, being afraid of inflaming my tonsils.

Tania: Doesn't sound like a cloudless childhood. For all that, don't you have some truly big dreams and desires?

Irene: Of course I have. But for some reason I don't see them coming true. I keep wishing, but nothing comes out of it.

Tania: What is it that you wish, if it's not a secret?

Irene: There is nothing secret about it. I want to love and to be loved.

Tania: It's what everybody wishes. You're not unique in this respect.

Irene: I don't want to be unique. I want to be happy.

Tania: Loving and being happy is not always one and the same thing. Occasionally, it's just the other way around. Besides, it's a sheerly abstract wish. Who in particular do you want to love?

Irene: Not anybody in particular, but a composite image of a man. I still have a vague idea about it.

Tania: (*ironically*) Tall, handsome, tenderhearted, with an irresistible sex appeal? You were about to get married. Isn't that the wish that came true?

Irene: Well, marriage is one thing; love is something quite different. You don't have to put all your eggs in one basket.

Tania: So you didn't exactly love him, did you? Money must have interested you more?

Irene: He wasn't that rich, owned an apartment, a car... A handsome man, he was pretty good in bed. I liked him to the last day, but there was no unbounded love between us... In brief, he just wasn't one in a thousand.

Tania: What then do you have by love in mind? Flowers, tender words, kisses under the stars?

Irene: I have little trust in words... Flowers... To tell you the truth, I don't like them. When presented, you rejoice for a minute or two, after which the flowers become a nuisance that in a day or two can be rectified only by dumping them in a garbage can. Neither are kisses under the stars to my liking – in winter it's cold, in summer the mosquitoes are plaguing you...

Tania: What about spring, when trees and flowers are in bloom?

Irene: In spring it's always raining, especially irritating when you forget to take along an umbrella.

Tania: What an unromantic character you are! You're certainly hard to please.

Irene: I wouldn't say so. What I like most are presents – jewelry, clothes, cosmetics...

Tania: I see. Since you can have all that now on a whim, why would you need a man? Maybe your wishes don't come true here for the simple reason that you need only presents, comfort, and the like...

Irene: (*dejectedly*) Do you really think so?

Tania: Have you ever fallen in love? Say, at first sight.

Irene: I have...

Tania: How did it happen? What if you simply forgot what that feeling is like?

Irene: Please don't laugh at what you'll hear now. Promise?

Tania: I promise.

Irene: I was still a schoolgirl when I saw an American movie with this Hollywood star – and I was immediately over head and ears in love with him.

Tania: They are like that only in the movies, while in real life they're drunkards, druggies and bed hoppers at best.

Irene: And at worst?

Tania: Gays.

Irene: It was the last thing on my mind then.

Tania: Didn't you ever fall in love just like that with our men?

Irene: Never.

Tania: Know what, take a look in your handbag whether everything is in place there?

Irene: Are you suggesting that something in it was palmed?

Tania: Quite the contrary. Just take a look.

Irene: (*looks into the handbag, rummaging through it nervously; finds a letter*). Strange, a letter with an address in English. It definitely isn't mine. Did you put it here?

Tania: I didn't touch your handbag.

Irene: (*reads the letter to herself*). Unbelievable... it's from him, along with his photograph.

Tania: What does he write?

Irene: That he fell in love with me at first sight, having searched for someone like me for years. The way he wrote this letter is the most incredible thing of all.

Tania: Why?

Irene: It's written in Ukrainian. He studied it to write me this letter... now he can't imagine his existence without me and says that his future is exclusively in my hands. I simply cannot believe it.

Tania: But it's just what you wanted.

Irene: How did you know about this letter?

Tania: I didn't know for sure. It was more of a hunch, because I experienced something similar. He wasn't an actor but an engineer I came across on the Internet. All this does not bode a happy ending, though.

Irene: Why?

Tania: For this kind of love letters, photographs, fantasies and fond memories seem to be enough. What you need is someone who'll be at your side all the time, and that might prove to be an altogether different kettle of fish. What if you get disappointed? Yours is a delusive dream that'll lead you to this station. At least mine did.

Irene: So you want to get out of here? Is it that bad?

Tania: I don't know. I'm beginning to have no dreams or wishes at all. The ones I have occasionally are somewhat petty and indistinct. You'll feel that yourself soon.

Irene: (*picks up the letter again*). Excuse me, but I'd like to read this letter once more. Incredible as it might be, I still like its message.

Tania: I won't disturb you. What about some tea?

Irene: No, let it be wine.

Tania: (*opens the teakettle, smells its contents, and offers it to Irene*). It's Muscat champagne.

Scene 6

Appears Olga in an exotic dress

Irene: Wow, where did you get those far-out threads?

Olga: Not threads actually, but the leather gear of an Amazon. What are you wetting your whistles with, ladies?

Irene: We decided to stir up our blood a little with wine. Want some?

Olga: No, I'm loaded enough with adrenaline as it is. Time I cooled down.

Irene: (*picks up the teakettle*) Now it'll be mint tea. Strange, but it's not.

Olga: (*takes the teakettle, smells its contents, and tastes what she had poured into a glass*). Tastes like milk to me.

Tania: (*smells the liquid*) It's koumiss, fermented mare's milk, a favored beverage with the nomads. Olga, what have you been doing before you showed up?

Olga: Oh, I did a lot of what I never thought I'd be capable of! I parachuted, deep-dived in the sea, and tore around a field on horseback.

Tania: Imagining being an Amazon?

Olga: Sort of. When I was a child I liked playing an Amazon.

Tania: And the Amazons adored koumiss. So crook the elbow in honor of your ancestors.

Olga: (*tastes the beverage and screws up her eyes from pleasure*). That's just what I lacked. What if I really was an Amazon in the past life?

Irene: Which means that you were interested in men only as trophies?

Olga: Oh no, the Amazons also got married, but first they had to kill at least one enemy. Nowadays it would be something like bumping off a male pig chauvinist.

Irene: Mind what you say in this place.

Olga: It's no more than a joke.

Tania: You must have enjoyed yourself immensely in the meantime.

Olga: Oh yes, I have a weakness for outdoor exercise. But for some reason I no longer want anything.

Irene: Me too.

Tania: So quickly?

Olga: Maybe we simply got tired of dreaming, wishing and wanting. Don't you think so, Irene?

Irene: I suppose everything should have a reasonable limit.

Tania: Congratulations, ladies. Here comes phase two of your visit to The Station. La-la, la-la, la-la!

The women sit down in a circle and spontaneously one after another strike up a mournful folk song (or something similar of the producer's choice)

Olga: Why is it that once our wishes come true, we don't get any joy or pleasure out of them?

Irene: That's exactly how I feel now. I'm holding this letter in my hands as if it were no more than a rent bill.

Tania: The explanation is simple. We appreciate things for the price we paid for them. In this place, though, you get everything for nothing. Absolutely nothing! And that doesn't put any edge on the joy and pleasure.

Olga: That can mean only one thing: however much you'll wish to get out of here it just won't happen.

Tania: Not exactly. I saw it happen once since I've been here.

Irene: I still don't understand what we have to do to this end.

Tania: It's up to each to decide whether to stay or not.

Olga: But judging from what I've seen here, we no longer belong to ourselves.

Tania: Of course we don't.

Olga: So who the hell holds the power over us all?

Tania: You know the answer by now.

Olga: Me?

Irene: Yes, you and each of us. The Station demands from us real wishes, not cheap counterfeits to soothe our egos! When you begin realizing what your real but not illusory dreams and wishes are, it gives you the blues and the creeps. Is it that difficult to understand? The Station has enslaved us. We are its happy hostages. It gives us everything, though denying the opportunity to fight for it. It's like a vampire that sucks out the human will and power, leaving but a nice shell that takes comfort in its own chimeras! You cannot challenge this morass, because nothing is holding you in the real world where for every wish and desire you have to surrender a little part of your own heart. At The Station you don't need a heart at all, because nobody wants to suffer any sacrifices and pay or have his/her peace and comfort upset...

Olga: How then can we get out of here?

Tania: It's simple. Just think only of those wishes and desires for which you are prepared to fight and pay the price.

Pause

Olga: I want to get out of here!

Tania: No, no, that's not it. It's but a way but not the goal. You have to know and feel something that will guide you out of here, something important, essential...

Olga: When's the train, airplane, ship or whatever arriving?

Tania: In twenty minutes.

Olga: What will it be?

Tania: It should be a train. If you hope to get out, favor a wish that has a high purpose you are prepared to pursue relentlessly.

Everyone paces around the passenger lounge, thinking intently

Irene: Nothing comes to my mind.

Olga: With me it's about the same.

Tania: We've got little time left. The morass is already creeping up to our souls.

Olga: I want a good job, a big house, a man I love, a child...

Tania: Words, words, without a single truth in them!

Olga: But it's true. I really want all that.

Tania: It's no more than words.

Pause

Irene: *(quietly, under her breath)* I don't know... Seems I'll never solve this puzzle... I'll stay here. Maybe it's not such a bad choice.

Tania: Don't give up! Every time I wait for a train or ship I try to recall something special to get out. Don't give up!

Olga: What's that to you if one of us manages to leave?

Tania: Perhaps it'll inspire my faith in such a possibility.

Again everyone paces nervously around the passenger lounge. Then they stop abruptly

Tania: Well?

Irene: Nothing...

Olga: Everything I wish is so phony... everything but this... No, I don't know...

Tania: What is it you don't know?

Olga: Some insignificant trifle just crossed my mind.

Tania: Tell me about it.

Olga: When I was a five-year-old child, we had an old wooden swing in our backyard. It creaked horribly and looked like a prehistoric monster. I used to swing high into the air where little wings seemed to grow out of my back, while I, like some fanciful bird, would soar over the world below and trill my cherished song. For some reason I recalled that swing now. It was more of a wish to put my child on the swing and give it those little wings. I really wished to see that swing here, but there's none in sight.

Irene: (*runs around The Station in search of a swing*). Indeed, there's no such swing around.

Tania: I think that it's a good sign.

Olga: Why?

Tania: All the wishes that come true at The Station are nothing more than chimeras. Here we can have the best imaginable swings, but not a single real swing we had personally known at one time or another in our life. Couldn't that be the whole point of our predicament?

Irene: (*to Olga*) Wait a minute. You said that you wanted to put your child on the swing, didn't you? But do you understand that you can't decide everything for a child?

Tania: We must have landed in this place for a reason. A child, though, is innocent, because it comes pure into this world.

Irene: And we cannot decide for it in what world it has to live.

Olga: Our wishes come to an end where the wishes of others begin. So if we want something for others, we have to sacrifice something of our own...

Irene: Are you really prepared to sacrifice everything you can have at The Station only for the sake of putting your child on an old swing? Is it worthwhile?

Olga: Do you think that I'm that crazy?

Tania: Don't lead her thoughts astray. They might be crazy, but they are real. At times a woman does not understand the mysterious nature of her wish, but she follows it and achieves it in the end.

Olga: When does the airplane arrive?

Tania: You probably had the train in mind.

Olga: It seems to me that it will be an airplane.

Tania: Five minutes

Olga: I'll have a go at it.

Tania: I wish you luck! But don't forget that it's only at The Station you can have everything for free, while in the world you're headed your wishes and desires come at the highest prices.

Olga: Can a simple swing have a price? It's no more than a recollection of long ago when a playground swing was intended for fun and excitement.

Tania: A recollection of the past, you say? Perhaps. But when it's projected into the future it ceases to be just for fun and excitement.

Irene: Three minutes...

Tania: On your marks, get set...

Olga: Here I go. Until we meet again... Or not? (*Leaves The Station*).

Irene: Will she make it?

Tania: She found what's worth paying the price.

Irene: And what about us?

Tania: We'll have tea.

Irene: With me it's lime-flower tea.

Tania: I'll have black tea with lemon.

Pause. Drone of an airplane in the distance

Irene: Do you hear that? Sounds like an airplane.

CURTAIN

**Translated from the Ukrainian
by Anatole Bilenko**

Olexandr Viter, playwright, scriptwriter, poet, actor and producer, was born on February 26, 1972 in Kiev. He graduated from the Ivan Karpenko-Kary Institute of Theatrical Art of Kiev in 1996. Since 1994 he has been collaborating as a producer and playwright with the Anatoliy Diachenko Center of Modern Experimental Dramaturgy, Benefice Theater, Ivan Franko National Theater, Suziria (*Constellation*) Drama School, Kiev Chamber Theater-Drama School, and theaters in Luhansk, Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, Bila Tserkva, and Moscow, producing and stage directing over 20 plays and theatrical presentations within this period. In 2001 he was awarded the Presidential Grant for Young Artists to stage Lesia Ukrainka's drama *Advocate Martian* at the Ivan Franko Theater in Kiev. In 2003-2006 he was chief producer with the Managerial Board of Art Programs of Ukraine's National Radio Company.

As one of the founders of YIAMT (Youth Interactive Modern Theater) in 2006, he is currently its full-time producer, playwright, and instructor in dramaturgy and rhetoric. His two-act play *The Station* was premiered at this theater in 2006.

He won prizes at numerous Ukrainian and international theatrical festivals, e.g. first prize at the Festival of Modern Ukrainian Drama in Kiev (1999); second prize as screenplay coauthor and producer of the feature film *Sentimental Hunt for the Shadow* (Sentimentalne poliuvannia za tinniu, Grok Studio, Kiev, 2002) at a film festival in Minsk, Belarus (2002); second prize for the play *Traces of Yesterday's Sand* (Slidy vchorashnioho pisku) at the Topical Arts Biannual Festival in Kiev (2004); first prize for the play *The Station* at the Creativity of the Youth – the Nation's Treasure Competition in Kiev (2006); first prize for *The Station* as the best play at the Theatrical Session Festival in Dnipropetrovsk (2008).

Olexandr Viter also wrote the play *The New Adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh* (Novi pryhody Vinni-Pukha) to the motives of A.A.Milne's children's classic (1996), the play *The Angel that Went Mad* based on Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Camera Obscura* staged at the Kiev Chamber Theater (1997), the lyrics to the musical *The Adventures of the Wooden Boy* (Pryhody derevianoho khlopchyka) staged at the Panas Saksahansky Theater in Bila Tserkva (2002), the play *How to Become a Real Hippo* (Yak staty spravzhnim behemotom) staged at the KYIV Municipal Theater (2007), and the screenplay for *Hostages of the Earth and the Sky*, a joint Ukrainian-Iraqi Kurdish production of a 10-film TV serial (2008).

Anatole Bilenko, born on January 16, 1939 in Kiev. In 1943-1954 resided in Germany and the US where he gained most of his secondary education. In 1967 he graduated from the Department of Translation at the Taras Shevchenko University of Kiev and embarked on the career of a professional translator in 1964. He is a member of the Ukrainian Writers Union, has to his credit over 20 books of Ukrainian, Russian and Belorussian fiction translated into English, and holds the Ivan Franko Prize for Literary Translations. His latest literary translations are featured in the *Ukrainian Literature* journal (a project of Prof. Maxim Tarnawsky of Toronto University, published by the Shevchenko Scientific Society in New York, N.Y., USA [www.UkrainianLiterture.org, vol.1, vol.2]) and in *The Mercurian: a Theatrical Translation Review*, vol.1, No.4, 2008.

Staging Identity through Art

MARG A R I TA VARGAS

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Quando el arte imita al arte la imitación nunca es exacta, ocurre lo mismo que cuando el arte imita a la vida y muy probablemente también cuando la vida imita al arte. (García Ponce 1982a, 41)

Almost 20 years after his last production for the stage, Juan García Ponce (1932–2003) returned to his first passion with *Catálogo razonado* (1982a), a play he was commissioned to write by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (The National Institute of Fine Arts) in 1979.¹ Significantly, he took an art term —“catálogo razonado,” commonly known as *catalogue raisonné*—to title his play. In the art world, the French term is used to describe a publication that lists the contents of an artist’s exhibition, along with related descriptive or critical material, including titles of articles or literary works.² The chosen title is appropriate to the extent that García Ponce inserts many of his favorite writers (including Xavier Villaurrutia, Jorge Luis Borges, Pierre Klossowski, and T. S. Eliot) and composes a play that catalogues the five novels—*La cabaña* (1969), *El gato* (1974), *Unión* (1974), *Crónica de la intervención* (1982) and *De anima* (1984)³—for which the protagonist of *Catálogo razonado* served as model.⁴ In addition to scenes from these novels, the play provides a list of artists whose paintings document the existence of Michèle Alban,⁵ the woman who is the protagonist’s referent, no matter how far removed she may be from the multiple copies and repetitions made in her image. At the same time, García Ponce appears to adopt Diderot’s aesthetics, which, according to Roland Barthes, “rests on the identification of theatrical scene and pictorial tableau: the perfect play is a succession of tableaux, that is, a gallery, an exhibition; the stage offers the spectator ‘as many real tableaux as there are in the action moments favorable to the painter’” (Barthes 1984, 70). This episodic structure, of course, is also reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theater, which expects criticism, not adherence from its spectators (71), that is, an intellectual reaction to the play rather than an emotional one. It is important to note, however, that the erotic scenes in the play do not allow for complete detachment. Finally, *Catálogo razonado* has also been

classified as a totalizing theatrical piece since it uses various types of technical, mechanical, and audiovisual media to create a spectacle that impacts all the senses (Sotelo 1998, 80).

The entire action of the play—which begins with a dialogue between the voices of the fictive author (First Voice) and the fictive director (Second Voice) planning to stage the piece—takes place in the author’s imagination, which is “habitada por las cosas que él pide aparezcan en el escenario” [inhabited by the objects that he asks to appear on stage] (García Ponce 1982a, 10).⁶ The time period of the action is described as “el tiempo fuera del tiempo en el que se desarrollan todas las obras de teatro” [the time outside time in which all plays unfold] (10). When the fictive author materializes on stage, he is identified as the “Actor en que encarna la voz primera” [The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice], and the fictive director is identified as the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice. The main female character in the play is simply “el Modelo” [The Model]; she reenacts scenes from novels for which she presumably served as the original model and has been summoned by the fictive author to play herself. The fictive author suggests that the plot consists of proving that the model may be nothing more than the portrait for which she modeled because ultimately he invents her. Even as she tries to show her independence, she continues to be his model (12). At the same time, however, he admits to the director: “Me temo que yo nunca he inventado nada. La que inventaba era ella, con la ligera diferencia de que ella sólo se inventaba a sí misma” [I’m afraid I’ve never made anything up. She was the one who invented, with the slight difference that she only invented herself] (21).

What interests me about this play is precisely the conundrum of the possibility of the construction of identity in general, and of feminine identity in particular. This question is relevant to a feminist discourse that seeks agency for women. Insofar as García Ponce makes women the center of his work, albeit a center mediated and thus displaced by the male gaze, the question of the representation of gender is a salient issue in his works. Judith Butler alludes to the controversial quality of the term “representation” when she states that, on the one hand, it “serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the

other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (1999, 3–4). The double meaning Butler attributes to the term “representation,” in its capacity to legitimize and essentialize women simultaneously, faithfully reflects the action of *Catálogo razonado*. In the play, feminine agency is channeled through the female character who chooses to be the artist’s model and who enables the fictive author to invent her, yet, because the fictive author fluctuates between his supreme role of creator and the recognition that his creation has free will, the reader remains uncertain about the degree of her subjectivity.

Perhaps the best example of a literary text in which the characters exercise their free will is Pirandello’s *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*, 1921 (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*). Pirandello’s characters, unlike the Model, are looking for an author who will put them in a play since the one who conceived them (Pirandello, as fictive author) is no longer willing to include them in his drama. In García Ponce’s play, the main character struggles against the role the playwright has created for her and, at the same time, takes pleasure in serving as his model. Like Pirandello’s celebrated play, *Catálogo razonado* begins as though it is yet to be conceived: while Pirandello’s characters enter an empty stage, the instructions in García Ponce’s play indicate that it all takes place in the author’s imagination. Moreover, the conversation between the First and the Second Voices gives the impression that they are in the middle of the construction of the play the audience will eventually see. In both cases, what is important about the fluidity of the space is that it mirrors the fluidity of the characters’ identity. Identity has been generally understood as a force of domination that is “always and inevitably based on a logic of opposition to and exclusion of the Other” (Weir 1996, 4), yet in *Catálogo razonado*, the protagonist’s identity is produced as much by the character herself as by the fictive author. Moreover, despite the fact that the fictive author is the creator of the text—because García Ponce makes explicit the process through which identity needs to exclude in order to exist—he disrupts the normative as well as the binary process traditionally involved in the construction of identity. The fictive author basically assumes

the role of compiler: he composes his fiction out of the raw material his model provides. He admits to her that “Quizás al principio tú imitabas, aun sin darte cuenta, lo que yo imaginaba; pero no podías suponer que si yo imaginaba algo era porque tú me lo habías sugerido.” [Perhaps at the beginning, without realizing it, you imitated what I imagined; but you couldn’t fathom that if I could imagine something it was because you had suggested it to me] (García Ponce 1982a, 12). At the same time, however, he avails himself of his artistic license to create a new portrait, one that only resembles the model because, after all, he has invented her and that authority, “te hace mi prisionera, puesto que siempre puedo usarte como modelo, sin que nadie sepa que eres mi modelo, sin que ni siquiera tú puedas probar lo contrario, en el instante que empiezo a imaginar” [makes you my prisoner, given that the instant I begin to imagine I can use you as a model without anyone knowing that you’re my model without even you being able to prove the contrary] (1982a, 12–13). And thus, armed with his pen like a magician with his wand or a king with his knightly sword, the voice of the fictive author pronounces: “Te destino a ser ese espectáculo de ti misma en el que no puedes dejar de reconocerte a ti misma, aunque sólo sea como el fantasma de mi deseo al que tu cuerpo permite encarnar.” [I destine you to be that spectacle of yourself in which you can’t help but recognize yourself, even if only as the ghost of my desire which your body allows to personify] (13).

The play, then, advances toward the dramatization of the problem of whether the Model has an identity of her own that she projects onto the fictive author and which allows him to recreate her, or whether the Model has become nothing but a reflection of what he has created, as he claims: “Para mí nunca dejarás de ser la imagen en el espejo donde yo te permitía reflejarte, hacía que te reflejaras, y donde, para tu elevación o para tu desgracia, depende desde cuándo y cómo lo pienses, te enamorabas de ti misma”. [For me you will never stop being the image in the mirror in which I allowed you to be reflected, made you be reflected, and where, fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you see it, you always fell in love with yourself] (García Ponce 1982a, 13). She vacillates between an argument of herself as the primary figure from which the fictive author derives the portrait of his various novels and

herself as the product of his creation. She first asserts to be the original version of the fictive author's creations after a photo session in which she acquiesces to pose in the nude for one of their male friends. The awareness of herself as more than a model occurs once she is no longer in character and realizes that her daughters may have witnessed the event. The possibility of an intervention from the world outside the intimacy of their relationship disturbs her and makes her ask for the negatives. The fictive author, however, begs to keep them, promising that no one else will see the photographs (which is, of course, a lie). The Model argues that she, the original, should be all he wants, but he replies: "Me gusta verte repetida. Quiero poder verte siempre a ti y mirarte al mismo tiempo desde afuera." [I like to see you repeated. I always want to be able to see you and to look at you at the same time from the outside] (1982a, 27). The Second Voice yells out that ultimately the fictive author achieved his voyeuristic goal, but the question still remains: which is the portrait and which is the model (28)? While the play provides an answer to this question, Judith Butler, in her discussion of the difference between sex and gender, sheds further light on the issue: "if gender is something that one becomes—but can never be—then gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort" (1999, 143). It is through the repetition of the image, then, that the author attempts to capture the essence of the original model, fully aware though, that like Sisyphus, he is condemned to repeat the same action *ad infinitum*, or as the fictive author says in the text: "Escribir, después de todo, es como hacer el amor: sólo se termina para empezar a esperar el momento en que se quiere volver a empezar." [Writing, after all, is like making love: you finish only to start waiting for the moment in which you want to begin again] (García Ponce 1982a, 64).

The Model addresses the ontological question posed by the Second Voice when she discusses with the fictive author the female character in *La cabaña*: "Es muy perturbador. Soy yo pero no soy yo. . . . De todos modos, creo que me gusta lo que estás haciendo conmigo. Me veo a mí misma tal como tú quieres que me vea". [It's very disturbing. It is me but it's not me. . . . In any case, I think I like what you're doing with me. I see myself exactly as you'd like for me to see myself] (García Ponce 1982a, 17).

Also, when she stands back and watches a younger actress play her when she was between the ages of 16 and 21, the Model comments: “No sé lo que estás haciendo. Me despojas de mí y me entregas a mí. ¿Por qué, si yo no soy ésa, soy más yo en ésa?”

[I don’t know what you’re doing. You strip me of myself and then give myself back to me. Why, if that’s not who I am, am I more myself in her?] (38–39). Toward the end, though, she rebels and challenges the explanation that his interest is to pay homage to her, when he states that “Cada repetición, cada forma bajo la que apareces siendo tú misma y otra es un homenaje, muestra mi imposibilidad de apartarme de tu imagen.” [Each repetition—each form under which you appear as yourself and as another is a tribute—shows my inability to separate myself from your image] (83). She retorts:

Pues el efecto es el contrario. Yo me siento condenada al perpetuo insulto que son tus homenajes. No soy sólo tu modelo. Soy una persona, dueña de mí misma, con responsabilidades, con obligaciones, con un sentido de la justicia y de la decencia.⁷ Soy madre. Tengo una profesión decente. He trabajado para poder ser libre y tú me has hecho la prisionera de tus inmundas ensoñaciones.

[Well, the effect is the opposite. I feel condemned to the perpetual insult of your tributes. I’m not your model. I am a person, self-possessed, with responsibilities, with obligations, with a sense of justice and decency. I am a mother. I have a decent profession. I have worked to be able to be free and you have made me a prisoner of your filthy fantasies.] (García Ponce 1982a, 83–84)

The question of originality is important only to the Model; the fictive author and director are more concerned with the portrait that represents the model. Only as the original version of a portrait created by the fictive author can she claim to be a person, to own herself. She must fight her way out of the author’s fictitious world in order to have “a sense of justice and decency,” in order to assume her role of mother and professional. The fictive author and director, however, would prefer to align themselves with Jean Baudrillard’s line of reasoning regarding the relationship between an original, a model and a copy,

which he masterfully discusses in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard convincingly argues that “simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it” (Baudrillard 1994, 1). We are left with only a model and its representation, which keep us safely within the realm of fiction and language and detached from any social responsibility we may want to attribute to any text. Baudrillard also poses another question that is pertinent to *Catálogo razonado*: he asks,

But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. (5–6)

This endless circle with no beginning and no end, this Borgesian labyrinth, this prison without exits, is precisely what the Model fights against unsuccessfully. In her role as Paloma in *De anima*, she realizes that she has not achieved the life she had been dreaming of for years and interprets this “como una prueba más de que una mujer nunca puede hacer lo que en verdad desea” [as proof that a woman can never do what she really wishes] (García Ponce 1982a, 50–51). The Model can rebel and claim “Yo no sólo soy tu personaje. También soy dueña de mí misma” [I’m not just your character. I also own myself] (49), and even tries to tell her side of the story, as she does in *De anima*—the one novel in which the female character assumes her own narrative voice—however, it is the author who ultimately controls the narrative, as the following dialogue illustrates:

MODELO: Pero aun como personaje tuyo soy yo. Déjame escribir.

VOZ PRIMERA: Escribe. Al hacerlo te conviertes en otro personaje mío.

[MODEL: But even as your character I am I. Let me write.

FIRST VOICE: Go ahead, write. As you do it, you become another one of my

characters.] (García Ponce 1982a, 50)

The audience also gets to experience the disappearance of the Model from the stage and see her represented twice removed from herself, through slides of the photographs taken by a friend: “se han ido proyectando sobre una gigantesca pantalla diapositivas de todas las fotografías . . . Asistimos de ese modo a todo ese movimiento de desvestirse y vestirse, de adoptar actitudes teatrales que progresivamente nos van llevando hasta la desnudez del Modelo” [slides of all the pictures are projected on a gigantic screen. . . . Thus, through this medium, we witness all of that movement related to dressing and undressing, of adopting theatrical attitudes that gradually lead us to the Model’s nakedness] (García Ponce 1982a, 29). The fictive author explains that during the creative process, he establishes an even greater distance from the original by departing from a picture of her to her as model in order to turn her into something, which, though perhaps not identical, is at least very close to the original photograph (39). This explanation of the act of creation makes very clear the impossibility of ever finding the original, for as the Model admits when talking about the character Nicole: ¿Por qué, si yo no soy ésta, soy más yo en ésta?” [Why, if that’s not who I am, am I more myself in her?] (38–39).

Despite the heightened self-awareness of the play and the progressive attitudes of the fictive author and the fictive director, at times they fall into the social traps of sexism, possessiveness, and chauvinism. Early on in the play, the First Voice tells the Second Voice: “Recuerdo que me turbó mucho al escribirla [la escena de una de sus novelas] suponer que con toda seguridad iba a leerla y quizás se reconocería; pero también el placer de estarla convirtiendo en otra de la que era sin que dejara de ser ella misma no podía compararse a nada y la afirmaba a través de esa aparente negación y confirmaba mi amor por ella” [I remember, while writing it, (a particular scene in one of his novels) that it really disturbed me to imagine that for sure she would read it and perhaps would recognize herself; but also the pleasure of turning her into someone other than who she was without ceasing to be herself didn’t compare to anything else, and it affirmed her through that apparent negation and confirmed my love for her] (García Ponce 1982a, 14). Moreover, at the end, when the Model and the Actors that embody the

first and second voices are at an exhibit of drawings by Pierre Klossowski, the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice says to the other: “Así habría que manipular a las mujeres.” And the first one responds: “Así habría que hacerlo” [This is how we ought to be able to manipulate women. . . . This is how we should be able to do it] (86). Their desire to manipulate women and the pleasure of turning them into someone different from who they are brings to mind the mythic Pygmalion, that talented Greek sculptor who chiseled himself a wife out of “a large, beautiful piece of ivory,” although it was Aphrodite who gave the statue life, not insignificantly because it resembled her (*Encyclopedia Mythica*).⁸ Aphrodite’s role resembles the Model’s since in both cases the artistic products based on them would not be possible without their prior existence.

But it is perhaps George Bernard Shaw’s rendition of the myth that more closely approximates the plot of *Catálogo razonado*, since Shaw’s work oscillates between the instinctual desire to reconstruct a woman and the rational counterargument that women have feelings and minds of their own and, therefore, do not need to be reformed. In Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, the character Henry Higgins, author of *Higgin’s Universal Alphabet*, decides to transform the street flower girl Liza (or Eliza, as he calls her) by improving her linguistic skills. He proclaims: “You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador’s garden party. I could even get her a place as lady’s maid or shop assistant, which requires better English” (Shaw 1916, 124). However, when Higgins takes his raw material home, he discovers that he got a lot more than he bargained for when his housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce, points out that to insure success he must alter his own personality in order to serve as a good model for his new project. First of all, Mrs. Pearce recommends that he stop swearing in front of the girl (142). About his personal cleanliness and table manners, she suggests: “might I ask you not to come down to breakfast in your dressing-gown, or at any rate not to use it as a napkin to the extent you do, sir. And if you would be so good as not to eat everything off the same plate, and to remember not to put the porridge saucepan out of your hand on the clean tablecloth, it would be a better example to the girl”

(143–44). Moreover, his business partner, Colonel Pickering, brings to his attention that the girl has feelings with which he must contend.

Once Liza attains the degree of sophistication and linguistic ability that Higgins expected, she rebels, like García Ponce's Model.⁹ Her complaint is that no matter how much she tries to please him, he does not show any kindness toward her, to which he responds:

You call me a brute because you couldn't buy a claim on me by fetching my slippers and finding my spectacles. You were a fool: I think a woman fetching a man's slippers is a disgusting sight: did I ever fetch your slippers? I think a good deal more of you for throwing them in my face. No use slaving for me and then saying you want to be cared for: who cares for a slave? If you come back, come back for the sake of good fellowship; . . . and if you dare to set up your little dog's tricks of fetching and carrying slippers against my creation of a Duchess Eliza, I'll slam the door in your silly face. (Shaw 203)

Realizing that asking for his kindness is not effective, she resorts to complaining about how he stole the independence she had as a flower vendor. While he is arguing that independence is a "middle class blasphemy," it dawns on her that the one thing she can do is teach, and she says: "I'll go and be a teacher. . . . Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You cant [sic] take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can" (Shaw 207).

Higgins, however, dons his Pygmalion outfit and appropriates her newly acquired freedom, claiming that the sense of independence she has obtained was part of his premeditated plan, as we so often see the fictive author do in *Catálogo razonado*:¹⁰ In full authoritative regalia, Higgins asserts: "You damned impudent slut, you! But it's better than sniveling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles, isnt [sic] it? [*Rising*] By George, Eliza, I said I'd make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this" (Shaw 1916, 208). By denying her agency, Higgins pretends to keep her under his tutelage and to enjoy the care and attention she is so

willing to dispense, and to which he has grown accustomed. Evidence that the Model in *Catálogo razonado* finds herself in a similar situation appears every time she mentions that no matter how disturbing it may be, she likes what the fictive author does to her and that she enjoys seeing herself the way he would like her to see herself (García Ponce 1982a, 17). She also enjoys floating adrift and letting him be in complete control, as the following evinces: “No sé a dónde quieres llevarme. Pero me gusta” [I don’t know where you want to take me. But I like it] (1982a, 28). When discussing how the fictive author will portray her in the scene from the novel *Unión*, the Model demonstrates a perverse pleasure in his idiosyncrasies. To his revelation that he enjoys watching her ex-husband draw her while she imitates the poses of Balthus’s erotic paintings, she comments: “Todo esto es anormal. Pero me gusta” [All this is abnormal. But I like it] (1982a, 39). Her final submission to his perverse desires occurs at the end of the play when she agrees to have the fictive director visit them. Although it becomes apparent that she wants to be reassured that the fictive director likes her, she tells the fictive author, when he asks if she needs to be liked, that she agreed to see their friend principally because “a ti te daría gusto que le gustara” [it would please you if he liked me] (1982a, 74). Because both the Model and Liza derive pleasure from pleasing the men they love, they simultaneously assume positions of power and submission, power because they derive pleasure from their desire to be desired, and submission because their sexual pleasure “can only be constructed around [their] objectification” (Kaplan 2000, 126). In his need to subdue women and recreate them, García Ponce finds himself in the company of many other men who share the same male fantasy. There are numerous variations in literature as well as in cinema of the Pygmalion syndrome, including El Conde Lucanor’s “De lo que aconteció a un mancebo que casó con una mujer brava,” Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*, and the films *Educating Rita*, *The Stepford Wives* (based on Ira Levin’s novel), and Almodóvar’s *Habla con ella* (Talk to Her).¹¹ While some use violence and others technology, others use language to subdue and recreate the objects of their desire. Even though the fictive author in *Catálogo razonado* does not hold onto a normative ideal of the

role women should play, like Higgins, he does lay claim to his authorial role and, thus, the right to his unlimited use of the Model.

In addition to depicting the Model through the various characters in the novels, her identity is also construed in the play according to the few clothes she wears. Judith Butler's ideas concerning the performative nature of gendered identity are relevant to a further understanding of how identity is represented in *Catálogo razonado*. According to Butler, "acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body [and] are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (1999, 173). The discursive means used by García Ponce to reveal the "internal core or substance" of his female character consists of her transparent garments either within or in front of paintings used as backdrops. What her clothes or lack of reveal is her desire to be desired or to expose herself, as the fictive author recognizes: "Y luego fui descubriendo hasta qué extremo hacía más intenso nuestro placer el descubrimiento de que ella era alguien a quien le gustaba exhibirse . . ." [And then I started to realize to what extent our pleasure was intensified by the discovery that she liked to exhibit herself . . .] (García Ponce 1982a, 63–64). The Model first appears inside one of Arnaldo Coen's cubes—which evokes the series of two-dimensional cubes he painted in the mid to late 1970s—wearing "un amplio transparente camisón que debe permitir entrever, pero no ver por completo, su cuerpo desnudo" [a wide, transparent nightgown that should reveal, but not completely, her naked body] (1982a, 11). The rest of her wardrobe consists of a bikini whose straps she unfastens in order to show a bare back (1982a, 14–15); an old black-lace dress that belonged to her grandmother, and later a cape that reveals her panties (22, 24); boots, a grey skirt and a black turtleneck sweater (26); and flowing veils that expose her nudity (32). Her last outfit is a bikini, which she wears with boots (78). The multiple variations of the Model either naked or semi-naked can all be read as the repetitions necessary to create her identity, and which are a part of performativity. According to Butler

performativity does not consist of a singular act, but rather, “a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (1999, xv). That the fictive author is aware of his use of art and attire in the performance of the Model’s identity becomes evident when he tells the Second Voice:

la acción que te acabo de mostrar es la que mejor la define—si puede definírsele—como la fuerza que me mueve. Desvestirse, vestirse, adoptar actitudes teatrales para que todo sea como una representación y . . . para poder verla sin mí, como si fuera su creador, como si yo la hubiera puesto en el mundo para solaz de los demás y del mundo. Pero es verdad que la creación no sería posible sin el modelo. Nunca sabré exactamente qué fue primero: ella o mi necesidad. Lo imaginario necesita lo real en la misma medida en que a lo real le es indispensable lo imaginario para poder contemplarse en la imagen que la imaginación crea a partir de la posibilidad de lo real.

[the action I just showed you is the one that best defines her—if she can be defined—as the force that moves me. To undress, dress, adopt theatrical attitudes so that everything can be like a representation . . . so that I can see her without me, as if I were her creator, as if I had placed her in the world for everyone’s solace. But it is true that the creation would be impossible without the model. I will never know exactly what came first: she or my need. The imaginary needs the real to the same extent that the real is indispensable to the imaginary so that it can contemplate itself in the image that the imagination creates through the possibility of the real.] (García Ponce 1982a, 28)

The naked body in exhibition is considered an object of the gaze because its primary function is to serve for the pleasure of an other, yet in *Catálogo razonado*, the Model both derives pleasure from exhibiting

herself and has the authority to stop the action at will. In the first scene, inside the cube, her transparent nightgown and her hand movements suggest that she is masturbating.

Her public onanism alludes both to her ability to please herself and the need of an audience that validates her action. Aware, however, that she is merely following a script, she interrupts herself shortly before orgasm and yells “No!” as she exits the cube, the artwork that contains her (García Ponce 1982a, 14). One could argue that it is the author who allows her to escape, yet within the play, the fictive author cannot control her actions. In the scene where she wears her grandmother’s black lace dress and is photographed by their friend, she refuses to take off her panties, a decision which the fictive author appears to respect and which recalls Higgins’s comment that no one cares for a slave.

As we all know, proper names are a major marker of identity, and in *Catálogo razonado*, the author has dispensed with them. However, the Model and the fictive author engage in conversations about the names he has chosen to give her in his novels. In reference to the name “Nicole,” which the author gave his protagonist in *Unión*, the Model comments: “Siempre he querido llamarme así. ¿Cómo pudiste adivinarlo?” [I’ve always wanted to be called Nicole. How did you know?]. And he answers: “Es el amor” [It’s love] (García Ponce 1982a, 35). Nevertheless, when they’re playing the scene from *La cabaña* and the character asks her lover, “What am I?” (after having suggested that she must look like an iguana) and he answers “Claudia,” the First Voice yells out, “¡Es lo único que no eres! ¡Eres mi modelo! [It is the only thing you’re not! You’re my model!]” (19). The discussion of the protagonist’s name from *El gato* occurs while the fictive director is telling the Model how to play herself as Alma: “Recuerda que te llamas Alma. Un Alma debe tener un cuerpo verdaderamente cachondo para hacerse visible.” [Remember your name is Alma. A Soul needs to have a truly lustful body in order to become visible] (66). The last character of one of the novels mentioned is Paloma, from *De anima*. Even though the significance of her name is never discussed by any of the characters in the play, it is important to note that the word means “dove,” which conjures images of wings and their relation to freedom and perhaps even refers to the symbol of peace and of the

holy spirit, as the title of the novel suggest. Most important, however is the lack of proper names in *Catálogo razonado*, which emphasizes the issue Pirandello raises in *Così è, se vi pare* (1917, translated *Right You Are (If You Think So)*, 1922). The play addresses the problem of the relativity of identity as well as the impossibility of determining exactly who someone might be (Bassnett-Mcguire 1983, 6). The dramatization of this ontological question is developed through the conflicting versions of a Signora Ponza's identity. While her husband, Signor Ponza, claims that his wife's mother, Signora Frola, lost her mind when her daughter died and lives convinced that his second wife, Julia, is her daughter Lena, Signora Frola explains that her son-in-law remarried but fantasizes that the new wife (her daughter) is his old wife. Because Ponza's wife never goes out and never visits her mother, the town is curious about her identity. The town attempts to find out who she is by examining the village records, only to discover that they were lost in an earthquake. Their research efforts thwarted, they only have recourse to Ponza's wife, whose existence they begin to doubt (Pirandello 1922, 122). To verify her existence and find out who is right about her identity, the town asks the prefect to talk to her. What she reveals as the truth is that she is the second wife of Signor Ponza and the daughter of Signora Frola and for herself, nobody. At the prefect's insistence that she must be one or the other, Signora Ponza replies: "No! I am she whom you believe me to be" (138). Because the world "is in continuous flux, and within that flux the individual seeks a fugitive coherence by naming," as Anthony Caputi points out, communities need to classify individuals according to their own value systems, but they need a basic truth from which to depart. Therefore, it is imperative that the town now know who Signora Ponza really is. Caputi also mentions that Pirandello continuously repeated that "the world itself has no reality unless we ourselves confer it," thus the necessity and illusion of creating fixed identities (Caputi 1988, 84).

Within this context, then, it appears that by choosing not to name his characters, by creating female characters who write their own stories, and by writing a self-reflective play, García Ponce reaffirms the importance of living life through art and recognizing the impossibility of a fixed identity because to others we are always someone different than who we think we are and because all efforts to

mold someone in our image are continuously thwarted by their particular sense of agency. Ultimately, though, *Catálogo razonado*, as in the rest of García Ponce's works, is in search for relationships in which subjectivity disappears in order to achieve that objectivity which is only possible within the realm of literature.¹²

NOTES

I thank David E. Johnson and Carine Mardorossian for their careful reading of the essay and their insightful comments and suggestions.

1. According to Juan Bruce-Novoa, Mexico's INBA, during the government of President José López Portillo (1976–1982), strongly supported the arts. INBA set out to stimulate the theater by commissioning leading authors to write plays (Bruce-Novoa 1983, 5 and note 3 on p. 13).
2. This definition can be found at <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/catalogue+raisonne>. *Merriam-Webster* defines the term as "a systematic annotated catalog; *especially* : a critical bibliography." <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=catalogue+raisonne&x=17&y=12>.
3. Even though *De ánima* was published two years after *Catálogo razonado*, it was already in process at the time García Ponce agreed to write the play.
4. García Ponce also includes a scene from what he calls *Vida de los santos* [St. Gregory's dialogues] by San Gregorio Magno in which he recounts Saint Benedict's fortitude. Unlike the saint, the fictive author says he couldn't resist the temptation of including that scene because he is not as strong as Saint Benedict.
5. Michèle Alban, a teacher and translator of French descent, was first married to poet Tomás Segovia with whom she had a son, Rafael Segovia. Her second husband was author Salvador Elizondo, with

whom she had two daughters. She was involved with Juan García Ponce from the late 1960s until the late 1970s.

6. I take the term “fictive author” from Robert Spires’s study of Miguel de Unamuno’s *Niebla* (1914).

Spires calls the Unamuno within the novel the fictive author. According to Spires, “by the act of electing to answer his own character the fictive author has all but destroyed the distinction between author and character; they exist on the same narrative level, and consequently the illusion of the fictive author’s power over his character vanishes” (36). The idea is that “the fictive author and the character alternately create and are created by one another; each is but a sign system generating and then being generated by the other” (37).

7. For a detailed discussion of self-possession and exposure to the other, which questions the character’s ability to “own herself,” see David E. Johnson’s “La promesa de la disponibilidad,” a paper presented in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico, in August 2004 and published on the Juan García Ponce website:

<http://www.garciaponce.com/lecturas/pag03.html>.

8. *Encyclopedia Mythica*, s.v. “Pygmalion myth.” www.pantheon.org/articles.

9. The act of deviating from the assigned or fixed role dreamed up by the author evokes the first line of Lezama Lima’s famous poem “A que tú escapes”: “A que tú escapes en el instante en el que ya habías alcanzado tu definición mejor,” which García Ponce uses as an epigraph in his novel *La presencia lejana*. This poem, as well as the works by Shaw and García Ponce, begs one to ask questions regarding the identity, hidden desires, and ideological position of authors interested in defining their subjects.

10. For example, the fictive author, directing himself to the Model, asserts: “Después de todo yo te invento y aun para demostrarme tu independencia tienes que prestarte a seguir siendo el modelo”(12). [I invent you, after all, and even to show me your independence you have to agree to continue to be my model.]

11. Bryan Forbes’s adaptation of Ira Levin’s 1972 novel was produced in 1975, while Paul Rudnick’s version came out in 2004.

12. On the question of the object, see pp. 2–3 of David E. Johnson’s essay “La promesa de la disponibilidad.”

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JUAN GARCIA PONCE

COLLECTED WORKS

To Juan José Gurrola

CHARACTERS:

First Voice and the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice

Second Voice and the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice

Model

Model as Claudia

Maid

Engineer

Friend photographer

Actor Who Embodies the First Voice as Saint Benito

Voice of the Devil and Model as Temptress

Nicole

José

Jean

Friend of Jean

Model as Paloma

Armando, Ricardo, Luis Enrique, Deborah, and Actor Who Embodies the First Voice as Gilberto
in the film that must be projected.

PLACE:

All the action takes place in the author's imagination. His imagination will be
inhabited by the objects that he asks to appear on stage.

TIME:

The time outside of time in which all plays unfold.

*Curtain rises, stage is dark. The recording of a man's voice is heard in
absolute darkness.*

FIRST VOICE: *(Very tentative. He thinks out loud unaware of the direction his*

thoughts are taking. Nevertheless, his first sentence is firm and assured.) I don't know how to begin. *(Long pause.)* You told me to write something down, that all I needed was the first phrase and the rest would flow. Can I trust you? My first sentence limits all my other options. The problem is that I don't know if I want to write a vengeful play, which sometimes I think is my only option, or a tribute, which is what all my vengeful projects always turn into.

Lights on. An enormous cube, like the ones Arnaldo Coen paints, appears on center stage; but this time, even though its sides contain all the decorative elements Coen uses in his works, the cube does not simulate a cube on a plane surface, but rather it is a cube with volume. Like the paintings it is also transparent. Thanks to the lighting, and confused with the decorative elements, we can see a beautiful thirty-year-old woman inside lying on either a bed or perhaps simply an austere cot, depending on the artist's taste. The headboard is raised, which creates a diagonal rather than a horizontal line. She is a woman and she is the Model.

SECOND VOICE: *(Somewhat mocking, but also with affection.)* See? All you have to do is begin.

Inside the cube, the Model is wearing a wide, transparent nightgown which should reveal, but not completely, her naked body. Her eyes are closed and she is absolutely still, her arms extended along the length of her body.

FIRST VOICE: *(Talking to the figure inside the cube.)* Let me look at you. In fact,

that's how you appeared. I didn't expect anything, I didn't desire anything. You led me to look at you. Back then I couldn't even imagine that you were going to be the Model, but the Model of what? Of my own need which borrowed your figure or of that which your figure turned into a need? I don't know how to make you reach me, how to reach you. As fiction, as reality? Which one is fiction, which one reality? It's a very old question that's ultimately mere rhetoric. I would have to start by determining the precise moment from which I speak. But that's impossible. What matters is the reality of your appearance. I've followed you so many times within what is considered reality, for so long I've made you follow my wishes so they would become embodied in the field of fiction through your figure that now it's impossible to limit the boundaries between one and the other. Do you remember? Perhaps at the beginning, without realizing it, you imitated what I imagined; but you couldn't fathom that if I imagined something it was because you had suggested it to me: your presence, the secret possibilities that your presence contained, denouncing them in each one of your gestures, in each one of your attitudes, in all your reactions, in your independence or in your apparent submission. In what moment do we find ourselves now? Have you rebelled yet? Are you no longer my Model? Are you no longer the portrait we created together? Do you want to be yourself again? Is it possible to prove that you're something more than the portrait for which you posed? Is that confirmation the plot of this play? I invent you, after all, and even to show me your independence you have to agree to continue to be the Model. There's no solution. Perhaps the only possible answer is to review some of the scenes that occurred in reality as well as in fiction because as they're repeated in this space that you're going to allow me to create, they're already nothing more than

fiction. Everything's false and true. But there's a truth that can't be denied. It's there.

You're its prisoner and that makes you my prisoner, given that the instant I begin to imagine I can always use you as a model, without anyone knowing that you're my model, without even you being able to prove the contrary. Prove it. For me you will never stop being the image in the mirror in which I allowed you to be reflected, made you be reflected, and where, fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you see it, you always fell in love with yourself.

Up to now, oblivious to the words of the First Voice, the feminine figure inside the cube has remained still.

FIRST VOICE: I'm watching you, only you. I could threaten you now, I could say: I'm going to exhibit you, I'm going to expose you, I'll turn you into the defenseless object of desire for anyone who wants to get close to your figure. But I'm sure all that is quite relative. You want to be that object of desire, you've encouraged me and made it possible for me to find the way to turn you into that object of desire. Isn't it true? Would you dare answer? You're there. You know they're looking at you. There's an audience. There are many readers or perhaps only one reader, only one spectator, just me, perhaps. One gaze is enough. It represents them all. I destine you to be that spectacle of yourself in which you can't help but recognize yourself, even if only as the ghost of my desire which your body allows to personify.

The voice becomes silent. In the meantime, over his last words, at the precise moment the director wishes, the feminine figure inside the cube starts moving her head from side to side in a series of gestures that want to express a sort of

exasperated negation, nevertheless, the movements of one of her hands contradict the gesture because she has started to run it through her body over the nightgown. The movements of her body, responding to the hand's contact, also contradict those of her head. Then her head freezes. The feminine figure also caresses her body under the nightgown. Without making it obvious, the movements of her hands and her body, the change in the expression of her face, suggest that she is masturbating and pleasure replaces the initial rejection. But before she reaches climax, the Model gets up suddenly.

MODEL: No!

She lifts the side of the cube that faces the audience and gets out.

BLACKOUT

The stage remains dark while the Second Voice is heard.

SECOND VOICE: I can do something with that. I told you: everything is possible. But just out of curiosity, in order to anticipate the challenges you expect to send my way, I would like to know what you're going to do next.

FIRST VOICE: I'm going to have you represent one of the scenes I've written and for

which she served as the Model. I remember, while writing it, that it really disturbed me to imagine that for sure she would read it and perhaps would recognize herself; but also the pleasure of turning her into someone other than who she was without ceasing to be

herself didn't compare to anything else, and it affirmed her through that apparent negation and confirmed my love for her. In that novel, her name is Claudia.

The light shines on the scenery created with backdrops that depict trees in a forest, which at the same time evoke the clearing Ludwig Tieck considers the romantic scene par excellence and which Roger von Gunten's painting titled In the forest suggests. However, it is really not a forest, but rather the shady orchard of a house in the provinces. On a colorful blanket, down and center stage, lies the figure that functions as the Model. She's lying on her stomach. She's wearing a bikini, but she has untied the back strap and it lies on both sides of her body, leaving her back bare. In this scene a lightshow should be created to give the impression that the light filtering through the trees is the one producing a series of reflections on the semi-naked body, with the sole purpose of holding as long as possible that first appearance of the Model. Other than the light on her body and on the stage floor, nothing else is moving. A maid enters from one side or the other. She could be a witch, or a pre-courtesan procuress. But her movements are not those of an old woman. She approaches the blanket where the Model is lying on her stomach with her arms extended forward and her head resting on them.

MAID: That man's in there, ma'am.

Claudia lifts her head and looks at her disoriented, as if she weren't expecting to be interrupted, as if the sunlight dazzled her. The action freezes. Long pause.

SECOND VOICE: (*Mockingly.*) A maid! And you're going to use that realist language.

FIRST VOICE: (*Embarrassed.*) Maybe only this time. (*Firm:*) But everything's possible.

The action continues on stage. The Model takes her hand up to her eyebrows to protect herself from the glare of the sun. Just like every future gesture, that one should reveal her semi-nakedness to the audience.

CLAUDIA: Which man?

MAID: That old man, the so-called Engineer who helped you fix up the house.

CLAUDIA: He's not an old man, Jesusa. And besides, he has been very nice to us. Ask him to come out here.

MAID: Like that?

CLAUDIA: I don't understand. What do you mean, like that?

MAID: You're naked.

CLAUDIA: I'm not naked. This is a bathing suit. There's nothing wrong with that.

MAID: That's what you think.

CLAUDIA: (*Impatient.*) It doesn't matter what I think. Ask him to come out here.

The maid turns around and exits without any gesture. She should not be allowed to raise her shoulders or to produce any body language. The Model gathers the bikini straps to tie them. She ties them. Short pause. She moves her hands

toward her back and unties the strings again and leans her head on her arms again. The Engineer enters followed by the maid a few steps behind. He stands close to the blanket, looking at Claudia with the maid still a few steps behind.

ENGINEER: I don't dare speak. I don't know if you're asleep.

Claudia quickly looks up.

CLAUDIA: *(Each one of her attitudes reveals the change that takes place in her by the single fact that she is being contemplated by a masculine figure.)* I'm not asleep.

Or at least I don't think I was. Perhaps I was. I don't know. It's the sun. Jesusa came out a little while ago to announce your visit, sir.

ENGINEER: Sir? Don't you remember the last time we spoke we agreed to call each other by our first names?

CLAUDIA: Forgive me. It's the sun.

ENGINEER: I didn't know that you'd be in the orchard. Perhaps it is not the most appropriate time for a visit.

CLAUDIA: No, on the contrary. I never have anything to do at this time. And none of my college friends are planning to stop by to see me either.

In order to speak she has propped up on her elbows with her hands clasped together, in such a way that her raised torso reveals the beginning of her breasts.

ENGINEER: Anyway, even if I arrived at an inconvenient time, I'm glad I came and caught you by surprise.

CLAUDIA: Why?

ENGINEER: I had never seen you in a bathing suit. You look great.

CLAUDIA: I don't think it makes a big difference.

ENGINEER: It makes all the difference. Dressed, you conceal the body that I see now.

He sits on the edge of the blanket, not very far from Claudia. The maid's presence becomes even more evident.

CLAUDIA: *(To the maid.)* Jesusa, you may leave.

She obeys without a comment. Once she has left, Claudia gathers her bikini strings, but has difficulties tying them. Politely, the Engineer moves over to help her fasten her bikini top. Claudia also sits up.

CLAUDIA: Thanks.

BLACKOUT

SECOND VOICE: How old is she in that scene?

VOICE FIRST: Twenty-three, perhaps twenty-four.

VOICE SECOND: So exactly how old?

VOICE FIRST: I don't know. That's your problem. For me it's always the same

Model. Either pick one wonderful actress or change actresses continuously. But in the meantime, don't worry. This scene isn't over yet.

With the curtain closed, from a corner on the stage, the Model appears dressed in a straight skirt, a shirt blouse and loafers. She should be speaking to the First Voice, but her speech is really a monologue. There is no one else on stage.

MODEL: It's very disturbing. It is me but it's not me. I would've never behaved like

that back then. But it's true that I had a lover. I've already told you the story. Is that what you used? In any case, I think I like what you're doing with me. I see myself exactly as you'd like for me to see myself.

BLACKOUT

FIRST VOICE: That's how all doubts started to disappear. Could I say that everything

was different back then? I can't be sure now to what time I'm referring. You will always be the Model that you're reverting to, although perhaps one could say that in order to be able to return to the Model, I'm using the portrait I had evoked before. Let me continue.

The light goes on at the previous scene. Once again it is the orchard in a provincial town depicted by drop curtains designed by Roger von Gunten, and which can look like a forest. Claudia is on the blanket wearing her bathing suit with the top untied. The Engineer enters with the strap of his camera case on his

shoulder and two silver screens under his arm. He gets close to the blanket and remains standing next to her.

ENGINEER: You're not asleep.

CLAUDIA: *(Without lifting her head.)* I'm not pretending to be.

ENGINEER: Fine. But don't move.

CLAUDIA: Why?

ENGINEER: I'm here to take the pictures you promised you'd let me take and I'd like the first one to be like that, as you are now. This is how you dazzled me the first time you let me come to this orchard while you were lying down. Don't move.

CLAUDIA: *(Submissive.)* Fine. But I already told you; I don't know what to do when I'm being photographed.

ENGINEER: That's why I'm not asking you to do anything. Don't move.

The Engineer arranges the screens so that there is even more light on Claudia's body. He takes out his camera. Claudia has not moved, but now she slightly raises her head.

CLAUDIA: What did you do? It feels hotter.

ENGINEER: I set up some screens. But don't move, please.

Without answering Claudia drops her head on her forearms again. The Engineer takes a few steps back and focuses his camera.

ENGINEER: Your back is endless.

SECOND VOICE: That judgment is yours not the Engineer's.

FIRST VOICE: It's true. But it's my play.

In the meantime, as if neither Claudia nor the Engineer had heard him, he takes several pictures from different angles, moving the screens every now and then. He lowers the camera and stares at Claudia for a long time. Then he gets close to her.

ENGINEER: Will you let me do something?

CLAUDIA: *(Without moving.)* What?

ENGINEER: This.

He pulls one of the bikini straps from under Claudia's breasts.

CLAUDIA: I warn you that Jesusa might be spying on us from the kitchen.

ENGINEER: I can imagine. But I didn't do anything wrong.

CLAUDIA: *(Raising her head.)* For her it's bad enough that you're taking pictures of me and perhaps I feel the same way.

ENGINEER: Stay as you are. Don't move.

CLAUDIA: How?

ENGINEER: With your head raised.

CLAUDIA: It's very uncomfortable. And I must look like an iguana.

ENGINEER: You never seem to be more than what you are.

CLAUDIA: What am I?

ENGINEER: Claudia.

While they speak, Claudia automatically has propped her elbows on the ground and clasped her hands in front of her.

FIRST VOICE: (*Shouting.*) It's the only thing you're not! You're my model!

SECOND VOICE: Don't be stupid. Don't interrupt your own scene.

Neither Claudia nor the Engineer have heard the voices.

ENGINEER: That pose is even better. Let me take a picture.

Again he takes many pictures of Claudia moving around her. From time to time, without speaking, he touches different parts of her body to change her position slightly, separating her legs or uncrossing her arms, but also, for a moment and for no reason, placing her hands on her back. In the meantime, he continues taking pictures and moving the sunscreens. Claudia crosses her arms and leans her head on them, with a gesture of abandonment this time. The Engineer stops taking pictures and stares at her for a long time.

ENGINEER: Turn over.

CLAUDIA: No!

ENGINEER: Why not?

CLAUDIA: You know why. I'm topless and Jesusa is probably spying on us.

The Engineer sits next to her on the blanket.

ENGINEER: That doesn't matter. Perhaps she's not. And I want to take a picture of you like that.

In the meantime, he runs his hand down Claudia's back freely. The Engineer takes her by her shoulders trying to turn her over.

CLAUDIA: *(Almost in a whisper.)* No, please. I have another idea. Give me my bikini top.

The Engineer hands it to her. Claudia puts it over her breasts, but without fastening it, and she sits up, pressing the bikini against her breasts with one hand.

ENGINEER: Let me take a picture like that as well.

CLAUDIA: It's not necessary. Let's go to the rooms in back. The ones that are empty and which you didn't bother to remodel.

The Engineer stands up and gives Claudia a hand. Still holding the bikini against her breasts with one hand, Claudia puts out the other and allows the Engineer to help her get up. The Engineer continues holding her hand as they exit.

BLACKOUT

SECOND VOICE: So why did you choose precisely that scene?

FIRST VOICE: Because, by using the characters of the novel, it is the imitation or the representation with its indispensable variations of another scene that actually happened, one could say in “real” life, between her, me and a friend of ours who’s a photographer. In that sense, this is its third representation. The only thing that hasn’t changed, like you can imagine, the only thing that will never change, because it’s always the same and different, is the Model. Do you want to see the scene that corresponds to real life and would thus stop corresponding to it? I’m afraid I’ve never made anything up. She was the one who invented, with the slight difference that she only invented herself.

When the light goes on, the drop curtains on the stage reproduce the unreal and precise space of one of the interiors in Joy Laville’s early paintings. They are the same colors; the same type of furniture. The actor who embodies the First Voice is sitting either in an armchair or on a sofa, depending on the furniture on stage. The Friend is sitting opposite to or beside him. Both are drinking.

FRIEND: Where did she go?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: One can never know.

FRIEND: But she’s already drunk.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Like you and me. (*Aside, like in*

classical theater.) It’s true that at that time, just like now, as you well know, we were almost always drunk. And we should point that out. What follows is going to be up to you almost entirely. I’m only going to give a few instructions.

SECOND VOICE: Don't look for unnecessary excuses to stop the action. Do it. The truth is
you're scared that she may appear not like your portrait but like the Model she once
was.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: (*Aside.*) Only the portrait exists. The
Model is already the portrait.

SECOND VOICE: In the theater all theoretical discussions are useless. This is not a
comedy by T.S. Eliot. Prove it.

*The Model enters wearing the remains of an old black lace dress, really worn
out, but which does not make her look grotesque or shabby, but rather beautiful.
It is obvious that she is wearing only panties under the layers of lace.*

FRIEND: What's that?

MODEL: (*Smiling, delighted with herself.*) A dress that belonged to my grandmother. I have a
trunk full of things like this. You guys don't like it?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You look divine. (*To the friend.*) Didn't
you bring your cameras?

FRIEND: They're in the car.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Go get them. You must take pictures of her.

*Without saying anything, the Friend leaves. The Model sits for a moment. Then
she gets up and walks in front of the Actor who embodies the First Voice.*

MODEL: You really like it?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I like you. I like what I can see under those rags.

The Model laughs.

MODEL: They're not rags. It's a dress that belonged to my grandmother who was a very serious and respectable lady.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: She couldn't have been that serious and respectable. Your nipples are showing through the lace.

MODEL: That has nothing to do with the grandmother, and everything with the granddaughter.

The Actor who embodies the First Voice takes her by the hand and sits her on his lap. He slips his hand under her dress to caress her breasts.

MODEL: Don't start. He's coming right back.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: That's why I'm doing it.

MODEL: Then you could at least not say it to me. I would like for you to like me. ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: There's no difference.

The Friend enters with the camera on his shoulder and a series of lamps under his arm, the same way the Engineer did in the previous scene, except that now they are electric lamps instead of silver screens.

MODEL: Do you always have all that in your car?

FRIEND: Of course not. He and I just got back from taking pictures of the trees in the city. A newspaper article, my love. We must make a living.

In the meantime he arranges the lamps in the room and plugs them in.

Finally he addresses the Model.

FRIEND: Get up.

MODEL: I'm camera shy.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Don't be hypocritical.

The Model stands up and adopts an affected pose, according to the particular idiosyncrasy of the director. The change in poses and the taking of pictures follow one another. The Actor who embodies the First Voice contemplates the scene.

MODEL: *(To the friend.)* Wait.

She exits.

FRIEND: *(To the Actor who embodies the First Voice.)* And now?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I don't know. You heard. We have to wait.

And in fact they wait, in the pose that the director decides, until the Model enters again wearing a new dress, which this time is made of black transparent gauze. A new series of shots follow. The Model exits again. She enters with a cape and a box full of old hats. She puts them on and takes them off so that he can take

different photos while at the same time, for each one of them, she opens her cape, sometimes a little, some times a lot, revealing that underneath she is only wearing panties. Finally the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice speaks during one of those moments when she is not wearing a hat.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Take off your cape, take it off.

The Model backs up against one of the walls and very slowly begins to remove the cape, while the Friend keeps taking pictures, until she is only in her underwear with her back against the wall. The Friend takes more pictures, moving the lamps around.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: *(To the Model.)*

Turn around! Turn around!

The Model obeys very slowly. She is facing the wall, naked, except for her brief black panties, with her head slightly inclined almost touching one of her shoulders and her eyes shut with modesty.

FRIEND: Such beauty.

More pictures. Little by little the Model slowly falls to the floor until she's lying on her back, she opens her arms although not fully extended. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice approaches her and tries to remove her panties, while the Friend continues taking pictures.

MODEL: No.

She prevents the action of the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice, gets up and leaves running.

BLACKOUT

SECOND VOICE: You're not expecting me to comment on each scene, are you? You haven't done anything more than look for another excuse to exhibit her.

FIRST VOICE: But it serves your purpose. If I must exhibit her, thanks to that you're able to organize the representation.

SECOND VOICE: Can you imagine what a psychoanalyst would say to you?

FIRST VOICE: It's not difficult and probably he'd be right. But I'm more interested in showing what happened afterwards.

The light comes on in the scene. The Actor who embodies the First Voice is sitting in one of the armchairs. The Model enters. She is wearing boots, a gray skirt and a black turtle neck sweater. She kisses the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice in the cheek and remains standing in front of him.

MODEL: What happened last night?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You know perfectly well.

MODEL: I swear to you I don't. The last thing I remember is that I put on one of my grandmother's dresses and that you took pictures of me. This room was full of clothes and hats this morning. What happened?

ACTOR IN WHOM THE VOICE EMBODIES FIRST: You undressed.

MODEL: Completely?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: No. You refused to let me take off your panties when I tried to.

MODEL: How embarrassing! And you were taking pictures of me the whole time?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Yes.

MODEL: And what happened afterwards?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Nothing. He left and I took you upstairs to your room.

MODEL: Did you stay with me?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You know I did. It's very sad that you don't remember that either.

MODEL: Don't be silly. That's not what matters to me. Did my daughters see anything?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: No, I'm sure.

SECOND VOICE: Is it true that nothing else happened?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: *(Aside, towards the emptiness from*

where the Second Voice speaks, while the action seems to freeze, just as in the classic comedies.) It's true. Don't interrupt. You're confused because later I combined that

scene with another similar one in one of my novels and that time the night ended differently. The three of us went to bed together. But the real character was someone else, the novel was also a different one and what we just finished representing was real but only before we represented it. But, please, now I'm the one begging you not to interrupt.

MODEL: (*After a brief pause.*) I want all the negatives of those pictures. We have to destroy them.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: No, I beg you. I want the pictures for me.

MODEL: But they really do embarrass me. And it would be horrible if somebody else saw them.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: There's no reason to be embarrassed. You looked gorgeous. And no one besides you and me will ever see them.

Uproarious outburst of laughter off stage by the Second Voice.

SECOND VOICE: I can't believe you said that. The Actor who embodies the First Voice ignores him. The action continues.

MODEL: But why do you want them? You have me, you have the original.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I like to see you repeated. I always want to be able to see you and to look at you at the same time from the outside.

SECOND VOICE: (*Shouting.*) And you achieved it, you wretch. But now which one is the portrait and which one is the Model?

The characters on stage ignore the interruption.

MODEL: I don't know where you want to take me. But I like it. I even like leaving you with that responsibility. If it's true that no one is ever going to see them, go ahead and have the pictures developed.

The Actor who embodies the First Voice stands up, hugs the Model and they kiss.

BLACKOUT

FIRST VOICE: See? The scene isn't exactly the same, but in some way it is the same. You have to admit that at least I expose and reveal to you "the sources of creation," just as she accepted that the pictures be exposed. And I warn you that it hurts me. I know that by recovering her in this way, perhaps I am losing her for good. But perhaps I'm also glad. I'm free. Except that, who wants to be free? Do you remember? "And the slave who doesn't break his bonds/and the blind man who doesn't look for the light they stole from him/and the lover who doesn't want but indifference", says Villaurrutia. Anyway, the action I just showed you is the one that best defines her—if she can be defined—as the force that moves me. To undress, dress, adopt theatrical attitudes so that everything can be like a representation so that—while somebody photographs her and at the same watches her, exposes her—I can love her being watched in order to be able to see her without me, as if I were her creator, as if I had put her in the world for the pleasure of others and the world. But it's true that the creation would not be possible without the

model. I'll never know for sure what came first: she or my need. The imaginary needs the real to the same extent that the real is indispensable to the imaginary so that it can contemplate itself in the image that the imagination creates from the possibility of the real. On this point, on this subject, on this exigency, one would have to read Klossowski.

While the First Voice speaks, all the pictures the Friend took of the Model are being projected on a gigantic screen in the order he took them. Thus, through this medium, we witness all of that movement related to dressing and undressing, of adopting theatrical attitudes that gradually lead us to the Model's nakedness. The end of the First Voice's monologue must coincide with the last pictures in which she is facing the wall wearing panties only, then with her back against the wall equally half-naked, and finally on the floor in the same positions the actress had assumed earlier.

BLACKOUT

Note: If the director wishes—but the author does not recommend it—there can be an intermission at this point.

When the lights come up again, a slide of Roger von Gunten's painting Naked in the charparral should be projected on a backdrop and screens on both wings of the stage. On the stage, towards the back, there is a simulacrum of thorny blackberry bushes, so elaborate, so carefully designed, that there should be no doubt that it is a prop and that the theatrical bushes are incapable of hurting anybody. The scene may begin in silence or with background music consisting of

religious hymns which my musical ignorance prevents me from identifying, but which must be the oldest that can be found, or else consist of absolutely modern music. In any case, at the end as well as at the outset, the music sounds like noise. Perhaps also for that reason silence is preferable. Downstage, the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice, an empty bowl and a clay pitcher beside him, is dressed in the rags that must have covered all hermits of the first years of Christianity, the heroic years. He is embracing an enormous wooden cross with a passion that should clearly portray absolute sexual rapture. He extends his arms in cross-like fashion, murmuring unintelligible words, and the cross falls to the ground with a loud thump. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice quickly picks it up with fervor and embraces it again with what in decent terms would have to be considered an indescribable passion.

VOICE OF THE DEVIL: (*Insinuating, tempting.*) Your pitcher is full of fresh water. It murmurs inside the pitcher like an imprisoned stream. Don't be foolish. Don't waste your life. God put you in the world for a reason. Your parched mouth, your parched throat, are waiting for it. Drink. Your action would only confirm and celebrate the Glory of the Lord. However, if you allow your mouth and your throat to remain parched you will be guilty of the sin of pride. It is the Lord who has given you that body. So why mortify him? Why do you insist in contradicting the will of your Creator?

While the voice of the devil is heard, the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice embraces the cross with even greater fervor. When the voice stops, the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice sets the cross down very carefully on the ground.

He bends down to kiss it. Then he turns towards the pitcher. He picks it up.

There is a moment of absolute suspense. Is he going to drink? But the Actor

Who Embodies the First Voice raises the pitcher over his head and violently

smashes it against the floor. The pitcher is empty, of course.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: (*Looking upwards, downwards,
towards one side and towards the other.*) Vade retro Satan!

He embraces the crucifix again.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: (*Almost like a female hired mourner.*)

Lord, take pity of your poor servant, Benito. Lord, do not allow them to tempt me beyond my strength. But no, Lord, I'm not asking for that either. It is your poor servant who must resist all temptations. Thank you, Lord. Thank you also for sending them to me. All things praise you and glorify you. Your Adversary cannot keep the light of your name from shining even brighter. You become visible even in his abominable words.

VOICE OF THE DEVIL: (*Serious, grave, objective.*) You deceive yourself, Benito. It's not the Tempter who speaks. It's your Lord. He whom you want to serve, He whom your heart desires with all the ardor of a blackberry bush that could go up in flames. I am He who has created the world for your pleasure. Turn around, abandon that cross which symbolizes the sacrifices I've made for all the sins of mankind to whom I gave life so that you would celebrate Me and my beloved Son, who is Me. Look at your bowl. In it are melons, watermelons, pears, peaches. They're the fruits with which I have covered the

world in all the different latitudes for my greater glory and for your delight. They're yours. Enjoy them. I'll enjoy them through you.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice returns to look at the bowl. Of course it is empty; but his imagination allows another bowl, which is conspicuously hanging from a cord and with all the fruits that the Devil has just described, to descend. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice walks towards it, looks at it, picks it up, raises it over his head and then the bowl with the fruits ascend again and he only has in his hands the empty one, which with a sleight of hand he picked up without the audience noticing. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice hurls the bowl violently against the floor.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Vade retro Satan!

He picks up the cross again and embraces it lustfully.

VOICE OF THE DEVIL: Benito, man of God, as they have so pompously called you, I will prove to you that the flesh is weak.

The Model enters from one of the wings, with veils that reveal her nakedness in the most provocative way the costume designer can imagine. Embracing his cross, the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice looks at her fleetingly, almost with terror, and he hugs his cross tighter. The Model approaches him with obvious seductive movements. At this moment, depending on the director's wishes, sacred or tropical music can be played, The Sonora Matancera, for example. Perhaps a combination—though not simultaneous—would be more appropriate.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice continues hugging his cross. The Model, already next to him, caresses his hair, begins to remove the veils from the most suggestive parts of her body, and kisses his neck.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Lord, have mercy. Lord, do not abandon your poor servant. Lord, do not allow me to be tempted beyond my strength. No, Lord. Forgive me for requesting so much. Your Adversary is also free. I'm the one who with your help and in your name will defeat him. Forgive me Lord; forgive me Lord; forgive me Lord.

But it is no longer possible to tell if the last two "forgive mes" are an anticipation of what one fears will happen, because, in the meantime, the Model has continued kissing the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice and has gotten him, very delicately, to let go of the cross and instead to hold her in his arms. They kiss and caress without restraint. The Model, taking him by the hand, makes the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice stand up and begins to undress him until he is completely naked. One last ardent kiss and the Model steps back to finish removing the veils that barely cover her.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Vade retro, Satan! Vade retro, Satan!

He runs naked towards the fake blueberry bushes, falls on them and rolls around like a possessed being.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Punish my sinner's flesh, Lord. No punishment is sufficient. I will mortify myself until only your glory is affirmed. May the thorns, the same ones that crowned your Son's head, punish me. More, Lord. More.

But what he says while he rolls around in the blueberry bushes is said with a tone that makes it impossible to distinguish extreme pleasure from extreme pain, in such a way that the bushes only seem to have replaced the Model effectively. In the meantime, she, almost naked, watches the excessive action of the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice shaking her head from side to side, standing in a posture that recalls one of Lucas Cranach's Venuses.

BLACKOUT

SECOND VOICE: *(With surprise and slight indignation.)* In what novel is that scene?

FIRST VOICE: *(Humble, somewhat contrite.)* None. But I've always wanted to write

it. It is in *Life of the Saints* by Pope St. Gregory the Great, which recounts the edifying strength of Saint Benito, the man of God, as St. Gregory calls him. I could not resist the temptation of writing it. I'm not as strong as Saint Benito. I had to take advantage of the opportunity and, in any case, I'm sure the original temptress must have greatly resembled my Model.

SECOND VOICE: I don't doubt it. But this won't get us very far. Allow me to ask you, servant of the Lord, to limit yourself to our anecdote. After all, in this case and in this scene, I am the Lord.

FIRST VOICE: But, in any case, I am free.

SECOND VOICE: Don't imagine for a moment that I'm going to fall in the trap of one of your obscene theological discussions.

FIRST VOICE: What direction should I take then?

SECOND VOICE: In that case, yes, you're free. You decide.

FIRST VOICE: What I would like is to continue inventing. Perhaps I need her presence during those moments when it used to surprise, please, and flatter her for me to describe situations that either she had lived or that she could've lived.

In one corner of the stage a slide of Balthus's painting The card game is projected on a screen. The same table with the checkered tablecloth and the same chairs as in Balthus's painting are placed in front of that projection. But instead of the strange feminine figure on the chair, the Model is on the actor's right-hand side, in the same position as Balthus's figure. Her left hand rests on her skirt and her right one is extended on the table with a card in her hand turned right side up, although she looks fixedly towards the front, dressed in the same way as Balthus's figure. On the other side of the table, just like in Balthus's painting, the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice is standing up, with a knee on the chair, leaning towards the table, with his right arm resting on it and the left one raised up to his chest with another card in his hand and also watching fixedly towards the audience. From then on she begins to move according to the demands of the performance, sitting in a different way, standing up, walking, etc. But the projection of Balthus's painting remains in the background.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You have shown me your cards. But I have a surprise for you. I wrote a novel about you between the age of sixteen and twenty-one. Your name is Nicole.

MODEL: (*Loving.*) I've always wanted to be called Nicole. How did you know?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: It's love.

MODEL: Silly . . . What's the novel about?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: About you, your adolescent love, your first marriage . . . And other things . . . Do you want to read some of it?

The actors return to a position identical to the one on the painting in the background. In the meantime, at the other end of the stage, another actress, who must represent the Model when she was between sixteen and twenty-one years old, is sitting on the edge of the stage with her legs dangling. Sitting next to her is an actor, also young and very handsome. Behind them is another white screen.

JOSÉ: You must help me.

NICOLE: Yes, in everything. I will always be with you.

JOSÉ: Always . . . what an awful word. Because of it everything's lost in the distance, as if we were sliding, moving away from ourselves, unable to know where we're headed.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice stands up, goes towards the wings, where they give him a book, and with it in hand he advances towards the front of the stage. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice reads from the book facing the audience, while the Model looks towards the young couple on the edge of the stage who have remained still and deep in thought.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: (*Reading.*) “Then he would remain silent and Nicole would feel that the present was becoming undone in a thousand pieces and that it didn’t exist at the moment they were sitting with their hands intertwined,

The actors sitting on the edge of the stage hold hands at that moment.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: (*Who has continued reading without interruption.*) in front of the closed door of a strange house whose interior was unknown to them, before the bottomless immensity of the night, inside of which each thing closed in on itself: a tree, the outline of a roof, the stars scattered in the sky without any other relation to each other, indifferent to one another, just as all things on earth; and nevertheless, from that neglect a form of tenderness emerged, fragile and gentle like a solitary blade of grass stirred by the wind.”

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice goes towards the wings to return the book. Somebody takes it and he sits back down in his place at the table. He and the Model look at the two young actors.

JOSÉ: Love is not for life.

NICOLE: Tell me what love is.

JOSÉ: Perhaps what we are from the outside, something that wanders without an owner.

NICOLE: But I have found you.

JOSÉ: You don't understand. Love was already there.

The two young actors stand up and leave.

MODEL: He wasn't anything like that. You've made him much better.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: *(Aside, to the public like in the old comedies.)*

Perhaps he wasn't like that; but he was right in many of the things he says: "love is not for life". Nevertheless, I'm almost sure I often made her appear in that novel the way she wanted to see herself and, I dare to say, the way she really was, before we all become the strange beings, caricatures of themselves, that appear in that painting. *(He turns his head towards Balthus's painting.)* I don't doubt that I wrote lurid scenes. That's why literature exists. But it's also true that, in the stories she used to tell me of her youth, at least the possibility of those scenes existed. Anyway, we already know that everything is true because it can also be a lie. But the beauty of some moments . . . I made it possible for Nicole and José, at seventeen years of age, to make love every Sunday morning in her house, while her family was at the country club. Later I used their conversations in other stories.

At the opposite end of the stage a screen appears on which a reproduction of Balthus's painting The Window that Faces the Cour de Rohan is projected. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice stands up and goes towards the wings and again comes back with the book. He reads just like before.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: “Then Nicole would put on a dressing gown on her naked body and her bare feet would recognize the changes of the floor, from carpet, to wood, to ceramic tile. She would make coffee. José would slip into his trousers and drink it in the living room sitting on the carpet.”

Just as the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice has read it in the book,

Nicole and José enter with a cup of coffee and a saucer in their hands.

They sit on the floor in front of the projection of Balthus’s painting.

NICOLE: They’re expecting us. We must go.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: *(He reads.)* “But José would manage to convince her to take off her night gown and to sit naked in an armchair while he watched her from his place on the carpet.”

José and Nicole carry out those actions. To make this happen a

stagehand enters with the indispensable armchair and then exits.

JOSÉ: Someday I’m going to draw you all the time.

NICOLE: But you don’t know how to draw...!

JOSÉ: That doesn’t matter. What matters is to see the space around you.

The figures of Nicole and José remain still for a moment and then, while the Actor

Who Embodies the First Voice speaks, they leave. José carries off stage the

armchair in which Nicole had been sitting. The reproduction of Balthus's painting, which had been projected on that side of the stage, shuts off.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: (*To the Model.*) The space around you . . .

MODEL: I don't know what you're doing. You strip me of myself and then you give myself back to me. Why, if that's not who I am, am I more myself in her? It's true that I told you my story. It's also true that my first husband liked to draw me; but the events are not exactly the same, and he didn't look anything, absolutely does not look anything, like the character you call José.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You're the Model, but there's also a portrait. The play is fiction. That's what it's about.

MODEL: But why is that necessary?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I contemplate you the way I didn't know you; I live with you what I didn't get to live. I could tell you that I'm José's Model, but that wouldn't be true either. I have created myself so that José can behave as I might've behaved at the moment when you were Nicole. You're the one who creates the necessity to contemplate you.

MODEL: What do you plan to say in the novel?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Everything. What is true and what is the equivalent of the truth. You will marry José and you two will be happy and in fact, he will draw you so that I can look at you while he's drawing you.

MODEL: All this is abnormal. But I like it.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Nothing is normal from the moment we can be someone else.

MODEL: Those are your theories or the theories you've read who knows where and made yours. Perhaps you can explain everything to yourself. All I care to know is that you like me and that you need me in that way.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: My need is much more elaborate than you can imagine. Often I move from a portrait to you as Model in order to turn you into something, if not identical, at least very similar to that original portrait and to have you as its new Model. Do you want to see what I used in order to imagine José, who is your first false husband, drawing you as a false Nicole?

MODEL: She's not false. I am Nicole. I want to see it.

The part of the stage where they're standing becomes dark. A screen appears backstage on which a pencil drawing by Balthus is projected. The drawing is of an adolescent sitting in an armchair holding a book, her hands parallel to her waist. Her right knee is bent up to her chin and her foot rests at the edge of the seat, which makes her skirt slide down and reveal her thighs. The other leg stretches forward, with the heel slightly raised so that her foot can reach the floor. José enters with a drawing block and several pencils followed by Nicole, who is carrying an armchair identical to the one in which Balthus's model is sitting. Nicole puts the armchair down. José continuously consults the projection

on the screen so that Nicole can assume the position of Balthus's Model, but to achieve this he handles her like a doll and, at the same time, the director, whom I trust, must make sure that each one of his movements and those that he imposes on Nicole are erotically charged. For example, if he lowers her skirt, it should be an entire ceremony that uncovers Nicole's legs and allows him to touch them. Then José sits down in front of her on the floor and begins to draw her.

BLACKOUT

FIRST VOICE: See?

MODEL: My husband never looked at me that way.

FIRST VOICE: But now I am looking at you on his behalf. And by doing so I'm allowing everyone to watch.

MODEL: Yes. Do it. I like it. And let me see myself first.

VOICE FIRST: As often as you want.

Another one of Balthus's drawings is projected on the screen. The same girl, sitting on the same armchair appears facing the audience, with the legs in the same position, so that the skirt slides down revealing her thighs entirely; but now the Model is not reading, but rather she raises her arms over her head and rests her hands on the top part of the back of the armchair. Nicole, however, is in the same position as in the previous drawing and José continues drawing sitting on the floor in front of her. He considers his drawing finished, sets his block aside,

stands up and goes towards Nicole. He makes her get up by extending his hand to her. He places the armchair so that it is in front of the audience in the same position as the drawing projected on the screen. Then he sits Nicole in it and with the same eroticism that becomes evident in the way he handles her, he makes her assume the same pose as Balthus's model. He sits in front of her and draws.

MODEL: (*Outside the scene.*) It upsets me. What's wrong with that, what about it is forbidden?

FIRST VOICE: (*Excited, a little anxious as if they had interrupted him in the moment of the creation.*) Wait. There may still be more.

Brief moment of darkness and another one of Balthus's drawings appears on the screen in which the same girl is sitting in the same armchair with her legs in the same position, but now she is naked with the exception of knee-highs. Her left arm is not visible, the right one is hanging towards the floor with her fingers extended, her head is slightly inclined and her eyes are closed. Just as in the previous scene, Nicole—however—it still in the same pose. José stops drawing. He stands up; he makes Nicole stand up and with the same erotic charge of all his movements he disrobes her completely and sits her in the armchair in the same position as that of Balthus's model.

MODEL: But Nicole isn't wearing knee-highs.

FIRST VOICE: When art imitates art the imitation is never exact, the same thing happens when art imitates life and also very probably when life imitates art. But don't forget, it doesn't matter that you are no longer Nicole and that I only used your past to exhibit you as Nicole. It's always the same game, our sign, our gesture, the one that belongs to us and defines us: you get dressed and you undress and you get dressed again, and you undress and I recreate that scene or anticipate it.

BLACKOUT

When the light comes on the Actor Who embodies the First Voice and the Model are sitting again at the table where they were before. A spot light illuminates the figure of a young man on the other end of the stage. The Model turns around to look at him.

MODEL: Who is he?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: He's Jean.

MODEL: And who is Jean?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You told me that your first husband introduced you to a French friend of his, who then, after you had already separated from your husband, became your lover, but who had been in love with you from the beginning and always tried to convince you to leave your husband. In my novel, Jean is that friend. But the action is not exactly the same. It's my duty to make reality more precise. From my point of view, the problem begins when José wants to draw you, to see the space around you, which is nothing more than to see around you the world that surrounds you. He draws

you. And as you have already read, there are other anecdotes, the events that in my novel form your life. But the need to draw you . . . For that reason, in my novel, in spite of all the betrayals, you continue being faithful to José. You are the image. You cannot stop being the image which he has turned you into as he drew you and made the image of his love appear; in the same way that I create your image in my novel using you as Nicole and your first husband as José even though I'm partly his Model and not your first husband. The image of the girl I never knew and that I make mine.

MODEL: So then why must Jean appear?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You can only be mine entirely whenever I realize that incessant recovery of yourself. You leave to return.

MODEL: I don't understand you. I don't want to understand you.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Perhaps it's better this way.

MODEL: But I'm not sure that I always want to be your Model either. What you've got isn't enough?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Because I know what I have and I love you as you are, you must always be my Model. I need that, but also allow me to offer it to you. Borges says it in one of his English poems: "What can I hold you with? . . . / I offer you whatever insight my books may hold, whatever manliness or humour my life. / I offer you the loyalty of a man who has never been loyal. / I offer you explanations of yourself, theories about yourself, authentic and surprising news of yourself." The Spanish translation is by José Emilio Pacheco; we must give him credit.

MODEL: You're such an idiot!

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Do you want to see the explanation about yourself that I offer you through Jean? He tries to seduce you in every possible way and in my novel he succeeds, although you don't stop belonging to José, because I don't want you to stop being José's, since it's my way of suggesting that you will never stop being mine.

MODEL: But that's not reality.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Supposing that reality is real in some way, supposing that reality exists, within the reality in which we exist now it's enough for us to want something to happen in order for it to be possible to represent it. Do you want to see how Jean seduces you when you are Nicole?

MODEL: Perhaps what I want to see is how you see me as Nicole in that scene.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: There are deceptive arguments by Jean at the beginning. But that's not important. What I'm interested in finding out, what truly matters, is why you, in my novel, if you're in love with José, allow Jean to come near you, precisely because it doesn't mean anything. Is it a condition of yours, is it a condition of the feminine, to exchange or at least to risk more for less in order to affirm a certain availability that, in the last instance would then be the essence of the feminine?

MODEL: I often have thought, in fact, that I was exchanging more for less and didn't know I was doing it. Just following a certain form of curiosity.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: And because there's something

fascinating in each new encounter. José got you used to another gaze when he looked at you to draw you. Jean saw you for the first time apart from José when he went to pick you up at the bookstore where you worked, both in my novel and in real life. There's a secret pleasure in including real-life details in works of fiction. But see yourself after talking to Jean when you had already gotten used to seeing him alone and your pleasure at that time consisted of defending your love for José.

Nicole leaves and she approaches the figure of Jean illuminated by a spot light.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice goes towards the wings and takes the book that somebody hands to him.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: (*To the Model.*) Listen, this is how I explain what Nicole feels in the book. (*He reads the book that is in his hand.*) "What did she mean to Jean? She didn't know who she was. Suddenly she merely seemed to be following the path her beauty took her, but she remained apart, and nevertheless, she was nothing more than the one who was sitting, and the melancholy of knowing that she was betraying herself gave her a strange sense of power, it brought the promise of a confirmation from which her love seemed untouchable, blurred and abandoned, like an object that is lost and has to be found again. Then she wanted to be with Jean and he would get near her, softly, with all of his admiration showing in his curiosity, as if only now, thanks to his attention, she began to exist. But sitting in front of her, in the almost empty cafe, strange until then, where they were nobody to anyone, he was also untouchable to Nicole, although the entire weight of one was in the body of the other."

The Actor closes the book, he hands it to somebody behind the curtains and returns to the table where the Model is sitting.

MODEL: It's very beautiful. It moves me. Is this how you imagine yourself seeing me when I was like Nicole?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Like this and as José sees you and as all those in the novel see you. I wrote it to see you from all those angles. But hear yourself and listen to Jean when he begins to act over you.

The action is transferred to the zone where Nicole and Jean are sitting. The Model and the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice stand still.

JEAN: How long have you known José?

NICOLE: Forever. I can't remember not having known him.

JEAN: It could've been someone else: anyone. It was pure chance. Then one becomes nothing more than that chance and everything happens within it. Perhaps that is life.

NICOLE: (*Furious.*) You don't understand.

JEAN: Are you afraid that's how it is?

NICOLE: Afraid why?

JEAN: Nobody wants to stop being who they are. A feeling of emptiness opens. I know that.

The light goes off in that zone and it comes on in the zone occupied by the Model and the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: That emptiness. You lived in it when I met you.

Later you will hear yourself speaking like a new character whose name is Paloma. But in the meantime look at yourself betraying José as you become Nicole and being eternally faithful to José for that reason: Do you remember? He once told you: “Love was already there.”

In the meantime some stagehands have used screens to create an interior space with two rooms. The first one is a living room, the second one a bedroom. Their colors and the shape of the furniture also recall the interior spaces created by Roger von Gunten. The screens that at times function as walls may even be decorated by scenery produced by him. There is even a window drawn on one of the screens which depicts the profile of a mountain. Nicole enters the living room followed by Jean and she sits on a sofa.

NICOLE: Now I’m in your apartment.

JEAN: And also someday you’ll be with me. Not now, but someday.

NICOLE: No.

JEAN: Why not? There’s nothing to prevent it.

NICOLE: I love José.

JEAN: That’s not true.

The light changes to the zone where the Model and the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice are standing.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Now I would make him add: “All you want is love”. This would get him close to José and in addition it would be true. You and I know it now. In my novel it surprised you to have done it, but you made love to Jean and then to betray him also, just as you had betrayed José, you made love to one of his friends.

MODEL: That did not happen in real life.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: It didn’t happen later with others even if they weren’t Jean’s friends?

The Model remains silent.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Let me see you once again just as I imagined you acting as Nicole. Jean lives with a friend. You know him and he knows you as Jean’s lover, not as José’s wife, whom he doesn’t even know. Often, when you make love with Jean, you know that he is in the adjoining room. One day he goes away on vacation. Then he returns. Look at what happens.

The light goes on in the bedroom. Nicole and Jean are in bed. She gets up and gets dressed. Jean begins to the same, but more slowly. The Friend is in the other room. Nicole goes from one room to the other.

NICOLE: Hi. I thought I’d never see you again.

FRIEND: Why?

NICOLE: You left without saying good-bye.

FRIEND: I was going to be back in a few days.

NICOLE: Yes, but as you can see, you're never around. Work is worse than vacation.

The Friend looks at Nicole quizzically.

NICOLE: I missed you while you were gone. When are you here, alone?

FRIEND: Tomorrow morning, if you want.

Jean comes in from the other room and hugs Nicole. The light is moved toward the table where the Model and the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice are sitting.

MODEL: That scene only makes sense as one of your fantasies. No woman acts like that.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You act like that.

MODEL: When?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: We will have a chance to see it very soon.

You know perfectly well that it's just a matter of starting. Look at how it happens to Nicole.

The light goes on in the other room. The Friend is sitting in the living room of the apartment. A doorbell rings. He gets up and opens. Nicole is standing at front of the door.

FRIEND: You came...

NICOLE: Why wouldn't I?

FRIEND: I don't know. I wasn't expecting it.

NICOLE: *(She smiles.)* May I come in?

FRIEND: But of course.

He moves aside. Nicole enters and stops after taking a couple of steps. The Friend contemplates her from the door. He goes to her, after closing the door, and takes one of her hands.

NICOLE: No.

FRIEND: What's the matter?

NICOLE: *(He lets go of her hand and steps back.)* Open the curtains.

FRIEND: You wanted to come, didn't you?

NICOLE: Yes; but now I don't know.

FRIEND: Don't be foolish. You've wanted this for a long time.

NICOLE: How do you know?

FRIEND: *(He smiles.)* I just know. I can tell.

NICOLE: You're mistaken.

FRIEND: No. You don't know yourself.

He gets close to Nicole. She doesn't move. The Friend puts his arm around her waist.

NICOLE: I don't feel like doing anything. Nothing.

FRIEND: It doesn't matter. Wait. You don't know.

NICOLE: Why don't I know?

FRIEND: (*Without letting go.*) That's who you are. I know you.

The Friend begins to unbutton her blouse, slips his hand under her blouse and caresses her breasts. Nicole puts her arm around his neck.

NICOLE: (*In a whisper.*) No.

FRIEND: Wait.

He takes her towards the other room and they fall on the bed. The light shifts to the table where the Model and the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice are sitting.

MODEL: It's not true. I already told you. It's how you'd like for things to happen; but

It's not true. Nevertheless, I like it and it excites me and perhaps I love you because you can think that that's how things should happen.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE VOICE FIRST: That's also how you think. See yourself and hear yourself writing your diary in my next novel where your name will be Paloma, and you appear shortly before your second divorce, many years after Nicole and José and Jean and everything else; but always as my model.

MODEL: The one you suppose I am.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: The one you have allowed me to discover in you. Can you deny it?

MODEL: I don't want to talk about it. I can allow you to use me as your model and I may even like it. I admit, actually, that often I like it, not only because of the times I recognize myself but also because I like to discover how you see me. But I can always deny everything. I'm not just your character. I also own myself.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Sure. Free will.

MODEL: That doesn't matter to me. I'm an atheist.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: An atheist and my love and somewhat of a whore to my delight which can also be considered shameful. But by chance that's exactly what free will is all about. Let me show you as we meditate about your free will.

BLACKOUT

When the lights come up, the screen on which Balthus's painting was projected and the table and the chairs where the characters had been sitting have disappeared. Now Pierre Klossowski's painting Roberte attacked by the spirits she herself has censured is projected on the screen. Roberte is sitting at a table preparing to write while her left hand is held by one of the "pure spirits." The Model is in front of the projection, sitting at a table on a stool identical to the one in the painting, in the same position, with the right hand holding a pen preparing to write in the notebook that is on the table, the left arm thrown backwards and the hand doubled downwards showing the palm, as if, in effect, a "pure spirit"

was holding it. Her hair is gathered back with a clasp in such a way that her hairdo looks like Roberte's.

MODEL: Where is your free will?

FIRST VOICE: It's yours. Although you don't realize that because it is yours, given how it expresses itself, you can't help but give it to me.

MODEL: But even as your character I am I. Let me write.

FIRST VOICE: Go ahead, write. As you do it, you become another one of my characters.

The arm that appeared to be held by the "pure spirit" is freed and the Model, who is now called Paloma, also places it on the table. Lost in her memories she remains pensive during a brief pause, and then starts writing. She stops frequently to think. To the extent possible, the recording, which in the Model's voice gives us an account of what Paloma is writing, should follow these interruptions and pauses. Paloma writes.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: Paloma, are you going to start again? In the last three days the question has kept resurfacing at the most unexpected moments. It's a reproach. I never seem able to do what I set out to do or, to be more exact, what I think I want to do. This is not how you go about getting the life I had decided to lead a few months ago or perhaps, going back further, the one that I had been dreaming about during the past few years, without the rhythm of the days allowing me to think that it was nothing more than an impossible dream and that's the only reason I could imagine it during times of leisure and boredom, when I also didn't see it as a simple reaction

against the unpleasant and often violent turn that events took on many occasions. Then it could be interpreted as further proof that a woman can never do what she really wishes and it is possible that that realization was the one that fed them. But I haven't even been living alone three days in my house without . . . (*Pause. Paloma stops writing, remains pensive, shakes her head from side to side. She touches her lips with her left hand, not as a mechanical gesture but as a caress, and returns to her writing.*) Only two weeks have gone by since Armando hasn't been a constant presence, although the result of our last encounter seems definitive and Ricardo, with the apparent security he showed, has been in the background continuously for almost the entire year. What has happened then? How must I interpret it? It's true that remembering what happened makes me flow imperceptibly from the will of reproaching myself that stupid and irresponsible act to the pleasure that the memory awakens in me. Right now, as I write, I recognize my excitement as I relive my sensations and the reproaches seem totally false or merely banal. Why did I do it? Perhaps the best answer would be to say that because I can't avoid letting myself go on certain occasions, obeying someone within me who is me because she tries to suppose that she wants to be the opposite. Armando would be right then, but what I'm not willing to accept nor do I wish to accept are his reasons, precisely because they deny me the right to be me, including through that which is inevitable, and supposing that at some moment I had wanted to be or looked into being somebody else. The reality of the past cannot persist in such a way. But then, what about the present? Doesn't what just happened prove that, in fact, the past persists and will always remain because that is who I am? Moreover, there's Ricardo. Often he's told me that I always trade down; but now I can't even decide what it is that I've traded and

I'm almost sure that that is Ricardo's fault. Instead of looking for an answer where there's none, wouldn't it be better to follow what my body is telling me behind all these words and to remember frankly how I went to bed with Gilberto?

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice enters, he stands behind her chair, and bends until his head is next to hers.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: See? I am Gilberto. The only thing

I've made you write, as if you were Paloma, is the condensed version of your second marriage, a first insinuation of why your second husband was jealous about what had happened between your first and second marriage. It is a confession that should confirm your husband's jealousy about your occasional lover whom you kept in reserve, and whom I've named Ricardo, and of the first memory of what happened with me. I owe you the description of your sensations because you told them to me. But now I give them back to you by making you embody Paloma.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice leaves the scene as soon as he stops talking. Paloma turns her head violently searching for the person whose voice she has just heard. There's nobody. She stares pensively into space and starts writing again at the same time that her recorded voice is heard.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: Of course three days ago, at night, after I got home from work, bathed and laid down to read in my room still naked except for my robe, unable to decide whether I wanted to have supper or not, I thought I was sure I wasn't going out in spite of Ricardo's invitation and knowing that he was going to be at that party which

didn't promise anything interesting, not even his company, which up to this point and after the last few months with Armando, exasperating but also, without doubt, intense months, was not a solution for me. I thought that what I wanted was to be alone, in control of myself and my time, in my house, which is also already only my house. It's obvious at least that it's true that I never know what I want. While I was reading I also thought that to repeat again what I had done the last few nights is not what one should expect from a thirty year old woman either. This house was now only mine, I was lying on the bed that for seven years I had shared with Armando, but the sensation I felt then was one of emptiness and senselessness completely opposite to that which I feel now in spite of my supposed regret. I stood up, went to the closet, took out a skirt and a sweater, as Armando would've liked and which I never wore for him. I put on a garter belt and stockings, a black slip, finished getting dressed, went to put on my make-up in front of the bathroom mirror, and took the car out of the garage. I told the maid, who came out to open the garage door for me, not to wait up. As I drove away from home I had the same feeling of freedom I had so often felt during the last few years, although now I wasn't on my way to work but rather to a place where I didn't know what I was looking for but towards which I was led probably by the pure pleasure of feeling completely responsible for my own actions. Was that what provoked everything? That wasn't what used to happen to me in the past, before I got married. And if I think about it now I realize I got married, not because I was in love, but precisely because I didn't want to be free, therefore, everything that happened, even though it may be no more than an insignificant incident, should have a different meaning.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice approaches her again, the same way he did before, and bends until his head is almost next to hers.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Of course it does. I'm the one who's going to make sure you make it visible. But you will write it, in the same way as the Model, who enables me to create you as a portrait, allowed me with her actions to make you write this.

Same game. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice exits. Paloma turns around violently. There's nobody there. Paloma shrugs her shoulders and resumes her writing.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: The house threw me out. It's not about beginning again, although the truth is all one does is to begin again in one way or another, in order to return to an immediate past or one further back. The first case is the one that made and, in spite of what happened, still makes my relation with Ricardo feel so uncertain. In the second case, the problem is that I'm no longer twenty-three years old. Although everything can happen again, what could it imply? Perhaps that's what I ask myself. But in the meantime the memory, just the possibility of repeating for myself what happened... *(She stops writing; she puts her hands on both sides of her face and thinks for a moment. She starts writing again.)* I must confess that during these last three days I have abandoned myself to the sensation of having been possessed by Gilberto. What I really want is to remember that night, to feel that I am reliving it.

FIRST VOICE: Precisely. That's it. That's what writing is all about. What a great idea for you to think it and what a great idea for me to make you write it.

Paloma has interrupted herself only long enough for the First Voice to be heard.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: *(In the meantime she continues writing, of*

course.) I hadn't realized it was so late. The streets were empty and there was almost no traffic. I was tempted to go back. I had been with Armando too many times in Luis Enrique's apartment. It's always the same party, with the same people. But alone in the car I had a sensation of freedom. Perhaps it'd be better to say of availability. I was able to decide on my own what I wanted to do, and even if it wasn't anything specific, it was still something I hadn't felt in a long time. I must have driven aimlessly, away from Luis Enrique's apartment instead of towards it. Solitary and quiet, some of the avenues of the city can be beautiful at that hour. I felt somewhat absent from myself and outside all reality, but one also needs a purpose. We know that a future exists and I didn't want it always as uncertain as it felt at that moment, which was going to end anyway. Finally, I was in front of Luis Enrique's building. I parked the car, I entered and went up the stairs very slowly instead of taking the elevator. I hadn't even put on a coat and perhaps my skirt and sweater weren't really appropriate for a party. However, my physical presence, the body that I knew Ricardo liked, and the fact that I wasn't committed to anybody gave me confidence. Nevertheless, it wasn't a party or at least it no longer was when I arrived. The only people in the house, in addition to Luis Enrique of course, were Ricardo, an old lover of his named Débora, with whom he had broken up because of me, and Gilberto. I had hoped to please Ricardo. I had told him I wasn't going to go to the party and now I found him with someone else. In any case, it's true that it bothered me that Débora was there. But it's also true that now I justify myself with that excuse.

Anyway, I can say that Ricardo had never shown me any commitment. I smile when I think that Armando—who was so jealous and would become furious about a past I had wanted to forget since the day I married him—only reproached me a few times Ricardo’s constant besieging, which I had allowed and favored for over a year simply because it flattered me amidst the continuous tension in my life. I had slept with Ricardo three times during one of Armando’s trips when I can sincerely say I actually felt no temptation to be unfaithful. I’m the one who betrays herself; it is my body that betrays me; it’s nothing more than the pleasure of knowing somebody likes me. Then I always tell myself what I had tried to avoid by getting married: “why not”? I see my hands, I feel myself sitting in front of that writing-desk and I pick up the pen again. I don’t want to be ruled by my emotions; I simply want to recall what happened. I go back to writing in order to explain what had made me stop writing.

There has been, of course, a pause in the recording beforehand so that Paloma can perform the actions she describes from the moment she says “I see my hands...” Then she interrupts the action of writing so that we can hear:

FIRST VOICE: That’s what I told you. I know her very well.

SECOND VOICE: I don’t doubt you know her very well and that you’re right. I believe her when she says what she says although you’re the one who’s making her say it.

VOICE FIRST: Repeating her, always her.

Paloma continues writing.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: Ricardo was either surprised or upset when he saw me

come in. Many times before he had reproached me that I never made up my mind about anything or else always did the opposite of what I had said I was going to do. But a woman, any woman, is never more than that and she always wants to be accepted the way she is. At least it's true of me, and I'm happy with myself despite the fears that make me look for a certain security. I don't regret anything, and if I'm going to reproach anything to anybody that would be Gilberto who hasn't even bothered to call me during these last three days, and he, however, has been on my mind the whole time. I wonder what he thinks of me. I have no doubt what he thought about being with me. For a long time I've known that he likes me. Knowing that is very simple and he has shown me this wherever we've coincided. I remember a party where we danced although I was with Armando. Three days before he and Luis Enrique had been happy to see me show up. Neither one thought to ask me how I had found out there was a party. I simply showed up. The party had been a flop, and someone would show up when everybody else had left. The four of them were a little drunk. I also started drinking while Ricardo tried to divide himself between Débora and me. Before long, Gilberto asked me to dance. Shortly after we started dancing, he was kissing me. Gilberto has an audacity to which I can't help but respond in the same way. As we danced, after kissing me, he started caressing my breast and soon, under my slip, he found my nipple and took it between his fingers. He had done the same thing the last time we danced together. Now instead of making sure that Armando didn't see me, he tried keeping his back to Ricardo. What I was doing was perhaps crazy, but I couldn't help it. "You're a bitch," Ricardo said to me when I danced with him as well. "It's your fault," was all I could say. Then I also danced

with Luis Enrique and again with Gilberto, always in his arms between one song and the next. Finally when I separated from Gilberto and sat next to Luis Enrique, I noticed that Ricardo had left with Débora. It's true, then, that it had been his fault. Armando, why did you become so exasperated with my past when it should've been enough to know that I was really prepared to be with you? Ricardo, after such a long and tenacious perseverance why not use what you already had to make me stay by your side? I just got proof that I'm not that great at opposing someone else's will. And above all else, my current pleasure increases as I accept that. I don't know if I'm going to start again as I had wondered when I decided to start writing these lines in order to drive away the solitude and the contradictory and combined regrets; but what I had already done . . . is in my entire body and it exceeds me completely. I remember the living room in Luis Enrique's house. He's gay. By leaving, after what he had seen already, Ricardo in fact left me alone with Gilberto and at that moment I wanted nothing more than that. Luis Enrique also knew it and he was happy. He adores Gilberto and he likes me. Given what he had just seen, although I'm sure he knows nothing of my secret affair with Ricardo and knows only that I had recently separated from Armando, he wouldn't want anything else to happen than what happened. That is the only time when we, homosexuals and women, are accomplices. With his mere presence, Luis Enrique pushed me towards what I didn't need anybody to push me towards. Meanwhile there were three of us, and I was in the middle, although I was only with Gilberto. He and I were giving Luis Enrique the spectacle of our closeness. And to know myself watched under those circumstances exceeded my desire to exceed myself, to go further.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice enters and stands behind her. He leans until he is almost touching her face.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: It's a confession that unites us. You and I are the same.

Paloma continues writing as if she had not heard anything.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: I danced with both of them. Very differently with each; but I said to both that if I weren't wearing a slip, I would take off my skirt. "That's very easy. I'll show you how. Come," answered Gilberto. He took me by the hand and led me to Luis Enrique's bedroom. Back then my only will was a desire to yield to everything. I didn't think about anything, nothing else existed but the moment, and feeling empty inside the moment filled me completely. Gilberto took off my skirt. I sat on Luis Enrique's bed. Gilberto didn't try to kiss me, he didn't try to do anything but what we had announced we were going to do when I was there, in his hands and waiting. He pulled up my slip exposing my garter belt; he unfastened my stockings and removed them very slowly, caressing my legs. Then I asked him with difficulty, but knowing that that was what I had to do to delay everything even more, to leave the room so that I could take off my slip. He obeyed. He and Luis Enrique were in the living room when I came out again dressed only in my panties and sweater. The pleasure of exhibiting myself, of behaving like I was doing.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: The pleasure of having you write this knowing it really expresses what you felt.

Although Paloma has raised her pen and stopped writing as if she were mentally evoking the scene, she does not appear to have heard the comment. A little later, she continues writing.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: I danced again with Gilberto and every

now and then with Luis Enrique. I don't remember very well when we left. I think Gilberto said, "Let's go now" and I obeyed. Again I put on my skirt and shoes and picked up my garter belt, my stockings, and my slip. I think at that moment I desired myself more than I desired him. You must admit, Paloma, that you're nothing but the epitome of amazement even to yourself and that you only followed the person you found in yourself, the one that Ricardo could not awaken and that Armando stupidly always tried to erase.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice kisses Paloma on the neck carefully and for a long time. She raises her shoulder and lowers her head in order to prolong the kiss, but also it could've been a meaningless gesture because obviously she does not seem aware of the presence of the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice, instead she continues writing, like a diligent and focused student.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: Gilberto got in my car without comment. It was obvious that we were going to go to his house, which is not far from Luis Enrique's. I already knew where he lived, but I had never been inside. I now smile again as I accept that many times I had imagined, even though I hadn't admitted it, that the moment I walked in what happened three days ago would happen. His home is in an old and pretty

building, with English windows. In the car, Gilberto tried to take off my sweater. “You’re going to see me naked in a minute. What’s the hurry?” I said to him and he didn’t even touch me the rest of the way.

*The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice remains standing, without moving,
behind Paloma’s chair.*

PALOMA’S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: I didn’t notice what his house looked like when I first entered; nevertheless, now I remember it perfectly, although I can’t say at what moment I really saw it. His bedroom is quite large and it faces the street. It has a narrow single bed. To get to it, one has to go through a small room with a few paintings and two short bookcases. Now I am also postponing for myself the moment of narrating what happened later. Gilberto lay down on his bed without undressing, however he asked me to undress. I did it and stood next to an armchair. He only watched me. That gaze. I feel it now, next to what I felt later and what I haven’t stopped feeling during these last three days. To give oneself to someone, not for oneself, but just to give oneself. Truthfully I had begun to do it in Luis Enrique’s house. Poor Ricardo! But what do I care now? I don’t know when Gilberto took me to bed, but he too was already naked. To think that a few hours earlier I was here reading, in my house, without any intention of going out. Then I was someone else and at the same time only the one I’ve always been. My pleasure was immense but above everything else, it consisted mainly of the pleasure I was giving Gilberto. I faked three orgasms without having a single one. That didn’t matter. What mattered was the conversion of my entire body, of all my senses, of all my feelings, into the pleasure that I felt and which the single act of giving it made me feel.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice turns around and leaves the scene very slowly. Paloma turns to look in the same direction afterwards, as if she had noticed him leaving. But, of course there's nobody there. Paloma continues writing.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: I don't think Gilberto noticed my

deception. He was only using me. Every woman has to know that she can't expect anything else. Absolute abandonment happens before an orgasm, therefore a fake orgasm can be real. I confirm it now as once again I feel through memory what I felt then.

Long pause. Paloma stops writing. She wraps her hand around her neck. She touches her lips with the tip of her forefinger. She remains still. She returns to her writing.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: Then Gilberto told me that his car was in front of Luis

Enrique's house and asked me to take him there so that he could then follow me home. It was almost dawn. Through the rear view mirror I could see him from time to time following me. We hadn't said much of anything or at least anything worth remembering. I did not put the car in the garage. When we got to my house, he parked behind me; he got out of his car and gave a kiss me on the cheek.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice enters. He stands behind Paloma's chair. He places his hands on her shoulders and little by little he lowers them until he starts caressing her breasts under her blouse. Paloma continues writing.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: That happened three days ago. I've been

going to work and I haven't seen anybody except the people at work. What can I expect? To do the same with others, to see Gilberto again? I can't go looking for him and I'm not going to do it. Perhaps I'm hoping that he'll come; but I'm not sure.

In the meantime, the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice continues caressing her breasts, he kisses her neck, her face, her hair, without Paloma seeming to notice his presence nor ceasing to write.

PALOMA'S VOICE ON THE RECORDER: In any case, if I expect it, that feeling is too vague in comparison with the intensity and the preciseness of my memories. Chance did everything and all we can do is leave it up to chance. Would it mean then, will it mean then to begin again, *Paloma*? It's likely that I sat down to write in order to erase the pleasure I have felt these last few days by remembering, and to see myself as I now know I want to see myself. But that doesn't mean anything. The past is not the present. There is no present. All I know is that when I leave this desk my entire body is alive, wide-awake and awaiting in memory that past that remains as present and constructs me and defines through my sensations.

Under the effect of the caresses of the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice, Paloma lowers her arms on both sides of her body, lets go of the pen with which she was writing, throws her head back and rests it against the body of the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice who has remained standing behind her. While Paloma writes in her diary and the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice intervenes

from time to time, her voice is heard emanating from the recorder. In the open space left on the stage there is a screen on which—from the moment Paloma's voice says "of course three days ago . . ." etc., —a film, in which the image often freezes so that it looks like a still shot, begins to be projected. Thus, on that screen, we see by means of a series of frozen images, first, how Paloma enters her house, goes to the bathroom, different moments in which she undresses, gets in the bathtub, comes out, dries off, puts on her robe, and lies down in bed to read. Each one of these images must be like a painting. Then, in the continuity of the film, we see Paloma no longer reading, standing up, getting dressed, getting in her car, leaving the house. Then the film should show images of the solitary streets of the city. These images must be beautiful and from time to time should be interrupted by frozen shots of Paloma's dreamy and distracted face. The film continues so that we can see the car arriving in front of Luis Enrique's house and parking; but the image is frozen again so that we can see the extreme beauty and elegance with which Paloma gets out of the car showing off her thighs. The film continues to show us Paloma entering the building and going up the stairs. Then it shows Luis Enrique's apartment the moment Paloma enters along with the different reactions of everyone at the party. But the projection is interrupted when she says "I smile when I think that Armando . . ." etc. Then still shots of Paloma and Armando's wedding appear on the screen. Then we see her writing with the projector off until she says "Ricardo was either surprised or upset when he saw me come in . . ." and the projection begins again, alternating the description in movement of what Paloma says with frozen photos of key

moments. We thus see them dancing, the moment when Gilberto takes off Paloma's stockings, Paloma with her back to us when she takes off her slip and again puts on her sweater. We see her exit again into the living room and the entire sequence from the moment she and Gilberto leave Luis Enrique's house. Gilberto's apartment should be photographed in such a way that it is seen clearly. The photos are again frozen with certain frequency to show her face while they are making love and the last thing that must be shown in the projection is the absolute ecstasy in her face when her voice says: "a fake orgasm can be real". That image can remain or be turned off, it is left up to the director's discretion, while Paloma continues writing and her voice is heard. On stage, as the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice caresses her, Paloma stops writing, lowers her arms and lets go of the pen as the scene goes to a

BLACKOUT

Note: If the director wishes, although the author is against it, there can be an intermission at this moment.

FIRST VOICE: Maybe I hadn't thought of doing it, I'm not sure what my intentions were after finally having gone to bed with her; but the truth is that I came back. And then I started to realize to what extent our pleasure was intensified by the discovery that she liked to exhibit herself and that I found in the gaze of others my own admiration and perhaps even my love. I wrote a short story which expressed our mutual excitement before an unknown possibility through the invention of a symbolic gaze. But I like the story so much that I had to return to it. It represented not only my relationship to her but also,

without realizing it at the moment I was writing it, my relationship to art. Why is it necessary to give an independent form to lived events in order to be able to contemplate them? I wrote a novel with the same theme and even now I would like to represent the scene in which I recognized my pleasure and hers. I faced mine with the possibility of always being able to count on a third gaze and hers aware of the fact that I could see her through that gaze. Writing, after all, is like making love: you finish only to start waiting for the moment in which you want to begin again. In that novel her name is Alma and mine is Andrés. Could you help me represent that scene differently, to repeat it once again?

SECOND VOICE: How?

FIRST VOICE: You know perfectly well how. I want to see you direct it.

SECOND VOICE: A rehearsal that anticipates the rehearsals of what I am going to direct soon?

VOICE FIRST: Exactly.

SECOND VOICE: If that's what you want . . .

The light shines on a scene that is not yet set like a scene. The back wall is either a slide projection or an enormous reproduction of the drawing in color by Roger von Gunten on the subject of The woman and the cat. On the side walls there are other drawings by the same painter with the same theme; but it is obvious that it is a scene under construction. It is important that the profusion and repetition of the drawings suggest the fastidious character of the scene that is going to be represented. Downstage, parallel to the audience, a bed. Next to it

is a nightstand with a lamp and many books on top of it. Further back, diagonally to the bed, is a huge armchair. There are chairs in different places, that do not belong to the stage design of what is going to be represented, but which are there so that the actors can use them. The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice is sitting astride on one of the chairs, which allows him to rest his arms on the back. The Model is standing in front of him, wearing a blue robe. Further away the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice is sitting on another chair with his legs crossed.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*To the Model.*) You already

know then, love. I want you very sexy from the beginning, like in all the other scenes in which you are asleep on the bed. But even sexier if possible. Remember your name is Alma. A Soul must have a truly lustful body in order to become visible. Besides you are predestined already. One assumes that in this scene your degenerate Andrés has already on another occasion brought in the cat and you as well as he have seen it several times on the corridors of the building. Can I trust you? They don't have to write a script for you, do they?

MODEL: No. I know it perfectly well. Don't worry.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: I don't worry, love of my life, my soul, my true soul, not like that bastard's (*he points with his head toward the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice.*) Everything ready? Where's the cat?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: The gaze.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: The cat. What I need is a cat. The gazes will belong to the audience. (*Shouting towards the drop curtains.*) Bring the damn cat! (*To the Model.*) And you love, please, take off that robe and lie down on the bed.

The Model obeys. She covers herself with the blankets after she lies down on the bed.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Fewer covers my love. You're exposed to the sun and to our gazes. Let's see, lower the blanket. More, much more. All the way down to your pussy. And put an arm over your eyes.

The Model follows his instructions.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*Shouting beyond the stage.*) The cat, damn it!

A stagehand enters with a small gray cat in his arms.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*To the stagehand, indicating to the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice.*) Give it to him.

The stagehand obeys. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice stands up with the cat in his arms. He is wearing corduroys and a black sweater.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Pay attention now, please. We've

already rehearsed this scene plenty of times. I want to run through it in its entirety, without interruptions. When I speak, you obey, and don't ask me anything. Just keep going.

With the cat in his arms, the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice enters into what is supposedly already the "stage set". He looks at Alma, asleep on the bed, with admiration and tenderness. Then, making sure his movements do not wake her up, he approaches the bed, leaves the cat next to Alma's naked body and stands there watching both of them fixedly, with a curiosity whose nature he himself cannot discern.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Place the cat in a way that she can hold it carelessly between her body and her arm. It is impossible to trust those damned little animals.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice repeats the action following the instructions. Alma moves in her dreams. She pulls back the hair from her face at the same time that she mumbles something unintelligible, stretches out her arm, and touches the cat. She opens her eyes bewildered and sees the cat.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: That's the way, love. Very sexy. Nothing surprises you.

In the meantime, standing in front of the bed, Andrés laughs. Alma looks at him annoyed, at the same time that she sets the cat aside without letting go of it.

ALMA: I don't like for you to wake me up . . .

ANDRES: It wasn't me, it was your cat. Look at him.

Alma continue to give him a dirty look, with a vertical wrinkle between her eyebrows, now fully awake.

ANDRES: (*Laughing with her, at her.*) Did he scare you?

ALMA: (*She stops looking at the cat for a moment to answer Andrés.*) You fool.

She looks back at the cat and extends her hand to caress it. The small gray figure, timid and scared, does not move.

ALMA: Where did you find it?

ANDRES: On the stairwell. It looked like he was waiting for me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: More casual. Less deliberate. You're pretending innocence and you're not guilty of anything.

Andrés repeats his lines.

ALMA: It's just that he doesn't have a master. Poor thing . . .

She picks up the cat and puts it on her body, near her breasts, where the cat remains still. Andrés sits on the edge of the bed and both stare at the immobile figure of the cat. Alma takes it in her hands and lifts it up to her face, moving her hands slightly from side to side.

ALMA: Poor kitty, poor kitty, poor kitty . . .

Held by Alma's hands which are wrapped around its chest with her thumbs behind its front legs, the cat's body falls downwards. In that position he looks much longer. Without support, its hind legs stretch out in the air and almost touch Alma's breasts while she moves it affectionately in front of her face. Andrés watches with fascination the proximity of the cat's hind legs and Alma's breasts. She also notices that gaze and stops speaking to the cat. There's a very brief silence. The dense pause only lasts a moment. Then, Alma slowly places the cat on her breasts in such a way that its front legs end up directly on one of her nipples. Her gaze remains fixed on the cat, apart from Andrés. He moves his arm forward and caresses first the cat and then Alma's breast, the one on which the cat's front legs are resting, and then the cat again. The rhythm of Alma's breathing changes distinctly, but she breaks the tension with a short laughter and, with a quick jump, she leaves the bed. The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice leaves his chair and walks towards the Model.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: *(Taking the Model by the shoulders and giving her a kiss on the cheek.)* Perfect, it was perfect. Now it seems like the actions that degenerate invented are finally arousing you.

MODEL: *(To the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice.)* You know what? I'm tired of being your figurant. I no longer know what's ours and what isn't. Why the cat, why all this? What we are should be enough.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: This is what we are.

MODEL: But I'm tired.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Can't you discuss this at another time? For once the scene was working.

MODEL: But he's not an actor and neither am I.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: It doesn't matter. For the moment you have agreed to pretend that you are, in the same way that actors pretend that they are the characters they represent. (*He hugs the Model.*) Please, my love.

MODEL: No. I'm serious. I'm tired. I no longer want to be a model nor play the roles he invents through me. Who follows who? Where are we? I'm not going to continue acting. I mean it.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You're not acting. It's you.

MODEL: Then I don't like that image of myself. I quit.

She exits.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Now what are we going to do?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: It's very simple. Stop acting. Return to reality.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: What do you mean?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Just that. Go backwards. You're going to have to be yourself and come to my house as if you didn't know what was going to happen. Let life follow its normal course. Let her act out her true self.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Which scene do you want?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Can you have them create a set that duplicates my dining room and living room?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: It's doable.

He exits. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice stays in his chair. Drop curtains are lowered on the three sides of the stage. They represent in, a naturalistic way, walls with paintings and bookcases. Stagehands enter to remove and replace the furniture from the previous scene. In one corner they place a round table with four chairs and on another three armchairs of different shapes and a low table with a record player on top. Because of the movements of the stagehands the Actor who embodies the First Voice has had to leave his place and once the set is ready he goes and sits at the table, which is covered with a table cloth. Dirty plates indicate that supper has just ended. The Model enters wearing a gray wool dress, with a very short skirt, with buttons from her neck down to her navel and of which the first four are unbuttoned. The dress has long sleeves, but the Model has folded them up to her forearm. She is wearing boots. She sits at the table next to the Actor who embodies the First Voice.

MODEL: He's not going to come.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: If he told you he was coming, he's coming. In the meantime, finish your drink.

The Model is drinking from a cognac glass.

MODEL: I should've told him not to come.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Why?

MODEL: Why should he come?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: He wanted to see you. You were the one who told me that he had called you.

MODEL: But we don't need him for anything. Aren't you satisfied alone with me?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Of course I am. It's not about that. He wanted to see you and you told him to come. Thus, you also wanted to see him. It isn't a very complicated syllogism.

MODEL: Perhaps it isn't too complicated because in some way you make it false.

When you intervene, the facts are never what they seem. It can be that he called me because he wanted to see me and it may even be possible that I wanted to see him as well. But I'm no longer free to do as I wish. Even without realizing it, I told him to come, thinking, somewhere inside of me, that you were going to be pleased if he came.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: It pleases me. He's my friend and I love him very much.

MODEL: It pleases you, but not because he's your friend or because you love him so much.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Then?

MODEL: You know perfectly well why. You know why he called me and that is what
pleases you.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Why did he call you?

MODEL: Because he wanted to see me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: That's obvious.

MODEL: But it's not obvious that it pleases you.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Why?

MODEL: Because if he called me it's because he likes me and there's no reason why it should
please you that your friends like me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I don't see why not. I'm proud of you.

MODEL: What are the limits of that pride?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Pride is a feeling and as such it is very difficult to set
its limits.

MODEL: But in this case the limits of that pride are determined by my person.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: And that doesn't make you proud?

MODEL: No, because everything happens at my expense.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: We could also say that it is at my expense and
in your benefit.

MODEL: This is the type of argument with which you have persuaded me to do too many things.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I could argue, instead, that I had no alternative but to allow them.

MODEL: You just finished admitting that it pleases you that others like me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: And that you like to please.

Pause. They both drink.

MODEL: In any case, he's not coming.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: If he promised you that he'd do it there's no reason why he shouldn't.

MODEL: That doesn't mean anything. It doesn't give me any confidence.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: You should find confidence within yourself.

MODEL: I am confident. But your friends' promises don't mean anything.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: That's true. But I trust the promise that you hold.

MODEL: That you've made me hold.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Because you held it even before you knew it.

MODEL: That's debatable.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: It doesn't matter. It's likely that he won't come.

MODEL: He must come.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: A moment ago you were the one who doubted.

MODEL: Only so that you could reassure me of the opposite.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: So why do you want him to come?

MODEL: To prove that what he said was true and that he likes me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Do you need him to like you?

MODEL: Yes. Because it would please you if he liked me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: He's coming.

MODEL: There's no guarantee. It's already very late.

Pause. They both drink.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: What if he doesn't come?

MODEL: It wouldn't matter, at least as far as I'm concerned. But it would be your fault.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Why?

MODEL: Because at first he wanted to see me alone. I was the one who suggested he come here. I know what you like.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: And what do you like?

MODEL: That has to do with being with you. That's what I like.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Then this conversation makes no sense.

MODEL: It makes sense precisely because I'm with you.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: That's true.

He bends over the table and kisses her on the mouth.

MODEL: I love you.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I love you.

They both drink.

MODEL AND ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE (*at the same time*): Will he come?

The Actor who embodies the Second Voice enters, swaying, a little drunk

MODEL: Hi.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Were you waiting for me?

MODEL: No, not really. I didn't think you'd come this late. I'd forgotten.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: What were you doing then?

MODEL: We just finished having dinner.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Then it's not that late.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: In any case, you're here now.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Then you were waiting for me and she's a liar.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Of course.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*To the Model.*) That's what I love about you.

He gives her a kiss on the cheek.

MODEL: You're the one who said you wanted to see me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: I wanted to come. It wanted to see you.

That's why I'm here. (*To the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice:*) Does it bother you?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: No.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: I already knew. (*Brief pause.*) What are you drinking?

Without waiting for the answer, he takes the drink from the Model, finishes it and pours himself another one.

MODEL: You want me to bring you a glass? We already sent the maid to bed.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: That's what I expected. That's why I got here so late. But I'm fine with your glass. (*He drinks again. He looks at the Model.*) How was your trip?

MODEL: Great. The sun was marvelous. I'm fully rested.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*Ignoring her, to the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice.*) There's an unbearable silence in this house. Can I put on some music?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: As you wish.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*To the Model.*) You do it.

MODEL: Always me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Yes, always you. I don't see how you can complain about that.

MODEL: What do you want to listen to?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Whatever you want me to.

The Model stands up, goes towards the record player and begins to look for a record.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: She's got an amazing tan. I hadn't noticed.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Yes.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: And good looks. But we both already knew that.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: That's also true.

The Model, who hears what they're saying about her lingers looking for the record.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Can you imagine everything she did on her trip?

MODEL: (*Turning towards them.*) Absolutely nothing. I went to rest and to be with my children.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Yeah, right. Tell us how many boatmen.

MODEL: None, stupid.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*To the other.*) How many would you say?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I don't even want to think about it.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Very wise.

Finally she puts on a record and returns to the table. It is music to which you can dance and which the director likes. The Model sits down.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: I mean it: you have an amazing tan.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: And wait till you see the bathing suit she bought.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Is it here?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: In my room.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*To the Model.*) Let me see it on you. It's not fair that only he gets to see you.

MODEL: You're crazy. I would have to take off my dress and boots.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Not the boots. On the contrary, I would like to see you in a bathing suit and with boots.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Yes. Wear it with the boots. Even I haven't seen you like that. My friends have original tastes.

MODEL: You're hopeless. Both of you.

But she stands up and exits. Pause during which the men drink and only music is audible. The Model enters again in her boots and a bikini made out of red and yellow scarves.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Brilliant.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: I agree. (*To the Model.*) Let me see you. Walk in front of the table.

The Model obeys as if the men's behavior was crazy, yet she had no other alternative but to obey. The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice stands up; he goes up to her and separates the cups of her bikini that cover her breasts.

MODEL: Fine. That's enough. That's as far as they go.

The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice returns to his place. Both men contemplate to the Model. She walks in front of the table. Then she stops, she bends down and takes off her boots.

MODEL: I like it better like this.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Me too.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: I'm not sure. But you decide.

MODEL: What I've decided is that I want something to drink.

She goes towards the table, sits down, picks up her glass and takes a drink. From then on the conversation, while the music continues playing, acquires the stupid incoherence of all conversations that are only an excuse.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Why do you let her behave like this?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Do I have a choice?

MODEL: You don't like it?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: That's why I ask. And what do you think of your behavior?

MODEL: It's all your fault.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: The problem is that you didn't want us to continue talking about the boatmen.

MODEL: Is there something wrong with that?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Nothing.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: But we would like to know the details.

MODEL: I don't have your imagination.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: And you don't need it either. What I'm seeing is enough.

In the meantime they all have drunk out of each other's glasses indiscriminately. The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice takes the Model by the wrist and sits her on his lap. She does not resist. The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice separates her bikini cups again. The Model watches him do it.

MODEL: Okay, that's enough.

The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice kisses her on the mouth. The Model closes her eyes while he kisses her. Then she gets up suddenly, stands next to the table and extends her hand towards the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice inviting him to dance. They dance. Rather: they hug and kiss. The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice stands behind the Model, separates the cups of her bikini as he slips his hand under her bathing suit and caresses her belly, her breasts, and her sex. The Model lets the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice do as he pleases while she leans her head against his shoulder, with her eyes closed and her mouth half-open.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*To the other.*) Look at her, look at her.

The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice stands up and kisses the Model on the neck.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Let's go to the bedroom.

The three exit embraced in the way the director chooses.

BLACKOUT

FIRST VOICE: See? That's all it takes to return to reality.

SECOND VOICE: I saw as much as you saw and I stopped seeing, just like you. But that reality isn't going to change her decision.

FIRST VOICE: She is she. We cannot anticipate it. But because it's her, I have confidence. If there's a portrait it's because there was a Model.

SECOND VOICE: Perhaps. But what I need to know is how you're going to end it.

FIRST VOICE: I don't know. But I can imagine the action that will allow me to find out.

When the light goes on a white wall approximately three yards high extends across the first third of the stage. On that wall, from left to right, photographs of the following drawings, in their life size, by Pierre Klossowski are projected or reproduced: Diana and Acteon, Recovery of capital gain, Roberte ce soir, and Roberte with the troglodytes. On the right side of the stage, a reasonable distance from the paintings, the only prop is a high stool similar to the one that appears in the Recovery of capital gain. With his back to the audience, the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice is looking at the photographs. He is wearing jeans, a black sweater with a round collar and no shirt, no socks, and loafers. There is a long pause. Along with the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice the spectators should be admiring the photographs. The Model enters on the left side. She is

dressed in an obvious theatrical manner: she is wrapped completely in a long black cape, but it must be open at the sides because her naked arms are exposed. The Model is wearing black high heels and opera-length gloves. She approaches the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice who, absorbed in the contemplation of the photographs, has not heard her come in, therefore, when the Model speaks to him he is startled.

MODEL: That's the type of art that you can understand, huh?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: *(Still startled.)* Oh, it's you . . .

MODEL: Who else would it be? But in your case, it probably would be necessary to ask to whom you're referring when you ask if it is me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: To you, of course.

MODEL: And who am I to you?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: That's another problem. It's very possible that I can't resolve it. In principle, I'm sure I like not understanding it and that it never fails to surprise me.

MODEL: No, of course. People can't or shouldn't be understood. *(She points to the pictures with her head.)* On the other hand, you do understand that art.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I don't know if I understand it. Of course, I admire it and envy it.

MODEL: Because you have a deformed brain and a pathological mind.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I would add to my warped brain and

my pathological mind an obsessive temperament and a disproportionate view of passions, all things that allow me not only to admire you, but also to love you, venerate you, and adore you from that absolute admiration.

MODEL: Perhaps it's true; but the way in which you show those feelings degrade me and make me feel like you're insulting me . . .

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: (*Interrupting her.*) When actually all

I want is to honor you. Each repetition—each form under which you appear as yourself and as another is a tribute—shows my inability to separate myself from your image in the same way that the righteous who have gone to heaven cannot separate even for a second from the contemplation of God.

MODEL: Well the effect is the opposite. I feel condemned to the perpetual insult of your tributes. I am not only your model. I am a person, self-possessed, with responsibilities, obligations, with a sense of justice and decency. I am a mother. I have a decent profession. I have worked to be able to be free and you have made me a prisoner of your filthy fantasies.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: I have done nothing more than follow you.

MODEL: Even if that was true, I would say and always will say that it is false, that you

invent, that you deceive with your fantasies about what you'd like me to be. That should be enough to keep me as I am or if you prefer, between you and me, even to become visible, and to be seen as I want to appear, as I want to be judged by others.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: It's true. You're right. That should be enough.

The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice enters. He is wearing a dazzling gray suit, so light that it almost seems white. His shoes are the same color. His shirt is black and his tie is wide and pink. He talks to the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice as if the Model were not present or as if he could not see her.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Hi.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Hi.

The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice glances at the photographs quickly, moving from one side of the stage to the other with the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice at his side. When they finish looking at all the photographs, they are again next to the Model, but they continue talking as if she were not there.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: A beautiful exhibit.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: Truly beautiful.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: It inspires the purest artistic feelings in me, a rapture, an exaltation.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: The same thing happens to me.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: (*Dreamily.*) This is how we ought to be able to manipulate women.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE FIRST VOICE: (*No less dreamily.*) Yes, this is how we should be able to do it.

The Model faces the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice, standing between him and the Actor Who Embodies the First Voice with her hands on her waist.

MODEL: You're not going to say hi to me? Are you going to pretend that you haven't seen me?

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: I'm not pretending anything. What happens is that I realized before entering that you were arguing and I don't feel I have the right to meddle.

MODEL: But you do feel you have the right to other things. At least according to what your friend imagines.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: That he imagines or that you allow him to imagine?

The Model puts her hand on the mouth of the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice in exactly the same way that Roberte does with the naked figure in the painting titled Roberte ce soir.

MODEL: (*Offended.*) I'm no longer going to allow anybody to say those things. I have definitely resigned as your friend's Model.

The Model raises her arm to slap him, without removing the other hand from his mouth, and the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice grabs her by the wrist in the same way that the naked figure does in Klossowski's painting. With his other hand, also just like in the painting, he lifts her cape exposing her legs up to her buttocks. Very slowly, the Model removes her hand from the mouth of the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice and lowers her arm.

MODEL: (*Disturbed, in a low voice.*) Don't do that.

ACTOR WHO EMBODIES THE SECOND VOICE: Do you like it?

MODEL: (*Insinuating, seductive.*) Sometimes . . .

The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice opens her cape. The Model is naked. The Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice contemplates her. He moves and goes and stands behind her, he kisses her on the neck and his hands get lost under the cape of the Model who, little by little, bends forwards in a way similar to Diana and Roberte in Klossowski's paintings with Acteon and the troglodytes. Then the Actor Who Embodies the Second Voice, takes the Model by the hand towards a stool (or bench) at the opposite end of the stage. He removes her gloves, her shoes, her cape, he sits on the bench and sits the Model on his lap in such a way that they both assume exactly the same position as that of Klossowski's painting titled Recovery of capital gain. The Actor Who Embodies the First Voice watches them without moving. On the stage everything is fixed, still.

SECOND: Is that the end?

FIRST VOICE: There is no end. It's impossible to anticipate it. I might forget her. But it's also possible that I will always remember her and disguise her and use her gestures, her attitudes, her figure to imagine an action or her actions in order to attempt once again the reappearance of her gestures, her attitudes, her figure and make sure that she's never real but that she exists only in the possibility of repeating herself as someone else.

SLOW CURTAIN DROP

Margarita Vargas (1956) is Associate Professor of Spanish in the department of Romance Languages & Literatures at The State University of New York at Buffalo. She co-translated with Teresa C. Salas *Women Writing Women: An Anthology of Spanish-American Theater of the 1980s* and with Juan Bruce-Novoa the novel *The House on the Beach* by Mexican writer Juan García Ponce. She also co-edited the volume *Latin American Women Dramatists: Theater, Texts, and Theories* with Catherine Larson and has authored various articles on drama and fiction. Currently she is finishing a book on the representation of the feminine in twentieth-century Spanish-American theatre and working on a new project on Divine Law in Mexican film.

Juan García Ponce, Mexican novelist, essayist, art critic, and playwright, was born in Mérida, Yucatán on September 22, 1932 and died in Mexico City on December 27, 2003 has been described as an iconoclast. In all his writings, he pays tribute to writers such as Borges, Pavese, Musil, Lezama Lima, Blanchot, Bataille, Villaurrutia, and Klossowski among others. Both his fiction and his essays have merited numerous awards from as early as 1956 when he received the "Premio Ciudad de México" for his play *El canto de los grillos*. Austria awarded him the Cross of Honour for Science and Art, First Class for his dedication to Austrian letters and Robert Musil in particular. In addition to several other awards in 1981 he received the Anagrama Essay Prize and throughout his career was the recipient of the four major literary prizes granted by his home state of Yucatán.

La aparición de lo invisible (1968), *Entrada en materia* (1968) and *Las huellas de la voz* (1982) are considered three of his most prominent works of criticism. The main themes in his fiction, which include love, death, eroticism, insanity, and identity can be found in his novels *Figura de paja* (1964), *La casa en la playa* (1966), *La presencia lejana* (1968), *La cabaña* (1969), *La invitación* (1972), *El nombre olvidado*

(1970), *El libro* (1978), *Crónica de la intervención* (1982), *Inmaculada o los placeres de la Inocencia* (1989). His literary production comprises more than fifty volumes of fiction, plays, and criticism.

Carlos Semprun-Maura

BRANDY BLUES

(Le Bleu de l'eau-de-vie)

Translated by

Phyllis Zatlin

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BRANDY BLUES

(Le Bleu de l'eau-de-vie)

A bedroom. PETER is lying on the bed. He has on pants and an undershirt, and sandals on his bare feet. On a small table, next to the bed, a bottle of scotch, glasses and cigarettes. There is a knock at the door. A second knock. The knock is repeated several more times. PETER sits up, irritated.

ALAN (*offstage*): Peter? Peter, are you there? It's me...Alan!

PETER: Yes?

ALAN: It's me. Can I come in?

PETER: Yeah. (*ALAN enters.*)

ALAN: Hi!

PETER: Hi.

ALAN: Did I wake you?

PETER: What time is it?

ALAN: Noon.

PETER: Noon? What a bad time.

ALAN: A bad time? Why?

PETER: It's like a... void. Eight o'clock, ten o'clock, two o'clock, five o'clock. Now those are times that make some sense. But noon? It's nothing. It's a void. It's not morning. It's not afternoon. What in the hell can you do at noon.

ALAN (*smiling*): You can have lunch. There are people who eat lunch.

PETER (*skeptical*): Yeah. (*Pause. ALAN sits down. PETER looks at him, smiling.*) What do you want?

ALAN (*startled*): Me? Nothing... I was in the neighborhood, so I dropped in...

PETER: You dropped in?

ALAN: Am I disturbing you?

PETER: No, not at all, not at all. What is it you want?

ALAN (*surprised*): Well, nothing. What's the matter?

PETER: I don't know what's so surprising. Why wouldn't I think that you might drop in to say-- or ask me--something in particular?

ALAN: Could be. But no, I just dropped in, that's all. I was in the neighborhood. So I said to myself, why not go up and see Peter? I... We could have a cup of coffee...chat a bit...

PETER: I don't think I have any coffee here.

ALAN: Can't we go out?

PETER: Not now. At noon all the cafés are packed. I don't like packed cafés. I like cafés when they're empty, with just the regulars, the guys who sit there looking at their fake-leather appointment books and yawning. Now it's the lunch crowd. Secretaries, salesgirls, clerks from the police station. It reeks with 'em. So, to change the subject, how's the job going?

ALAN (*smiling*): It's going okay.

PETER: So what are you grinning about? You playing hooky?

ALAN: It's noon. I'm not working.

PETER: That's true. That's why I don't like this time. All the working people take over the streets, the cafés... There's no way you can get any peace and quiet. Now, don't you want to tell me why you came?

ALAN (*disconcerted*): I came because I wanted to.

PETER (*ironic*): That's really nice.

ALAN (*as if he had not heard*): If I'm bugging you, I'll leave.

PETER: No, man, no. You're not bugging me at all. I'm just curious, that's all. And besides...and besides...I thought maybe you had something to ask me...something *important*. That you might *need* me. To be *useful*, you see. That's all it is really. (*Suddenly.*) Say, you want me to pay back your money?

ALAN (*dryly*): Peter! That's not even funny.

PETER: Hey, what's with you today? It's perfectly normal. You're not rolling in dough, as my sister would say. You've got a job that makes you sick. A little family to support... Well, you *could* have one. I know what it's like, man! It's no fun every day, right? Admit it! Sometimes, in the morning you'd just like to throw in the towel, wouldn't you?

ALAN (*entering into a kind of complicity*): You're telling me!

PETER (*playing the game*): And what can you do to get out?

ALAN (*delighted with the old game*): There's no way...no way. Let me tell you, I've quit jobs a bunch of times.

PETER: Oh, yeah? And after that?

ALAN (*still playing*): After that? I starved, then I borrowed money, and then, when nobody would lend me any more, I found another job.

PETER: So that's it. There's no solution. That's what I always say. There's no coffee either, not here. But there's scotch. You want some?

ALAN: Now? Well, why not?

PETER: That's it...why not? Why, there'll be a time for drinking scotch. (*He gets up, takes the whiskey, and hands a glass to Alan.*) I don't have any ice. Fridge is broken. That okay?

ALAN: Sure. Bottoms up!

(PETER serves himself a full glass of whiskey. Up to the end, he will drink constantly. As soon as his glass is empty, he will refill it. ALAN will nurse the first glass.)

PETER (*pacing up and down*): You know what they've found out? That alcohol causes cancer, too. Even nature likes to moralize. What do you think about that, you left-wing intellectual?

ALAN (*joking*): I think that medical science will make great progress in the cure of cancer.

PETER: Yes, medical science will make great progress. But will it make progress so we can drink more and more--or to keep us from drinking? How are you?

ALAN: Me?

PETER: Yes, you.

ALAN: In what way?

PETER: What do you mean, in what way? In every way. We haven't seen each other in a long time. Since you're here, I'm taking advantage to find out what's new with you. You doing okay?

ALAN: We saw each other last night. Don't you remember?

PETER (*intrigued*): Last night? We haven't seen each other...

ALAN: You don't remember. Of course you were drunk as a skunk.

PETER: Last night?

ALAN: Oh, it must have been about two in the morning.

PETER (*still astonished*): Two in the morning? And I was drunk?

ALAN: Oh, yeah, completely out of it.

PETER: I don't remember.

ALAN: That's not surprising.

PETER: I don't remember. Did we have a long drunken conversation?

ALAN: No.

PETER: That's good. I hate long drunken conversations. Say, do you believe it?

ALAN: What?

PETER: That alcohol causes cancer?

ALAN: I don't know.

PETER: That would really be something, wouldn't it? Alcohol causing cancer, marijuana giving you leprosy. And so on. Science and sin, inseparable. Are you sure I can't do something for you?

ALAN: Oh, stop! *(He lights his pipe.)*

PETER: I would have liked to, anyway. I swear. I'd like to do something for you. For other people, in general. To participate in community activities, work for charity, you know. Life doesn't have any meaning otherwise.

ALAN: Stop the bullshit.

PETER: You still smoking that damned Irish tobacco?

ALAN: Yes. *(Mildly surprised.)* You recognize the aroma?

PETER: You're kidding! You're the only one who'd smoke stuff like that. You used to smoke "Sobranié." Talk about being a snob. Stalin's favorite Georgian tobacco. But you bought the name brand, Dunhill's, no less!

ALAN (*laughing*): You're way off. "Sobranié," that's like "Virginia": it's just a name for a kind of tobacco. It doesn't mean much. (*Sniffing his pipe.*) Personally I think this tobacco smells great.

PETER (*abruptly*): What did we talk about last night?

ALAN (*momentarily disconcerted*): Huh? Oh...we didn't talk. You were punching some guy around. Then they kicked you out of the bar.

PETER (*stunned*): Me? I was punching some dude?

ALAN (*lightly*): Well, sort of... When you took a bottle to smash him in the face, I got kind of scared. You could have killed him. Luckily, you were separated. And they kicked you out the door.

PETER: You must have had a good laugh.

ALAN: I was part of the peace-keeping force. To separate the combatants. When they kicked you out the door, I followed you out to the sidewalk. But you got in a cab and left. You'd almost say the cab was waiting for you. I found that... strange. Don't you have bruises? Those were some pretty rough blows.

PETER: No. (*Pause.*) Are you sure you didn't make that story up?

ALAN (*shocked*): Make it up? Of course not. You really don't remember?

PETER: And this morning, as a loyal friend, you've come to see for yourself. I could need something. Arnica, for instance. Those bastards in the drugstores, why is it they don't sell arnica any more? They do it deliberately, you know. Always out for a buck. Now there's a scandal somebody ought to blow the whistle on. When arnica was so pretty! So, working on a boy scout badge? (*ALAN takes a sip of whiskey without answering.*) Yes, uncalled-for

dirty trick, and not even funny. Because, at heart we like each other. Don't we like each other? After all, I mean, we've been friends. In case of a tough blow, we know we can count on one other. You're not used to drinking whiskey in the morning, huh?

ALAN: No, why?

PETER: You drink it as if it were a laxative. One night he sees me trading punches in some dive and sure enough, the next day, he has to come checking up on me.

ALAN: You're a pain, you know.

PETER (*stopping short and facing Alan*): Unless someone asked you to drop by and see how I was?

ALAN (*vaguely uncomfortable*): Who would have asked me to do that?

PETER: Oh, anybody. My sister, for instance. She's been worried about me lately. She keeps telling me, "Peter, you can't live like that." But you can see that I do, I tell her. But she's a mystic, my sister is. She's decided that you can't live like that and all the evidence to the contrary can't convince her.

ALAN: I can't imagine your sister sending somebody else. She'd come herself.

PETER: You never know. You could take turns at guard duty. Well, you see, I didn't think I was still up to barroom brawls. That proves that I'm still far from being a...zombie. The hollowed-out old trunk's still standing.

ALAN (*pause*): Was there really a cab waiting for you outside the bar? Or was it coincidence?

PETER: A cab? What cab? I don't ever take cabs.

ALAN: Besides, you wouldn't remember. Of course not.

PETER: That's it. I don't remember. You still working for the same old rag?

ALAN: Still am. Why change? They're all the same damn thing.

PETER: Man, you'll have me crying. And what do you write about?

ALAN: I hardly write at all. (*Making a joke of it.*) I'm editorial assistant for the business section.

PETER (*pretending to be impressed*): The business section?

ALAN (*laughing*): Yes, business.

PETER: And you're happy?

ALAN (*cheerful*): Not at all.

PETER: That's what I said to myself. Business may be the secret, the mainstay of society, but for you it's an escape. Yes, it is. You were a political journalist, that's what you were. Ultraliberal. A bit of a Trotskyite around the edges, right? And there you are hiding out in the business section, as technical support at that. You do the layout for other people's articles: stuff like that, don't you? It's a cop-out.

ALAN (*cheerful*): It's nasty to twist the knife in the wound.

PETER: You see I always had you pictured as a reporter out of a Hollywood movie: lucid and cynical, but underneath it all always ready to get fired up over a just cause. You've already got the pipe and the tweed jacket. All you need is the woman.

ALAN: The woman?

PETER: In the movies there's always a woman who pushes the lucid and cynical reporter into getting fired up over a just cause. Until he's ready to lose his job and good salary at the big, rotten daily press and end up buying some little, independent paper in the boonies.

ALAN: There's no woman. That's why I'm still working for the big, rotten daily press.

PETER (*ironic*): Come on, come on.

ALAN: What's that supposed to mean: come on, come on?

PETER: We're friends, we're adults, we can face the truth.

ALAN: Cut the crap.

PETER: I haven't said anything yet.

ALAN: We're friends, we're adults, and I don't understand a word.

PETER: So what?

ALAN: What I said: cut the crap.

PETER: I've always wondered if you ended up sleeping with my sister.

ALAN: What does Nicole have to do with it?

PETER: Nothing. I remember one day when I surprised you in her room. We were out in the country, on vacation. Remember? I wanted to steal some cigarettes from my sister. You pulled away from each other...your faces all red. But there are signs that don't lie. Even if the window was open. You, of course, have always denied it. But you, you're a sly devil. She denied it, too. Just think. Corrupting the morals of your younger brother's buddy--eight years younger at that. It's not the kind of thing that people want to admit happens in the best of families.

ALAN: You seem to want to believe your little story.

PETER: Me? It doesn't mean squat to me.

ALAN: You'd never know it. You talk about it all the time. As if you absolutely had to believe that I slept with your sister. Sorry, but it never happened.

PETER (*doubtful*): Yeah... So she wasn't the one who told you to come?

ALAN: No.

PETER: "Dear Peter. He's in such bad shape. First of all, he drinks. And then he doesn't do anything. He finds everything disgusting. He's really out of it. Something has to be done. If he won't work, at the least he ought to take care of himself. There was a time when he had a bit of talent as a poet. A gift of sorts. With perseverance... and effort... he could have... who knows? Maybe written some pretty poems. A... little book of verse." (*In a tone of complete ridicule.*) That's what my sister would say.

ALAN: A world without books would be an even worse place, right?

PETER: Wrong.

ALAN: Why?

PETER: I don't read.

ALAN: Maybe you don't, but...

PETER: I'm talking about myself. I only talk about myself. I'm modest. Nevertheless, I should so much have liked to participate in a common enterprise... given myself fully to a cause. Why don't we organize some barricades where we can die while striking a dramatic pose? I've always been fascinated by people standing on their barricades during, how shall I say, critical moments in history. During the Paris Commune, for example--or in Spain say, in 1917. And getting photographed in action. It's wonderful, isn't it? One changes the world while never failing to get pictures to impress the grandchildren. We were there. Look, here's a photo of Pepe in the process of changing the world.

ALAN: If that's all there was to it...

PETER: Oh, not with me, not with me. Your little act of being a bitter and disillusioned revolutionary--doesn't mean squat to me. If you believed in world revolution when you were twenty, that's your problem. Tough shit!

ALAN (*laughing a little, then*): And you, you didn't believe?

PETER: Me? I always believed that whenever there was some guy up on a platform, yelling out speeches at masses of clods who were standing there, listening to him with their mouths wide open, and applauding like crazy... That somebody should shoot the guy on the platform. Even if he did wear a beard. Have a drink!

ALAN (*making a face*): It's a weak image. You've lost your touch. You used to come up with jolting images.

PETER: It's not the touch I'm missing. It's the revolver. Well, then, where were we?

ALAN: With respect to what?

PETER: Out with it! What do you want?

ALAN (*lightly*): You'll know soon enough. (*Changing his tone.*) You think it's that strange that I would drop in to see you? That hurts. We were friends, after all. And we go back a long ways. It's true that you had a gift. I remember some poems you wrote in high school. There was one I especially liked, "Brandy Blues." Remember?

PETER: Alcoholic even then. (*Pause. He drinks.*) "Brandy Blues." Don't remember.

ALAN: Really? How can you forget poems you wrote as a teenager? It was about "dying from living one's death" and stuff like that. Very deep. (*He snickers.*)

PETER: You wrote poems in high school, too.

ALAN: No. My thing was short stories.

PETER: It's the same difference.

ALAN: No way. It's not at all the same. Poetry doesn't take you anywhere. Short stories take you to journalism.

PETER: Nothing to be proud of. Are you sure my sister didn't ask you to come visit her drunken brother?

ALAN: You're obsessed by that.

PETER: "A good friend, an old but ever renewing friendship, can only help *in his condition*."

ALAN: Wouldn't you like to go have lunch with me? I'm hungry.

PETER: Lunch? Bah! I couldn't swallow a thing, no matter what. I just got up.

ALAN: You can watch me eat. We'll reminisce about our school days, our old girlfriends, and I'll recite some of my poems for you. (*Joking.*) Life has its good moments, what the hell! You shouldn't let them slip by.

PETER: Impossible. Just the thought of burning grease makes me queasy. And I detest watching other people eat when I don't. I have my meals very well organized, you see. I eat once a day. An early supper, when the restaurants are still empty. I like being the only customer in a dining room. The grease is still fresh; it doesn't stink so much. I can even talk to the waitress. Sometimes she'll even stand by my table while I eat. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see her protective black dress. (You know what a woman dressed in black means in a Mediterranean culture?) But if you're hungry, go ahead.

ALAN: Yes.

(He doesn't move. The silence becomes more and more uncomfortable. PETER paces back and forth. ALAN smokes his pipe. They give each other surreptitious glances.)

PETER: What are you waiting for? Get going!

ALAN: Oh, I can wait another few minutes.

PETER (*in a slightly irritated tone*): I can't bear the thought that you're standing there, dying of hunger. Please get yourself something to eat.

ALAN (*smiling*): You're kicking me out?

PETER: Bug off!

ALAN: Do you often get into bar brawls?

PETER: Never.

ALAN: Except yesterday.

PETER: It wasn't me.

ALAN: Was so!

PETER: It wasn't me. Besides last night I didn't go out. It must have been somebody who looks like me, somebody who hangs out in bars, who has a drink too many and picks fights with people. Not my style at all. Me, I was here. I have witnesses, well one witness. The neighbor on the second floor. She's a whore. A professional, you'd better believe. We have an advantageous arrangement. At least for me. For her, who knows. She still can't do a complete Andalousian. You know what that is?

ALAN: No. Do you?

PETER: Of course. For a whore, not to know that, can you imagine? I have to teach her. (*He laughs.*) A dumb broad if there ever was one. You seen Laura lately?

ALAN: 'Scuse me? Have I seen...?

PETER: That's right. Laura.

ALAN: Yes.

PETER: Well then?

ALAN: Well then, what?

PETER: Well then, how is she?

ALAN: Okay.

PETER: You don't sound very sure. She's not okay?

ALAN: Yes, she's fine.

PETER: She's like a rock, that woman. Right?

ALAN: I don't know.

PETER: Oh, yes. A rock. An oak. You see her often?

ALAN: No.

PETER: You ought to. What's become of her?

ALAN (*in a sarcastic, bitter-sweet tone*): Sometimes she asks about you.

PETER (*ironically*): Not really? Laura? For her I'm under a tombstone, and she can just walk away. (*He laughs.*) What's

hilarious about Laura is that you're all convinced I'm sad because she left me. But it's the other way 'round. She left me because I'm sad. And when I say sad, I mean a disaster! A living disaster, man, I swear to you!

ALAN: That's not what she told me.

PETER (*drily*): My word, you actually talk to her? What did she say?

ALAN: That you threw her out the door, kicking her behind all the way.

PETER (*laughing*): She said that? It was for her own good. Word of honor! I could feel homicidal urges coming on. To protect her from me, I asked her to leave. It was time to take stock, as they say. (*Changing his tone to greater sincerity.*) It was unbearable, you understand? Unbearable. When I'd come home drunk, she'd pretend not to notice. She was smiling, at four o'clock in the morning, hair neatly combed, wide awake. "Did you have anything to eat?" Me, I could hardly walk. I was hanging onto the furniture, vomiting in all the corners. She would run around behind me, with a scrub rag or a brush, what do I know? Always smiling. "Would you like some coffee?" She'd trail me around for hours before getting me to bed, her face always serious and calm, basically quite satisfied with herself. Look, look what I good wife I am! I wanted to kill her. What's become of her?

ALAN: Sometimes she asks about you.

PETER (*a bit surprised*): You already said that.

ALAN: Yes, I already did. I'm repeating it. I thought you might be pleased.

PETER (*genuinely surprised*): Me?

ALAN: No? Generally people are pleased to know that others think about them, ask about them, and so forth. Right?

PETER: You jerking me around?

ALAN: As for me, that would please me. If someone's asked you how I am, please tell me. You see, I like it when someone asks about me.

PETER (*distrustful*): Yeah...

ALAN: Besides, she not only asked me about you, but she more or less suggested I stop by to see you.

PETER: Laura? She asked you to come see me? For what? She's worried about my health? She's afraid that I'll shoot myself?

ALAN: Nothing quite so melodramatic. Why would you shoot yourself? You have a relaxed old life, don't you?

PETER (*lying down on the bed, his legs in the air*): There. One relaxed old life.

ALAN (*pretending to be suddenly disturbed*): If something's not going right, let me know, please! You know that...

PETER: Know what?

ALAN: Well... that... if I can do anything for you... You see what I mean.

PETER (*deliberately*): Not at all. What do you mean?

ALAN: You're putting me on. You understand perfectly well what I mean.

PETER: So she's the one who asked you to come? That's what I was saying to myself.

ALAN: You said what to yourself?

PETER (*standing up, on the bed.*): When you brought yourself here a bit ago, that you have the disgusting face of someone who has to fulfill a mission.

ALAN (*laughing, but a bit annoyed*): Thank you. But it's not exactly that, not really. I mean... of course, Laura has asked me twenty times to stop by to see you, but it's, that is... if I came today it's because I wanted to. So there. It's a coincidence, if you like.

PETER (*falling back on the bed*): Oh, I don't like that, I don't like that, I don't like that at all. Don't talk to me about Laura. I have no desire to talk about Laura with you.

ALAN: So let's not talk about her.

PETER (*ironically*): Let's talk about God.

ALAN: I haven't degenerated that much.

(Pause.)

PETER (*after staring at Alan*): What does Laura want?

ALAN: Nothing much, just that matter of the telephone.

PETER (*sincerely dumbfounded*): The matter of the telephone?

ALAN: Right. The matter of the telephone. Nothing serious, as you see.

PETER (*yelling*): WHAT MATTER OF THE TELEPHONE?

ALAN: Why are you screaming like that?

PETER (*in a bad mood*): Spit it out, okay?

ALAN: Why are you so rattled? You're usually so calm. In the old days, that used to make me so angry, you and your poker face that you tried to...

PETER (*approaching him menacingly*): Are you going to tell what's this business about the phone, dammit?

ALAN (*with a slight laugh*): As if you didn't know! After all, you're the one doing the calling, right?

PETER: Me? Who do I call?

ALAN (*either surprised in turn, or pretending*): Well, Laura, of course. Who else could it be?

PETER: Me? Telephone Laura? You nuts or something?

ALAN: If you don't want to talk about it, we won't. What I've been saying about it...

PETER: Listen... listen... sit down. (*Alan is already seated.*) Catch your breath, relax, try to get hold of yourself, and tell me, in a nutshell, what this story of the telephone is all about.

ALAN (*looking at Peter flabbergasted*): What game are you playing? If somebody has some explaining to do, it's you. That's how it seems to me. Right?

PETER (*making an effort to control himself*): It's possible... it's possible. But all in due time. Pretend that I don't know anything and tell me the story from the beginning. So, it seems that I phone Laura?

ALAN (*snickering*): So it seems, indeed.

PETER: And then?

ALAN: Then what? Do you think that it's pleasant to be awakened every night by the phone ringing?

PETER (*more and more dumbfounded*): Every night? Laura claims that I call her every night?

ALAN: For the past month, yes. Around three or four in the morning.

PETER: That's a lie. Besides, I don't have a phone. Or at any rate the service is disconnected. I haven't paid the bill.

ALAN: There are public phone booths everywhere, you know.

PETER: But I haven't called her! I've never called her!

ALAN (*after a pause*): It's strange... that Laura would invent those phone calls. Right? Why would she make up such a stupid story? I'll have to ask her.

PETER: She asked you to come talk to me about it?

ALAN: Yes. It's a nutty story, isn't it? Laura says to me, "Listen. You should go see Peter, try to found out why he's harassing me like this. (Those are her words.) Why he calls me every night." Put yourself in her position. It's unpleasant enough after all to be awakened every night by the phone. Now she waits for you to call her before she goes to bed so she won't get woken up, you understand.

PETER (*flatly*): It's not me.

ALAN (*shrugging his shoulders*): I'll tell her.

PETER: Why does she think it's me?

ALAN: She recognizes your voice. You know, she's not really angry, but... she's perplexed. And since she barely sleeps any more... it rattles her.

PETER: But I don't identify myself? I... or rather, "he" doesn't say: "This is Peter. Lovely night, isn't it?"

ALAN: No. You don't say, "This is Peter. Lovely night, isn't it?" But your voice is unmistakable on the phone. No way to confuse it.

PETER: Nevertheless, it's not me. I've never phoned Laura.

ALAN: It's strange that Laura would make up this story. What I'm saying is, what does it mean, in your opinion? Because, after all, if one time you were drunk and you called her, for a joke, without realizing what time it was, that's certainly not a reason for her to send me to talk to you. Right? That kind of thing can happen when you're drunk. (*PETER looks at him somberly.*) I mean, to play jokes that you don't remember in the least the next day. I recall one time you had me convinced that I'd pushed Tony into the river and he'd drowned. It was the biggest scare of my life. I couldn't remember if it was true. I was drunk the night when--according to you--I'd committed the crime. Until Tony showed up fresh as a daisy. Maybe you call her when you're drunk and you just don't remember?

PETER: I thought you were hungry.

ALAN: Gee, that's true. I'd forgotten. The pleasure of your company, no doubt. You've been making yourself so scarce lately. By the way, how do you live? What do you do with your day?

PETER: I get up. I go to bed. In between, I'm bored. And you?

ALAN: About the same. Except, of course, that I'm a paid slave. My time's not my own, like yours.

PETER: You wouldn't know what to do with it. The art of pushing minutes in front of you, like billiard balls, is a difficult one. And, man, you're always being stalked by angst. You, in my place, you'd already have started building castles from match sticks.

ALAN (*laughing*): Maybe. So you do absolutely nothing with your time? Aside from drinking, of course.

PETER (*ironically*): Of course. Aside from drinking.

ALAN: What did Nicole have to tell you yesterday?

PETER: Yesterday? I didn't see her yesterday. It was two or three days ago. At any rate, Nicole never has much of anything to say.

ALAN (*smiling*): She doesn't give you little sermons?

PETER (*looking at Alan in silence*): What are you trying to suggest?

ALAN: Me? Nothing at all. Simply that your sister called me, yesterday. In passing she said she'd just left you. She thinks you drink a lot. Well, you know what I mean.

PETER (*after a pause*): You're a shithead to have agreed to it.

ALAN: To have agreed to what?

PETER: This stupid little conspiracy. My sister's in on it, I'm sure, and maybe Laura, and you're the one elected to carry it out. Shut up! Let me talk! You came to give me some spiel in the purest Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde mold, about how I fight every night in bars and call Laura--and what else?--without having the slightest recollection! Oh, all for my own good! White lies, just to scare me so that I'll agree to be detoxed. Shut up, I said! It's my sister's obsession. She's been wearing my ears out for weeks. "My dear Peter. It has to be done! Oh, I know that the very day you leave the clinic you'll start to drink again, but at least your body will be in better shape..." Subtle dialectic of the alcohol cure so that the body can last a few extra months! Soak it up, dry it out, soak it up! Where the hell do you fit in?

ALAN (*laughing*): Well, old pal, I've been asking myself where you got this story of a conspiracy! That's really something! Your sister asking me... I confess that I would never have thought of that.

PETER: Really? That cracks me up.

ALAN: But since you're talking about your chronic binges, I might just as well ask you something... that's intrigued me since I got here. Don't get mad, but why do you drink?

PETER (*stunned*): What do you mean "why"?

ALAN: No, it's true. You haven't stopped drinking since I got here. You've already drunk four or five scotches. I'm sure you'd have drunk less if you'd been alone. With alcoholics, it's just the opposite. They hide to drink. In front of their families, they drink cokes, and when everybody's back is turned, they add rum. There's a guy like that at the newspaper: he's always drunk but nobody ever sees him drink. You, on the other hand, you show off. As if you wanted to play the alcoholic role.

PETER (*delighted*): You mean you're accusing me of not being a real alcoholic?

ALAN: Oh, I'm not accusing you of anything. I never accuse anyone of anything. I'm just curious, that's all. (*Joking.*) Perhaps you have a desire to be an invalid?

PETER: That's an interesting idea. Would you repeat it, please?

ALAN (*in the same tone*): There are people like that, who enjoy being sick. So others will take care of them. If they're healthy, nobody notices 'em. They're just shadows moving back and forth. But if they're sick, people feel sorry for them, and tuck them into bed at night, and fix them hot water bottles. And the invalids smugly resign themselves and let themselves go, while the whole family gravely watches by their bedsides. They finally feel as if they exist. But, of course, in your case... we can't say that nobody notices you.

PETER: It's funny that you haven't had better luck with women.

ALAN (*surprised*): I don't get the connection.

PETER: That way of yours, of keeping your feet solidly on the ground. With a steady gaze and your chin up. Women adore that, you know.

ALAN (*ironic*): And even so, I'm not a Don Juan--like you?

PETER: Who, me? No! Besides, I've been reconciled to that for a long time now. Have you ever seen anything stupider than a womanizer? But without being a Don Juan, one can still have good or bad luck with women. Or with one woman in particular, if you prefer.

ALAN: What are you driving at?

PETER: Have you been lucky with women?

ALAN (*after a brief pause*): Still that same old story?

PETER: What old story?

ALAN: Doesn't matter.

(Pause.)

PETER (*with gusto*): So? Tell me everything: Have you already picked the clinic? What color is it?

ALAN: The clinic?

PETER: For my cure?

ALAN: I don't give a damn about your cure! After all, you ought to know if you want to be detoxed or not!

PETER (*joking*): I see... The modern method. "We'll force you into facing your responsibilities. You make the decision. You have to decide voluntarily if you want to seek help..." Well, shit, no way. Voluntarily I decide not to go. I hereby decree that I shall choose the slow and charming decline of drunkenness. So there. Besides, I detest hospitals. The smell of cadavers. Augh!

ALAN: Well, that's perfect. Nobody's talked about a cure except you. And as for your nocturnal phone calls, the good news is that Laura is having her number changed. It'll take a while to do. In the meantime, try to call her less often.

PETER (*yelling*): I don't call her!

ALAN (*perhaps pleased at having angered him*): Okay, okay. You don't call her. Laura's making it up. Maybe that's symptomatic, huh? That she's inventing this story about phone calls. As if she had an unconscious desire for you to call her. Perhaps not exactly the same way that she tells it, but you know what happens when the subconscious mixes things up, right? Everybody knows that.

PETER: What's wrong with you?

ALAN: 'Scuse me?

PETER: I find you strange. Since you came through that goddam door--where, I might add, the people I'm expecting never show up, and I'm not saying that to bug you, man, you know how it is--since then, I've found you strange. Come on, tell me what's up! We're pals, right? Friendship, man, friendship, that's the only thing that counts. So? You unhappy? You feel like you've wasted your life?

ALAN: Everybody's life is wasted. So you say.

PETER: So I say. Or said. Back in my first stage, if you like. Back when I believed in a system of inverted values. But now... wasted with respect to what? It doesn't make sense. Wrong side or right side, it's all the same. I'm not a part of it.

ALAN (*smiling*): You're certainly bitter. So, there's no solution?

PETER: You could always throw yourself in the river...

ALAN: Why don't you do that?

PETER (*looking at him for a moment in silence and then giving a short laugh*): I swim too well.

ALAN: A bullet to the temple? No? How about hanging... They say it gives you an erection, complete with orgasm. A beautiful death, don't you think?

PETER (*a short pause, followed by an ironic smile*): You'd like to see me hang?

ALAN: Not at all. Quite the contrary. You can see, I'm joking. If it were serious, you could at least believe our friendship would keep me from kidding about it.

PETER: Besides, why kill oneself when we're going to croak anyway. And then, I rather like watching myself disintegrate little by little. It's an intellectually stimulating spectacle.

ALAN: You're disintegrating?

PETER: I'm not?

ALAN: You're the one who said it.

PETER: Yes, I'm the one who said it. So, just why did you come?

ALAN: Well, old pal. Nostalgia, you believe in nostalgia. We don't see one another anymore. And for ten years we saw each other practically every day. We chased girls, got drunk, stayed out all night, and above all, above all, we talked. We talked and didn't stop talking. Remember? Afternoons, whole evenings, in cafés or in the street, talking. Dreaming up a thousand projects, trips, adventures. But they're not what's important. With the passage of time... what remains is a certain feeling. And suddenly, bam! We don't see each other anymore. Maybe I missed you.

PETER (*insultingly*): Are you sure you're not putting the make on me?

ALAN (*annoyed*): Oh, shit!

PETER: Now there's the first intelligent thing you've said since you got here.

(*Pause.*)

ALAN: So your sister gave you another of her little sermons yesterday?

PETER: I already told you it wasn't yesterday. It was two or three days ago. I remember distinctly.

ALAN: It was yesterday. She remembers distinctly, too. She's got excellent reasons to.

PETER: Did I maybe break a bottle over her head? Just trying to stay in shape?

ALAN: That's not it. What am I going to tell Laura?

PETER: That I have fond memories of our life together.

ALAN: That true?

PETER: What the hell difference does that make to you?

ALAN (*laughing*): None, of course. Now, about the telephone, what am I going to tell her?

PETER: She should take it off the hook... or have it temporarily disconnected. Or maybe she should buy one of those machines that automatically record conversations. She should have got herself one of those a long time ago. They're supposed to be very useful. She could

listen to the tapes during breakfast. Just what am I accused of having said to her, by the way?

ALAN: You really want to know?

PETER: But of course I want to know!

ALAN: *(after a brief hesitation):* Hmm... insults...

PETER: Insults? Such as? Slut? Bitch?

ALAN *(looking at him with a curious expression):* Precisely. Slut. Bitch. Whore. Who's fucking you now? Garbage like that. You get the idea. Oh, your vocabulary is rather limited. It's funny, isn't it? When you're usually so verbose.

PETER: It sounds a bit too conventional to be true.

ALAN: Therefore it isn't.

PETER: How's that?

ALAN: You prefer that it be true?

PETER: Oh, I don't prefer anything at all.

ALAN: As you please. You don't call Laura; you didn't get into a fight in a bar last night. Your sister made up a story. We won't talk about it anymore. Let's talk about you. How have you been living lately? Having a lot of trouble keeping yourself in scotch?

PETER: Not a lot. When Sis's check is late, I sometimes have to swipe a bottle here or there. Nothing serious.

ALAN: Ah yes. There's Sis's check.

PETER: You're not trying to make me feel uncomfortable somehow?

ALAN (*quickly*): Not at all, not at all! Just for a moment there I was wondering how you manage, just to eat and drink. I'd forgotten about Sis's check.

PETER: You'd have lent me money otherwise?

ALAN: Maybe, yes...

PETER: If you're that anxious, man, you don't have to deny yourself the pleasure. I have lots of debts, you see. I owe a bunch of dough to Madeleine, for example.

ALAN: Madeleine?

PETER: Yes, the neighbor on the second floor. You've already forgotten my neighbor on the second floor? My alibi for last night? The one that proves to me you're lying?

ALAN: It must not have been you. It surely was somebody who looks like you. And who was wearing my jacket, besides.

PETER: Your jacket?

ALAN: Yes, the one you swiped from me.

PETER: Oh, you bastard! You gave it to me!

ALAN (*laughing*): Agreed... So her name's Madeleine. And just what can't she do complete yet?

PETER: An Andalousian.

ALAN: And what's that?

PETER: What good is it for you to know? You're not going to talk about it in the business section, are you?

ALAN: Certainly not... it was just a matter of personal curiosity. (*Pause.*) Are you sure she really exists, this Madeleine?

PETER: She exists. Go see for yourself. Knock, go in, and say to her: "Show me the beauty mark on your right thigh." If she's got one, that's Madeleine. And if she doesn't, she's still Madeleine.

ALAN: I see. The sort of woman who arrives in the middle of the night? After you've carefully prepared yourself by the Arabian method. She passes through the wall. Sideways. She enters. But she still doesn't know how to do a complete Andalousian.

PETER: She does now. Besides it isn't at all like that. Our relationship is strictly business. I admit, of course, that she's extended me credit. Quite an accomplishment, wouldn't you say?

ALAN: I think you're quite capable of moving a prostitute with a heart of gold. How did you meet her? You ran into her on the stairs and there were sparks?

PETER: We ran into each other on the stairs and I asked her, "How much?"

ALAN: As sordid as that? You've changed. You used to have such romantic adventures with women. And when no women were there, you made them up, invented them. The Sonia game. Remember?

PETER (*pensive*): The game I'm playing with Madeleine leaves indelible traces.

ALAN (*ironic*): Really? (*Friendly, in a natural tone.*) You changed suddenly, three years ago. Before that, you were a happy guy, you moved about, you saw people. I won't say that you led a "normal" life, because that doesn't mean anything, does it? But at any rate, you led a different life. Something must have happened to you, before your marriage to Laura. The marriage was strange after all. A sort of game maybe, or a refuge, or both. But it didn't solve anything. You continued to burn your bridges, with your friends in particular. Even with Laura, whom you didn't see anymore.

PETER (*interrupting*): Did so. I did see her. I saw only her, and it was absolutely nauseating.

ALAN: So? Did something happen? Don't you want to talk to me about it?

PETER: You're really cute, you know, in your role of charitable friend. Yes, man, I swear you are. A little ridiculous maybe, but not without charm.

ALAN (*after a pause*): Okay. You don't want to talk about it. So let's not. Tell me, why do you call her?

PETER (*violent*): I do not call her!

ALAN: You're sick! I've heard you myself.

PETER (*after a pause*): Have you been sleeping with her for a long time?

ALAN: That's not the issue!

PETER: Sorry to wake you up, too, man. But you realize I had no way of knowing.

ALAN (*agitated*): That's not the issue! It was last week. We were playing poker. At Laura's. It must have been three in the morning... or a bit later... the phone rang.

PETER (*smiling*): And then?

ALAN: Laura picked up the receiver... and handed it to me.

PETER (*same tone*): A real Hitchcock. And then?

ALAN: I already told you.

PETER: Insults?

ALAN: Insults.

PETER: Whore? Slut? Bitch?

ALAN: Things like that... and worse...

PETER: It's very interesting. These phone calls, do they have an effect on your relations?

ALAN (*trying to remain calm*): It was during a poker game! You don't believe me? There were three other people in the room. Of course, we didn't tell them the name of the maniac who was yelling obscenities over the phone... but they heard your screams, too!

PETER (sweetly): Do you realize that you've always been attracted by my women? As soon as I had a girlfriend, you'd fall in love with her. First there was my sister, then Sonia... and now Laura! It's rather morbid, don't you think? I know I mean a lot in your life, but still!

ALAN: I don't give a damn about your dumbass women!

(PETER jumps up and hits Alan full force. Prolonged pause.)

PETER (with a little laugh): Sorry... but I just can't have my women insulted.

(PETER obviously does not believe what he's saying. He has been looking for an excuse to hit Alan.)

ALAN (trying to remain calm): And now what? Do we exchange cards and arrange a duel in the woods?

PETER: Why not? It's as good a pastime as any other! But while we're waiting, let's have a drink.

(PETER pours himself another one. He seems quite pleased to have hit Alan. Strangely enough, ALAN also seemed secretly satisfied.)

ALAN: You must not be as much in control of yourself as you'd like it to seem, because you spend your time hitting people without any reason... like last night. You maybe expected me to hit you back? A nice little brawl to kill time?

PETER: As a matter of fact, that's true. Why didn't you hit me back?

ALAN: I don't beat up on sick people!

PETER: Aha! I'm sick. Oh, I know that you don't mean cancer. Poor guy, what game are you playing? Who sent you here to clown around? Go back to your business section and leave us in peace!

ALAN: Us?

PETER: Yes, of course. Us. The other and I. I and my shadow, the monkey on my back. My dark double. The criminal who lurks within me and comes out at night to alarm good mothers who lie dreaming of vast prairies. You've no doubt remarked that good mothers always dream of vast prairies? It must have some connection with mammary glands, or worse yet...

ALAN (*looking at him dubiously and then*): During the day, it's still okay, at least for now. You show off, you make speeches--to yourself if no one else is around. You have a drink. No doubt you do go out to a restaurant from time to time. You look at shop windows. You help old ladies cross the street. Whatever. You while away the minutes, the hours, and the day passes. But at night, something snaps. Why?

PETER: Indeed... Why?

ALAN: At night you pull stunts that you don't remember the next day.

PETER: Really? And you think that's serious?

ALAN: Do you even know what you do at night?

PETER: I don't have a very precise plan for my nights. For my days either, for that matter. I just take things as they happen. Always drifting along. You know how I am.

ALAN: Can you remember even one of your nights?

PETER: I can remember several. I also have some childhood memories if they would be useful to you.

ALAN (*stubborn*): Last night, for instance? Where were you after they kicked you out of the bar?

PETER (*openly mocking*): No doubt in some church. Right? It's what I usually do after killing somebody in some dive. The silence... the peace... the cool marble against my burning brow. In spite of being an atheist, I long for purity; say man, don't ever forget that!

ALAN: You obviously don't remember. You don't remember anything. That's why you made up this Madeleine, just like Sonia the other time. Listen, Peter, you have to face things squarely.

PETER (*same tone*): That's all I do! All my life, that's all I've done: face things squarely. In profile, they might have looked prettier, but I know my duty, and I resist the temptation of looking at profiles: I face things squarely... directly... like a man!

ALAN (*tired*): Yes, okay... You're joking. You try to get out of it by joking. You've always known how to weasel your way out. And why not, since it works. Since your sister takes care of you and feeds you, your friends worry about you, and I came to... (*He falls silent.*)

PETER: To what? To console me? To offer me a friendly shoulder... and share with me the weight of the world? Here I was, in my cosy little nest, happily preparing myself to confront a new day with resignation and goodwill. A day, you really don't know what a day means until you do nothing. That's when each minute recovers its original density. Are you sure you're not going to be late? I wouldn't want to be the cause, however indirect, of a reprimand from your supervisors!

ALAN: Okay. Alright. I won't insist. (*Pause.*) I don't give a damn about your health, you understand? Doesn't mean a damn thing to me. If you've decided to become an alcoholic, that's your business! Only... after all... why torture Laura? I don't understand.

PETER: She want a divorce? She can have it. People should never get married in the first place. Love can't survive all that paperwork. Not to mention greasy cooking and cavities. And

other things I won't say. The only woman a guy should marry is his mother. That way, he can at least be sure that there'll never be more than one. What was your mother like? No problems there? Wait, let me remember. Your mother... Wasn't she a fat little woman with glasses, and rather stupid? Or maybe that was my mother. As for me, you see, I'm a drunkard--a good-for-nothing, as we say in the country. I could almost be a vagabond if I weren't so lazy, but with my mother, I always behaved like a gentleman. Not one inappropriate gesture. And for good reason. And to think that I was condemned to love that fine woman... but so boring, so boring. I really had trouble getting used to it.

ALAN: Nevertheless you went to her funeral... and all the way back to your hometown at that.

PETER: Yes. Shouldn't I have?

ALAN: I said it like that...

PETER: You said it like that... just to let me know that you aren't fooled, that under by cynical exterior I have a big heart. Actually, you see, I was drunk, and my sister--with the help of Hector, her husband, and Laura--forced me into a car and took me there. Hector, just as proper as you please, was behind the wheel. Dressed all in black, as if he were driving the hearse. I threw up four times during the damn trip. And I swore I'd get even with Laura. Strange, isn't it? Why Laura? Innocence personified! How can you blame the cows for watching the trains go by? But you didn't come here to talk about my family life.

ALAN: Why not?

PETER: Anyway, it's funny. You obviously came here with a particular purpose. Man, I could feel it the minute you came through the door. And after making comments about my nefarious deeds, you seem to expect me to confide in you about something or other. But I don't have a thing to tell you, word of honor. I like you, that's all. You really piss me off, but I like you. You're a revolting little bourgeois radical, but I like you. You're a "leftist" who works for disgusting tabloids. At Saturday night parties, between two waltzes, when you become sentimental--the way non-alcoholics do when they drink--you, yourself, call them the "rotten press." (Why are you looking at me like that? Don't you waltz?) But it doesn't make any difference, your well-ordered little life. Other people might criticize, but I like you. We can't control our feelings. Oh, I almost forgot. You have no taste in clothes, but just the same, I forgive you. If anything, it only makes me like you more. Your jacket, today, is downright ugly, but we'll let it pass. So, I have nothing to tell you. Except that you

lead a stupid life, that you're getting fat, and that for an hour now you've pissed me off for reasons that are murkier than ever. But it doesn't matter; it's a pleasure to see your ugly mug. Have a drink, go on! You should get to the newspaper soused--part of your journalist image from Hollywood movies; they'll appreciate you more for it. Maybe they'll even give you a raise, thrust you into writing editorials. A promotion. You can shake your head: the problems of underdevelopment, the growth rate, the G. N. P.! There's nothing you can't handle! You know. You're on the inside track! Believe me! You should get there soused, cuss out your editor-in-chief--who no doubt deserves it or he wouldn't have the job--and then you go home to bed. Tomorrow you'll write your letter of resignation and you'll take the opportunity to insult the bossman again. But, in a dramatic turn of events, the owner of your rag--and just who is that? Some bank no doubt? Ah, yes, banks... banks are gobbling up everything! In short, the owner of your rag not only refuses your resignation but is so delighted with the way you insulted the editor-in-chief, that they fire him and give the position to you. All the great journalists began their careers like that. You ought to know. Of course, you'll hesitate a moment before accepting, because when you sent your letter of resignation, you had imagined yourself moving in here, to share my life of debauchery and drifting--an old dream, isn't it, you son of a gun? But the attraction of printer's ink and the smell of lead in the early morning will be too strong. You'll drop your old pal, the non-mystical tramp, and you'll happily climb the black marble steps of success! Shit! After that, I need a drink...

ALAN (*delighted*): I don't know if you realize it, but that's almost word for word the speech you made to me almost ten years ago, when I accepted my first job in the "big rotten press."

PETER (*another glass in his hand*): And he extends his big, brotherly hands, to offer me his syrupy friendship. I really don't give a damn! What game are you playing? You want to see me on my knees? You want to drag me across the ground while I call out for help? Once again you're playing the farce of the charitable friend: the devoted, comforting, solid good guy? Poor jerk! Listen, be nice. You see, there's a door over there. You get up, you open it, and you go out. Ok? Come back in a year or two! I'll be pleased to see you. We'll have a drink, we'll talk politics... and it'll be just perfect. In a year or two. But now, I'm bushed. Scram!

ALAN: After all, it isn't Sonia, is it? It's not because of her?

PETER: Oh, shit! What on earth do you mean by that story again?

ALAN: Didn't it all start because of Sonia?

PETER: But if... well, sure. It's because of her. I'm like a tree that's been struck by lightning. Empty. Destroyed. Afterwards, nothing had any meaning. So there. You happy? Then, go away!

ALAN: After all, it isn't because of a woman who never existed? Who was only one of your pranks back then? For a year you had us all dangling about that ravishing woman that none of us had ever seen. We were all jealous. The black-eyed blonde you said you had to protect from the sun. After a year she left and you put a bullet in your heart. Wonderful! What a beautifully sad love story! What a simply marvelous story, until I discovered, quite by accident, that there never was a Sonia! A wonderful hoax. (*For the first time, he's nasty.*) If you think about it, you've gone downhill, Peter. Now all you're capable of inventing are prostitutes next door. You've fallen into neorealism. Or worse yet, you're not inventing a thing and you're sharing Nicole's check with a common whore who screws you once a month and gets a glass of scotch from you for a tip. You're disintegrating, all right, but in a petty way. I never believed that alcohol produced genius, but in your case, it takes away the little bit of imagination that you sometimes succeeded in putting into your life... You're in the process of becoming a shabby lunatic, the neighborhood psychopath who insults his ex-wife over the phone! Alcohol doesn't enhance you; it's simply in the process of making you sick--stupidly, ridiculously sick and aggressive, like a mangy dog... Is that what made you crack, three years ago? The discovery of your mediocrity?

PETER (*pensive*): Take a breath, man, you're going to choke from talking so fast. As for me, like Galileo facing the Inquisition, I can only say: "But she does move." I refer, of course, to Sonia.

ALAN: Sonia? You mean to say that...

PETER: Exactly. I mean to say that. You're jealous, huh, you ugly bastard? A woman you've never seen, doesn't that beat all. You'd like to know all the dirt, rub your nose in it? Have me tell you in detail? Well, I don't want to. I don't want to talk to you about Sonia. Not then, and not now. She was tall and beautiful and she passed through the streets of this city. That's all you need to know. You've always lived by proxy, do you realize that? My love affairs, by proxy. Life and other people's happenings, by proxy--that's the dirty job of a journalist. British, by proxy, with your ugly jackets and your stinking tobacco and your imported shoes... and what else? Incest by proxy with my sister! What else? (*He doubles up in pain, his arms pressed against his abdomen. He turns around slowly. He is visibly suffering.*)

ALAN (*in a low voice*): May I also suffer, by proxy, in your place? (*PETER pays no attention; perhaps he hasn't heard. He continues to turn around, doubled up.*) What's the matter? Are you sick? (*Still doubled up, PETER rushes out of the room. Immediately ALAN begins to look around, his face pale in anger. Quickly he looks at objects and at the papers strewn around, etc., as if he were searching for something. Then he takes a miniature tape recorder out of his pocket and puts it in an out-of-the-way spot. He waits. PETER returns. He has thrown up and is pale. But he behaves almost normally. ALAN pretends to be concerned.*) What's the matter? Are you sick?

PETER (*joking*): Did you poison the scotch? I've vomited it all. First time that's happened to me. (*He pours himself another glass.*)

ALAN (*shocked*): You're not going to keep on drinking?

PETER: Why not? (*He sniffs his glass.*) It doesn't smell of bitter almonds anyway... It's not arsenic... What do you call that poison that has no smell or taste? Curare? To your health! (*He drinks and shudders, as if the alcohol were making him sick.*)

ALAN: You're trying impress me by drinking like an idiot? Well, I'm not impressed.

PETER (*agitated and happy*): You ought to get married... start a family... That's what you ought to do! You're as repressive as any good paterfamilias. You weren't cut out for the solitary life... it goes to your head... it makes you buzz around other people's places like a pesky fly. **ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ.**

Marry Angelica. Angelica, the blonde. Angelica, of the wide hips... who'll give you beautiful blond children. You'll let your beard grow. You'll have a garden. You'll be happy. But don't delay. Angelica's not going to wait forever. She's choking from repressed desires. Her maternal instincts are driving her crazy. If she doesn't bring a dozen children into the world soon, she'll explode. Like an overripe fig.

ALAN: May I ask who this Angelica is?

PETER: Your future wife. The woman who, from waiting for you, has developed flaming night fevers... and zits at the corners of her mouth. The woman who languishes, drenched in sweat in her great peasant's bed where she sleeps alone, poor thing, her breasts swollen with the promise of mother's milk... just like old bossy! Can you see yourself, at the wheel of a green station wagon, going for a spirited Sunday drive in the southeastern suburbs? I can. White shirt. Conservative tie. Jacket carefully arranged on a hanger and placed on the clothes hook by the left rear window. A pipe in your mouth. You will say: Angelica, it's time to reinvent parent-child relationships... and off you go! To the western highway. And, by the way, (*Making a leap over to Alan.*) I forgot...

(*He punches Alan again.*)

ALAN (*surprised and angry, yells*): Holy shit! What in the...

PETER: Oh... oh... oh... I hadn't paid you back for the blow you gave me a few minutes ago...

ALAN (*same tone*): Me? You idiot! You jerking me around?

PETER: Exactly. You couldn't have forgotten it, after all? Hitting the guy who's been your best friend since we were in knee pants, you can't forget that! It really hurt me, you see; that's why I delayed in hitting you back... and when I say delayed, man... what I should say is hesitated. But I felt that you regretted hitting me, like that, without any reason. Then I said to myself: I'm going to hit him back, and then it will be over... cancelled out. You want to have a drink? To seal our reformed friendship? On second thought, I don't believe there's poison in the scotch. Just a simple intestinal problem on my part. (*He laughs, still agitated.*)

ALAN (*agitated*): I've about had enough, Peter! I've about had enough of your insults... of your blows... I came... to talk to you about... (*loud*) the only subject that interests you, about YOU! The miserable things you do, when you're soused, and that you don't remember! I understand why you're afraid to face the truth. You're... you're... Do you know what Nicole told me yesterday?

PETER: Somewhere over by the municipal building there's a market where they sell cherries for two cents less per pound...

ALAN (*looking at him for a moment in silence*): One day... a long time ago... We must have been 14 or 15... we were sitting on a bench in the park. We must have been cutting class. You

declared, assertively, that if you decided to, you could become a great criminal. A GREAT CRIMINAL! Do you remember?

PETER (*natural tone*): Oh, no! If one had to remember all the idiot things one said on park benches...

ALAN: Basically what's important isn't this particular declaration about crimes that you could or could not commit... the "anything goes" attitude is rather passé, isn't it? What's important is that you were convinced, and you succeeded in convincing some of us, that whatever field you chose... you were going to do GREAT THINGS! That your life, no matter what, was not going to be a life "like everybody else's." Now you have never, never done anything that wasn't miserable, painfully trivial. Oh, let's talk about your life of "debauchery and drifting"... little slobbery drunkard that they kick out of bars and who blubbers over the trash bins!

PETER (*interrupting, sarcastically*): Alan... Alan... Alan... my word, what a tone, what hatred in your voice...

ALAN (*drily*): Nicole was here yesterday. She told me the story. It was about seven o'clock. She knocked. No one answered. The door was open; she came in. You were sitting on that chair over there (*Gestures.*).. arms hanging at your sides... pale... mouth open. There was vomit on the floor. It stunk. She talked to you. You didn't answer. She went over to you. Then you grabbed her and said horrible things to her. (Those are her words.) It took her a moment to understand what you wanted. YOU DIDN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE HER. YOU CALLED HER MADELEINE AND YOU WANTED TO RAPE HER!

PETER: That would really surprise me. That fat cow!

ALAN: Don't even imagine that she was shocked. Don't try to put it in terms of I don't know what incestuous tendencies! Your sister isn't concerned about that. What "the fat cow" is worried about is you. She's sure that you didn't even recognize her. You looked at her without seeing her. You tried to rip her dress. She had to defend herself... she shoved you away... oh, not very hard, but you fell down. She stayed an hour watching you, sprawled on the floor, livid, like a corpse. Then you started snoring peacefully. So she got up. Are you listening? She got up. Cleaned the room and--irony of ironies--left you a bit of money on the table before going home. (*PETER smiles. ALAN, furious, yells.*) Don't you believe me? Oh, that's too easy! Call her! Go ahead! Call her, if you've got the guts!

PETER (*after a pause; he's shaken but almost manages to hide it*): Why did you come?

ALAN (*resuming his tone from the beginning*): To talk a bit with you. About everything and about nothing... about life passing by... about monotonous, ephemeral days... About nostalgia for seaside cliffs and the impossibility of accepting things as they are and the impossibility of changing them... Do you recognize yourself?

PETER (*tired*): Not really.

(*Pause.*)

ALAN: You shouldn't drink.

PETER: I know. I shouldn't drink.

ALAN: Of course we both know now, you and I, that we had too many illusions for you. But even so. Alcohol is turning you into an idiot.

PETER (*in his sarcastic tone from the beginning*): Oh, we mustn't exaggerate. I can still count to five.

ALAN (*once again turning nasty*): A retard, if you prefer.

PETER: I certainly do! It's much nicer, retard than idiot...much nicer... It has a country sound.

ALAN: So?

PETER: So what?

ALAN: Don't you have anything to say?

PETER: Good God, no. What do you want me to say? It certainly isn't my fault if for years you thought the world revolved around me, is it? Now you're disillusioned... and angry with yourself... I quite understand, but whose fault is it? I ask nothing of you, Alan, NOTHING. I've never asked you for a thing. No doubt that's what makes you sick, isn't it?

ALAN (*rancorous*): Do you remember Nicole's visit yesterday?

PETER (*sighing*): Why did you come?

ALAN: I think that's clear enough.

PETER: As a matter of fact, not very. Even when you try to make me believe that you want to protect my sister and my wife.

ALAN: She's not your wife anymore!

PETER: No, oh no! Thank God! I threw her out the door, kicking her behind all the way. And that's what I'm going to do with you in a minute.

ALAN: And what good will that do you?

PETER: None. Just for pleasure. I like kicking people. What is it you propose?

ALAN: How's that, what I propose?

PETER: I feel that you have an important proposition to make to me.

ALAN: No proposition. (*Sarcastic in turn.*) I came to inform you, as a friend, that alcohol isn't doing a thing for you, that you're making pitiful phone calls at night... and all the rest.

PETER (*interested*): And what's the rest?

ALAN: All the rest... all that you do drunk and that you forget afterwards.

PETER: I do a lot a things drunk that I forget afterwards?

ALAN: We've talked about some of them. Because I imagine that you weren't very lucid when you assaulted Nicole?

PETER (*same tone*): I assaulted whom?

ALAN: Are you kidding me?

PETER: No, no, I swear. It's just, you see... I have to tell you something. I... how should I say? For some time now, I forget everything. You think it's the alcohol?

ALAN: If you're going to act like that, I might just as well leave.

PETER (*drily*): I've already fogotten that you came.

(ALAN crosses to the door but stops. He can't leave. He still has a trump card to play. He comes back toward Peter.)

ALAN: Laura is *really* going to divorce you.

PETER: That's good.

ALAN: I advised her to record your telephone calls. That should facilitate the divorce. She bought an answering machine.

PETER: They say they're very useful.

ALAN (*ambiguously*): You don't need anything?

PETER: I don't need anything.

ALAN (*same tone*): Are you sure?

PETER: You want to give me a present?

ALAN: No. I'd like to show you something.

PETER: Is it really necessary? I wouldn't want you to be late for work.

ALAN: Cut it out. Listen to this. I'm sure it will interest you... I assure you that I can't wait to see the face you'll make...

(He turns on the tape recorder. We hear two voices, talking on the telephone. One is obviously Alan's [Voice I]. The other might be Peter's.)

VOICE I: Hello... Hello... Who's on the phone? (*Pause.*) Hello! (*Pause.*) Is this a joke? (*Pause.*) Hello?

VOICE II: Alan?

VOICE I: Yes.. Who is it? *(Pause.)* Hello? *(VOICE II mutters something incomprehensible.)*
Hello? I don't understand... Who's on the phone?

VOICE II: Peter.

VOICE I: Peter? What is it?

VOICE II: I have to talk to you. Something terrible has happened to me.

(PETER, in a brusque gesture, throws the tape recorder against the wall.)

ALAN *(ironic)*: That bad?

PETER: Get the hell out!

ALAN: The evidence is there. Recorded. All your crap...

PETER *(interrupting)*: Get the hell out! Dirty bastard!

ALAN *(backing away slowly toward the door)*: I'm leaving you. You can listen to it later. Alone.
You'll see. It's even worse than everything I told you, worse than everything you imagine...

PETER: That's it, already! Get out and leave me in peace! Your shenanigans leave me cold. Don't forget to close the door on your way out.

ALAN: I'm going, I'm going. I'm sure you'll listen to the tape. You couldn't resist. And then, old pal, all the scotch in the world won't be enough.

PETER (*sincere*): Why are you doing all this? Why are you going to such trouble? Why are you trying in such a ridiculous way to get even?

ALAN (*snickering*): Guess.

(He leaves, slamming the door. PETER remains motionless on the bed, looking at the little tape recorder lying on the floor. Then, with a sigh, he gets up, goes over to the tape recorder and picks it up as the lights go down.)

THE END

Carlos Semprun-Maura (b. Madrid 1926 , d. Paris 2009) was a bilingual writer of novels, essays, newspaper articles, and plays. His father served as a diplomat for the Spanish Republican government during the Civil War; the family hence left Spain in 1936. Semprun Maura returned clandestinely during the Franco years to fight against the dictatorship. With the advent of democracy, his work in Spanish appeared in major publishing houses and newspapers in his native land. His theatre, however, was written in French.

Reluctant to spend his energies trying to get his work staged, Semprun-Maura created most of his plays for the distinguished radio series "France Culture". Many of these texts deal with Spanish themes. The play included in this issue, *Le Bleu de l'eau de vie* (*Brandy Blues*), however, relates to French reality. Directed by Roger Blin in 1981, the play was a critical and audience success. It opened at the Petit Odéon, then moved to the Petit-Montparnasse in 1982. It has been staged at Off-Avignon Festival and in 1990 was revived in Paris.

Two friends, who had shared leftist ideals in their youth, meet again. One has seen the idealism of 1968 evaporate in a materialistic world; the other has sold out to the establishment. In

2008 Semprun Maura was invited by various periodicals to return to that famous Paris spring on its fortieth anniversary.

Phyllis Zatlin is professor emerita at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her areas of specialization include contemporary theatre and play translation. Among her translations from Spanish and French that have been performed and/or published are works by J.L. Alonso de Santos, Jean Bouchaud, Jean-Paul Daumas, Eduardo Manet, Francisco Nieva, Itziar Pascual, Paloma Pedrero, and Jaime Salom. Her book *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation* has recently been translated to Korean. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild and the Sociedad General de Autores y Editores.

