

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review *Volume 4, Number 4*

Editor: Adam Versényi
Editorial Assistant: Michaela Morton

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

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

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

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EDITOR'S NOTE

We begin this issue with the last of the roundtable discussions from the Theatrical Translation as Creative Process: A Conference Festival, convened here at the University of North Carolina in April 2012. This conversation is with Jean Graham-Jones about her translation of contemporary Argentine playwright Ricardo Monti's play *Apocalypse Tomorrow*, which was published in *The Mercurian*, Vol. 2, No. 1. This lively conversation, which concluded the Conference Festival, covers everything from orgasms and cocaine to questions of tone, style, and legibility in theatrical translation.

The roundtable discussion is followed by a new translation by Samuel Buggeln, whose translation of Marivaux's one-act, *School for Mothers*, was published in *The Mercurian*, Vol. 4, No. 1. Here Buggeln turns to Molière, with a new translation of *Le Misanthrope* titled *Hater*. Having recently dramaturged Molière's *Imaginary Invalid* in a new translation commissioned by PlayMakers Repertory Company from David Ball, directed by Dominique Serrand, which created a contemporary re-visioning of that play in the spirit of Molière, I was attracted to Buggeln's approach to *Le Misanthrope*. As he explains in his introduction to *Hater*, this translation was undertaken from a directorial point of view. Having loved *The Misanthrope* when he first read it in translation, Buggeln found himself suspicious that his standard rhymed translation was reflecting the original. When he went to the French he was "delighted and surprised" by the modernity of Molière's verse, which led him to a free-verse translation of his own. In his description of the translation process Buggeln raises questions of about rhyme, tone, style, and the familiar vs. the foreign in theatrical translation, finally opting for a collision of the two rather than choosing one over the other.

Hater is followed by Joanne Pottlitzer's translation of the well-known Cuban playwright José Triana's *Common Words*. The translation is preceded by two introductions, one from Triana himself describing how he based his play *Palabras comunes* on Miguel de Carrión's novella *Las honradas (Respectable Women)*, influenced by both the contemporary Cuban playwright Abelardo Estorino's adaptation of Carrión's *Impure Women* and by the 19th century Spanish playwright Ramón de Valle Inclán's play *Divine Words*. Pottlitzer herself then describes the genesis of her translation, following a production of *Common Words* at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1986 that was rejected by Triana after he discovered that the RSC had radically adapted and restructured his text. Her description of the translation process raises further important issues regarding adaptation vs. translation for the theatre. Pottlitzer's translation of Triana's complex, multi-layered play aims for a 19th century diction and style that accurately captures the tone of Triana's work.

The issue concludes with Szilvia Naray-Davey's article "TRUE TO 'THE LIFE' IN THE TEXT—Naturalistic drama through the actors' naturalistic tools" about her translation process with the contemporary Hungarian playwright János Hay's *Vasárnapi*

Ebéd (2010), a commission from the National Theatre in Budapest that asked ten playwrights to each write a play responding to one of the Ten Commandments. Hay's commandment was "Honor thy father and thy mother" and the resulting play is *Sunday Lunch*. Naray-Davey describes her desire for her British audience "to love, accept, and value the play's foreignness." As such, her guiding principle for her translation became "peformability" using a Stanislavkian acting approach to naturalistic texts as the foundation for her translation of Hay's work. We hope to publish her translation of *Sunday Lunch* in a future issue of *The Mercurian*.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can now be found on the website of the Department of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina, <http://drama.unc.edu/related-links/the-mercurian/> where we will maintain a permanent web presence. As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Vol. 5, No. 1 of *The Mercurian* will be a special issue on German-language theatrical translation Guest Edited by Gillian Drake. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 5, No. 2 will be April 1, 2014.

--Adam Versényi

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TRANSLATION CONFERENCE: ROUNDTABLE & CONVERSATION WITH JEAN GRAHAM-JONES

The Theatrical Translation as Creative Process Conference was staged during the second week of April, 2012, on the campuses of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University. It was a collaborative offering of The Mercurian, the UNC-CH Department of Dramatic Art, The Process Series (also of UNC-CH), and the Performance and Embodied Research Colloquium at Duke University. Open rehearsals and staged readings of translated works were followed by lively round-table discussions. Rather than present formal lectures, conference participants drew on their collective experience in “Open Space” dialogues.

The conversation that follows presents participants’ reactions to Jean Graham-Jones’ translation of Ricardo Monti’s play, *Apocalypse Tomorrow*

ADAM VERSENYI. Jean, do you want to talk a little bit about your relationship with Monti? What the process has been?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I first met Monti in 1992 when I was in Argentina doing research for my dissertation. I lived there for a year, and I interviewed, I don’t know, seventy people involved in theater of the dictatorship era. He was someone whose first play was produced in 1970, and he also wrote a play that was produced in 1977 that was the great drama hit of the season, and reading both that play and the great comedy hit of the season, I thought, “Oh my God. How the hell did they *do* these plays under dictatorship, get around censorship, and be received, and with such success?” So he was on my wavelength for that reason, and I read everything he wrote and really connected to his plays. There’s one of his plays that I adore, which is called *A South-American Passion Play*. I had read all the criticism, like a good little scholar-girl, yet I disagreed with most of the local critics on how they’d interpreted the play. So I’m having this interview with Monti, and I’m sitting in his home, and we’re drinking tea, chat chat chat, and inside, I’m going, “Can I ask him? Should I ask him? I’m going to totally screw up this relationship by asking him...,” and I finally get up my courage at the very end of the afternoon, and I say, “I want to share with you my own response to this play.” And I say it. And he just stops, and he looks me, and he says, “I don’t get it. How can somebody who’s coming from the United States understand my play better than the people of my own city?” Hugely validating for me. At that part, I started thinking about it. He invited me to the theater, and I saw several things of his, and we met several times. And I thought, “I *do* have a connection to this guy. I think I kinda get him. I think everybody else should hear about him and know him and see his work.” Monti’s well-known in Europe, but in not the US. So I asked him if I could possibly take a stab at translating one of the plays. And that led to a working relationship of my going back every year to Buenos Aires with one more rough translation of another play, and over a ten-year period, I ended up translating nine of his plays. I’ve known Monti for over twenty years, now. When I directed his 1977 play, *Visit*, the hit I mentioned, I directed it in English

translation at Florida State, and I brought him up. He saw the first two performances and was part of the talkbacks. So he has seen how I work, too. Really, it's quite lovely.

NEIL BLACKADDER. I just wanted to say how much I appreciated an actor who was taking her time with the text.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Oh, I was really moved. I was so thankful.

NEIL BLACKADDER. There were moments when she wasn't speaking, that were still in the world. That was good.

JOSEPH MEGEL. It's hard, because you're doing a one-person show in a reading, and I think her original desire was to be able to be out of the book.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. But she'd end up in paraphrase land.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Exactly.

JOSEPH MEGEL. But she didn't paraphrase. There were maybe four words.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. That's it. She really embraced the text. Which I appreciated. And it's not easy language to wrap oneself around. If I had rewritten it to make it easier to speak – that's not what the original is. Monti's a very lyrical writer. He even writes in verse sometimes. He'll place a neoclassical ode in the middle of a play. I've struggled with those translations, and I want to honor the lyricism. To me, it's what gets under my skin and resonates with me.

JOSEPH MEGEL. It's a difficult thing to pace. A lot of my notes were "take your time with this," and "slow it down." It's a matter of sitting in it, but also trying to find the dynamic where things are lifting.

Yael PRIZANT. That also gives it class. Her class is much more obvious from her language, and the relationship between her and her sister from that language, how that language changes when she's Bianca versus when she's Rosie. If you lose that piece of it, that's a big chunk gone.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Oh! "Blanca and Rosie."

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. "*Bianca*."

NEIL BLACKADDER. Oh, "*Bianca*." Because I translated another play by Rebekka Kricheldorf, and it's called *Rosa und Blanca*. Based on the Grimms' Fairy Tale.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. We've got a *show*!

NEIL BLACKADDER. The Rosie and Blanc-ie Show! But is that in there? Is the Grimms fairy tale in Monti's mind, or is that just a coincidence?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I have not asked him that question.

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. Ask him about Faulkner.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Well, he *has* read Faulkner.

ADAM VERSENYI. Also, "white and red" in the Argentine context is a totally different matter than in the German context. There's a whole history. The formation of Argentina as a nation was essentially a civil war between the Unitarian Party and the –

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. The Liberal Centralist, let's-be-like-the-United-States-and-Europe party, very focused in the capital of Buenos Aires. And then a federal, regional rights movement, where you had a lot of local bosses and party leaders. Then in the mid-19th century, a dictator by the name of Rosas, who made everybody wear red –

ADAM VERSENYI. You had to paint your house red.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Everything had to be red, or you could be dead. So there's a bit of that authoritarian in Rosie, Rosa. But *rosa* is different, because *rosa* is "pink." It's "Rose," but it's also "pink." And of course, Bianca/Blanca ... virginal, stay-at-home, innocent. I think it's more those connotations – which could be in the Grimm as well, right?

Back to a question that Andy Bragen asked me earlier: Monti went to college for a little bit, but dropped out. He's very much an autodidact. In the 70s, he was influenced by the Germans. Peter Stein, for example, he *loved* Stein's stagings back then. He has a very European background, more than US. That's not atypical for intellectual formation of the Argentine middle classes. A lot of philosophy, a lot of history. He told me that he basically quit reading fiction about twenty-five years ago. He's still writing a historical novel that he's been working on since I met him. It's about six hundred pages now. I've yet to see any of it. He's done adaptations. About four years ago, he did a theatrical adaptation of *A Death in Venice* that's really wonderful. He's done some adaptations of novels like Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* – he did an incredible theatrical adaptation of that.

ADAM VERSENYI. And of *Marathon*. An adaptation of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Yes and no. It's because Jaime [Kogan] told him he wanted to set a play in a dance hall, and then Monti went to town with it. Yet it's very historical and Argentine. Some of his plays are historically set. He has some influences of Brecht, I would say. Brecht and Beckett were very present in the Buenos Aires cultural scene during his formative years; in his childhood, there was an important production of

Waiting for Godot in Buenos Aires. It seems like everyone I know who was alive then saw it.

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. How old is he now?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. He was born in 1944. That makes him – 68?

Yael Prizant. I'm glad that you said that about Beckett, because I definitely got bits of *Happy Days*. Maybe because a reading –

JOSEPH MEGEL. Didn't you see the sand? I put sand –

ADAM VERSENYI. That teacup was full of sand.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. In the Argentine production, the actress sat on a little black cube. Just sat there in her little pink suit and her gray wig, and did all sorts of wonderful things with her legs and arms. Bonnie really moved from there when she came in and left. Joseph has a copy of the DVD of that Argentine version. Which I'm not sure I totally liked.

Monti is a rather shy person, and he stays home a lot. He doesn't go out. I've had one meal in a restaurant with him. It's always, "Come over to my house. We'll have some tea.". He's a real homebody.. When we brought him to Tallahassee, he was there for two days, and said, "I want to go home." He didn't do any tourist stuff.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Well, once you've seen Tallahassee...

NEIL BLACKADDER. Get home as soon as you can!

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. Does he get involved in the staging of his plays, their productions?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. He worked for a long time with one director, Jaime Kogan. They were very close, and then the director died. That kind of sent him into a spin as to who to work with, and he wasn't produced for a while, until he started working with the woman who directed the Buenos Aires production of this monologue, Monica Vinao. Earlier in 1989, he and his longtime partner Kogan fought, and Monti took over directing *A South American Passion-Play*. It was a huge disaster. He directed a couple times before that, but now, nothing. He goes to rehearsals and is an incredibly generous person in terms of text. He'd say to me during the translation process, "Go with the simplest word. Do whatever you want." He'd sit in on rehearsals and be extremely generous and open with his work. He spent time with my actors and was really wonderful.

NEIL BLACKADDER. One word thing that I was very interested in was the thing that the kid on the street says to her. Is it "rotten old bitch"?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I'm glad you picked up on that. "Vieja podrida." We talked with Joseph and Bonnie about this. It occurred to me that the kid would never have said that to her – in 2001, no kid is going to run up to you in the street and say that. It'd be "vieja de mierda." It'd be worse. My interpretation is that it's her rewriting. She's rewriting and retelling.

NEIL BLACKADDER. She can't bring herself to say what he really said.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Right. I wanted it to sound antiquated. Not euphemistic, but ... and then she calls herself, at the end, a rotten old bitch. "Rotten" works very well for me in terms of no longer being able to lose her virginity, not having another virginity to give, you know, locked up in your home. I'm glad it hit home.

ADAM VERSENYI. Something that really resonated for me is the way time works in this piece. Perhaps it's because I just taught parts of *Death of the Last Black Man...* the other day and was trying to get my students to understand the way that time works in that piece, that it's not linear but it's a spiral and past, present, and future are there together, which is very much the same thing that happens here, but in a totally different way – I haven't quite wrapped my mind around what the distinction is between the two of them yet. But that was fascinating. I think it has something to do with her being an unreliable narrator of events.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I think of her in terms of Freudian dream revision. I feel that that's what she's doing. It's kind of in that in-between state. I'm not a Freudian by any stretch, but that's kind of how I process –

ADAM VERSENYI. Different levels of consciousness that are occurring.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. For me, she's headed toward a state of grace of some sort.

JOSEPH MEGEL. I think Bonnie came to that, too.

Yael PRIZANT. I like the thought that the piece starts with a day-marker, because to me, that took out a little of the question of sanity vs. senility or dementia. Because that's the first question they ask you, isn't it, when you hit your head? What day is it, or what year? And so there's some sense of her being able to mark that pretty clearly. "No, Rosie, you're wrong, it wasn't 1999, it was 2000." She seems to have the dateline down, right from the get-go. Which left me *not* doubting her mental state. She becomes more unreliable as it goes on. But the fact that she starts out fairly clear let me in to see her as somebody who's holding onto it at the beginning, and it slowly crumbles for her. That's what it did for me.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. For me, it's not that she has dementia, just that she's living in an in-between space. She sometimes connects and sometimes doesn't.

ADAM VERSENYI. Well, she's also *high*.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. And she's high! Yeah.

Yael Prizant. And the choice of that drug for an older person is fascinating.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Isn't it wild? I said to Monti, "Why the coke?" And he said, "I don't know..." He liked the asthma plus the cocaine.

JOSEPH MEGEL. I never knew coke was for asthma!

ANDY BRAGEN. We really got to hear the play. Bonnie articulated it in a great way. But I also had this thought watching it, that the dramatic tension of the piece lies in this character starting out with the orgasm, and taking the coke, pushing against her being alone, à la *Happy Days* and a number of other plays. I think that the choice here was for her to sink into a kind of sensory experience of so much of it right now, instead of pushing toward the more playful side of the play.

JOSEPH MEGEL. There was a moment where she was seeing everything, it was really clear and very vivid, and I asked her to veil it a little bit. Make it a little more fuzzy. And she did that brilliantly.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. You used the image of a scrim.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Actors are really clear on what scrim is. It really changed the quality. The other was too precise, almost unreal. It just didn't work as well for me.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. For me, when she gets in the street and she sees the boy, it's almost over-focused. It's such a level of focus that everything else around her becomes fuzzy.

Yael Prizant. But that made cocaine a very good choice. It also made me believe that that would drive her outside.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. It also made her more interesting. Honestly! It's like, *what? she snorts coke! What an interesting old lady!*

Yael Prizant. But you could have chosen the sorts of drugs that would have made her want to stay inside and sort of retreat, but that was one that made her want to go out.

NEIL BLACKADDER. If you'd asked us to write down what we expect we're going to hear in a monologue about a seventy-five year old lady, how many of us would have put down "cocaine" and "orgasms"? Apart from Joseph! *[laughter]* That's ruffling our expectation right from the get-go, so we're more interested in her.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I have a question, and it has to do with production. As you could tell, I made a very clear choice not to overly contextualize it, in the sense of, "This

is Buenos Aires, December 20th, 2001.” It’s a political move on my part, or a strategic move rather, in that so much Latin American theater is immediately categorized as political theater, and it’s immediately localized as “it happens to them and nobody else.” I’ve dealt with a lot of that, and there are certain plays that I’ve done where I’ve made the local a very clear setting. This one, I purposely didn’t add it – it’s not in the original text, and I didn’t add it. I was wondering, in terms of reception but also potential production, how much localizing would you want to see or wanted to have seen? There was a little confusion in terms of what year she’s in, but I’m okay with that in her present moment.

ANDY BRAGEN. There’s a very long tradition of monologues you can’t quite place. I put it in the tradition of Beckett or David Adjmi’s *Elective Affinities* that was done by Zoë Caldwell this past autumn, some of the Wallace Shawn stuff – *The Fever* – where you can’t quite place exactly where they are and it doesn’t really matter.

NEIL BLACKADDER. But the specificity about 1945 – I was trying to work it out. Bonnie said she was imagining it was now, but if it was now, then she had the orgasm when she was five? That’s a very different story!

ANDY BRAGEN. We’ll put that together though, right, from her age?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Well, in the reading, the stage directions say that she’s seventy-five. But in performance, you might not know how old she was. It’s seventy-five for 2003. For the moment he wrote it in, for the specific context.

JOSEPH MEGEL. So now she’s 83.

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. For some of the other plays we saw, it was important to me to know where they are. But this one is not that way. I’m imagining, I can really well imagine, an old woman like that, be it here or in Argentina or now or forty years ago. I can well imagine that, and I don’t think it’s important.

JOSEPH MEGEL. And people go out into cities with melees all the time. It could’ve been the LA riots.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Except for the knife sharpener. The knife sharpener was the thing – what is that telling me about where we are? Cause that’s not a world I recognize.

Yael PRIZANT. But it didn’t differentiate it as Argentina versus Bolivia. The knife sharpener is something I see in the street in Cuba. It may only be Latin America in a certain sense, but it doesn’t take you out of it being one country or the other. We don’t have those in the US. We have the trucks, but not on the street.

JOSEPH MEGEL. In boroughs in Manhattan! In boroughs in Manhattan there are knife sharpeners who went around – it might have been in ethnic neighborhoods, but I have this distinct memory of being in a neighborhood in New York City –

ANDY BRAGEN. It's archaic.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Yeah.

KLAUS VAN DEN BERG. I had no trouble imagining it. My mom's dad never learned to drive. To have a knife-sharpener or somebody come around with ice...

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Plus the whistle is going to sound – what does it say, I wrote the words but I can't remember them – a far-away, almost unreal sound of a knife-sharpener's whistle? You have the broken violin string or something. A Chekhovian moment.

Yael Prizant. I think it's a moment of, is the music in her head or is it real?

For Cuban plays, there's a thing in Cuba where time sort of stands still in some ways. There are old cars ... it feels like the 50s or something.

JOSEPH MEGEL. I feel sometime that these images that seem foreign exist in a literary allusion. When I hear "knife sharpener," I don't need to go to any country in particular. It becomes the world of this play, and certainly there are plenty of American playwrights who throw allusions at us that may feel foreign to our cultural experience, but become their own thing and have their own value. There does become this balance question for me: so we have this relationship that is so specifically class-oriented that we may not recognize between the two boys, but makes sense to me in a North American context. I guess what I'm saying is that these constructs have their own meaning and their own buoyancy as literary allusion.

Yael Prizant. I would say that we, as translators, should be asking whether it is legible, and not *how* it's legible. Because it doesn't matter which way you read it as long as you can.

Adam Versenyi. And is it part of the world of this particular play? How important is it to make it legible within that world?

Yael Prizant. It does not sound strange when she talks about it within her context – at all.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. The language is not easily spoken language. I thought Bonnie really worked it. There are some phrases that had to be quite long, some I could break up, some that just had to go on and on. She stayed with it and did it and I was so happy to get to hear that. It was a real gift. But she threw me. The first thing she asked me when we went out to lunch was, "I'm all about the Method, so, what's your backstory?" I thought, "Oh, crap." But I was ready for that question, and I just said, "If you asked the playwright that, I know him, and his answer would be, 'I have no idea.'"

And she was kind enough to take that and work it in her own way, and she found what she needed to find, I think.

ADAM VERSENYI. That's another really interesting aspect about the way we set all of this up, which is, for the final piece, you have an actor who is experienced, who has the chops, who's going to take it and run with it, versus the other types of casting we had to do for the other three pieces.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Thank you! And she was older. I really liked that she was an older actress rather than someone in their twenties trying to age up.

ADAM VERSENYI. But I'm just thinking how that then affects audience reception particularly with a translation, rather than with something that's been written in American English initially. I mean, I don't know! I guess it's a question that I've got rolling around in my brain.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Is that part of the legibility issue for you?

ADAM VERSENYI. Well, a reading of anything is going to depend upon the quality of actors that you've got doing the reading, but is there another layer that enters in? If the acting isn't clearly serving the text for a translation, does that make it even more difficult to make the cultural shift?

JOSEPH MEGEL. Well, it speaks to the first duty of a reading, which is legibility. I mean, that is the first duty of a reading. To create clarity, as much as you can, about what's happening, what the language is doing. With some plays, it's harder to create that legibility than with others. But when I think about directing a reading, that's my first duty as a director. To find a way to help the actor make it as clear as possible what's going on in the text. It really does help to have actors with chops no matter what the age is, but age appropriate is also very helpful, because the visual of that – twenty year olds playing seventy year olds – the disconnect of that is always going to distance you from the reality of that play.

ADAM VERSENYI. This is a question to throw at you, Joseph. Was your approach to working on this just as if it was any new play?

JOSEPH MEGEL. Yes. I did not think of it differently.

ADAM VERSENYI. As a translation.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Right. No, I didn't think of it differently. And I had Jean there, and Jean will tell you that I'm not shy about asking the playwright or the translator questions about text.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. That's been a real revelation for me, I have to admit. It's helped me so much to think of a new translation as a new play. I think it's going to help

me with working with directors and producers and other people considering doing a translation, to think of it in those terms. Because in my own experience there have been some problematic match-ups, and I think it's because I haven't thought of a translation's first production as a new play. It's obvious! But it's helpful.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Talking with you *is* like talking to a playwright, because there are questions I ask playwrights all the time, where they're not even clear what a line is doing when there's a problem, versus when you *know*, "Oh, that's this, and everybody misses it."

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Or when you maybe don't know why but you know it has to be there.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Exactly right. Or, the distinction between the language being difficult to say on purpose, versus an oddly constructed line that should be retranslated. But you *know* the difference.

Yael Prizant. I had the good fortune on the translation of *Chamaco* to get a group of actors sitting around the table to, what I'll say is, *hear* the play. Because we sat around a conference table, so it certainly wasn't a presentation and I wasn't watching their faces. I was hearing the play. A few of the roles were not perfectly cast – they were age appropriate, but not perfectly cast – but for me as a translator, there was something about the audio of the play that became really important. And I think we have to think about then, when we're discussing something – concert reading vs. staged reading vs. the other layer, which may be for a person like the translator to hear the work. For us it was private. There was no public there. The actors had the text beforehand but certainly were not expected to have worked on it.

HECTOR GARZA. Did they have the Spanish?

Yael Prizant. No. It was the English version only. We didn't read the Spanish.

HECTOR GARZA. I've seen instances where the Spanish version is in the room, and that becomes really problematic –

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. When you have a Cuban actor saying, "Well, that's not how we say it..."

Yael Prizant. Yeah. Right. No, there was not Spanish. I recorded it, so I can use the recording later. But it certainly made me go, "Ooh, that section's clunky. Whoops, this part."

JOSEPH MEGEL. Again. Translation, original play. Same thing.

Yael Prizant. But the privateness of that reading, before it becomes a concert reading, was especially important.

ANDY BRAGEN. There's also the question of tone and style, I think, and I think any first production is about discovering where the translation is in line with the text, where it is against the text or where it is in conversation with it. And I think it's a fact – I've talked with people who have directed at Repertorio Español—there is a certain kind of Latin American acting style that is very different from the US. I'm not putting any judgment here. It's not simply about realism. There are actors who are doing all kinds of stuff. I think it's very interesting when you see a Mexican play in translation, for example, it's going to feel very different. A Japanese play in the States, or a German one. I think in *The Ugly One* [at Soho Rep] for example, they were trying to find their "American" style to deal with the script. It becomes something very new. I'm sure the Argentinian production would be amazing; but I also imagine that the most successful American production, in an amazing way, would feel completely different.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Oh, yes. But it's interesting – I think Neil and I are kind of in the same stage with our translations in that I've done readings of this but it's not been actually produced. Whereas you, Andy, have had a full production. Was the reading for you here more like a second production reading?

JOSEPH MEGEL. Do you feel like it was a throwback to a stage you're already beyond?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. For me, I'm still making some adjustments such that if anybody wanted to do this, I'd probably do some minor tweaks.

ANDY BRAGEN. I listen for things. After you've worked on something for a few weeks, and you have some very experienced actors, a lot of times, they make things work. It's never bad to hear it again, because there are things that pop out for me. But it's different having seen it produced. I have a sense of what I think works in space and all that, and adjustments are made in terms of what it means in that sense. You can't get that rhythm, you can't get that much rhythm, and you can't always figure out tone, in a reading. You're going to get a certain sort of gesture in its direction. I have a number of plays that are unproduced, sadly, and a number of translations that are unproduced. There are immense things I've gotten out of workshops of these plays. Your translations are both done, and they're really wonderful. It's not about you having more work to do, at least I don't think so, but I think it's more about, you get in a rehearsal room, you're going to have a deeper understanding of what the play is, which isn't even necessarily about language. It's about a fuller feeling.

Yael Prizant. I was thinking, during the reading this afternoon, about how the actor's face becomes text. I haven't thought about that quite so much before.

ANDY BRAGEN. That moment when she describes the sister, making herself up like the sister ... I kept thinking of the tattered nature of these Argentinians who had money and who don't anymore. This sister. To a part of her, going out felt like a kind of prostitution.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Especially the description of the lift.

ANDY BRAGEN. Yeah, the lift. And this is the breadwinner –

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Having forgotten that they have money out there, and she needed money.

ANDY BRAGEN. Yeah, it was fascinating to feel that.

JOSEPH MEGEL. Yeah, you know, and girls that go out are sluts. “That’s why I got your man...”

Yael PRIZANT. But when she says “the little hat,” too, that also made her this strange throwback to the women who would never leave the house without a hat on. Right? There was that sort of distance all of a sudden that I loved.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. There are people who have lived in their modest apartments in Buenos Aires for generations, you know. The apartments are paid for, so you don’t have that expense. I can imagine her, and I can also imagine it being a place that’s maybe also starting to miss some furniture... I was really pleased that there were some students there this afternoon. Who was the one sitting in the front, who talked about Japan?

Yael PRIZANT. Is he a student?

ADAM VERSENYI. I think he’s a graduate student

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Thanks for the wonderful comments.

ADAM VERSENYI. I know we’re all tired, and this has been a long few days. But anything else? Final thoughts?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. This goes for your selection of collaborators and texts: I really appreciated how un-Usonian they were.

ANDY BRAGEN. Un-what?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Un-Usonian. I copy Frank Lloyd Wright and Noam Chomsky, who referred to people from the United States as “Usonian.”

ANDY BRAGEN. Un-American? Oh, come on! I take some offense to that! I mean, Neil’s not American ... but we all live here.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I’m American, but not just from the United States.

JOSEPH MEGEL. But at least you speak our language. *[laughter]*

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. The point of this is that I really liked that there was, for lack of a better word, a foreignness to each one. It's something you don't always see in translation. All four plays have that, and retain it in translation.

NEIL BLACKADDER. Do you mean, as opposed to – if I translated a family drama from the German, it could just as easily be set in the United States of America?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Or some of the suggestions in terms of what you have done – it could be anywhere. It could be in the United States.

ADAM VERSENYI. So translating *Ballad*, but turning it into Marin County.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Or *Huddersfield*. I would take a different direction from Caridad's. I actually don't want it to be Pennsylvania slackers. I want the location. And even if Caridad doesn't wish to acknowledge it, I think it's there in her translation.

ANDY BRAGEN. I think that the idea of a play that captures the place it's coming from and the place it's going to, and exists in that kind of third place, that would be absolutely right.

NEIL BLACKADDER. So, I don't know what the thinking is about future iterations of this conference, and I don't want to press either Adam or Joseph to say anything about that particularly, but I was just thinking – it's been great, and I've really enjoyed this whole thing – but thinking about translations as if they were new plays, I was wondering what it would be like to do a staged reading of a draft translation? It would put the translator in a pretty vulnerable and weird position, but it would give a chance to talk about the choices that are being made based on what we all heard together in a group reading.

HECTOR GARZA. I was thinking the same thing and I would volunteer for that. That's one of the things that I think is next. We've been talking about where we are in the process. All four of these are published already and have some success. It'd be interesting to see something –

JOSEPH MEGEL. And it's much more accurate to what the process is anyway.

ADAM VERSENYI. And I could conceive doing something that's in its first or second draft, doing a reading of it on the first night of a four-day event, and on the last night, having worked the script, doing another reading. It would require more planning.

JOSEPH MEGEL. And the writer will never attend a conference again ...

[laughter]

Yael Prizant. But can we add a layer to that? I'd love to do partnered collaborations, where we have a partner who is a translator, maybe purposely not from the same language, who might read the work before and give us some feedback so there's already a conversation before it comes out to that next level.

Jean Graham-Jones. So, two translators working together.

Yael Prizant. Together, where they're each working on a piece and they read each other's and give each other feedback. I guess you could always make it partners coming from the same base language for the translation, but to me, there's something about the translation being all there is when you don't speak the base language.

Jean Graham-Jones. Andy's experience.

Andy Bragen. Yeah, I think there's a certain amount of freedom in that. I think that's great when you read someone else. Because then you're really focused on how it's going to feel in the English.

Adam Versenyi. The other thing to do – the experience that I'm remembering – is like when I was in grad school, we were required to take a course on translation and adaptation, and the dramaturges and the playwrights were all put into that class together. So Edit Villarreal and I both translated a couple of scenes from Lorca's *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*) and then we brought them in, presented them simultaneously the same day. They could not have been more different. There was also something very weird going on in terms of male and female selections of language there.

Yael Prizant. Virginia Scott has an exercise where she gives you a literal trot of a piece of Molière. And I don't speak French. So she gave us the French, but she gave us her literal trot and asked us to make something of it. And they were all completely different. It was exciting to see that as a group in the room, but it was also exciting to understand people's processes, because we had to speak to the choices we were making.

Adam Versenyi. That's exactly what I was just thinking.

Jean Graham-Jones. But those instances of well-known plays and playwrights where there's a lot of baggage coming to the table. It'd be really interesting to do that with a play by someone you don't know.

Andy Bragen. There was a translation conference in Montreal where they invited eight translators from various countries: a Lithuanian, an Argentinian, two German translators, etc. etc.

Jean Graham-Jones. Sounds like a joke! They all walk into a bar and then what happens?

ANDY BRAGEN. And it was. Both Germans were named Frank, from Berlin, bald with glasses. There's a joke there. But we did a little workshop with excerpts from this play, *Yukon Style*, which I really love. A Quebecois play. We had the French, and everybody took fifteen minutes, maybe a little longer, to translate two little passages into the language they translate into, and then we read those out loud. Granted, we didn't all understand the languages. The two Franks, apparently, had very different translations – they sounded very different – and then the Lithuanian ... You really got this amazing sense of everyone working on this same piece – quickly, of course, not with a lot of thought – but how people wrestled with things. It was fascinating to hear, and actually pretty quick.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. I would like to have us pursue Joseph's master idea of the Network. Even as simple as an email list, we all have each other's contact information ... but also maybe collectively coming up with all the theaters in the United States we think might be interested in new translation. People were throwing out names in the course of these several days, and I actually think there's quite a group.

ANDY BRAGEN. Who knows how reliable it is, but in the back of the Dramatists Sourcebook, there is a list of companies that claim to be interested in translation.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. But I'm more interested in the ones that we know and really believe are interested or have been doing it.

ADAM VERSENYI. Well, we have about five minutes, so any final thoughts anybody would like to throw out?

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. Alejandra has been so quiet...

ALEJANDRA RODRIGUEZ. Oh, but I'm the type of person who likes to learn. Listen and learn. The only thing that I can say now is that this conference has been an epiphany to me. Has opened a new world to me. So I'm super happy, and thank you very much, for allowing me to be part of it. And congratulations to all of you, because your work is awesome.

NEIL BLACKADDER. I don't know what the ethics of this are, but if somebody tells you they had an epiphany, is it rude to ask them to talk to you about the epiphany?

[laughter]

I'm interested. Can you say a bit more?

ALEJANDRA RODRIGUEZ. This is why I don't talk very much! Well, in the sense that I never thought about translating and I have a lot of problems because the works that I work on, they are not translations. So nobody knows it, and it is very difficult to tell people about them. And I was thinking, maybe I could do *this*, someday. Because at the same time, as you know, I write theater, I love to write, and being here with you, I have

seen that being a translator is also being an artist, being a writer. It appeared so fascinating to me.

SCOTT WILLIAMS. It's been interesting for me, too, because I come at it differently from most of ya'll, I think. You come at it from theater, and I come at it from the much larger angle of translation studies. Lots of reading in translation theory, what different people have been doing over the last thirty-four years particularly, struggling with myself to situate theater translation within that much larger context. It's partly confirmed things that I have thought about, and it gives me lots of food for thought. I can't say that I had an epiphany – it might come in two weeks or three weeks – but I have a lot of food for thought.

JOSEPH MEGEL. The conference was incredibly important to me because I'm sort of expanding. I came from such a specific new play/playwright model. I got a good sense that, yes, it changes, people do it different ways, but they all take some form that is sort of understandable. To really think about this process as a new play process, and to see that my impulse and instinct are probably the same, and that you're probably working on the same issues and the same problems, ultimately, with the idea that the connection to the original material is important – but that's sort of like an adaptation issue. What happens when you adapt from another source? What is fidelity versus the theatrical world to be created anew? This process feels very familiar to me. It was sort of revelatory that I can go into thinking about process for translations in this way and feel fairly secure.

ADAM VERSENYI. That was obviously part of my thinking in putting all of this together, which is that the translator is frequently not seen as a creative artist. I firmly believe that they are artists. I'd just like to thank you all for the privilege of spending the last number of days with you, to talk about things that I care passionately about. That's been wonderful.

JEAN GRAHAM-JONES. The sustained conversation has been a luxury. *[All clap, and stretch, and leave.]*

*

Jean Graham-Jones is a professor at the CUNY Graduate Center's Theatre Program, where she currently serves as program head. The author of *Exorcising History: Argentine Theater under Dictatorship*, she has published three booklength collections of Argentinean plays in translation: *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti*, *BAiT: Buenos Aires in Translation* (four plays presented in 2006 at New York City's Performance Space 122), and *Timbre 4: 2 Plays by Claudio Tolcachir*. She recently completed translating Rafael Spregelburd's latest play, *Spam*, and her monograph, *Evita, Inevitably: Performing Argentina's Female Icons Before and After Eva Perón*, will be published by the University of Michigan Press in 2014.

PLAYAS GOTTA PLAY: AN INTRODUCTION TO *HATER*

BY SAMUEL BUGGELN

1

As you've probably inferred from the title, *Hater* doesn't sound like most translations of classical French theatre. The verse is unrhymed and the language is very, very contemporary. I'll discuss here the ideas behind this approach and in some ways how it has worked, but I can't pretend I formulated the rationale in advance. I work in theatre regularly as a director and occasionally as an adaptor, and at the time of beginning the project many years ago, had not translated a thing. So the sound of *Hater* didn't emerge from theory—or even from knowledge!—but by trial and error, from my intuitive feeling for the play.

I first read *Le Misanthrope* in a standard rhymed translation, and I immediately loved the brilliance and force of the argumentation, the hilarious comebacks, the exuberance of the characters and their colliding needs. There seemed something proto-Chekhovian about these peoples' passionate refusal to be in love with the right person. But I was suspicious as to whether the translation was doing all it could to transmit the qualities of the original. I remember feeling like I was reading the play somehow muffled, across a veil. And when I read the play in French, I was delighted and surprised. Delighted by the breezy clarity of Molière's verse, quite unlike the structure and formality of its English counterpart, and surprised by the vocabulary. I suppose I'd expected a French Shakespeare who would send me to the dictionary at every other word. Instead I found the amazingly clear and modern-sounding diction of Molière. I loved it. I reviewed a lot of other English translations: no dice. The path was clear. Like any self-respecting twentysomething who had no idea what he was doing, I set out to write a translation of my own.

At first I didn't know what my version would sound like: somewhere I have pages of rhyming couplets, iambic pentameter, and period-sounding language. As I worked, though, what "clicked" revealed itself, and soon I'd found a method: I sat at my desk energetically mouthing each original line and then re-enacting the beat in English. (Like

a crazy person. Am I the only reader of *The Mercurian* to have found himself doing this?) It was a way to step back from the words and phrases of the original—laden, anyway, with *fausses amis*—to attempt instead to discern the dramatic impulses animating the text, and then to find the way that impulse might be most entertainingly verbalized by the same person in the same circumstances today. Of course this was an act of imagination: these people and circumstances couldn't exist today. But, I reasoned, isn't all translation of period work an act of imagination?

I found my way to free verse by a process of elimination. My attempts at rhyming couplets and blank verse hindered my ability to land the jokes and argumentative points as powerfully as I heard them, and in return neither form was creating an effect I delighted in. (I've never much loved the way long-form rhyme plays in English; and when I don't know the source material in advance, in the moment of hearing most performance to be honest I find blank verse tough to distinguish from prose.) On the other hand when I wrote in straight-up prose, I found myself agreeing with Richard Wilbur—widely considered Molière's preeminent English translator—who argues that in a prose version some “‘musical’ elements would be lost, in particular the frequently intricate arrangements of balancing half-lines, lines, couplets, quatrains, and sestets. There is no question that words, when dancing within such patterns, are not their prosaic selves, but have a wholly different mood and meaning.”¹

In terms of diction, I found that every time I backed off from a contemporary choice in favor of something that sounded more “period,” I succeeded, again, only in fuzzing the argument and the humor. My main concern was that the characters of *Le Misanthrope* are drawn from among the most fabulous, fashionable, and irreverent people in Molière's Paris, and I wanted them to sound that way rather than stodgy and fuddy-duddyish. And conveniently the major characters here, unlike in many plays of this period, are similar in status (no wily chambermaids or rebellious children)—so with no need to establish social

¹ Richard Wilbur, *The Misanthrope and Tartuffe, by Molière* (Orlando: Houghton Mifflin; 1965), 9

strata via levels of formal language, the last argument disappeared against simply making the characters sound like I imagined their modern-day equivalents.²

Evidently I wasn't fussed that this sort of language would feel anachronistic. Instead, I think I was drawn to that feeling. In order to say why, let me take a step back. A translator's central dilemma often seems to hover around a version of this question: to what extent do I translate the ease of reading of the original, even if that requires ironing out what is unfamiliar and thereby sacrificing flavor; and to what extent do I transmit the qualities of the work that are foreign to us, perhaps making the translated work a tougher read than it is in the source? Many translators, myself included, may sympathize more with the latter imperative—after all, the foreignness is the point—while perhaps a publisher will lean to the former. In the case of theatre translation, when the work is destined to be performed as well as read, the pressure naturally increases to make the language as natural to speak and easy to understand as possible. (After all, audiences won't be able to review a bit they didn't get the first time.)

Nonetheless, as a director in a recent case much like this one, I found myself insisting on the foreign. It was a LORT production of Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage* (recent, set in the present, easy to speak in the original). For the West End run of the play, Christopher Hampton's excellent translation was into British English, and the setting remained Paris: the characters addressed each other as Madame and Monsieur, and the *clafouti* remained an old family recipe from the *midi*. For Broadway, the language was sensibly shifted to a more American English, but the story was, distressingly, reset in New York. Leaving aside whether this transition was well executed, I found it disheartening that some decision-makers thought an audience of privileged middle-aged New Yorkers would be unable to invest in a story about privileged middle-aged Parisians. For my regional

² By contrast, my translation of Marivaux's *The School for Mothers* appeared in Volume 4, Number 1 of *The Mercurian*. The play is full of levels of status (parent/child, servant/master) and is about a child's desire to escape the strictures of duty, so a more formal diction (by my standards, at any rate!) seemed right.

production, therefore, we created an American equivalent to the West End version: a hybrid text in which the spoken English was American, but the setting remained Paris.³

I think I preferred this approach because as a director, one gets in the habit of seeking the most exciting way to detonate, if you will, a text onto an audience. So, perhaps like many directors, I think of foreignness and familiarity less as poles on a spectrum than as things one might *collide*. (One thinks of how seldom Shakespeare's plays seem to be set in Elizabethan costume these days.) For me, then, one of the reasons to produce *God of Carnage* in the US is to communicate that the set of venal lefties depicted in the play transcends country and culture—a “bonus” layer of meaning that's not available to the original audience (perhaps some compensation for the inevitable losses of translation.) And we get this effect only when we're reminded of the familiarity of these couples *alongside* their foreignness (in this case, familiar character versus foreign country). In *Carnage*, then, to shift the setting to New York not only effaces much of the flavor of the original, but also misses the opportunity for this “collision” layer of meaning.

Since of course *Le Misanthrope* is set in a world that's thrillingly different from our own,⁴ in the case of *Hater* I think it was this taste for collision that led me to a contemporary diction. Let's look at an example, comparing the original to a standard recent prose translation and to *Hater*:

Molière	John Wood ⁵	Buggeln
Parbleu, c'est là-dessus, parler en homme sage, Et je vous en estime, encore, davantage: Souffrons, donc, que le temps forme des noeuds si doux. Mais, cependant, je m'offre	By Jove! Spoken like a man of sense! I admire you all the more for it. Let us then leave it to time to establish this happy relationship between us. Meanwhile I am entirely at your service. If there is anything I can do for you at Court, I am known to	Wow. You are so wise. I'm very impressed. Okay. We'll get to be friends slowly. Over time. But in the meantime truly you know Alex I'm your guy. If there are any

³ Since all of the words were Hampton's, we hoped that this hybrid script would be ethically (if not, ahem, strictly contractually) sound.

⁴ The action takes place at the home of a very rich, very young widow, where all day, whether she's around or not, a gaggle of powerful somewhat older men stop by and/or hang out, openly competing and maneuvering for their hostess's hand in marriage. Different!

⁵ John Wood, trans., rev. Coward, David, *The Misanthrope and Other Plays, by Molière* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 102

entièrement à vous; S'il faut faire à la cour, pour vous, quelque ouverture, On sait, qu'auprès du Roi, je fais quelque figure, Il m'écoute, et dans tout, il en use, ma foi, Le plus honnêtement du monde, avecque moi. Enfin, je suis à vous, de toutes les manières;	cut some figure with His Majesty. I have his ear and he treats me, by God, with the greatest possible consideration. Once again then—count on me entirely.	doors you need opened at the Louvre, I kind of know the King— I mean he listens to me, and he's always very very nice, so you know whatever you need it's fine.
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Now, OK. I'm certain that the diction of *Hater* will be startling to many, and to some simply definitively be Not What Molière Sounds Like in English. The point of the excerpt, though, is that in the NYC production of *Hater*, Oronte's line about being friendly with the king got a laugh. And that moment isn't particularly funny in the original play—it's an example of the bonus "collision" level, in which we are pleasantly startled that in the world of this play, whose characters are so recognizable, Louis XIV lives across town in the Louvre, and the guy onstage is in some way friendly with him.

Now, the line "I am known to cut some figure with His Majesty, I have his ear and he treats me, by God, with the greatest possible consideration," is a thoughtful and responsible translation. As would be the case in any conventional rendering, though, when we hear it we probably don't laugh, because nothing in it startles us with the differences between then and now. The apparent period of the language matches so well with the period of the play that in some way, to my ear, they efface one another. As standard as it may be to translate old plays into such appropriate-sounding language, I think when we do we run the risk that the audience receives both the form and content somehow condescendingly, enveloped in a nostalgic haze. So the contemporary sound of *Hater* operates, I hope, in a way analogous to a Shakespeare production costumed in business suits. The contemporary element lends immediacy to a foreign world, and the ongoing jangle of anachronism is stimulating rather than bothersome.

2

So my idea was, roughly, to land an unfamiliar world as unexpectedly clearly on our ear as the original would have on the original audience. Having found my way to that approach, specific questions often answered themselves.

I adjusted the characters' names, like the title, to be more familiar. "Hater" was acquired after the text was effectively finished, when the play was first produced, at the Ohio Theatre in NYC as part of their annual Ice Factory Festival. (I directed.) It seemed a lucky stroke that "hater" should have been so much in vogue as a term for the person who disapproves of everything.⁶ (After 2000 songs, iTunes runs out of space to list the cuts with "hater" in the title.) If such a popular term hadn't been in the air, though, I might have stuck with *The Misanthrope*. I still regret the extent to which a different title invites the interpretation that *Hater* is an "adaptation" rather than a "translation." It seems to me that the distinction is slippery in general, but so long as it's in use I maintain that no matter how unexpected the vernacular, any version of a play that transmits the referents of the original is a translation.

In line with the overall informal diction, I use first names for address rather than the original's honorifics. (In the few moments that servants speak, they address their superiors as "Sir" or "Madam.") And where Molière's characters explode, "Par la sangbleu!", "Têtebleu!" or "La peste!" I, ahem, didn't settle on "zounds" or "egad" as their most effective equivalents.

Having stepped back from the "nearest word" approach, I could make other choices to aid clarity. The play's many references to offstage legal action can be confusing at the best of times, so I translated "le cour" as "the palace" or "the Louvre," rather than "Court." This avoids confusion around the courts of law the play references and implies, and in a nice way reinforces the concreteness of what it would mean to be "at court" at this time. Similarly, though "arrêter" is most directly translated as "to arrest," to be "arrested" in Molière's moment seems to have been something more like what we'd call being "indicted," so that is the verb I used.

Given those parameters, line by line *Hater* hews very closely to the syntactic referents of the original play.⁷ (Closer, for example, than rhyming translations can.) And

⁶ The word is not, of course, a precise equivalent. Misanthropes hate human nature (or humankind), and haters hate, well, everything. But the proximity was too good to resist.

⁷ Thus my insistence that *Hater* is a translation rather than an adaptation. Reviewing the well-received production at the Ohio Theatre, two critics for prominent publications were

surprisingly, *Hater*'s reproduction of the broader rhythms of *Le Misanthrope* seems to produce a text with more classical qualities than one might have guessed. The cast of the Ice Factory production, almost all of whom had performed traditionally classical work on major stages, reported that *Hater*'s speeches required effectively the same process of preparation—and level of stamina—to spit out as did more conventionally period-seeming ones. In an earlier reading of the play, with the downtown NYC company Clubbed Thumb,⁸ an equally gifted cast found many of the speeches challenging to perform given the limited rehearsal afforded by a reading.

And as I write this, I've just had the revealing experience of seeing a production of *Hater* at Humboldt State University, directed by Michael Fields. Michael is the co-Artistic Director of Dell'arte, one of the country's foremost training programs for ensemble-based physical theatre, and among other things a master of Commedia. Now, I think of *Le Misanthrope* as probably the furthest of Molière's plays from his street-performer roots in Commedia (which are so visible in, say, *Sganarelle* or *Scapin*), and it was amazing and very unexpected to see a *Hater* that was powerfully based in this raucous tradition of street clowning. Rather than feeling in any way imposed on the text, the production seemed to reveal the depth to which Commedia traditions undergird even Molière's most heady late plays. And the audience's responses—during the show and in a talkback—surprised me by confirming that *Hater*'s characters can be sent up in the most broadly comic ways without reducing or obscuring their humanity or the stakes of the play's intellectual arguments.

More aspects of the Commedia tradition were explored in Fields' *Hater* than I could enumerate, but let me describe one: the cast took robust and hilarious advantage of the text's invitations to interact with the audience. The targets of Phil's and Celine's personality critiques and Ron's reference to an "empty-headed noble" were landed (to

seemingly startled by the vernacular into assuming the text was an "adaptation" and tempered their positive notices with disappointment that the text limited itself to "only" what Molière's original play achieves.

⁸ At the time the piece was entitled "The Misanthropist," reflecting a baseless fixation I had that "misanthrope" would not be a word in English if not for an early convention to import the play's original title into English unchanged—the opposite of *Hater*'s approach.

their delight) on specific patrons, Alex's descriptions of the faults of humanity were ascribed to swathes of the audience, and Celine and Zinnia's Act III battle was an open competition for the affection of the crowd, complete with urgings that they applaud particularly well-made points. With so thoroughly demolished a fourth wall, I leave it to you to imagine the self-assurance with which the young cast could respond to a ringing cellphone or late-arriving audience member.

Needless to say, it is fascinating as a director to see one's writing helmed by someone else so different from oneself, and so good. Perhaps the nicest aspect was that as successful as the Humboldt production was, I didn't think it worked better than the NYC production—just as well, though, and very differently. The magic of plays that have stood the test of centuries is that they contain many mansions. I was reassured to see that the text of *Hater* was not merely a manifestation of my own directorial vision for *Le Misanthrope*, but a sturdy vehicle for the visions of others.

At the same time, without having conferred on the matter Michael and I shared a surprising number of directorial impulses. We both used a version of a runway stage, allowing some of the audience members to look across the theatre at each other much like the *haut monde* in the boxes of 17th-century theatres. A runway, of course, also evokes the fashion-obsessed world of the play, and both productions began with a “fashion show” strut. Both shows, too, punctuated the act breaks with movement or dance interludes, as may well have been the case in 1666, to contemporary music (current radio-hit dance tracks in Humboldt, original dubstep cuts in NYC.) Most important, while the design of both productions incorporated contemporary features, both somehow felt foundationally “period.” In fact, while I think *Hater* would work well in full seventeenth-century regalia (I'm frankly hopeful to see that production), in the interest of collision management I wouldn't particularly encourage a modern-dress *Hater*. In a *Hater* that looked as well as sounded like the modern day, I fear the text's references to the palace, the king, carriages, and so on might not be enough to jell into an intelligible world.

Finally, as closely as I hew to the original text, I must own up to a few liberties. I play occasionally with “empty” lines of verse to suggest rhythmic possibilities; I occasionally extrapolate an argumentative point that is suggested in the original but not strictly represented there; and I add an occasional vocal tic or flourish that seems productively to “pop” a character. And I make one small narrative change. In the final moment of the play, I render Philinte’s couplet “Allons, Madame, allons employer toute chose, /Pour rompre le dessein que son coeur se propose.”⁹ as “Come on, we’ll go talk him out of it./He’ll never really do it—”; and I add the stage direction “[exit Phil; *manet* Liane].” I admit these choices were made by the director in me rather than the translator (if, at this point, one can still imagine such a distinction). A common strain of scholarship proposes that Alceste’s plan to flee Paris for *œun d’aert* (then, a deserted place) will probably add up to no more than a brief time in his country house to lick his wounds. As a director, though, my bias is towards the option that creates the highest stakes, and since 1666 was a moment when one could board a boat from France to any number of wild New World colonies I’m attracted to the idea that Alceste is truly leaving behind the society he knows. So with Phil’s slightly limp *œHe’ll never really do it—*” I mean to suggest that Phil knows that Alex *will* do it, and that the friends may never see one another again. As for the stage direction retaining Liane on stage as Phil exits: in my perhaps romantic reading, Liane—whose role, it must be said, leaves room for interpretation—remains in love with Alex; her offer to marry Phil is a melancholy acceptance that Alex will never love her back; and the very qualities for which she loves Alex are the ones that force him to leave for good. The actress who played Liane in the NYC production was the marvelous Merritt Wever (since then an Emmy nominee for her work in *œNurse Jackie*) and at the end of the play, after Phil left her in futile pursuit of Alex, she burst, alone, into sobs.¹⁰

⁹ Literally “Come Madame, let’s go do everything we can/to break the plan his heart proposes.”

¹⁰ The equally successful Humboldt ending was, of course, broadly comic.

Like many translators, I believe that plays—and classic plays especially—are served by a multiplicity of other-language interpretations, rather than the one magisterial translation “for the ages” that some Molière translators have sought to produce. Having just outlined my own approach and some of its results, this is a perfect moment for you to skip forward and read the play. For those that are interested, though, I’d like to develop here some thoughts I formed around Molière translation and production practice since finishing the script. I probably always knew that *Hater* constituted an unusual approach to *Le Misanthrope*, and the positive responses to it have of course been gratifying. But I was somewhat naively surprised to learn that for many theatres *Hater*’s approach in the abstract—whatever the text’s merits and deficits—puts the script fully outside the realm of consideration for the “classical comedy” slot. The two deal-breaking factors are, of course, anachronism and rhyme.

Given how comfortable audiences have become with anachronistic stagings of period plays, I’ve been surprised at the extent to which it seems that for most translators, to avoid “anachronism” is a foundational part of the job.¹¹ One often encounters the rationale that non-period-sounding language would be “jarring” or “take the audience out of the play.” As discussed, it seems to me that to jar the audience—indeed, to briefly take them out of the play—is often productive and exciting, and I would be delighted to see translators to use this effect on the page as freely as directors do on the stage.

More than that, though, I fear that as translators we may underestimate the expressive constraints we accept when we avoid language that feels anachronistic. For example, the idea seems surprisingly universal that Molière should be rendered in contemporary English. To speak only about *Le Misanthrope*: Richard Wilbur describes his project as “seek[ing] to avoid a ‘period’ diction.”¹² Donald Frame writes, “Since in French [Molière] does not generally strike the modern reader as at all archaic, he should not in

¹¹ Unless we are to call it an “adaptation,” which opens the door to an infinity of changes in referents and, for that matter, narrative.

¹² Wilbur, *The Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, vi

English... I have sought an English that is familiar and acceptable today.”¹³ Maya Slater says, “I have avoided old-fashioned language. In the original, the speeches are clear and lively; an over-literary version would give too stilted an impression. I have aimed for a modern idiom...”¹⁴ And Constance Congdon writes, “The language I chose for this version is... American English, typical of the latter half of the twentieth century.”¹⁵

But each of these excellent translators, and they are typical in this, retreats in the face of anachronism. Frame’s sentence quoted above ends, “... an English that is familiar and acceptable today but not obviously anachronistic.” Slater ends, “I have aimed for a modern idiom, though not excessively so, avoiding current slang and anachronisms.” And the ellipsis I placed in my quotation of Congdon replaces the adjective “slang-free.”¹⁶

A goal thus bifurcated: to render a complicated play in language that is “modern,” fresh, immediate, witty, lands the jokes—all the qualities of the original—while denying the possibility of using a locution that an audience member might consider jarringly unlike something someone would say in 1666, is on its face a difficult project. Tony Harrison describes his 1971 commission from the National Theatre: “a version for seventeenth-century costume, accurate, speakable, no anachronisms, no jarring slang, but in modernish colloquial English,”¹⁷ as “an almost impossibly paradoxical request,” and refuses to play ball, setting his version in 1966.¹⁸

¹³ Donald Murdoch Frame, trans., *The Misanthrope and Other Plays, by Molière* (New York: New American Library, 1968), xiv

¹⁴ Maya Slater, trans., *The Misanthrope, Tartuffe, and Other Plays, by Molière* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xxiv

¹⁵ Constance Congdon, trans., *The Misanthrope, by Molière* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing, 2004), 2

¹⁶ I don’t think Congdon (or Slater) avoid slang because of its informality, since much of Molière’s writing was slangy and informal in its day—the problem is that today’s slang sounds like *today*.

¹⁷ Tony Harrison, trans., *The Misanthrope, by Molière* (London: Rex Collings Ltd, 1973),

xv

¹⁸ There are a surprisingly large number of people who, like Harrison, want to use uncompromisingly contemporary language to render *Le Misanthrope*, but then feel obliged to reset the play in the present. So Harrison’s version is set in DeGaulle’s Paris; Bartlett’s 1990 version is set in Hollywood; Martin Crimp’s 1996 version is set in the London of that day; Lochhead’s hilarious 2002 *Miseryguts* is set in present-day Glasgow;

Let's look at the language produced by a true expert in one recent effort to square this circle. Since the need to rhyme has its own effect on English diction, let's take verse out of the equation. Here is a representative excerpt from two translations of Molière's prose *Don Juan*: the first is Henri Van Laun, writing in 1875, and the second is Wilbur, writing in 1998.

Do not be surprised, Don Juan, to
see me at this hour, and in this dress.
An urgent motive obliges me to
make you this visit; what I have to say
will admit of no delay.¹⁹

Don't be surprised, Don Juan, to
see me at this hour and in this costume.
The most urgent motives compel me to
make this visit, and what I have to say
will permit of no delay.²⁰

Wilbur's language is all but indistinguishable from that produced 123 years earlier. When scrupulously avoiding a feeling of anachronism, it would seem to become virtually impossible to "avoid a period diction," a goal that almost every translator notes as being equally important. The problem may be that this approach aims definitely *away* from something—language that sounds too new or too old—but seems unsure as to what it is aiming *at*. Wilbur almost confirms as much, in his *Misanthrope* introduction: "at best the diction mediates between then and now, suggesting no one period."²¹ But I fear this nowhere may not be anywhere. The territory in which many translations aim to live—not detectably of our day but neither sounding "period"—is one that may contain very little land.

Finally, it seems to me that to own up to the newness of one's writing may simply be the most honest approach. If we want our Molière to feel like 1666 untainted by the present moment, fascinating and genuinely old translations are extant, googlable, and in the

Ranjit Bolt's 2008 *The Grouch* is again set in contemporary London. I can well understand wanting to see the story set, for example, in 1966 Paris—but, inveterate collider of periods that I am, I might prefer to do so using Ozell's 1714 translation.

¹⁹ Henri van Laun, trans., *The Dramatic Works of Molière, rendered into English, Volume Third*, (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1876), 153-54.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=LeAwAQAAMAAJ>.

²⁰ Richard Wilbur, trans., *Don Juan, by Molière* (San Diego: Harcourt, 2001), 119.

²¹ Wilbur, *Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, 10.

public domain.²² It seems to me that when a purely “period” or “authentic”-feeling production of Molière is desired, one could do worse than to look to those who wrote within a few decades of the playwright himself. When an artistic director, as in Harrison’s case, commissions a new translation but would like it to be “non-jarring,” I wonder if she sneakily wishes to ease the challenges of genuinely old language for her audience, while keeping the process invisible. But to attempt to persuade an audience that it is experiencing the past unmediated by the present yet also breezily easy to understand is a Disneyfication of the world of the play. As theatre makers, we know we have no way to transport the audience to 1666 Paris, but merely to an imagined place that mixes the then and there with the here and now. And this hybrid space is not a failed but a thrilling one. I would urge that as translators, we feel free—when appropriate—to take our audience into our confidence and exploit, rather than conceal, the advantage of our currentness; that we make a tool of anachronistic-sounding diction and the collisions it creates; and that we do so unapologetically under the banner of “translation.”

4

Finally, to rhyme. This question is more localized to translators of Molière, but for the past 60 years it has been powerfully localized there. For almost three centuries Molière is exclusively translated into prose or occasionally blank verse.²³ Jump with me to 1955: Richard Wilbur is a celebrated poet advocating, *contra* the New York School, the Beats, and other American poets of his moment, that English-language verse ought to return to rhyme. And with *The Misanthrope* he does the impossible, translating Molière’s rhyming couplets for the first time into the same form in English. Like the four-minute mile, though, once the impossible thing is done, it is done often. Three more prose or blank-

²² I’m a particular fan of the version that appeared in 1739, along with six other of Molière’s plays, in volumes four and five of *The Comic Theatre: Being a free translation of all the best French Comedies by Samuel Foote, Esq., and others*. “Nothing is so nauseous to me as the grimace and cant of those great promifers; those smiling, cringing, hugging puppies...”

http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Comic_theatre.html?id=VDY0AAAAMAAJ

²³ Complete or selected works are contributed in prose by John Ozell (1714), John Watts (1732), Baker & Miller (1739), Samuel Foote (1762), R. Taylor (1771), Henri Van Laun (1875), Charles Heron Wall (1876), Thomas Constable (1898), Charles Matthew (ca. 1890), Katharine Prescott Wormeley (1894), A.R. Waller (1902), and in blank verse by Curtis Hidden Page (1908).

verse contributions appear in the 1950s,²⁴ but since then, rhyming couplets have seemed almost mandatory for Molière's verse plays. Wilbur's *The Misanthrope* has become canonical, and since 1970 at least ten more rhyming translations of that play alone line up next to it, compared to one without rhyme.²⁵

Now, whether one enjoys the way extended rhyming couplets play on stage in English is a matter of taste. What I find puzzling, though, is that one often hears rhyming-couplet translations of Molière described as being more "classical" than others. Indeed, Wilbur writes in his introduction that his rhyming couplets "recall our own tragic tradition."²⁶ In fact, though, when one surveys the history of English drama it seems that to write an entire play in rhyming couplets may be thought of as a challenge to our tragic tradition. The emergence of what we consider to be the English language itself coincides with the abandonment of rhymed-through playwriting, in the shift from Middle English in which the rhymed mystery and morality plays are written, to the Elizabethan English in which Shakespeare and his contemporaries write largely unrhymed verse. The first time rhymed-through verse appears on the English comic stage is via Wilbur's pen, in 1955.²⁷

²⁴ As correctives? They are Morris Bishop, 1957, Bernard Grebanier, 1959, and John Wood, 1959.

²⁵ Rhyming versions are contributed by Tony Harrison (1973), Neil Bartlett (1988), Martin Crimp (1996), Ranjit Bolt (twice! 1998 and 2008), Maya Slater (2001), Liz Lochhead (2002), Constance Congdon (2003), Stephen Mulrine (2005), and David Ives (2010). Slater and Bartlett even eschew iambic pentameter to write in the rhymed 16-syllable alexandrines of the original. In 2009 Prudence Steiner contributes the sole unrhymed version in 30 years.

²⁶ Wilbur, *Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, 8

²⁷ The Restoration provides a brief experiment in long-form rhyming couplets on the tragic stage, in the "heroic tragedy," a genre championed by the master of English rhyming couplets, John Dryden. Several dozen plays are written in the form over the course of its fifteen-year life, and the most that can be said of them is that they are neither revived nor fondly remembered. The form dies when Dryden publicly abandons it in the introduction to *Aureng-Zebe* (1675), in which he "damns his laborious Trifle of a Play,"

Not that it's worse than what before he writ,
But he has now another taste of Wit
And to confess a truth, (though out of time)
Grows weary of his long-lov'd Mistris, Rhyme.

The newness of this form in English is of course no argument against the approach; no more is *Hater* a traditional approach. I mention the point merely in the hope that the acting teachers who rightly desire to train their students in the performance of classical verse understand that rhyming couplets in these cases are not more traditional than the cadences of Allen Ginsberg and Frank O'Hara. To my mind, the most classical English-language Molière is found in the 18th century translations, which are in prose.

As a general matter, I can't help but wonder if very often the best way to translate a verse form into a highly different destination language will be simply to reproduce it there.²⁸ Historically, the English verse most equivalent to Molière's Alexandrines would be the blank verse of the Elizabethans.²⁹ And in terms of the *effects* of verse in each language, rhyming couplets in English behave quite unlike they do in French. The linguistic reasons for this are profound, numerous, and not for delving into here.³⁰ Suffice it to make two points: first, rhymes are much harder to find in English than French, and so extended rhyme in English implies some compromise to lexical fidelity in the translation, and some more unusual syntax than occurs in the original. And second, once we've made these compromises, English rhyming couplets could hardly sound less like they do in French. The effect in French is formal, regular, and constantly present, yet graceful and unobtrusive, supporting the play's thought structures without dominating them; in English it would seem that this effect is simply not available. Our language is structured such that long-form rhyming couplets must walk the line between sounding, when audible, as songlike as Dr. Seuss or, when good writing and performance work to counter this effect, sounding virtually imperceptible but for the linguistic distortions they

From then on Dryden continues to write plays but without rhyme, and he continues to write rhyming couplets—to celebrated lengths—but not even when adapting Molière's *Amphitryon* does he employ them for the stage.

²⁸ The principal arguments made by translators in favor of English rhymed couplets for Molière are made by Wilbur, Frame, and Harrison in their *Misanthrope* introductions. To my mind, these arguments tend either to be very subjective or simply to dissolve upon scrutiny.

²⁹ In 1908 Curtis Hidden Page makes this argument memorably, introducing his *Complete Works*, (<http://books.google.com/books?id=nWpBAAAAYAAJ>, xxxiii), as does Christopher Hampton, much later, in the introduction to his 1983 blank-verse *Tartuffe* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber), 8.

³⁰ Hampton's *Tartuffe* introduction gets into the technicalities of this.

necessitate. (The actor Brian Bedford, one of Wilbur’s greatest champions and interpreters, notes that “often the audience is not aware of the rhyme,” though he insists “it does do something.”)³¹

Don’t get me wrong: when we eliminate rhyme in the translation altogether, something is lost. And if, as I suspect, to recreate the rhyme in English is not the best compensation, how might one try, imperfectly, to make up the difference? It seems that Molière makes sacrifices too. He often adds a word or phrase, purely, it would seem, to make up the syllables he needs; so in unrhymed English, at least the points and jokes can land more directly.³² And the arrangement of Molière’s speeches often seems governed by the logic of the rhyme rather than that of the ideas, so I often found myself able to build a more propulsive argument by swapping the order of some clauses or even sentences. Further, Molière’s language is beautifully clear, but if one sets aside the rhymes it’s not particularly exciting: he’s famous, in fact, for using almost no imagery nor lyrical turns of phrase.³³ So one might hazard to make up for some of what is lost—to the extent of one’s gifts—with wit and imagery. For example:

Original	John Wood ³⁴	Wilbur ³⁵	Buggeln
ACASTE	ACASTE	ACASTE	CASHIN
Parbleu, s'il faut parler des gens extravagants,	Egad, talking of odd fellows I have just had a dose of	Speaking of dunces, I've just now conversed	And speaking of weirdoes I'm absolutely
Je viens d'en essayer un des plus fatigants;	one of the most tiresome of them all—I mean that	With old Damon, who's one of the very worst;	wrecked. Damon, Mister Chatty, this is
Damon, le raisonneur, qui m'a, ne vous déplaie,	garrulous bore, Damon! He kept me out of my sedan	I stood a lifetime in the broiling sun	true, kept me out of my sedan chair for a solid
Une heure, au grand soleil,	chair for an hour, if you please, and in the blazing	Before his dreary	hour yapping in the blazing

³¹ Jaime Weinman, “The last of the rhyming poets,” MacLeans.ca, May 30, 2011. <http://www2.macleans.ca/2011/05/30/the-last-of-the-rhyming-poets/>.

³² I’m not the first to notice this: John Wood, in his original introduction, says a prose translation provides the “small consolation that it is possible to eliminate some of the minor but recurring tautologies, the odd words which are put in to rhyme or to eke out the line.”

John Wood, trans., *The Misanthrope, and Other Plays, by Molière* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959), 20

³³ Notwithstanding that almost half of his plays are written in rhyme, Molière is not really considered by the French to even be a poet; in English, on the other hand, Shakespeare (who rarely rhymed in his plays) is thought of as one of our greatest.

³⁴ Wood, trans., rev. Coward, *Misanthrope*, 110

³⁵ Wilbur, *Misanthrope and Tartuffe*, 61

tenu hors de ma chaise. CELIMENE C'est un parleur étrange, et qui trouve, toujours, L'art de ne vous rien dire, avec de grands discours. Dans les propos qu'il tient, on ne voit jamais goutte, Et ce n'est que du bruit, que tout ce qu'on écoute.	sun too! CELIMENE How he <i>does</i> talk! He contrives to say nothing at the most inordinate length and I can never make any sense of what he is talking <i>about</i> . It is like listening to so much noise.	monologue was done. CELIMENE Oh, he's a wondrous talker, and has the power To tell you nothing hour after hour: If, by mistake, he ever came to the point, The shock would put his jawbone out of joint.	sun! CELINE Oh he is the Olympic Mouth Champion— that guy can actually talk without saying anything. It's true, I've searched, there's no content, it's a string of purely abstract noises.
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I chose this segment because it's a bit tricky: it doesn't advance the story so it has to be entertaining on its own. And I think by many measures it's among Wilbur's most successful passages: the rhymes are regular, the rhythm is clear, and the effect is delightful.³⁶ I'd point out, though, that in Wilbur's rendering more of the delight comes from the effect of the rhymes than from the way in which the scene *itself* is entertaining; the reverse is true in French. And while these couplets read beautifully in this sort of short burst (in which form, by and large, they are used in Elizabethan dramatic verse), in performing the entire play the actor will have to de-emphasize the rhymes to virtual inaudibility in order that they not come to dominate the proceedings. Finally, though the sense remains broadly the same, the need to rhyme has prompted some imaginative reinterpretation on Wilbur's part: Damon becomes old, and a dunce rather than an oddball; we lose the fabulous image of being kept out of one's personal litter; to come slowly to the point subs for speaking emptily; and a jawbone is invented of whole cloth.

It may be nervy of me to quibble with the some of the pressures Wilbur applies to Molière's precise syntactic referents, since *Hater* bends some lines in similar ways. (I am able to do less of it though, and in pursuit of other game than to rhyme.) I hope it's clear that I don't make these points to criticize Wilbur, who is more responsible than anybody for re-introducing Molière to English-language stages, but simply to consider the tradeoffs implied by a rhyming approach. As for the compensations I have to offer? "Weirdoes," "wrecked," "yapping," "Mister Chatty," the Olympic Mouth Champion":

³⁶ A few lines later, his form is less regular: "His talk is full of eyebrows and grimaces;/How tired one gets of his momentous faces;"

they're certainly not conventional, but I've had the honor and pleasure of seeing them heartily entertain a number of audiences. I hope in context they divert you as well.

*

*

Samuel Buggeln is a director, casting director and translator based in NYC and Ithaca, NY. In NYC he is an Artistic Associate of the New Ohio Theatre, and he often creates work with his collaborators as Bug Company. Work at the New (or old) Ohio includes the world première of the Bulgarian play *The Eyes of Others*; the O-B première of *Rum & Vodka* by Conor McPherson; the Drama Desk-nominated *Cressida Among the Greeks*; and, for the Obie Award-winning Ice Factory Festival, *Hater* (his unconventional translation of *Le Misanthrope*) and his adaptations of Queneau's *Le Vol D'Icare* and Duras' *Les Yeux Bleus Cheveux Noirs* (developed at as an Artist-in-Residence with New York Theatre Workshop at Dartmouth College). He has directed and/or developed new work at numerous other downtown NYC theatres including NYTW, the Atlantic, Clubbed Thumb, and the Lark. Regional credits include shows at Capital Rep (Albany, NY), Mason Street Warehouse (Saugatuck, MI), StageWorks (Hudson, NY), and extensive work at Portland Stage (ME). He is an alumnus of the Lincoln Center Directors' Lab and a frequent guest director at NYU/Tisch and other universities. He just finished a six-month stay in Buenos Aires, where he explored (and [blogged](#)) that city's extraordinary theatre scene. He is currently finishing work co-translating new Argentine plays by Rafael Spregelburd and Santiago Loza. His translation of Marivaux' *The School for Mothers* appeared in *The Mercurian* Vol. 4 No. 1. <http://www.buggeln.net>.

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, often known by his stage name, **Molière**, was born into a prosperous Paris family in 1622. He studied to be a lawyer at the Collège de Clermont but at the age of 21 left town to become an itinerant actor. He worked the road for about thirteen years before in 1658 returning to Paris for a command performance for Louis XIV. The audition secured Molière the use of a small theatre space near the Louvre, and over the next decade or so his work generated outrage, scandal, censorship and hilarity in ever greater measure. By 1667, Molière's health was poor, and he took a break from the stage. His sense of irony was undimmed, however, and in 1673, while playing the titular hypochondriac in *Le Malade Imaginaire*, he was seized by an all-too-real coughing fit and hemorrhage. A pro to the end, he finished the performance but collapsed and died a few hours later.

hater

a new translation

of Molière's *Misanthrope*

by Samuel Buggeln

draft 4.2

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227 West 16th Street #1WR

New York, NY 10011

(646) 734-2740

samuel.buggeln@gmail.com

Characters

Alex (Alceste), (in love with Celine)
Phil (Philinte), (Alex's best friend)
Celine (Celimène)
Ron (Oronte) }
Cashin (Acaste) } (marquises, suitors to Celine)
Clinton (Clitandre) }
Liane (Eliante), Celine's cousin
Zinnia (Arsinoé), a friend of Celine's
Woody, Alex's valet
Basque, Celine's valet } may be replaced by an intercom voice
A Guard of the French Marshals }

The play takes place over the course of one day in a reception room at Celine's home in Paris, 1666.

Act I

I, 1 [Alex & Phil]

PHIL: So what is it what's wrong?

ALEX: Get out of here Phil.

PHIL: Oh this is nuts, will you just tell me?

ALEX: I stay here Phil, you run away and hide.

PHIL: You're supposed to hear people out before you fly off the handle.

ALEX: Yeah I *enjoy* flying off the handle more than listening to—

PHIL: Oh I don't *get* you when you're crazy like this and I'm your friend, so—

ALEX: And you're not my friend. You were my friend and then I watch this happen, which is not the behavior of any friend of mine, I don't want any part of anyone so corrupted by—

PHIL: Wait, that was really a big deal for you?

ALEX: Phil it's fucking scandalous, there's no excuse for it, you should be dead right now from pure shame! I mean you almost smothered that guy— you just think he's the greatest, you'd do anything for him you swear you would— it's all very enthusiastic, and *so* heartfelt— and after, when I ask who *is* this person, you're not quite clear on his name! You're like whatever, I dunno, because he's not *here* at the moment, so who cares about him? Jesus Phil it's just ugly, it's cowardly, it's grotesque, I mean it debases the man—the soul—that you are. If I ever saw myself do what you just did, I'd cut my own throat.

PHIL: Well I'm not sure the case absolutely demands the death penalty— maybe you could commute my sentence to life plus twenty-five.

ALEX: Yeah yeah such a comedian—

PHIL: —then seriously, what am I supposed to do?

ALEX: —speak the truth, have some integrity, is that so outrageous?

PHIL: Look, if someone acts thrilled to see you, you just pay him back. He says something nice, you say something nice. He wants to scratch your back, you say you'll scratch his back.

ALEX: I will not! It's the worst kind of cowardice— that whole chic crowd, tying themselves in knots of "sweetie sweetie sweetie" kiss-me-on-both-cheeks, I'll say anything you want to hear, it drives me fucking crazy— it's a battlefield of compliments! You know, these people behave exactly the same towards their best friend and any total asshole, I mean what *meaning* does it have when some guy embraces you, swears his undying love and makes you his personal man of the year when he's gonna run do the same for whichever random dick next wanders by? I guess I don't consider it real love if it comes from a hooker. I mean liking someone should have some *basis*, no? If you think everyone's amazing you can't really think anyone is. And it seems you've bought into the entire degenerate system, and that is not my people. I don't want you to like me because you like everybody; I want to be special. So Phil you can be everybody's friend, or you can be mine.

PHIL: Alex when you live in human society you have to respect some basic social graces.

ALEX: No, you have to fight to destroy this sickening commerce in artificial friendships, you have to be a *man*. Respect your brain and express the things it thinks—you don't have to hide behind a wall of fake compliments.

PHIL: But there are lots of cases where saying everything you think would be ridiculous. Not to mention rude. I mean integrity

is great, but there are a lot of thoughts that are better off hidden. I mean what are you arguing— you have to tell everybody exactly what you think of them? If you don't particularly like someone you have to *say* so?

ALEX: Why not.

PHIL: Oh come on! You'd tell sweet demented Emily that her sex kitten years are deep in the past and her makeup is a national scandal?

ALEX: Sure.

PHIL: And you'd tell Dorian there's nobody at the Louvre he hasn't completely glazed over, talking about his military career and Historically Prominent Family?

ALEX: Absolutely.

PHIL: You're joking.

ALEX: I'm not!
I won't *spare* people anymore, they don't deserve it. In town, at the palace, there's nobody left that doesn't piss me off. It *hurts me*, Phil, when all I see everywhere I look is this kind of asslicking and lying and cowardice and betrayals— I'm finished with it. I'm declaring war on humanity.

PHIL: Alex, this righteous rage, it's just so feral, you know, it's borderline self-parody. It reminds me— the way we grew up together— it's like those two brothers in *The School For Husbands* when—

ALEX: That isn't clever, Phil.

PHIL: Well let it *go* a little then, will you? You're not going to change the world. Look since you're so into frankness I can tell you frankly your obsession about this is turning into a running joke. People kind of think it's hilarious.

ALEX: —
You know what? Fine. Fuck it.
Perfect. That's a very good sign,

you know people are such
idiots, if they thought I was right I'd worry.

PHIL: So you're up against human nature itself.

ALEX: Yes! I *hate* that shit.

PHIL: And everybody who's got it?
Every single poor living mortal?
In this day and age Alex is it really—

ALEX: Yes Phil I think really I do hate
everybody— half of 'em because they're just
evil, and the other half because they
don't *hate* the evil people the way a
decent person would.
And the perfect example is that transparent
bastard I've got the lawsuit with.
I mean everybody knows he's a piece of pure
trash who only got where he is
by some very dirty tricks
(and the fact that they *worked* is
appalling in itself.) You know, you can say
anything about that guy, and
nobody's gonna defend him— go anywhere
and call him a miserable sonofabitch
and everybody'll say yeah that's him—
but let him show his face and they go,
“Come *iiin!*” They titter, they *hobnob*, he's
everywhere! When a spot comes up
at the palace he weasels right in and nobody
competent stands a chance.
Fuck! Dishonesty does so well in this
world it kills me. Two days out of five
I wanna run away and be a hermit.

PHIL: Jeez Alex, you know even if you're right about
morality today, you're not obliged to let it
eat at you like this. I mean if you hold
human nature up to this rigid standard,
well yes you're going to find faults,
but why not approach them with some
generosity? I don't think it's any more
ethically sound to be this judgmental,
you know? Intransigent.
Not to mention the rules you're stuck on
are antiquated, they don't
work for people now, just get with
the times! It's nuts to pound your head
against a wall trying to fix the way of the world.

Okay. Just like you every day I see about a thousand things that could go better. But you don't see me freaking out about them. I make myself cool with what people do, I'm used to it. It works in town, it works at the palace, and in fact it's just as ethically rigorous as these fits you throw.

ALEX: Oh the ethical rigors of *cool*, how convenient for you. So does anything break your cool? Say a friend stabs you in the back—he wants what you have and he manufactures a way to get it. Or hey, maybe he just starts spreading lies about you for fun. None of this is going to piss you off?

PHIL: Alex crappy behaviour is part of human nature. Absolutely, people are selfish and scheming and unjust—and that doesn't piss me off *per se* any more than vultures eating dead animals, wolves killing live ones, or monkeys throwing poop.

ALEX: So I just watch them betray me, gut me and steal my possessions without—Jesus Christ I'm not talking anymore: this is sophistry, and it's obnoxious.

PHIL: Jeez. Well as it happens, a little less talking would be a great idea for you. On that lawsuit for example—stop bitching and do something constructive.

ALEX: Oh I'm not *doing* one thing.

PHIL: Well who's lobbying for you?

ALEX: Um, common sense. The law. Basic justice.

PHIL: You're not getting in touch with the judges?

ALEX: No, is there any doubt I'm in the right?

PHIL: Well I know but that gang really knows how to kick up a fuss.

ALEX: I have decided not to do anything, either I'm wrong or I'm right.

PHIL: That doesn't always count for a lot.

ALEX: Phil I'm not changing my mind on this.

you most despise? Are you selectively blind? Or selectively tolerant?

ALEX: —

Neither unfortunately. Since Celine came on the scene after her husband died, her character flaws have been hard to miss. And I *do love* her, but I'm still the first to chew her out about them.

But you know what Phil— it doesn't matter what I do— It's my downfall, she's just got me. I see her weaknesses, I deplore them, but somehow I love her good qualities more.

I guess I think if I love her enough, the intensity could— purify her. Like a fire.

PHIL: —

That's gonna be a big job. You think she really loves you?

ALEX: Hell yes.
Or I wouldn't love her.

PHIL: Well but if you're so confident Alex why do you get so jealous of your competition?

ALEX: Phil, real love is demanding. It gives everything, and it wants everything in return. In fact that's what I'm here to talk to her about.

PHIL: Well jeez if it was me I'd just go for her cousin— I mean Liane likes you, and she's the most solid person I've ever met, seems more in your line.

ALEX: I know I know I think that every day. But it's not thinking that makes you fall in love.

PHIL: Well I'm just scared shitless about this whole white-hot—

I, 2 [Ron, Alex, Phil]

RON: So! Looks like Liane and Celine are out shopping but they told me downstairs you were here and I just thought damn. I am going to go up and tell that guy, bottom of my heart, how much I *admire* him, I mean I've been thinking forever this is someone I've got to get to know.

I mean I really I give credit where it's due and I'd really like for us to be, you know, friends.

I mean obviously a good friend is—
good to have.

Ah actually I was talking to you.

ALEX: Oh me?

RON: Of course you. Do you *mind*?

ALEX: Oh no I'm just I'm surprised, I wouldn't have expected such an— honour.

RON: Surprised? That I want to be your *friend*? But you've gotta know you're, you deserve it. I mean from *anybody*.

ALEX: Ron—

RON: I mean I can't think of anyone in France who's so totally respected—

ALEX: Ron—

RON: Esteemed! I would *so* rather spend my time with you than with some empty-headed *noble*—

ALEX: Ron—

RON: No, it's the absolute truth, strike me dead. And I'll stand by it, put it here, you're my man I really mean it, waddaya say. Shake on it. Friends!

ALEX: Ron—

RON: What? You don't wanna be my *friend*?

ALEX: —
Look Ron. I'm truly I'm very flattered. But I mean don't you think friendship should be a little more organic? I think it— devalues the concept a little to just hand it out willy-nilly, I mean let's get to know each other first. Right? I mean we don't want to regret anything if we were to find out somewhere down the line that we didn't like each other. For example.

RON: —
 Wow. You are *so wise*. I'm very
 impressed. Okay. We'll get to be friends
 slowly. Over time.

But in the meantime truly you know Alex
 I'm your guy. If there are any doors you need
 opened at the Louvre, I kind of know the King—
 I mean he listens to me, and he's always very very
 nice, so you know whatever you need it's fine.
 Oh *heey!* And since you're so amazing,
 one other thing that can maybe kick off this
 process. I just wrote a little sonnet and maybe I can
 show you, and get your opinion if I should publish it.

ALEX: Oh Ron. I'm a *really* bad guy to ask
 about that sort of thing.

RON: Why?

ALEX: I've got this
 terrible overhonesty problem, I—

RON: But that's what I want! I mean I'd be
 offended if I asked for your opinion
 and you weren't totally totally honest.

ALEX: —
 Well okay, if that's what you really want.

RON: "Sonnet." It's a sonnet. "*Hope...*" It's to this
 girl who sort of made me think— well I'm hopeful.
 "*Hope...*" You know this isn't some big sophisticated
 thing, just a simple little tender little—

ALEX: Well we'll soon see, right?

RON: "*Hope...*" I don't
 know if you'll think the style is clean enough. Or if I
 even sort of chose the right— words.

ALEX: Well you'll know very soon won't you.

RON: And also
 I only spent about fifteen minutes on it, so—

ALEX: Doesn't matter. Let's go.

RON: Hope, 'tis true, may soothe the breast;
 Assuage a time this bleak malaise—

But, Phyllis, the boon be so depressed
if its promise unfulfillèd stays.

PHIL: Oh that is already so charming. [to Ron]

ALEX: “Charming!” Oh you’ve got a lot of nerve. [aside, to Phil]

RON: You blessed me with some sweet delight
But ought have favored me with less
Saved your cares and efforts quite
If hope were to be your sole largesse.

PHIL: Ohhh that is so elegantly put!

ALEX: Yeah or maybe it *sucks*, you fucking creep. [aside, of Phil]

RON: If all the fruit of my passion sublime
Must be to wait ’til the end of time,
Then my recourse must be— the grave.

All that might save me is your care
Phyllis, a man falls to despair
When to hope alone he be the slave.

PHIL: Ron, those last lines just lovely, really so moving.

ALEX: Ah, you can fuck the last lines Phil, [aside]
cause I’m about to *break your nose*.

PHIL: I don’t know if I’ve ever heard verse so well-turned.

ALEX: *Sweet* motherfucker. [aside]

RON: [to Phil] Oh you’re flattering me; you think—

PHIL: No no no *really!*

ALEX: Oh, no, *flattery*? No no not *that*. [aside]

RON: Okay your turn now, we have
a deal. Lay it on the line.

ALEX: Well— you know these things are always so
delicate in art, we all sort of want to be
validated— But okay. I was once talking to
somebody, I won’t say who, and he had shown me
some of his verse. And I told him you know it’s so
important that a man of society be able
to control that impulse to, you know, write poetry.
And also that he be able to resist the temptation
to publicize stuff that is essentially private— and

I mean that urge comes from a maybe very healthy enthusiasm— but if he can't resist those things he can wind up looking— kind of— stupid.

RON: So are you saying I was wrong to want to—

ALEX: Well I'm not saying that. But I did say to this person that bad writing is weird, it's all people need to start thinking *less* of someone. I mean you can have a hundred great qualities but you know everyone always jumps right on the one weakness—

RON: Are you talking about my sonnet?

ALEX: Well not necessarily. But I did point out to this guy some of the fine people who had really sort of screwed up their lives indulging this kind of— thirst for the pen.

RON: And I'm like them? You're saying I'm a bad writer?

ALEX: I'm not necessarily saying that. But in the end I did ask him, what is this pressing need to make things rhyme? And then— dear god— to publish them? I mean the only people you can forgive for unleashing another bad book are the poor bastards who do it for a living, right? Trust me here. Resist the temptation— or at least keep it behind closed doors— and please don't throw away your hard-earned reputation as a bright and discerning guy— and just spurred on by greedy publishers— in favor of one, frankly, as a laughably, as a miserable author. I mean this is what I told my friend.

RON: Well I think I take your meaning. Why don't you just tell me what it is about my sonnet—

ALEX: Oh honestly Ron it's just about good enough to stick where the sun don't shine. You're working from bad models— these turns of phrase are so unnatural, I mean what's "*and relieve a time this bleak malaise*"? or "*promise unfulfilled stays*" and I mean, "*If hope were to be your sole largesse*"? and jeez, "*a man sinks to despair when to hope alone he is the slave*"? I mean I know this really elaborate thing is fashionable, but it's tasteless, right, it's fake— word games, pure affectation— and for that matter

it's not a tiny bit what love actually sounds like.
Poetry this century is horrifying. The old stuff may not be
sophisticated, but it's— Alright, I know this
sort of folk song that's still so much
better than all that crap that's in vogue:

[sings] If the King had given me
 great Paris for my own
And had said the price must be
 to leave my love alone
I would tell the King Henri
Then take back your great Paris ["Paree"]
I prefer my love, hey—ho
 I prefer my love.

I mean the rhymes are simple, the style's old,
but can't you see how much better it is than all those tacky
bibelots we're being told to like? It speaks
from the kind of— pureness of love:

[speaks] If the King had given me
 great Paris for my own
And had said the price must be
 to leave my love alone
I would tell the King Henri
Then take back your great Paris
I prefer my love, hey—ho
 I prefer my love.

That's how the heart really speaks. /Well I'm [/to Phil]
glad you find it so funny, but I like that
little tune way more than that flowery
pomp everyone else gets so excited about.

RON: Well I still think my sonnet's very good.

ALEX: And I'm sure you have your reasons
to think so, and I'm sure you'll allow
me my reasons to not think so.

RON: You know I don't give a shit what you
think— everyone else says it's excellent.

ALEX: Well everyone else is a better liar than I am.

RON: You think you're pretty effing smart don't you?

ALEX: Not smart enough to find anything to like about that poem.

RON: Well I think I'll get over it.

ALEX: Well you're going to have to.

RON: I'd like to see you try to write a love poem, and see how well you do—

ALEX: Ron it is possible that I could write something just as terrible, but I'd make damn sure nobody found out.

RON: Well you talk a pretty big game but—

ALEX: Look just take your quest for an ego boost somewhere else.

RON: How bout take *your* ego down a few notches, little man.

ALEX: Oh I have *exactly* as many notches as I deserve, big guy.

PHIL: Alright alright let it go guys! That's enough! [getting between them]

RON: Oh my apologies, I was so *rude*. Gentlemen I am out. Charmed I'm sure.

ALEX: Yeah! —Likewise.

I, 3 [Phil, Alex]

PHIL: Well nice work, very sincere very honest, and now you've got a huge pain in the ass *issue* on your hands. A child could see that all he wanted—

ALEX: Don't talk to me.

PHIL: But—

ALEX: In fact, leave me alone.

PHIL: But it's too—

ALEX: Go away!

PHIL: If I—

ALEX: And shut up!

PHIL: But what—

ALEX: I'm not listening.

PHIL: But—

ALEX: *Still?*

PHIL: Insulting—

ALEX: Oh for Christ's sake that's it, *I'll* go, you stay.

PHIL: Don't be silly, I'll come with you.

Act II

II, 1 [Alex & Celine]

- ALEX: If you want me to be honest, I hate it. I hate the way you act. And I mean it's— it may be actually making me bitter. So I think we should call it quits, anything else would be a lie, I mean sooner or later we're going to split up, unavoidably, you know and I would promise you a million times that it's not true, but it really is. True.
- CELINE: Oh you had me rush back so you could pick another little fight, I'm so glad.
- ALEX: I'm not figh— Look. It's just you're so socially indiscriminate. Everybody's after you, and you give them all so much *access* it's like I can't—I will not stand it.
- CELINE: So I'm guilty of the heinous crime of people liking me? Alex I can't help it that people think I'm amazing, what, when they make the effort to stop by I'm supposed to hit'em with a stick and throw'em in the street?
- ALEX: You don't have to use a stick, you could maybe just not be so *vivacious*. I mean obviously you're incredibly attractive, and that's great. But every time you catch someone's eye you hang onto it, being all *charming* like that— you give all your victims all this hope, and they glue themselves here doing you favors— if you were a tiny bit less encouraging, eighty percent of them would leave. No fine okay how about just explain to me Clinton. *How can you hang out with him?* Tell me one good thing about that asshole to help me understand— Or no let me. Did he win your heart with the long left pinky fingernail? Or was it that huge (and very popular) new blond wig? The lace around the boots? That mass of *ribbons*? That— god I don't even know what you call that thing— but no no no it must be the annoying giggle or no the breathy voice that caught the key to your heart—

CELINE: Oh now you're being stupid, you know exactly why I keep that one around—he promised to get all his friends interested in my lawsuit.

ALEX: I'd rather you lost the stupid case honestly than let that guy in the door, he's after you, I hate him.

CELINE: Alex you are jealous of the entire charted universe.

ALEX: Only because you invite the entire charted universe in.

CELINE: Well let that reassure you. I'm friendly to everyone equally. If I was paying attention to just one other guy maybe you'd have something to worry about.

ALEX: Oh *that's* reassuring. The issue is, what do I get that you aren't giving to everyone equally?

CELINE: You get to know that I love you.

ALEX: But *how* do I know?

CELINE: Because I tell you all the time, why can't you believe me?

ALEX: Cause how do I know you're not telling the same thing to everybody equally?

CELINE: Oh this is too freaking charming. What do you think I am? Alright look. I wouldn't want you to think I'm unfaithful. So fine, I take it all back. Every nice thing I ever said. Null and void. Happy?

ALEX: Jesus, how can I be in love with you? If I woke up one morning and this was an intense dislike, I'd fall on my knees and thank God, it's not even a secret. I try *every day* to not feel this but no dice—loving you is divine punishment for my sins.

CELINE: I have to say, your passion for me is not like anyone else.

ALEX: Yeah, I've got 'em all beat. It's not natural, I can't get my mind around it, I swear nobody's ever felt love this hard.

CELINE: Yeah, you're an original. I think you date girls mainly to provide

opportunities to fight with them.
It totally gets you hot.

ALEX: But, but that's up to *you*! Please
yes let's stop fighting, I mean great, we'll
open up, talk it out, try to stop—

II, ii [Celine, Alex, Basque]

CELINE: Yes?

BASQUE: Cashin is downstairs.

CELINE: Oh send him up.

ALEX: What—! Don't I *ever* get to see you
alone? That's exactly— every twit who shows his
face, you invite him up. Just *once* couldn't you
please not be at home?

CELINE: You want me to piss off Cashin?

ALEX: You worry too much about pissing people off.

CELINE: That one would never forgive me
if he thought I wasn't *thrilled* to see him.

ALEX: So what?

CELINE: Jesus Alex you *have* to be liked
by these people. Their fingers are in
everything that happens at the palace—
everything. Which is not to say they may
ever do you any good, but they can sure
screw you up if they feel like it.

ALEX: No matter what kind of a bastard
anyone is, you'll find a reason
to put up with him, it's pathological.

II, iii [Basque, Alex, Celine]

BASQUE: Clinton is here as well, madam.

ALEX: Oh and of course.

CELINE: Where are you going?

ALEX: Away.

CELINE: Stay.

ALEX: What for?

CELINE: Oh *stay*.

ALEX: I can't.

CELINE: I want you to.

ALEX: Tough,
it's torture talking to those
people, it's too much to ask.

CELINE: I want you to I want you to!

ALEX: Can't do it.

CELINE: Fine then go away, see if I care.

II, iv [Liane, Phil, Cashin, Clinton, Alex, Celine]

LIANE: The two marquises are on their way up, [to Celine]
were you told?

CELINE: Yes do we need more chairs? /We need more [to Basque]
chairs. /You still here? [to Alex]

ALEX: Yes. I've decided it's time
you make your feelings public, one way or the other.

CELINE: Oh shush.

ALEX: Today you're going to tell us what's up.

CELINE: Now you're being silly.

ALEX: Not at all, just let us know.

CELINE: Ha!

ALEX: Pick a side.

CELINE: This is all very funny sweetie—

ALEX: No, I'm finished being patient. Make a choice.

[enter Cashin and Clinton]

CLINTON: Holy shit my dear I'm straight from the palace, you wouldn't
believe the total asshole Leon made of himself

at the levée.³⁷ I mean doesn't he have a single friend or something who could tell him what one *does*?

CELINE: Oh I know that poor kid is a disaster. He's always just a little *off* you know? And then you see him again after a couple weeks and somehow he's even weirder than before.

CASHIN: And speaking of weirdos I'm absolutely wrecked. Damon, Mister Chatty, this is true, kept me out of my sedan chair for a solid hour yapping in the blazing sun!

CELINE: Oh he is the Olympic Mouth Champion—that guy can actually talk without saying anything. It's true, I've searched, there's no content, it's a string of purely abstract noises.

LIANE: That's a pretty good warmup. [to Phil]
Whoever's next is really gonna get it—

CLINTON: And then there's that fascinating Timothy—

CELINE: Oh right the man of *mystery*. He runs by, shoots you a distracted glance, you'd almost think he had somewhere important to go. And when he does talk it's so boring and yet so full of complicated *faces*. No that guy lives to interrupt a conversation to tell you some juicy secret, and every time it's a *zero*, dude has nothing! But it's all high drama to him—just saying 'hi' he's gotta whisper it in your ear.

CASHIN: And Gerald?

CELINE: Well he could use a little drama, what a snooze. That guy is obsessed with status—he won't mention anyone who's not at least a duke or princess and if you wanna chat with him it better be horses guns or dogs. And have you heard him talk to royalty? It's all "tu" and "toi," I'm sure at this point he doesn't even remember the formal address.

CLINTON: They say he's very tight with Lisa—

CELINE: —and how sad is *that* poor dull creature, it's like pulling out my fingernails when she comes by, I mean what do you

³⁷ The ceremony surrounding the king's waking up in the morning.
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say? You cannot have a conversation with that vacant fucking stare. I'm instantly using up the emergency measures—the sun, the rain, the heat, the cold—and once those are gone *what's left?* Right? And what's worse is she stays for *hours*. You can ask her the time, and then yawn, again and again *and again*, and she will *sit* there like she's made of *wood*!

CASHIN: And what do you think of Adrian?

CELINE: Oh that man is blown up with the love he feels for himself. He's always bitching the palace doesn't appreciate him enough, which is hilarious because in fact bitching is his *only skill*. But a job doesn't get given out, or a good *word* for Christ's sake, that he doesn't freak out because it didn't go to him.

CLINTON: And you know how everybody's going to wee Clarence's house this season, what's up with him?

CELINE: I think he's got a good cook. People don't visit him, they visit those dinners.

LIANE: He does put out an amazing spread.

CELINE: Yeah it's just too bad *he* has to be on the menu. Dizzy little dumbbell tastes like crap doesn't he, wrecks the whole meal.

PHIL: People seem to like his uncle David—what about him?

CELINE: Well he's a friend of mine.

PHIL: He seems cool and really *smart* you know?

CELINE: But that's the thing, he's so *into* his smartness. I swear that guy is racked with tension from constantly trying to think of something clever. And since he decided to get so fancy, nothing is ever good enough for him! He can find the fatal flaw in anything, like plain old liking something is for losers and intellectual lightweights. I mean even just in conversation the topic's usually too low to deserve his attention. He just stands there with his arms crossed gazing down from the height of his intellect pitying everything anyone says.

CASHIN: Oh Lord kill me now that is David exactly.

CLINTON: Darling you have a beautiful gift for portraiture.

ALEX: Oh yeah *beautiful* keep it up. Dear friends from the palace— everybody's got his turn don't they, of course if any of them showed up you'd scamper to his side, kiss-kiss and swear your undying love.

CLINTON: Well why get pissy with us? If you don't like what's being said, take it up with the lady who's saying it.

ALEX: Fuck no, this is on you. That whole hateful catty performance feeds on your applause—the second Celine stopped getting laughs, she'd give it up. In fact gentlemen, your exact brand of flattery is the source of ninety percent of what people do wrong.

PHIL: Alex I can't believe you're sticking up for those people, you know you'd trash any of them just as bad given a second's chance.

CELINE: But Phil he has to disapprove! Alex can't lower himself to the going opinion, just think how ordinary he'd feel! God made this man contrary and he needs to live that out loud. In fact Alex is forced to disagree with his own opinions half the time—he'll dispute them fiercely the moment he hears anyone else repeat them—

ALEX: Yeah once again the important thing is to get 'em laughing. I'm just one more target for your razor satire—

PHIL: Alex it's absolutely true you disagree with everything. I don't know what you like less, every nice thing anybody says or every bitchy thing.

ALEX: That's because I'm *right* to disagree with everything, because people are always either praising things fatuously or bitching about them recreationally.

CELINE: But—

ALEX: *No, Celine listen this is serious.* These games of yours are not acceptable, and it's wrong for these people to make you into someone they're going to cut up as soon as you turn *your* back.

CLINTON: Well I dunno but I think
Celine is just about perfect—

CASHIN: I see charm here I see wit I see
gorgeousness but I don't see anything to cut up—

ALEX: Well I do, and Celine knows it, and she
knows I won't lie to her about it. Love is
demanding, it's about truth not flattery.
Right? I mean I don't want some
feeble girlfriend who'd just
cave to every wild notion I get.

CELINE: So for you the perfect relationship should
lose the tenderness and all that
and just focus on reciprocal abuse.

LIANE: I don't think that's the way love
works. I mean people in love, they
love to talk about how great
their person is. They don't see bad things, only
good ones. In fact they can make the most
horrendous faults into virtues,
they just give them nicer names.
You know, skinny girls are
"willowy," fat girls are "majestic,"
some bedraggled sadsack has
"the natural look." She can be
nine feet tall and that makes her
a goddess, or four feet tall and she's
a pixie— a fat ego is just healthy
self-esteem; mean girls are witty,
stupid girls are sweet— if she never shuts up
she's cheery, if she never opens her mouth
she's thoughtful. Like that.
When you love someone,
everything becomes adorable.

ALEX: Well yes but I'd say—

CELINE: I'd say that's about
enough of that. Let's take a couple spins round
the gallery. You're not leaving darlings? [to Cashin & Clinton]

CASHIN: { No no no!

CLINTON: { Of course not!

ALEX: Obviously it'd terrify you if they
left. Well stay as long as you like
fellows, but I'm not going before you do.

CASHIN: Well if Celine's not inconvenienced
I don't think I have any appointments all day—

CLINTON: And as long as I can make the petit couché³⁸
I don't believe I'm married to anything else—

CELINE: I'm sure he was just being funny.

ALEX: Not at all,
I just wanna see if it's me you want out of here.

II, 5 [Basque, Alex, Celine, Liane, Cashin, Phil, Clinton]

BASQUE: Sir, a man is here to speak with you, [to Alex]
he says it's urgent business.

ALEX: I don't have any business that urgent.

BASQUE: He's wearing the uniform of the
Marshals.

[ALL: !]

CELINE: Well go see what it's about,
or have him come in.

ALEX: Fine fine, come in,
what can I do for you.

II, 5 [Guard, Alex, Celine, Liane, Cashin, Phil, Clinton]

GUARD: I have a brief message, sir—

ALEX: Spit it out then, talk, it's fine.

GUARD: The Marshals of the Kingdom of France
require your immediate presence,
sir.

ALEX: What *me*?

GUARD: Precisely.

ALEX: What for?

³⁸ The second ceremony surrounding the king's going to bed. More exclusive than the "grand couché."

PHIL: Oh Alex it's that ridiculous thing with Ron.

CELINE: What?

PHIL: Ron and Alex just got in a spat over this sonnet Ron wrote that Alex hated— they just want to nip the thing in the bud.

ALEX: I'm not going to cave on this.

PHIL: Well at any rate you have to go, so—

ALEX: And I don't know what they plan to 'nip,' are they going to sentence me to a lifetime of liking the poem? I'm not going to take back what I said, I mean it's a piece of crap.

PHIL: Yes but just try to be nice okay?

ALEX: It's not about nice, the sonnet sucks.

PHIL: Yes but if you just try to sound like a reasonable person, okay? Now hurry!

ALEX: I'll see them but there is nothing they can do to make me back down.

PHIL: So go have your say.

ALEX: In fact it would take an express order from the King to make me say *anything* nice about that shit, and until then as far as I'm concerned the guy should be hanged for writing it— you know, I do not see what's so fucking funny.

CELINE: Will you go? You should be there already.

ALEX: I'm going. But look, I'm coming right back to finish this conversation.

Act III

III, 1 [Cashin & Clinton]

CLINTON: Sweet Marquis! You're the cat who ate the canary today. Everything's making you titter, nothing's pissing you off— what can you possibly think you've got to be happy about?

CASHIN: Well damnit Marquis I'm just looking at myself and I can't find a thing to complain about, I mean look. I'm rich, I'm young and my family is pretty darn high-end. Which is nice 'cause not many gigs come up at the Louvre where I don't have a solid shot— I've got balls, which is important 'cause everyone knows I'll duel like a beast when I have to. Brains like crazy, *fantastic* taste, I mean I can opine about things I don't even really know about yet. Like the theatre for example— which I adore— I always take one of the seats up on the stage, let the audience know when to ooh, when to aah, it's a public service. What else? I've got basic coordination, perfect posture, nice features, thank god good teeth and alright— a great body. Clothes are important, and I do better there than anyone I can think of, I mean no wonder everybody likes me, the ladies especially, and for that matter so does the King. Does that answer your question?

CLINTON: It begs my question. If you've got such easy female pickings the world over, why are you wasting your time here?

CASHIN: *Me?* Ah ha ha shit you know it's not for my status nor my temperament to “waste time” on anyone. Oh I know the story about these losers “working on” a girl— worshipping at the feet of some ice maiden, acting sensitive, taking all kinds of abuse trying to get a piece of something that's out of their league. But a guy like me doesn't need to put myself out there on credit, d'you know what I mean? I don't need to pay the whole bill, I mean sure every honey is a precious treasure and all

that, but a guy like me has a price tag too. Nobody gets my attention for free, wouldn't make sense, it's just economics. You gotta get something in return.

CLINTON: And you think you're gonna get a little something from Celine?

CASHIN: Yeah Marquis that's exactly what I think.

CLINTON: Oh believe me here baby, you're making a very embarrassing mistake. You're flattering yourself— in fact you may be going blind.

CASHIN: Oh you're right I'm flattering myself definitely, going blind.

CLINTON: What makes you think you have a chance?

CASHIN: Well I'm *flattering* myself—

CLINTON: What are you going on?

CASHIN: Seems the tragic loss of my *eyesight*—

CLINTON: Anything concrete? At all?

CASHIN: No, completely deluded—

CLINTON: What happened,
she told you something? Privately?

CASHIN: Slapped me away—

CLINTON: Answer me.

CASHIN: Turned me down flat—

CLINTON: Drop the joke
Cashin, tell me what happened.

CASHIN: I'm the reject, you're the champ,
she hates me. One of these days
I'm going to have to do myself in—

CLINTON: *Alright Marquis.* This situation needs
managing. An agreement:
whoever can produce concrete
evidence that he has the better
chance of taking Celine,
the other will fuck off and clear the field.

CASHIN: Well hot damn now you're talking
Marquis, you have a deal. Oh and
shhh—

III, 2 [Celine, Cashin, Clinton]

CELINE: You kids still hanging around?

CLINTON: Baby we're in love.

CELINE: I heard a carriage pull up. Do you
know who it is?

CLINTON: No idea.

III, 3 [Basque, Celine, Cashin, Clinton]

BASQUE: Zinnia is on her way
up, Madam.

CELINE: —the hell does that woman want?

BASQUE: She's speaking with Liane at the moment.

CELINE: What is she *thinking*? Who invited her?

CASHIN: Ah but she's such a pillar of morality. And
such a *verbal* pillar—

CELINE: And isn't *that*
the performance of the year? She's as
shallow as any of us, I mean
clenching for a date. And totally tragically ignored,
and white-hot jealous of anyone who *has* a love
life while she just gets to rail against
the blindness of our Corrupt Century.
She pretends she's still alone because she's all
virtue but it's like darling, the fact you can't get
any doesn't actually make it a crime.
Anyway she craves it all right—
in fact, my theory? I think she wants
Alex, so every minute he spends
here just eats her
alive— like I stole him from
her, *please*— but boy she digs her
claws into my back every time I turn
around. It's annoying, but on the other
hand she's so very dense
that—

III, iv [Zinnia, Celine]

sweetie what's the happy occasion?
You have no idea how I've missed you!

ZINNIA: Well there's a thing I thought I should tell you.

CELINE: Oh I'm so glad you came. [Clinton and Cashin exit, laughing]

ZINNIA: And it's probably just as well they've left.

CELINE: Shall we sit down?

ZINNIA: I don't think we
have to. Celine, I think friends really
must look out for each other in the important
things, hm? And since nowadays *reputation* is
practically the most important thing a woman has—
well, the fact I'm here talking to you about
this just shows how much I care about you. So
anyway. Yesterday I was chatting with some
really good people, and your name
came up, and also your maybe dramatic
lifestyle. And well I'm sorry to say that not
everyone was in favour. Just the numerous young
men you invite up and the warm
reception they get and the confusion that gets caused—
well it got criticized
more than I'd have wanted *sweetie*,
and occasionally in really strong
language. And you *know* whose side I took—
I said everything I could think of
to defend you, that you had only good
intentions and a very fine heart.
But you know, there are
things that are hard to justify,
no matter how much one
wants to. I had to agree that your
manner sometimes *harms* you
a little. It just kind of comes across
badly, and stories are getting told
as you know they do. And you could
fix it so easily! Not that I believe you've ever
overstepped the bounds, I mean god
forbid— but you know how people are about
appearances. It's not enough
anymore, just to know in your own
heart that you've stayed the course.
So. And of course you're too
reasonable to take offense at any of this,
you know I'm only thinking about
your best interests.

CELINE: Well Zinny I am *in your debt*.
How could I take offence at such a caring
gesture? And in fact I can return the favor
immediately. Just the other day
I was with some truly fabulous people, and
we were discussing these very issues of
virtue etcetera, and somebody mentioned
your name. And in fact this sort of
prudish thing, these little eruptions of
judgment— were not held up as a very good model
either. This ultra-serious put-on,
the endless blabla about keeping
a good name, the sour face and
gasp if anyone says even some innocently
ambiguous thing— it's a question of ego frankly,
the condescension, the sniping at I mean
totally blameless events— well. To be
frank Zinny it was all roundly
criticized. 'Why does she bother pretending to be this
saint,' they asked me, 'when her actions
show her up so badly? She never skips a
mass, but beats her staff and pays them
next to nothing— she acts frigid around
anyone who cares, but trowels on the makeup
when there's a bachelor around— I mean
she's the classic anti-smut crusader who's clearly
desperate for a little of the real thing.'
Well of course I called them a pack of vicious liars
but sadly I was the only dissenting voice.
And in the end the opinion was that maybe
you should pay more attention to your
own actions, and less to ours. Because if your
hobby is gonna be fixing other peoples'
morals, the hard thing about that is your own life
has to be *so crazy perfect*. So
maybe we should all just leave that job
to the professionals. Hm? And I know you're also
too reasonable to take any of this
badly. 'Cause you know I have
nothing but your best interests at heart.

ZINNIA: Well it's always a risk to offer unsolicited
advice, but I certainly didn't expect
a reply like that—! Judging by its bitterness,
clearly I struck a nerve.

CELINE: Oh no on the contrary! You know, I think mutual
critiques like this should be the new standard. Just
think, the clean air of *absolute truth*, nobody
blind to their faults— Let's do it!

Say the word and we'll keep it up
just as thoroughly as we started: you tell me
everything you hear about me,
and I'll do the same for you.

ZINNIA: Oh, but I'd never hear *anything* about you, it seems now
I'm the one with the reputation to worry about—

CELINE: Oh Zinny listen, any single act is going to be
praised by one person and condemned
by another, and the thing is they can both
be *right*, 'cause it depends on your point
of view. There's a time where flirting is
best, and a time when it's best to be
a prude— maybe for example when you're not so
young anymore. It's probably a great way
to mask some of life's little disappointments.
Heck, I might even do it myself,
someday. But you have to admit that
twenty is not the age to be a nun.

ZINNIA: Oh yes you squeeze a lot of mileage
out of the trivial difference between
our ages. But a word to the wise:
youth is the wrong asset to rely on
that heavily. Anyway, I'm just surprised my little
tip elicited such a violent stream of abuse.

CELINE: And I'm just surprised you
can't get off my back! Zinny I can't
help it if men don't
like you. So they find me
attractive and offer me all
sorts of things you don't think I deserve
to have, well it's not my problem
and it's certainly not my fault!

ZINNIA: Oh my god. Do you honestly
think anyone's jealous of your mob
of boyfriends? Honey, I think we've figured out
how you stay so popular.
Ohh or are we supposed to think that
hoard likes you because you're
a nice girl? The way things are today?
They're good boys and they like you for
your mind, is that right? Please.
We're not blind, we're not
stupid, and there are plenty
of better girls who don't have
your Olympic level of success

with the men— so *whatever* could this mean? Ohh, maybe the kind of attention you get has to be *bought and paid for*. So don't get so high and mighty over such a dubious distinction. If any of us envied your prolific lovelife, she'd do what we all know your type does, cut loose and show just how easy it can be to attract a crowd.

CELINE: Ohhh then go to it baby! I wanna watch! Show me the secret— a *crowd*! Just you attract *one man*, *anybody*, and—

ZINNIA: *That's enough!* This is pushing us both too far. I would have left long ago, but my carriage is keeping me waiting.

CELINE: Oh well no rush, stay as long as you like, but I must be boring you to tears. So why don't I leave you in better hands? What luck, I think Alex here will suit you to a tee. Alex sweetie, I've got to go write a quick note— can't put it off another second— be a sweetheart and talk to Zinzin here? I *know* she'll forgive me—

III, 5 [Alex, Zinnia]

ZINNIA: Well I suppose I get to entertain you til my carriage gets back—! But you know honestly Celine couldn't have offered a thing I'd like better. I mean what I'm saying is obviously a man of your abilities will always get respect, but I— well Alex you've got some secret charm that just— Well, I always hope things are happening for you. Like the palace! I wish they'd give you some recognition, Alex, it's infuriating. Day after day they do nothing for you.

ALEX: For me? Why should the palace do anything for me? I can't imagine what you think I've ever done to help out the monarchy.

ZINNIA: Well not everyone who does well at the Louvre has done anything to deserve it Alex, that's for sure. And anyway you'd need the opportunity as well as the ability, and your abilities aren't being *recognized*—

ALEX: Can we stop talking about my 'abilities'?
What do you want the powers at the palace to get so excited about? The King would have his work cut out for him if he was expected to uncover everyone's buried 'abilities.'

ZINNIA: Alex real talent uncovers *itself*, and besides yours is already well-known.
Twice yesterday I heard people speak very highly of you. Well-placed people, too.

ALEX: Hah, well you know what? Nowadays everybody speaks very highly of *everybody*. It doesn't mean a thing to be praised, we're all gagging on praise—people throw praise at your head, you have to duck. Hell, my valet just got a very nice mention in the Gazette.

ZINNIA: Darling all I'm saying is I wish you were more interested in a palace position—something a little in the public eye. If you showed an inclination, I could put a lot of little things in motion. I know a number of people who'd be thrilled to make it a very smooth road for you.

ALEX: And what would I do when I got there?
I'm constitutionally unsuited to life at the Louvre, I don't have a single one of the skills you need to function there. I don't make nice, I like to tell the truth, and the Louvre is a place where if you're not good at hiding what you think, you're better off staying far far away. I mean I know I'm sacrificing all the pull, and the titles (which are nice), but on the other hand I don't have to deal with a million snide comebacks, and say how much I love so—and-so's poem, and flirt with fat Mrs. Whoever, and chafe my brain with those packs of inane fucking Marquises.

ZINNIA: —
Well alright let's not talk

about the palace. Let's talk about your
lovelife, Alex. I'm going to be frank.
You need to find a more worthy object of your
affection. You deserve a much happier
fate— that woman doesn't *remotely* merit you.

ALEX: Are you aware that you're talking
about a friend of yours?

ZINNIA: Well yes but I can't keep watching her
abuse you like this, it's too
upsetting. I'm morally obligated
to warn you, you're being *duped*.

ALEX: Oh thank you thanks that's very
kind, just what I wanted to hear—

ZINNIA: Well I'm sorry Celine may be
my friend, but she's not worth anyone as dear
and genuine as you. When she says
she loves you, she's lying.

ALEX: Well she may be, and I guess
nobody knows for sure. But it would have been
kinder of you to have not put that thought in my head.

ZINNIA: Well if you prefer to go on being misled
I won't say another word, nothing easier—

ALEX: No actually don't stop. Nothing you could say
now could be worse than what I'm imagining
thank you. I would request that you not say
a word more than you can prove.

ZINNIA: Well I think that's very reasonable,
and if you like I'll take you
up on it. You can believe your own
eyes, can't you? Just come as far as
my house, and I'll show you exactly how
faithful your 'girlfriend' really is. I mean Alex,
the sooner you start appreciating other women,
the sooner you'll be getting what you deserve. Hmm?

Act IV

IV, 1 [Phil & Liane]

PHIL: No the stubbornness was unprecedented, I have never seen such an agonizing road to resolution— the judges tried every possible angle on him, couldn't make a dent. And I'm sure they've never blown their time on a more asinine case—he was like “No, your Honours, I won't take it back, I'll agree to anything you want but not that. And what's his problem anyway, why does he even care what I think? And so what if he can't write poetry? Big deal, good people can write crappy verse. He's a great guy okay, good family, friendly, bright, whatever you want, the man can't write. I'll compliment his lifestyle if you want, his spending habits, his horsemanship, his swordsmanship, his dancing for Christ's sake but for the poetry I'm sorry, if you can't do better than that, you must learn to not pick up the god damn pen. Unless for example there's a gun to your head.” In the end the most generosity they could extract—and he thought this was diplomatic—was, “Ron I'm sorry I'm so difficult, I do like you and I truly wish I could have liked that sickening poem.” At which point they made them shake hands and threw them the hell out.

LIANE: Well Alex is definitely a nut job but I have to admit I find it all kind of appealing. He ties himself in such knots to stay honest it's like some great doomed heroic quest. God and hyperhonesty isn't exactly an epidemic these days. I'd kind of love it if everyone was screwed up like that.

PHIL: And then it's shocking to see how consumed he is with Celine. I mean it's strange enough that he should fall for anyone at all, but your cousin—? That defies rational explanation.

LIANE: Well of course it does. Love isn't rational. They say it's about finding your match, but it doesn't look like that here. The right person is never the one you fall for.

PHIL: —
Do you think Celine loves him?

LIANE: Who can tell? I don't think she ever knows. She can fall in love without suspecting it— then sometimes she thinks she has and realizes it was nothing.

PHIL: I'm afraid that cousin of yours is going to give Alex one bumpy ride.

If I was him I'd dump her and go for you.

You like him don't you?

LIANE: Well— sure. I try not to play any games about it.

But I'm truly happy for Celine, and of course for him, well I'd always hope he could marry the one he loves.

But if it didn't work out— like if she married someone else— I'd take him in a flash. I don't think being 'second choice' would even bother me.

PHIL: Well and I'd be thrilled for you both. I tell him all the time how great you are, he'll tell you so himself.

But you know, if those two were to get married and you found yourself looking—

I'd sure do everything I could to draw your focus.

LIANE: Oh Phil, be serious.

PHIL: I am.
I'm really saying sincerely I've been
waiting to find the moment to say—
Well hopefully it won't be long.

IV, 2 [Alex, Liane, Phil]

ALEX: You Liane you help me out, I have been
screwed around so bad it's, I can't *stand* it!

LIANE: Oh my god, what happened?

ALEX: This is life-threatening, Jesus
Christ it's an avalanche it's—
I can't even— My own— I don't
even know if I can *say* it!

LIANE: Try to calm down a little, okay?

ALEX: *Fuck!* Why does someone so
wonderful have to be such a sleazy—

LIANE: Alex, what—

ALEX: It's shot to hell.
I've been I've been betrayed I've been
murdered! It's Celine. Can you believe this?
She's seeing someone else, that little slut—

LIANE: Do you have a good reason to think that, Alex?

PHIL: You're sure it's not just some little thing? You get so
jealous sometimes and make monsters out of—

ALEX: Jesus *you* mind your own business,
it's absolutely certain, in fact it's in
my pocket in her own handwriting.
Yeah yeah Liane, a letter to Ron
spelling out all the creepy details. *Ron*,
Jesus I thought she hated him,
I felt *sorry* for the little sonofabitch.

PHIL: Look a letter can be misinterpreted,
maybe there's an innocent—

ALEX: One more time Phil *go away!* Find some
shit of your own to worry about.

LIANE: Alex for heaven's sake pull yourself together, you—

ALEX: Liane. The whole mess is in your hands now,
I'm turning to you to heal my shredded
heart, *you* can get back at that traitorous
coward of a cousin of yours—
(god I was so good to her!)
She's got to disgust you. *Punish her.*

LIANE: Punish her? Me? What are you talking about?

ALEX: Marry me.

—
You'll get me and that little slut
will not. I will punish her with all my
love all my loyalty my respect—
everything I have to my name
because I'm giving it all to you.

LIANE: —
Alex I— I do feel for how
awful this must be for you—

and I don't want you to think I don't
value what you've offered—

but maybe the situation isn't as bad as you
think and you won't have to go through
with this. You know you get hurt by someone
you love, lots of angry plans are made
in the moment, and then the next day
it can all be okay— It's
lovers' quarrels.

ALEX: No no. Not this time. That was fatal,
no going back. It's *over*.
I'd slap myself if I ever felt anything
but contempt for that— Oh and here she comes,
god she makes me angry, I am finally going
to confront her with what she is,
she will be finished and then I will be
yours. No baggage attached. Celine,

IV, 3 [Celine, Alex]

I'm trying very hard to control myself here—

CELINE: Wow! What's wrong, you're
purple, it's like you're,
you look *terrible*.

ALEX: What's *wrong*. All the most disgusting things ever done combined don't equal what you pull off on any given day. The gods really outdid themselves putting you together, baby— [to sky] what a bunch of *assholes*!

CELINE: Oh you are such a sweet talker.

ALEX: *This is not a joke*. Have the decency at least to show some shame. I have proof that you cheated on me. Yes. Gee I wonder why I always felt so jealous, oh I see it's because I was *right*. Yeah all my suspicions that got you so offended were justified the whole time— well you are a world-class liar but I guess the gods let me know to be wary. Just do not think I'm going to take this lying down.

Celine the thing is I know love happens or it doesn't and nobody can be coerced— I know! See I would have no problem with you if you had just once told me the truth, *anytime*— you could have turned me down at the beginning and I wouldn't be angry I wouldn't have the right. But to encourage me, to lie, to tell me you felt the same— that's *malicious*. That's so sadistic I can barely even think what you deserve, it's *beyond*, it's— all I can see everywhere I look is how *angry* I am at you. I swear Celine I'm not responsible for my *actions*!

CELINE: Alex *what* is this about? Have you finally totally lost your *mind*?

ALEX: Oh yeah yeah I lost it the day I first looked at you, you poisonous little— The day I persuaded myself there was an iota of sincerity hidden in with all the other— shit that was seducing me.

CELINE: I'm still trying to figure out what you're talking about!

ALEX: Oh god you're good, what a gift. Well this time I've got the tools to shut it down. Look. Here in your own handwriting. Ha! There's no bullshitting the evidence, is there.

CELINE: This is it? This is what's got you so fired up?

ALEX: Jesus, she's not even embarrassed to see it!

CELINE: Why would I be embarrassed?

ALEX: Damn! You're ballsy, I'll give you that.
Are you denying it's yours 'cause it's not signed?

CELINE: Alex it's my handwriting, why would I deny it's mine?

ALEX: —!
And you can see a letter like this in my hand
without being even a little embarrassed—?

CELINE: You are an absolute psychotic.

ALEX: What!? You're keeping this up? The evidence of your
thing with Ron isn't supposed
to impress either of us?

CELINE: *Ron?* Who told you this was for *Ron*?

ALEX: —the person who just gave it to me.
But even if it was for someone
else, why is that better?
Are you any less guilty of writing it?

CELINE: And if I wrote it to a girlfriend—
what's wrong with it then?

ALEX: —
Oh that's excellent. Really good
dodge, I admit I hadn't thought
of that, well I'm convinced.
How dare you? How
stupid do you think people are?
No okay let's see then, I'm dying
to know how you plan to sustain
this, go ahead it's a challenge,
explain it away, show me how
a letter this impassioned gets written
to a woman.

CELINE: *I don't think I will.* It's fascinating
to see how much authority you think you have
over me. I have never in my life been spoken to like this.

ALEX: No no no don't have a fit just take one minute
and explain what you meant when you wrote this.

CELINE: No you know what? I don't want anything
to do with it, you can think whatever the hell you like.

ALEX: Oh look please show me how this can possibly be for a girlfriend and I'll be fine.

CELINE: No it's for Ron, I'd rather you believe that. I love having that moron hump my leg, he's a poet, he's everything I look for in a man, whatever the fuck you want to believe but please quit *wasting my time*.

ALEX: I can't believe the *cruelty*, I mean people treat each other this way? I'm justifiably angry with you, I come in good faith to try to clear things up and you *attack* me, you push my my pain and my fears to the very limit and leave me dangling there, believing anything— and you enjoy it don't you? Of course I'm too much of an invertebrate to just walk out the door, God to just finally *dislike* you. I'm totally outclassed here— you play on my weaknesses like this instrument of blind idiot love custom built for your abuse— look please I beg stop doing this for one minute, I can't bear it— If you possibly can, just show me it's all a mistake. I mean my love will help you out— If you'd even try to *look* like you love me I'll try like hell to believe you—

CELINE: You're so crazed when you get like this you don't deserve to be loved the way I *do love you*. Alex, what could make me sink so low as to lie like that, to cheat on you? If I didn't love you why wouldn't I just say so? And I mean why can't it be enough that I *do* say so? All you can see are your endless suspicions, it's so painful— Alex, it's difficult for a woman to declare straight out that she's in love. Passion like that goes against everything we're taught: honour— restraint— When you see a woman surmount that, please give some credit to what she says. After that inner battle it's so awful to get nothing but doubts and grief in return—

You've been a bastard Alex.
I'm the invertebrate, to still be here, to still feel
anything nice for you. I should
walk away, find somebody else and really
give you something to complain about.

ALEX: —
I'm clearly crazy. I mean I'm
positive you're lying but hey
who cares? It's all out
of my control, I'll never escape—
I'm actually a little curious to see
how horribly you'll betray me in the end.

CELINE: Your problem is you don't know how to love another person.

ALEX: Oh I love you like nobody has ever loved
anybody. It's gone right to the end and
out the other side to the place where I
actually wish you ill— I wish you were
ugly, I wish you would lose
everything, I wish you had been born
with nothing, no title no money no land—
so I could sacrifice everything
for you. Fix all the injustice in your life
so I could know every single day that
my love had given you everything.

CELINE: Alex that is a very strange way to—
I sure hope that doesn't happen.

IV, 4 [Woody, Celine, Alex]

Geez Woody. What a get-up!

ALEX: What's all this about? What's [his outfit and demeanour]
going on?

WOODY: Oh sir—

ALEX: Yeah?

WOODY: Everything is really confusing right now—

ALEX: What is it?

WOODY: Sir I think we're in trouble.

ALEX: Waddaya mean?

WOODY: Out loud?

ALEX: Out loud! Now!

WOODY: But you're sure nobody here—

ALEX: Oh this is delightful.
Talk!

WOODY: Sir we gotta get outta town.

ALEX: What?

WOODY: No fuss no muss, we just gotta go.

ALEX: Why?

WOODY: I'm telling you sir we gotta get outta here.

ALEX: Because—

WOODY: No goodbyes, let's skedaddle.

ALEX: I'm requesting a *reason*, asshole.

WOODY: Because of the reason sir that we absolutely gotta leave.

ALEX: If you don't explain what you're talking about
I'm going to take your fucking head off.

WOODY: OK sir so this guy, all dressed in black, looked really *mean*,
comes *right* into the kitchen and leaves this
note for you, but the paper was just it was just
scrawled all over like the person wrote it from *hell*,
and I thought it had to be about your trial but I couldn't
tell, it was like it was dictated by *Satan*.

ALEX: What? So? Why in god's name does this note
mean we have to leave town?

WOODY: OK well what I mean is, about an hour after the first guy,
another guy, in fact a guy who comes over a lot,
this other guy comes over and it's really really
urgent. And when you're not there he tells me— and
he's really nice about this because he knows how hard I
work he's really *nice*— wait what's his name I forget his—

ALEX: Fuck his name, what did he say?

WOODY: Anyway his name doesn't matter, he's one of your
friends, and he tells me you gotta get out of town really
fast, 'cause if you don't you could get *indicted*.

ALEX: *What!?* He wasn't any more specific than that?

WOODY: No but he did ask for a pen and paper which he
 used, to write you another *note*, which I hope will tell you
 everything you need to know about the whole thing.

ALEX: Jesus, so hand it over!

CELINE: What do you think it is?

ALEX: I have no idea, but maybe someday
 I'll find out. *Hello*, dickhead, are you almost done?

WOODY: Oh sir I think I left it on the table back home—

ALEX: Oh for fuck's sake I'm going to—

CELINE: Look relax.
 Go find out what's going on and sort it out.

ALEX: No matter what I try there's always
 something to prevent us having this out. Okay
 look, I'll tell you what, please just make
 time for me to come by again tonight—

Act V

V, 1 [Alex & Phil]

ALEX: I said the decision is already made.

PHIL: But however bad it is you don't have to—

ALEX: You can talk 'til you're blue, Phil
but you're not going to change my mind,
this world is too twisted and I'm
leaving it. No human contact.
I mean— the law. Honour. Logic. Plain
decency. It was all on my side, the entire
world knew it was, and you know
I was actually kind of confident?
But how stupid, of course not— I was
right, so I lost. I mean an undisguised
criminal (and famous for it!) can just
fabricate something like that and win!
He cuts my neck and somehow makes them
thank him for it. He grins that grin
and our entire legal system plays dead, yeah,
he comes out clean as a whistle and I get
indicted! But that's not enough,
noo— you've seen that disgusting little
pamphlet that's been making the rounds? I mean
it should be illegal to *read* that sick thing
much less— well now he's telling people
I wrote it. And of course now *Ron's* running around
backing him up. And people
believe Ron! Fuck I was never anything
but good to that guy but the little shit
has to tackle me about that
sonnet and because I played
straight with him, wouldn't
mislead him, wouldn't *lie*,
he pins me with *this!* I'm his worst
enemy all of a sudden, he is
never going to forgive me, over
a poem! And my friend that kind of vanity
is standard issue— I mean not only,
I mean people *value* behavior like that.
It's too degrading, I have to get out of this
jungle— look around. These are the most
savage animals in the world
and I *refuse* to be one of them.

PHIL: Alex yes. But. I think you're being a little rash. There's not that much damage done. What he's been saying about the leaflet hasn't gotten you in trouble — it's a lie, people know it, and it's going to blow up in his face.

ALEX: Not that he cares, he loves an explosion like that. Somehow that guy's allowed to be a crook— when this is done blowing up he'll be more popular than he was before!

PHIL: So what? No one *believes* him is the important thing so you don't have to worry about it. The trial was bullshit but you have ample grounds for appeal and as for the indictment—

ALEX: Oh that *stays*.
 However bad it screws me
 I'm keeping that, it's worth it,
 it's too perfect. I want this case to go
 down to posterity as a signpost, as
 a testament to the absolute moral
 bankruptcy of the human race.
 This thing could cost me twenty thousand francs
 but you know what? Twenty grand
 will buy me the right *uncontested*
 to hate the human race now and forever.

PHIL: Oh, but really—

ALEX: But really you're wasting
 your time. What are you possibly going to tell me?
 Don't say you're going to try to justify
 the sick spectacle of that courtroom.

PHIL: On the contrary. I agree with everything
 you've said, okay? Everything's about influence
 and politics, the only thing that always works is
 fraud, and no that is not the way the world
 should be. But Alex, the non-perfection
 of humanity has never been a reason
 to abandon it. Human fault gives us a chance,
 a benchmark to examine our own
 weakness, which is maybe the *highest* virtue.
 If everyone were perfect, right, behaved
 ideally, virtue would have no meaning—
 in fact one of the biggest *tests* of virtue is in

how we respond to the things people do
that *aren't* good and virtuous.

ALEX: Phil you are the undisputed master
of obscure logic, but you're wasting this one
on me. It's only practical for me
to leave, I don't have enough
control over my mouth, I say
everything I think I can't help it,
and I'm only going to bury myself deeper and deeper.
Just let me wait here for Celine
will you— I just have to get her to agree
to this plan, and then—

You know I've never
really been certain she loves me.
Guess I'm going to find out.

PHIL: Well at least let's wait for her in Liane's rooms.

ALEX: No, I'm too nervous. You go see
Liane— I'll stay here in the corner
with my little black cloud.

PHIL: That is not good enough company.
I'll go get her to come down here.

V, 2 [Ron, Celine, Alex]

RON: Celine it's up to you— are we [neither see Alex]
bound by the sweet knots of love?
You have to *show* me please, a fire
like this, I can't keep wondering!
Has my passion made an impression?
Don't be afraid, just please let me
know, it's so simple what
I'm asking: Get rid of Alex.
Sacrifice that one relationship to my
love— bar him from the house.

CELINE: What have you got against Alex
all of a sudden? I thought you loved him.

RON: ...we don't have to go into that. I just
need to know your feelings.
You have to choose— me
or him, it's all I need to know.

ALEX: I think Ron's got the right idea. Seems [emerging]
we share both an affection and a desire for
resolution. Time to choose: this has

dragged on long enough.
Tell us what you feel.

RON: You know Alex if this is actually
your territory, I don't want to step on your toes.

ALEX: Well not to sound possessive but I don't
want to share her with you.

RON: Well don't worry. If it looks like she's into you—

ALEX: And if she seems *capable* of interest in you—

RON: I'm out of the picture.

ALEX: I'll never see her again.

RON: So speak up Celine don't be shy.

ALEX: Don't be nervous say your piece.

RON: Just tell us who's your guy.

ALEX: Cut and choose: him or me.

RON: Whoa, you have to *think* about it?

ALEX: What, you're not *sure*?

CELINE: My god what's going *on*? This isn't
the time or the place for this, you're acting
like animals. Of *course* I've 'made
my choice,' nothing's easier. This is
not me trying to decide, thank you,
this is me *mortified*. I will not
humiliate somebody to his face,
the situation's obviously a little sensitive
and there's no reason to be brutal. There are
more humane ways to let someone know
he's not the one.

RON: No no I can handle it. You've got
my permission to just say it—

ALEX: And I insist!
You don't have to soften the blow.
You've gotta stay in with everybody
don't you, it's your calling,
well this is the end of it. Say it clear. If you
hedge for one more instant I can

get the damn drift and as far
as I'm concerned we're done.

RON: Well thanks for being such an asshole Alex,
that's exactly what I wanted to say.

CELINE: Alright this is getting tiresome— you
both know what you're asking is unnecessary
and I've explained why it makes me
uncomfortable— oh look! Liane can be the judge,

V, 3 [Liane, Phil, Celine, Ron, Alex]

Liane thank god, I'm being
bludgeoned, it's two against one.
These maniacs are badgering me
to announce *right in front of them*
who I truly love, and then
forbid the other to ever darken
my door, I mean come on is this how it's *done*?

LIANE: Oh, don't ask me, I might answer
wrong. I'm for everybody just
saying what they think.

RON: Not gonna work—

ALEX: She's on *our* side—

RON: Just one word'll resolve the whole thing!

ALEX: One more second of *silence* will resolve it for me!

The Last Scene

[Cashin, Clinton, Zinnia, Phil, Liane, Ron, Celine, Alex]

CASHIN: *Babes* with your permission we've dropped by
to clear a little something up—

CLINTON: And gentlemen how great you're here, [to Ron and Alex]
it concerns the two of you as well.

ZINNIA: And I'm sure you're surprised to see [of Cashin and Clinton]
me, but blame it on these two. They both
just came to me very upset over
a little thing, and I said I will *not* believe it, I
adore Celine and I know she could never do
anything like that. The evidence
did seem strong but I said
no, I'm going to overlook our little

quarrel and swing on by to watch you
clear yourself of this calumny.

CASHIN: So darling this will be fun— we'd love
to see you explain this. I believe
you wrote this letter to Clinton?

CLINTON: And you wrote this sweet note to Cashin.

CASHIN: I'm sure you both recognize the script. [to Alex & Ron]
In fact dear Celine is so generous I'm sure
you've both gotten similar notes.
But this one's really worth a read—

Clinton, you're crazy to be upset that I have fun and to say I'm only happy
when you're not here—it's totally not fair and if you don't come right over to
beg my pardon I'll never ever forgive you. Ha ha. I mean that huge gangling
Viscount—

He should really be here—

—that huge gangling Viscount who you were complaining about could never
appeal to me. Ever since I watched him for forty-five minutes straight
spitting into a fountain to make rings in the water he just gives me the creeps.
And as for that tiny Marquis—

I don't want to sound vain but I think that's me—

—as for that tiny Marquis who clenched my arm for hours yesterday, he
barely even exists: looks the part but that's all. The misanthrope—³⁹

[to Alex] Over to you, sir—

The misanthrope does occasionally make me laugh—he's so hilariously rude
and loves to cause a scene—but ninety percent of the time he just drives me
up the wall. And as for the renaissance man—

[to Ron] This is your bit—

—as for the renaissance man who's dying to be a poet against everybody's
frantic advice, well I can't even be bothered to listen to him—his
conversation is even deadlier than his verse. So obviously things aren't as
much fun here as you think. Just remember I miss you like crazy through all
those endless functions I have to attend. Believe me I'd much rather spend
my time with people I *like*.

CLINTON: And now me.

³⁹ In the original: "The man with the green ribbons"
The Mercurian, Vol. 4, No. 4

—You asked me about Clinton, Mr. Romance: well he's the last person for me. He's crazy to think I love him, and you're crazy to think I don't love you. All you have to do to fix things up is switch minds with him. Ha ha. And then come and see me as much as you can, to help me cope with the stress of him obsessing over me.

Doesn't it all sketch a beautiful portrait?
And you know the word we have for that young
lady. But we must be off, we're going to be sharing
this pretty picture with a lot of people—

CASHIN: Well what a setup, I could use so many great lines— but
Celine, you're not worth the time anymore.
I will show you that tiny Marquises can afford
better quality comfort than the likes of you. [exit, with Cashin]

RON: Wow. I can't believe you'd be that mean
about me after all the things you
wrote. But I guess you were promising
all the same stuff to everybody— Well
whatever. I was stupid but not any more.
I mean I s'pose you've done me
a favor— I know who you are now. I get
my heart back. And you lose me. And I'm
a good guy. Alex I'm officially no longer pursuing
this. The field is clear. Knock yourself out. [exit]

ZINNIA: *I have never seen anything so disgusting
in my life.* I can barely contain myself,
I wouldn't have thought a human being
capable. And I'm not so concerned
about the others— but dear Alex,
whom you were lucky enough— I mean such
a wonderful man who simply *worshipped* you—
should he—

ALEX: Zinnia go away, alright?
I can take care of this. It's nice
you're defending me but there's no
point. If I was going to get back
at Celine by pairing off
with someone else, it wouldn't be you.

ZINNIA: Oh—! You—! You think that was—
that I'm that head over heels for
you? Well you've got quite an ego,
guess what, the reject from a piece
of trash like Celine is not that hot
a commodity. Why don't you step off
your high horse— people like

me don't go out with people like you.
In fact, I think you'd be doing very well
to stay with her. *You two are a perfect match.*

[exit]

ALEX: —
—

So. I've kept my mouth shut—
and what an opportunity—!
I let everyone else go
first. My turn now?

CELINE: —

Yeah. Say it all.
I mean, it's all true
isn't it. Enjoy yourself. I
admit it; I did— everything. I'm too
tired to think something up.

You know when all the others were
yelling I was— I mean, who cares?

But you— I did you
wrong. I deserve
everything you could say.

I must look so ugly to you
right now— so many lies—!

So look, you can finally
hate me. I earned it. Go ahead.

ALEX: —

I *can't*. You

criminal. I still can't make it
go away. God I want to hate you.
I can't seem to— find it.

Bastard love, huh?
You're the witnesses!
And it gets *worse*!
You know Phil all
the philosophy in the world isn't worth
a damn and here's the proof—

[to Liane & Phil]

Okay. Criminal. I'll
forgive you. I can explain it to myself—
naïve young girl led astray by degenerate
society— sure. If you'll go
with my plan. I'm moving away
from everybody. Everything. Living

[to Celine]

somewhere— deserted.
Come with me.
That's what you can do to make up for those
letters. That's the way I can still find
love for you.

CELINE: —
You want me to go with you
where it's deserted
and live alone?

ALEX: If you love me the rest of the world
won't matter, I can be everything
you need, I can be everybody—

CELINE: —
Alex I don't like it when I'm not
in a group, it scares me. I'm just
twenty, I don't think I'm—
I'm not strong enough to go
through with something like that,
if— maybe we could get married! Maybe
that could— I can be your wife, Alex! Maybe—

ALEX: Thanks.
No.

At last I hate you.

That did it, Celine— Finally
more than everything else—
Because it's—

even when we were married I'd never be
everything for you—

the way you are for me.

I won't marry you. It's finished.
I'll never look at you again.

[Exit Celine]

Liane. You are as— great a person as you are
beautiful, I have never seen you to be
anything but sincere and
honest and kind—
and I know I asked— but I would
not want you to marry
anyone as screwed-up as this.

Jesus what a useless—

I'm not cut out
for partnership, I don't deserve
you, you'd be debasing yourself.
You're worth far far more
than one of Celine's trash
discards and—

LIANE: Alex Alex please.
Think whatever you like, but I'm not in any mad
rush to the altar. And anyway if I popped the question
I think your friend here might say yes.

PHIL: Really? My God that's all I can
think about— I'd do anything—

ALEX: I hope you guys feel that way about each other
for a really long time.

Well. I have been betrayed
on every side. Buried in injustice and
and insult, and I am leaving this
pit. To find a tiny corner
somewhere in the world
where a man is free to do the right thing.

[exit]

PHIL: —
Come on, we'll go talk him out of it.

He'll never really do it—

[exit Phil; manet Liane]

the end

intercom

In the New York production, the roles of Basque and the Marshal were replaced with intercom voices. These could be live (as they were in our production, read by the actors playing Zinnia and Ron, respectively) or recorded. In either case, assuming Woody is also doubled (as he was in our case, with Clinton), the intercom allows the play to be performed by eight actors. Following are the scenes as they may be performed in that case:

segment 1:

II, 2

[the intercom buzzes]

CELINE: [up] Yes?

INTERCOM VOICE: The Marquis Cashin is downstairs.

CELINE: [up] Oh send him up.

ALEX: What—! Don't I *ever* get to see you alone?

—

ALEX: No matter what kind of a bastard anybody is, you'll find a reason to put up with him. It's pathological.

II, 3

[the intercom buzzes]

VOICE: Marquis Clinton is also here, madam.

ALEX: [starting to leave] Oh and of course.

segment 2:

II, 5 & 6 [adapted]

[the intercom buzzes]

VOICE: A message has been left for Master Alex. The message is marked "urgent".

ALEX: [up] I don't have any business that urgent.

VOICE: The message is from the Marshals of the Kingdom of France. [all pause]

CELINE: Well go pick it up or have it read.

ALEX: [up] What is it?

VOICE: The message is personal in nature.

ALEX: Yeah fine, what is it?

VOICE: [*click*] The Court of the Marshals of France requires your immediate presence.
[*click*] End of message.

ALEX: What, me?

VOICE: [*click*] Yes.

PHIL: Oh Alex, it's that thing with Ron.

segment 3:

In III, 3, as in II, 2 above, simply replace Basque's lines with the intercom voice.

ALWAYS ACCOMPANIED

by José Triana

When I read *Respectable Women* by Miguel de Carrión, the idea that something was missing came over me. The seductive suggestion of the title gradually began to fade. I found myself faced with a plot and characters that would disintegrate if touched, like fragile gold leaf or unhemmed linen, but were not fragile or unhemmed.

Frustration set in, and gained ground. Not much novel writing was happening. The theme, the grand theme of “respectable women” or of “honor” – in whose name so much ink has been spilled in my country since the beginning of the republic, even today, given that the “revolution used the term honor with intention” – instead of being explained and easily built on, that theme drained away, giving in to the fabric of sentimentality, squandering the plausible depth of the protagonists.

So, as I continued to read, I began to imagine here and there the possibilities of secret threads only hinted at and felt that this text could be revisited, that beyond the given image one could see signs of its characters behaving in another way, orchestrating new situations, creating and dissolving labyrinths, unveiling the mediocrity of their actions, formulating inner lives as a world apart, growing, shrinking—or escaping. I thought I had a clear opportunity to approach it, study it, and work on it, freely. Much like the way I was working with the Greek tragedies. But still I felt unprepared to embark on such a venture. I needed to wait a few more years. Years that would give me a deeper understanding of Cuban life in all its complexity, its contradictions, its authenticity; that way I could pay it proper tribute.

Once I finished *War Ceremonies* and *Minor Revolution in the Camp of Mars*, each of which occupied a place in our national history, I reread Miguel del Carrión’s *Respectable Women* – and as I was familiar with Abelardo Estorino’s interesting work based on Carrión’s *The Mercurian*, Vol. 4, No. 4

Impure Women, I knew deep inside how to approach it, accompanied by the vertigo of Ramón de Valle Inclán's *Divine Words*.

I would offer a more complex vision of the train station romance novel, I would include my family, who would be present in the abyss of writing, in the background, making demands on me, asking me to speak honestly about who we were, what we were searching for, what our concerns were, what side or political party we belonged to, what our real aspirations were. Rising up like a ghost from a dark corner of my study, my cave, my grandmother calculated what part she would play.

Yet, I slowly realized that such a project would not work if I wanted to create a serious piece. Therefore, combing through my own emptiness, I knew that I needed to look at the novel, at political and social life, with new eyes, delve into the torrid, murky, terrifying waters of dreams, concentrate deeply, confront myself. My insolence and pride had to disappear, evaporate. I had to think of it as scattering a poem like pollen or petals or music, invisible.

Out of that struggle, in one fell swoop, came the first version, which I titled *A Dialogue among Women*. Overwhelmed, disconcerted, as it always happens with me, seeking some kind of assurance, after a long discussion about theatre and literature, I gave the manuscript to Clara Ponce de León, who was working in Havana at the time and with whom I had a close friendship. She was its first reader. It was she who made the first edits, and her comments greatly benefitted me during that difficult period of 1976 to 1978.

Once I was in exile, and with pertinent observations by the French author Florence Delay, *A Dialogue among Women* became *Common Words*. A few years later, in a French translation by Carlos Semprún, it was performed as a radio play on *France Culture*. I remember the sumptuous version of Anne Fontaine with a cast of unforgettable actors. During that time I reworked the play from top to bottom for a production the Royal Shakespeare Company had offered me. The brilliant *mise-en-scene* by Nick Hamm and Guido González del Valle was

given the luminous gift of Janet McTeer. Now Joanne Pottlitzer is giving it a new life. I welcome it!

I relate these exploits of the marginal writer that I am because I believe they can help someone make an accurate analysis. They also show me that along that obstinate journey of writing, I must revere those who have given me the prodigious and unique fervor of their friendship.

José Triana, París, April 4, 2011

Translated from the original Spanish by Joanne Pottlitzer, New York, 2011

*

José Triana (born in 1931, Hatuey, Cuba), playwright, novelist, poet, emigrated to Spain in 1954 and studied liberal arts at the Círculo de Bellas Artes de Madrid. He began writing plays while living in Spain and continued when he returned to Cuba in 1959 to participate in the revolution. His play, *La noche de los asesinos* [Night of the Assassins] (1957-1965) won the Casa de las Américas prize in 1965. That play marked the beginning of Triana's national and international resonance—it has been translated into more than twenty languages and continues to be performed throughout the world—but later caused him to fall out of favor with the Cuban government. Of his thirteen plays, *Palabras comunes* [Common Words] (1979-1986), regarded by many as his masterwork, had its world premiere at The Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-on-Avon and in London (The Pit) in 1986-87 (with the English title, "Worlds Apart"). *Medea en el espejo* [Medea in the Mirror] was produced in 1993 at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and at the Talawa Theatre in London in 1996. Other dramatic works include *Ceremonial de guerra* (1968-1972), *Revolico en el Parque de Marte* (1971-1995), *Cruzando el puente* (1991), *La fiesta* (1992) and *Ahí están los Tarahumaras* (1993). In 1991, *La noche de los asesinos*, *Medea en el espejo*, and *Palabras comunes* were published by Editorial Verbum in Madrid under the title *JOSE TRIANA-TEATRO*. Other published works include a collection of short stories, *Cinco mujeres* (ActesSud, 1999) and several books of poetry: *De la madera de los sueños* (Madrid, 1958), *Coloquio de sombras* (Madrid, 1981), *Aproximaciones* (Málaga, 1990), *Oscuro el enigma* (Miami, 1993) and *Vueltas al espejo* (bilingual edition, French-Spanish, 1996, M.E.E.T. de Saint-Nazaire). Most recently, Ediciones Aduana Vieja in Spain published his *POESÍAS COMPLETAS* and *TEATRO COMPLETO* in 2011 and 2012 respectively. Triana has lived in Paris with his wife Chantal since 1980.

ON TRANSLATING FOR THE STAGE

by Joanne Pottlitzer

“Palabras comunes is the consensus of my sense of theatre, of poetical life, of fragmentation. It is about honorable people and dishonorable people, about revolutionary people and non-revolutionary people, about good and evil, about false morality. It’s about the cyclical nature of history.” – José Triana, 2006

The celebrated Cuban poet and dramatist José Triana may be known best internationally for his play *La noche de los asesinos* (Night of the Assassins, 1957-1965), awarded the coveted Casa de las Américas Literary Prize in 1965 and translated into twenty languages. But *Palabras comunes* (Common Words) is arguably his masterwork.

La noche participated in the Theatre of Nations Festival in Paris and the Avignon Festival in 1967 and had been produced later that year by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Yet as time went on, Cubans began to interpret the play as a metaphor for the flaws of the Castro regime. Triana had in fact written the play as a criticism of the Batista era. Notwithstanding, he gradually became ostracized from the Cuban theatre community until his plays could no longer be produced there. He finally left the country in 1980 with his wife Chantal and went to live in France.

Among the manuscripts Triana took with him was an early draft of a play he had adapted from the popular novella, *Las honradas* (Respectable Women) by Miguel del Carrión. He called it *Un diálogo de mujeres* (A Dialogue among Women). When the Royal Shakespeare Company expressed interest in producing the play in 1986, Triana reworked it and gave it a new title, *Palabras comunes* (literally, Common Words), paying homage in part to Ramón de Valle-Inclán’s classic play *Divinas palabras* (Divine Words) and alluding to familiar idiomatic

expressions or words, such as “honor” and “respectable,” whose meanings can shift within the ethic of a society.

Palabras comunes is a large and complex play that flows with a cinematic rhythm characteristic of Triana’s work. Set in Cuba between 1894 and 1914, from the prelude of the Spanish-American War to the eve of WWI, it dramatizes a bourgeois, racist society unable to recognize its own self-righteousness and rigidity, screened through the fragmentary memory of Victoria, a member of Cuba’s landed class. Victoria’s struggle to destroy society’s hypocrisies is set against the polarized politics of the time and an impending war that threatens a family’s way of life. Although the play’s protagonist is the character of Victoria, it is her brother Gastón who finally is able to achieve freedom—by leaving the country, as Triana did.

Translating *Palabras comunes* has been a long and delicate and exhilarating process. Triana’s intellect, attention to language and style, and sense of theatricality are extraordinary. But the play’s length and layers, its prolific use of poetic language, and the distinctive voice of each of its eighteen characters, made it prohibitive to undertake without financial support. I am deeply grateful to the NEA Literature & Arts Education Division for awarding me a translation grant in 2009.

One of the ongoing debates about transferring a work from one language to another is whether it should be translated or adapted. There are as many definitions of those two terms as there are arguments favoring one or the other. The translation of *Palabras comunes* is germane to that debate. When the Royal Shakespeare Company began rehearsing its production of the play in 1986, Triana was aghast when he attended an early rehearsal to see that the RSC’s dramaturg not only had “adapted” the play to take place in England, but had deleted some characters, added others, added scenes, etc. Triana flatly refused to have that version put on stage and threatened to call off the project. The actors, among them Janet McTeer in the role of Victoria, sided with the author and decided to use a literal translation, which they reworked into

playable language as they rehearsed. That version was never recorded. Triana asked me to translate the play in the early 90s. We had met in Cuba in 1968 at the Casa de las Américas, and after his move to Paris in 1980, had kept in close touch.

I was attracted to this play for its complexity, the depth of each and every one of the characters, the layers of meaning behind and in between the lines, and the beauty of the language. I liked its free, fragmented form and the issues it addresses, which though set in Cuba a century ago, are still relevant in today's world and to an American audience.

But although Triana's work is known and admired worldwide, it is not yet well known to U.S. audiences, essentially for lack of playable English translations. Translation is a delicate art form. The German art critic Walter Benjamin, in his 1923 essay on "The Task of the Translator," defines the hallmark of a bad translation as one that intends to perform a transmitting function, transmitting information. "We generally regard as the essential substance of a literary work what it contains in addition to information – as even a poor translator will admit – the unfathomable, the mysterious, the 'poetic,' something that a translator can reproduce only if he/she is also a poet."

Benjamin describes the masterful and influential translations of Sophocles' plays by the lyric poet Friedrich Hölderlin, "In Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles' two tragedies the harmony of the languages is so profound that sense is touched by language only the way an Aeolian harp is touched by the wind."

Translating for the modern stage can be equally challenging. It, too, requires someone who can transpose hidden language, distinguish between a common phrase and a poetic turn of phrase, someone who can key into the soul of the playwright.

A translator of plays should be trained in theatre, should know theatre. By that I mean knowing how to visualize a script on the stage, knowing the function of the director and the actors during the rehearsal period, knowing that a good playwright intentionally leaves spaces in

the dialogue for multiple interpretations, knowing that the action of a play and the nature of its characters are communicated only through dialogue without the assistance of expository or descriptive prose, and that clarification of thoughts and ideas is the responsibility of the production's creative team.

A major challenge for the translator of theatre is to give each character in the play an individual voice. Another is to create the rhythm of dialogue in the translated language that best expresses the rhythm of the original language, and be able to recognize colloquial references. For this the translator needs to sense the nuances of his/her own language and know the culture in which the play takes place. If one person does not fill those criteria, a team can be created to work on a translation of a play.

Most world plays are translated or adapted into English by playwrights. Latin American plays, primarily because there is less interest among our professional theatre community in that area of the world, tend to be translated by non-theatre people, usually academics or literary people, whose work seldom plays well on the stage.

Translations that do not reflect the beauty of the playwright's language or the theatricality of the piece shrink the possibilities of professional productions of the work. If an artistic director, a literary manager or a producer reads an inferior translation of a play, he/she will assume that the playwright is not a good writer.

I believe that in theatre a translation is never finished until you hear it coming out of the mouths of the actors. However well it sounds to a translator on paper, if an actor cannot get his tongue around a word or phrase, it's not workable on stage. We would like to see this play produced in the United States. Superb playwrights of the world should be given more opportunity to be seen on U.S. stages along with the "world classic" writers such as Ibsen or Chekhov or Strindberg.

I have always believed in theatre's ability to span international cultural bridges and so

was heartened to read a recent article in *The Guardian* by Scottish author and translator Jennie Erdal. “Cervantes compared translation to looking at the Flanders tapestries from the wrong side: ‘you can see the basic shapes but they are so filled with threads that you cannot fathom their original luster.’ Cervantes may be right,” she concedes, “but he has not given us a reason not to translate. For even the wrong side of the tapestry, with all its dangling threads, is worth seeing. Translators let us see another way of life, other possibilities, other matters, other manners, increasing the understanding between nations far better than politicians.”

*

Joanne Pottlitzer, New York-based producer, director, playwright, and translator, has produced many Latin American plays in New York and is the winner of two Obie Awards, three Senior Fulbright Awards, two NEA grants, and multiple producing and writing awards. She has directed in New York, Los Angeles, Tucson, and Santiago de Chile. Her translations of plays have been produced in New York and elsewhere throughout the country. Her history with Latin America and its cultures dates back to the early sixties. In 1966 she founded Theatre of Latin America, Inc. (TOLA), a New York-based major nonprofit arts organization that pioneered artistic exchange between the United States and Latin America. She has taught courses on Latin American theater at the Yale School of Drama, New York University, and other institutions. Her articles have appeared in the *New York Times*, *The Drama Review*, *American Theatre*, *PAJ (Performing Arts Journal)*, Yale’s *Theater* magazine, and *Review*. Among her plays is *Paper Wings*, about Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Joanne is currently developing a play, *Between Hope and Freedom*, based on her book-in-progress, “Symbols of Resistance: The Legacy of Chilean Artists under Pinochet,” about the influence of artists on the political process.

COMMON WORDS

[*Palabras comunes*]

by

José Triana

Havana, 1979-1980

Paris-Sitges, 1986

A PLAY IN FIVE PARTS

Translated by Joanne Pottlitzer
2009-2012

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Joanne Pottlitzer
38 West 56 Street
New York, NY 10019
Phone/Fax: (212) 333.7396
E-Mail: jomaka56@msn.com
Website: www.joanepottlitzer.com

CHARACTERS:

Victoria

Carmen (Victoria, Alicia and Gastón's mother; Ricardo's wife)

Juanita (Graciela's mother)

Adriana (Victoria and Joaquín's daughter)

Alicia (Victoria and Gastón's sister; José Ignacio's wife)

Gastón (Victoria and Alicia's brother)

Ricardo (Carmen's husband; Victoria, Alicia, and Gastón's father)

Antonia (Ricardo's sister)

Paulita (servant)

Borrás (servant)

Luisa (Victoria's friend)

Adolfo (Luisa's husband)

Pedro Arturo (Graciela's husband)

Graciela (Pedro Arturo's wife; Juanita's daughter)

José Ignacio (Alicia's husband; Teresa's brother)

Menéndez (a friend of Ricardo's)

Joaquín (Victoria's husband)

Fernando (Victoria's lover)

Teresa (José Ignacio's sister)

Time: 1894-1914

Place: Santa Clara and Havana

PART ONE

Scene 1

1914. Victoria enters. Takes off her hat and veil. Her face expresses a certain exaltation and upset. Flops down on an easy chair downstage. Upstage we hear the voices of Carmen and Juanita.

CARMEN

A respectable woman, a truly respectable woman is incapable of doing what Teresa does.

JUANITA

But times change, Carmen!

CARMEN

No they don't, Juanita! No they don't!

JUANITA

You are far too rigid...

CARMEN

That's the way it is, like it or not!

Pause. Noises of rattling plates. Some laughter. Adriana, Victoria's daughter, enters with a rag doll in her arms. When she sees her mother, she stops, looks at her and then approaches her, throwing herself into her mother's arms.

ADRIANA

Mommy, are you sick?

VICTORIA

(Stroking her hair) No, sweetie. A slight headache. I'm sure the cool of the evening will make it go away.

ADRIANA

The sun's almost gone, Mommy. Can I go play with my friends?

VICTORIA

(With a sad smile) Run along, dear, run along.

Adriana starts to leave. Halfway, she returns to Victoria's arms and gives her several kisses on the cheek. Victoria returns her kisses. Paulita, an elderly black maid, enters dressed in an impeccable uniform.

ADRIANA

Releasing herself from her mother's arms

I love you so much. Bye.

Adriana exits, skipping, accompanied by Paulita. Maid's voice is heard offstage.

PAULITA

Don't run, child, you'll hurt yourself. *(Pause)*

GIRLS' CHORUS

Singing, outside.

My mother made me marry
My mother made me marry
pretty little girl
yes oh yes
pretty little girl.

*Victoria stands up and comes downstage. Smiles; then her face contracts.
Sits down in the rocker.*

VICTORIA

(Sighs, with anguish and sarcasm) I'll always be a respectable woman! Heaven help me. Oh, I'm old, I'm fat, I'm tired!... Whew, it's hot! Like an oven! *(Brief Pause. Desperate.)* Neat and clean...where? Where? *(Another tone of voice)* No! No! No! *(Ferocious)* Respectable women, dear God!

GIRLS' CHORUS

My mother made me marry
My mother made me marry
pretty little girl
yes oh yes
pretty little girl.
a boy, a little boy
a boy, a little boy
I didn't love
no oh no,
I didn't love.

Victoria rocks gently. Lights fade slowly.

Scene 2

The singing intensifies. Pause. The darkness is almost total. We hear Victoria's mother Carmen's voice whispering.

CARMEN

Victoria, Victoria.

Victoria's face appears. It is that of a child. Carmen calls her again.

(In a scolding tone) Victoria! Victoria!

Lights up. Carmen is picking flowers in the garden. Ricardo, her husband, reads his newspapers. It is 1894. Alicia, a young blond girl of 12, dresses her doll. Gastón, about 10, plays with a yoyo.

VICTORIA

(Shouting to her brother) Look, Gastón, I can do it faster than you can. *(Vulgar gesture from Gastón)*

CARMEN

(To Victoria) Young lady! Look at you!...Alicia, your bow...Straighten it! Look at your sister!
(To Victoria) Get away from there! (To an invisible character) Eight years old and already a tomboy.

Alicia lays her doll against the sewing box and rushes toward Victoria. A struggle between the two sisters.

Scene 3

Antonia, Ricardo's older sister, enters with a dog in her arms. She is a woman of some 55 years. Dressed with sober elegance.

ANTONIA

(To Carmen) It's your own fault, my dear. Why do you let them do it? Plant a breeze and reap a storm.

CARMEN

Let them do it?

ANTONIA

(Petting, cuddling, her dog) Isn't that right, my little Titania?

ALICIA

(To Victoria) You're not going to have your own way. (To Carmen) Mama, Victoria won't...

CARMEN

(To Antonia) You annoy me. I'll say it to your face.

GASTÓN

(Mocking Alicia) Mama, Victoria won't....

Victoria and Alicia argue in low voices. Victoria spouts explanations, her sister, too. As Gastón plays, he listens to Antonia's speech, pretending not to.

ANTONIA

(To Carmen) It's the truth! What difference does spending the blessed day over a hot stove make, sweeping floors, washing down patios and fighting endless cobwebs? Neat and clean, yes. As fast as you can, no catching your breath... (Points to her head) But here. (In another tone of voice) If it were up to me, they'd toe the line. (Mocking gesture from Gastón) You indulge them. (In another tone of voice) I would have nipped those games in the bud, all that chasing through the garden and the orchard.

Alicia gives up. Victoria rocks on the swing or in a rocker, depending on the size of the stage, very gently. Alicia scolds her. Gastón puts his yoyo away in his pants pocket; he runs toward Alicia's doll, picks it up and exits howling like some kind of savage. Alicia runs after him and grabs him. They struggle. They fall to the ground.

ANTONIA

They'd sit indoors like mummies. Lined up like a regiment, on guard for all eternity.

Gastón tickles his sister. Her screams and cries turn to laughter.

Look at that spectacle!

Victoria gets up from the swing or rocker with a gesture of discomfort, puts her doll on Alicia's sewing case and approaches Carmen.

ALICIA: (*Laughing*) Gastón, quit it.

VICTORIA: It hurts here, Mommy. It stings.

GASTÓN: Isn't that what you wanted?

CARMEN: What does, child?

ALICIA: Oh, Mama's going to...

VICTORIA (*Almost whimpering*): I can't...

GASTÓN: Now you'll see...(*Laughter*)

CARMEN: Gastón! Leave your sister alone!

ALICIA: Leave me alone.

ANTONIA

I can't believe it! And it will only get worse!

CARMEN

Ricardo, do something!

Ricardo continues to read, distracted. Gastón gets up. Alicia does, too. She has recuperated her doll.

These children have the devil in them. (*To Victoria*) Let me see, child...

VICTORIA

A splinter, Mommy.

CARMEN

(*Observing her finger*) That's for disobeying! God doesn't punish you with sticks and stones. (*In another tone of voice*) It's nothing, Victoria! (*To Gastón, violently*) And you, why do you tease the girls? I don't like it.

Alicia sits in the swing or rocker. Victoria amuses herself with her splinter, talking to herself.

GASTÓN

In a sour mood, starts to play with his yoyo again

Mama, I...

CARMEN

No excuses, Gastón.

GASTÓN

(*Protesting*) No one lets me play with the boys around here... (*Furious*) I'll end up...!

CARMEN

Get that out of your head.

GASTÓN

But, Mama, I get bored...

RICARDO

The boy needs to go to school.

CARMEN

(*Interrupting*) And turn him into a hoodlum... Alicia, pull your skirt down and don't pump so hard.

ALICIA

But Gastón does, Mama.

CARMEN

He's a boy and he can do it. (*Grumbling, Alicia obeys.*) You are little girls and should act accordingly. (*To Ricardo*) I'm sorry, dear...but, not for anything in the world...They have their Aunt Antonia and they have me...Starting today, she can teach him catechism and sacred history. I'll see to grammar, to arithmetic ...geography and history...Oh, and the girls will learn embroidery and sewing with me!

ANTONIA

(*With a gesture of distaste*) Yes, keep your eye on those little Furies!

Exits.

Scene 4

CARMEN

I want my children to be living examples... Especially the girls... Modest, reserved ..., like the best crystal filigree...

VICTORIA

(*Still picking at her finger*) What does that mean, Mommy?

CARMEN

That? What "that", Victoria?

VICTORIA

What you said, Mommy...

CARMEN

Don't ask so many questions. You sound like a bluestocking little know-it-all, as your father says...and if you keep it up, you'll become a hopeless materialist.

Carmen sits down on a small rocker near Ricardo's easy chair. Upstage the children gather and play, unconcerned.

RICARDO

(*Throwing the newspaper on the table*) We're on the brink of war. There's no one who can keep us from it!

CARMEN

That's how you greet me! I want to be with you, and zzzt!, like an annoying fly, your pessimism buzzes in.

RICARDO

(*Interrupting her*) Pessimism! No! Realism!

CARMEN

The newspaper upset you, that. . .

RICARDO

I'm convinced of it, Carmen!

CARMEN

When you get an idea in your head . . . !

RICARDO

Someone with experience knows!

CARMEN

You've just left me one section!

RICARDO

That last anonymous message we received . . .

CARMEN

(Interrupting him) Don't talk to me about that!

RICARDO

. . . said that war was being prepared and that it was in the United States...

CARMEN

Please, Ricardo!

RICARDO

That a threat exists, it exists...

CARMEN

(Cuttingly) Oh, Ricardo, we're always being threatened in this country. From the time I could reason... There's an old desire here for delirium, a need to..., to... Mother used to say: "Child, wherever there's disaster, you'll find a Cuban."

RICARDO

No, Carmen! I'm speaking precisely and seriously. I know it makes you nervous, that you find it unacceptable...

CARMEN

What do you mean?

RICARDO

My dear, we've already had two ..., one in '68 and one in '79. Two wars! It's not as though we don't know the signs!

CARMEN

I think it's nonsense for you to start . . . For you, for me, for us, for the children ...

RICARDO

And throw what we've learned down the drain? Think about it a little, reflect on it. It doesn't please me to have to think about this..., especially now, with the new crop just in... If we're not prepared, it could be worse!

CARMEN

(Distressed) What are you basing this on? What makes you think that war is just outside our door?

RICARDO

(Convinced, firm) Simple experience! Not the newspapers, not rumors or anonymous talk, but all of them together... It's something physical! Something in the air!

CARMEN

(Laughing, nervous) If anyone heard you they'd think you were mad!

RICARDO

Laugh if you want to! When the Great War broke out in '68..., not the slightest idea! I didn't know! It's true!... I was fifteen, I was in Havana studying with the Jesuits. Nothing was happening in Havana..., well, yes, some gunfire outside the city..., bandits, delinquents... Mama

wrote me long letters, alluding to it, and I didn't understand, I couldn't understand... Papa had died, and she hid it from me... She would write, for example, that my two older brothers were going to abandon her, that my sister Antonia would hide in corners and cry, that the sheet music to "Claire de Lune" was missing..., oh, and the keys, the keys!... Some things you might call absurd, laughable..., and that she wanted me to return... And because I didn't understand, I extended my stay... Why my mother's determination? Why?... When I found out the sad truth...at last, when I learned that my two brothers had died in the war and that we had lost practically our entire fortune..., and Antonia and I found ourselves alone... Then I understood, painfully, I half-way understood!

CARMEN

Oh, Ricardo, Ricardo...!

RICARDO

Something stronger than I am tells me this; I could be killed, I swear...

CARMEN

I beg of you, my love...

RICARDO

It's incredible!... There are experiences that are engraved, like a slow simmer, into raw flesh... I've told you this before...

CARMEN

(Fast) You've told me? Me?

RICARDO

Of course, Carmen. Around that time, when I was still in Havana, one night a few of us boys escaped from boarding school and went to a third-rate theatre... I told you! Try to remember!

CARMEN

(Emphatically) Ricardo, I was living here, in Santa Clara, and you were in Havana. We lived in different worlds.

RICARDO

Fine, Carmen! You can swear up and down. I know I've told you. There was one point in the show..., it had a dash of irony against the government...

CARMEN

(Laughing stupidly) Oh, yes, yes!

RICARDO

Someone lost control and began to shout, "Out, out" to the Spanish volunteers in the audience and spewed out declarations...A kind of revolt! What a night that was!... For the first time, in a fraction of a second, I saw the horror of men..., one against the other...

CARMEN

(Still laughing) That's right! You told me!

RICARDO

Exactly the same as the other nights when we went to the Center...

CARMEN

(Rapid. Becoming serious.) Are you sure?

RICARDO

I told you! Two plus two equals four!... And people...

CARMEN

People are stupid.

*Songs of the children are heard. They are building a bonfire upstage.
Carmen, intrigued, stands up and observes them.*

RICARDO

(*Violent*) It drives me mad when you...! Forget about those children! (*Carmen starts to interrupt, he stops her.*) I'm talking to you about things that...that... , I've lost my train of thought! Where was I?... Oh, yes!..., and the most absurd of all is that, as we speak, the Liberal Party is still arguing a position that was pure blablabla back in the Year of the Comet... (*Another tone*) They say they fear the Revolution and don't want it in Cuba, that they want a Spanish Cuba, that they want it united with Spain... (*Another tone*) And the reforms they've proposed for business..., and the benefits? To hell with them! (*Another tone*) That's what a political party pretending to be liberal proposes..., So you can imagine what the others are saying!

CARMEN

My dear one, from the beginning of time, politics have been rotten.

RICARDO

Madrid is to blame! Or it's oblivious, or it doesn't much care, or it's blind!...Oh, I don't know!...The situation is reprehensible. Each Captain General who comes along..., one's worse than the other...They grab you by the nape of the neck and squeeze until you gasp for air! (*Another tone*) I'm not saying that the students and the coloreds and the mulattos and the sore losers of the other two wars don't take advantage of the situation and agitate their heads off!... The more repression, the more opposition!

Upstage, in darkness, you can make out the silhouettes of Gastón, Victoria and Alicia, singing around the bonfire, with their arms raised, whirling small sticks with tips lit up by putting them in the fire.

CARMEN

They're voracious rabble rousers!

RICARDO

Still in the clouds!

CARMEN

I can't stand them! They're capable of anything!

RICARDO

Don't start!

CARMEN

Not one of them with an ounce of brains . . .

RICARDO

Control yourself, please!... Listen to me... A few days ago, I ran into Menéndez...I was on my way to, I don't know, I think to the Club...We started to talk, very casually..., about the sugar cane crop, about prices, and the family...The usual stories! Suddenly, with great intrigue, he asked me if I had heard the rumors... Rumors?, I asked him...All the innuendos you can

imagine... , until finally he confessed that he had learned through certain authorities ... he didn't tell me who!, about arms and munitions being smuggled into the country... , and about secret meetings... I started to laugh and told him he was joking, and with that he spat out what he knew..., that one of his nieces had just arrived from the United States and was appalled, that the Cubans in Brooklyn had been conspiring there all the time against Spain and that she couldn't tolerate it and that she knew something big was being planned...

CARMEN

And you kept that from me!

RICARDO

Carmen, it's putting two and two together... *(Another tone)* Where there's smoke there's fire.

CARMEN

(Totally upset) Our peace of mind, our security..., for the children..., I thought...

RICARDO

We're sitting on a powder keg. *(Pause. Another tone)* From now on, not a word. We'll see what we can do..., not to anyone! Just you and I!... An honorable man!...

CARMEN

War, my God! Not again!

Scene 5

Antonia enters. Has a measuring stick in her right hand and carries some books in her left arm. Alicia, Gastón and Victoria, downstage, singing and jumping around the stage.

CHORUS

Jesus ABC
I can't remember the rest
it wandered down that street
Oh please, go find it for me.

ANTONIA

The Catechism! Come now, boys and girls! *(Hits some chairs with the stick)* The word of our Lord!

CHORUS

Jesus ABC
I can't remember the rest
it wandered down that street
Oh please, go find it for me.

ANTONIA

(With energy) Respect, children! Gastón, go to your seat! Alicia! Victoria! *(The children stop running around the stage, but continue singing softly as they sit down.)* Silence! *(Another tone)* Gastón, "The Our Father."

GASTÓN

(Stands up; recites without knowing what he's saying) Our Father, who art in heaven, hall ,..

ANTONIA

(Striking a chair) Hallowed...

Hallowed.

GASTÓN

Continue, child.

ANTONIA

GASTÓN

(Fast) Our Father, who art in heaven, hall..., hall..., ha...

Victoria and Alicia laugh, covering their mouths.

ANTONIA

(Furious) You forgot it!

GASTÓN

Hall..., hall...

ANTONIA

Hall, what?

VICTORIA

(Whispering to Gastón) Hallowed.

GASTÓN

Hallowed...

ANTONIA

Hallowed, what, what..., Gastón?

GASTÓN

Hallowed, what, what..., Gastón?

ANTONIA

You're mocking me. (*Strikes him*) Hallowed be Thy name... You'll learn. You'll remember the words with blood. Repeat it. Don't think you can do that with me. (*Another tone*) Hallowed be Thy name...

GASTÓN

(Crying) I can't! I can't!

ANTONIA

Girls, you, too... One, two, three... (*Alicia and Victoria repeat the text in unison. Gastón imitates them among sobs.*) Come, single file!

Scene 6

JUANITA

(A year later, 1895. Entering, in a rapture of tears) Look at me! Two days and two nights with my eyes wide open staring into space! My son, Ricardo, went off to the jungle. To the war! Just like that, he enlisted in the Mambisa army... The last thing I expected!

RICARDO

(Pretending) What are you talking about, Juanita? Is that true?

JUANITA

(Wiping her nose) Who would have ever thought it? I had so many dreams...

RICARDO

Incredible! That young man! He seemed so responsible!

JUANITA

Come now, Ricardo, stop the pretense! You knew about it!

RICARDO

(Disarmed) On our friendship... I am a man of my word!

JUANITA

(Doubting) Holy Mary! *(Another tone)* Well, it's true! He's gone! One fine day he made the decision, and boom! ...Off to war, to save humanity!

RICARDO

As far as I know, the war still...

JUANITA

Ricardo, what world do you live in! It's impossible you don't know about it!..., if I, an absolute nobody, hear the news..., The streets are swarming! It's ready to blow!

RICARDO

There are comments, of course...

JUANITA

It's already started!..., There's no stopping it! Load after load coming in..., from all over, from the United States, from Mexico, from Santo Domingo, from Haiti... They say the island will be destroyed from one end to the other! Why do you think there are volunteers and officers mobilizing..., those trains that come crammed full and unload every day, and they search you on the street and ask for your papers?

RICARDO

You're involving me in this, Juanita.

JUANITA

My soul is hurting! *(Another tone)* War... Oh, it's a horror!..., and my son mixed up in it and Patricio, the colored boy...

RICARDO

(It's a surprise for him) Juanita!

JUANITA

Yes, Ricardo. Both of them... Day before yesterday in the middle of the night...

RICARDO

(Frightened) Patricio told me he wanted to see his relatives... It seemed so natural to me!

JUANITA

(Interrupting) Convenient stories!

RICARDO

(Theatrically) Uf, dear God! ... Juanita, you...

JUANITA

(Sobbing) My son! He was my only support... Only him, Ricardo. And now... Where shall I go? To the authorities? Do you know what that means? My head is spinning. What shall I do? What shall I say? Whom should I see? I need to know. Has he made it through? Have they

arrested him? (*Another tone*) Sometimes I've wanted to run through the fields at midnight screaming, howling: "My son, my son." (*Pause*) The boy had his ideas... Ideas that neither you nor I share, which is natural; ideas that change things, that agitate... "Freedom, equality... We the Cubans." Imagine... Coming to me with words like that! "Freedom," where?... "Equality," where?... And "we the Cubans"—we're the last card in the deck... It's utter chaos, a disaster, no rhyme or reason!... Who's going to resolve this!... War? What good did the other two do?... More blood and more death!

RICARDO

(*Very serious*) You're so...

JUANITA

(*Fast*) I don't know what I am anymore! (*Sobs*) "Son, don't go. Let the coloreds solve their own problems! Look out for yourself! Wait a while!... Even though Patricio is the son of a freed man and works with Ricardo..., he's colored!"

RICARDO

An honorable man, loyal and a good worker, Juanita. Like Borrás.

JUANITA

(*Without thinking, fast; in her delirium*) But colored, Ricardo... and there's no changing that! Anyway, that's what I said to him, thinking it would soften the worry on his brow. (*Theatricalizing*) And he looked me up and down, as he had never looked at me before and didn't say a word..., and that's when I knew for certain, at that very moment, that he was no longer who I thought he was... It was like someone burying thousands and thousands of knives in my body searching out my bones, or perhaps beyond, far beyond, something that doesn't exist, because it's invisible... "Son, you're leaving me all alone, a bundle of nerves. I have no one to represent me. You're the only one I can rely on, my only happiness... Oh, my angel." And you know what he answered? "There is a mother larger than you: the motherland." (*Desperate*) And a bitter taste swelled up in my mouth, a taste of blood or hatred, a taste of terror. "You'd leave your mother. Leave her with her heart in her mouth. Leave her out in the cold. Let her starve to death. And your poor little sister." I didn't want to shout "inhuman," I didn't want to spit out my desolation, because a pain, here, in the pit of my stomach..., I couldn't, and anyway I didn't have the strength. (*Pause. Another tone*) He's my son, Ricardo. And a son is a son.

RICARDO

(*Pale, desperate. Hands in his pockets, taking long strides around the stage*) Yes, yes...

JUANITA

(*Coming back to reality*) Have mercy!

RICARDO

(*Beside himself, hallucinating*) Yes, that's right...

JUANITA

What did you say?

RICARDO

Ideas that change things, that agitate..., and I'm in the clouds, floating! My house, my land, my money... Always fearful!

Offstage we hear the voices of Antonia and Carmen arguing with Alicia, Victoria and Gastón. Ricardo collapses into a chair, devastated.

JUANITA

(*Shouting*) Carmen, Antonia!

RICARDO

I know it, but I cannot accept it! (*Carmen, then Antonia are startled, almost frozen.*)

Scene 7

Victoria, Alicia, Gracielita and Luisa are gathered in the shadows of the stage. Alicia, Gracielita and Luisa are somewhere between twelve and fourteen. Victoria is ten. Gastón, upstage, plays like a juggler with an archery bow. Now and then he approaches the group of girls trying to hear what they're saying, and as he can't, he uses the bow as though it were a violent weapon. The four young girls embroider.

GRACIELITA

It's an absolute fact. I'm a woman! (*To Alicia*) What about you?

ALICIA

(*Timid*) Me?

GRACIELITA

Luisa got it two weeks ago. She says it scared the living daylights out of her. (*Luisa laughs*) Of course, she's inexperienced...

VICTORIA

(*To Gracielita*) So how do you know?

LUISA

(*To Victoria*) Little girl, it's very simple.

GRACIELITA

Listen, Victoria, when you see... (*Laughs and whispers into Victoria's ear*)

VICTORIA

Really?

GRACIELITA

Yes, child...

VICTORIA

(*Interrupting. To her sister*) Is that true, Alicia?

LUISA

(*To Victoria*) Don't ask so many questions.

Pause. They continue embroidering.

GRACIELITA

Oh, I'm dying to have a lover!

The three girls look at her surprised.

VICTORIA

(*Horried*) Gracielita!

LUISA

(To Graciélita. Amused) You're such a silly-billy.

GRACIELITA

I'm sure I'll be able to soon.

VICTORIA

You'll be able to what? *(In secret with Graciélita)* What? Is that possible? That, too?

GRACIELITA

(Amused) You heard it right. Berta told me. That's the first step. Once you're a woman, you can. She saw how they did it...

VICTORIA

Who?

GRACIELITA

Her sister and her husband...

VICTORIA

(Interrupting) And she had the nerve?

Gastón continues playing, approaching the group.

LUISA

(With great abandon) I saw Mother and Father in bed together one night.

VICTORIA

How did you do that?

LUISA

I got up early in the morning, I was tiptoeing... And I heard an incredible noise, and it was so hot... *(To Gastón)* Boy, your ears are going to fall off.

ALICIA

Gastón, go away.

VICTORIA

Stop pestering us.

GASTÓN

The flying bow. The bow wants to know.

ALICIA

(To Gastón) I'm going to tell Mama... You know her!

GRACIELITA

Ignore him, Ali. He'll get tired of it!

LUISA

He can't hear you, Alicia.

GRACIELITA

Much as he wants to hear, he won't get any further than wanting.

VICTORIA

(To Luisa) What was it like?

GRACIELITA

(Interrupting) Listen to you! Victoria, you want to know everything. You're something! ...When I have more information, I'll tell you down to the last detail, from A to Z.

VICTORIA

(To Luisa) So...

LUISA

I saw a lump, a lump that moved... And they were breathing hard, you can't imagine, and they were saying things. Father was panting. And Mother was crying. It was something ...something...I tried to hear what they were saying, but I couldn't hear anything... My hair stood on end, and suddenly I was afraid.

ALICIA

How awful!

VICTORIA

It makes me sick!

GRACIELITA

But all older people do it. So do cats and dogs and roosters and chickens, and lizards...

VICTORIA

What do they do? And why do they do it?

LUISA

It must be good, right?, Graciелita.

VICTORIA

Once I discovered Papa not sleeping in his bed...

Gastón approaches again. He whirls the bow violently above the girls' heads.

ALICIA

Gastón, stop it.

GASTÓN

The fucking bow, the fucking bow. Think of the little dog Titania when she's all hot and bothered.

VICTORIA

(Violent) Filthy, pig! Stupid! He can only say dirty things.

GASTÓN

The bow, the little bow, little and fucking. The tom cat and the lady cat, mee, meow, mee...

ALICIA

That's too much, Gastón. *(Standing up)* Look, little boy, if you want Mama and then Papa... *(Gastón leaves, making faces and obscene gestures)* Keep it up and you'll see!

GRACIELITA

(To Victoria, who is sobbing) It's alright, Victoria. I assure you that when we're a little older, what seems like something from another world now will become our daily bread . .

ALICIA

Do you think so, Graciелita?

GRACIELITA

(Laughing) Of course, sillies! That's what marriage is for. If it weren't, how could there be children?

ALICIA

(Crossing herself) Oh no!

LUISA

(Roaring with laughter) What a couple of babies! I feel sorry for you!

VICTORIA

(To Graciélita) Indecent married people do that. I assure you that my mother and father don't.

Voices and steps are heard offstage.

LUISA

Careful! Careful!

The young girls concentrate on their embroidering. Great agitation and flushing. Gastón exits, playing with the bow, like a juggler.

GRACIELITA

Danger in sight!

Carmen enters.

LUISA

(Between her teeth) Here comes the enemy!

ALICIA

(In the same tone) Quiet, shhhh.

CARMEN

Now let's see, what are you girls talking about?

Alicia and Victoria lower their eyes.

VICTORIA

Us?

GRACIELITA

(Fast. Unruffled. Very natural.) Nothing, ma'am. Silly talk! Victoria says that Protestant ministers aren't priests because they can marry.

CARMEN

Bah! Play anything you want; but don't get into the subject of religion. *(Exits)*

ALICIA

(To Victoria) You see? What a performance! I'm sure Mama suspected something!

VICTORIA

(Interrupting Alicia) But when you get married . . . , do you think it's like she says?

ALICIA

Only God knows!

Silence. Pause. Murmurs are heard offstage.

VICTORIA

(*To her sister and her friends*) Come on, let's play Ring a Ring a Rosie. . .

LUISA

Hide and Seek . . .

GRACIELITA

No, no. (*Yelling*) Jump Rope.

VICTORIA

(*Imperious*) No, no; Ring a Ring a Rosie . . .

The four girls exit singing, forming a circle and jumping.

GIRLS' CHORUS

Ring a ring a Rosie,
A bottle full of posies,
All the girls in our town
Ring for little Josie.

Ring a ring a Rosie,
Ring for little Josie,
All the girls in our town
Don't believe the boysies.

Scene 8

It is one year later, 1896. Downstage Carmen, seated, wears a very elegant black dress. Juanita, resting against the back of an armchair, also dressed in black, cries inconsolably. On the floor, next to Carmen's chair is an enormous package.

CARMEN

Terrible, Juanita! . . . It's as though misfortune were venting its anger . . . But those are the intentions of the Lord, and one has to draw strength from these irremediable tests He sends us . . ., and with utmost resignation continue on the honest path of life . . . (*Genteel*) Would you like me to prepare a pot of chamomile for you?

JUANITA

(*Crying, sits down*) Stop it! . . . Every moment I feel he's going to appear at that door. . . Son, my son! I was right here, like I am now . . . They knocked, bang, bang . . . and I said to myself, "Who can that be?" Graciela came running, "Mama, Mama." (*Another tone*) One of those young generals from the Spanish authorities brought me some stupid document . . . Oh, Holy Mary, help me!

CARMEN

Yes . . . what does the document say, what does it state . . .?

JUANITA

Don't ask me, Carmen! Say what they will, they tortured him and killed him! . . . Oh, my sweet son! I can see him. Standing right there, in front of us. He was so good! He lived for me . . . An angel! . . . He even gave up his studies to help me . . .

CARMEN

There now, Juanita . . . Dry those tears! Pull yourself together! (*Another tone*) Would you like to come with us to Three Eagles? Next week the whole family is going *en masse*. . .

JUANITA

Oh, Carmen! A resort! Graciélita and I don't go anywhere... (*Another tone*) But my neighbors were telling me that things are calming down... Is that so?

CARMEN

(*Fast*) Illusions! Where are your neighbors' eyes? . . . All this time I've been praying with my girls. . . , an Our Father, a Hail Mary, an Our Father, a Hail Mary . . . When courage is needed, I invent it! This morning when I woke up I said to myself, "Today you're going to church." You know I'm far, far from being sanctimonious . . . I got dressed, I woke up the girls and told them, "After church we're going to Juanita's house to pay our respects . . . Bad times, good appearance, as my mother used to say. (*Another tone*) I'm making all the arrangements . . . I want to get away!

JUANITA

You do?

CARMEN

(*Not hearing her*) Yes! Disappear! . . . When, I don't know! But we're going!

JUANITA

(*Pitiful*) We'll be so alone!

CARMEN

(*Exaggerating*) My friend, about Ricardo . . .

JUANITA

(*Interrupting her*) Good lord almighty! I was so frightened a few months ago!

CARMEN

Between you and me, Juanita, no one can talk to him about revolutions.

JUANITA

(*Fast*) But I only . . . , I swear, Carmen . . .

CARMEN

(*Fast*) I know, Juanita! (*Another tone*) Do you think it's normal for him to spend the blessed day at home, practically a shut-in? Before, he would go out with the colored boy Patricio. And don't lie to me about it, please! (*Another tone*) So . . . he would make the rounds of the properties, talk to the overseer, he'd demand this or that . . . , and war broke out the very moment the sugar crop season was ending . . . , and that's when, Juanita, that's when the man cracked. For better or worse, more for worse, worried to death, he managed to bring it in. This year, thank God, we're dealing with Menéndez, a good friend of Ricardo's, you know him . . . that's right. . . . Ricardo is leary . . . , because they say that Menéndez abuses the coloreds. I argue with him, "Better a bad friend you know than a good one you haven't met." It's the only solution! . . . Sugar cane is money, my friend; thousands and thousands....

JUANITA

You don't need it!

CARMEN

That's what I insist . . . Well, when all is said and done, I'll be the one with the final say...If there's no money, so what, with two arms and two hands no one starves to death anywhere in the world . . . , and anyway, it won't be so bad for us . . . Some friends of ours in New York are

preparing the necessary paperwork . . . The main thing is to be together and in good health . . .
The rest . . .

JUANITA

The risks of living!

CARMEN

That's right, my friend! It would be worse if the house caved in and crushed us. (*Another tone*)
And you . . . what are you going to do?

JUANITA

Carmen, you've put your finger on the wound. This house is caving in on me and crushing me . .
(*Crying*) Oh, my son!

CARMEN

Stop that. You have Graciélita. You should be looking out for her . . .

JUANITA

Another test! A daughter . . . , and me alone! The little money my husband left me, God rest his
soul, is a pittance. How am I going to finish educating her . . . , make a respectable woman of
her! (*Laughter of the young girls is heard offstage.*) You haven't noticed? She already has the
body of a woman, and soon those young pesky boys will start to court her. . . no one can
imagine my worry . . .

CARMEN

(*Fast*) The same is happening to me. I don't have two eyes; I have four, six, a thousand . . . I'd
like to know what's going on inside those little heads of theirs. I do it with discretion, trying to
make sure they don't see my devices.

JUANITA

(*With a slight smile*) Just as I do!

CARMEN

Last week Alicia started her natural maladies . . . I had to sit down with her and explain what that
means, from the beginning. That a respectable woman, that she be careful, that her behavior . . .
All the details!

JUANITA

We have to do that! It's our duty!

CARMEN

My mother never bothered with it. I took care of myself! (*Another tone*) Victoria is intolerable.
You should see her . . . one question after another, and I: "Nothing, child, nothing" And then
there's Gastón, who's a child and again, he isn't . . . Oh, life is so . . . so... that's how it is . . .

JUANITA

(*Amid sobs*) Yes, my son! . . . (*Another tone*) The Lord hurts me, He wounds me, He takes me
beyond my last hope, and I go on living. . . What meaning does my life have? What meaning
should I give it, Carmen?

CARMEN

Bah, don't be a pessimist! Look on the bright side!

JUANITA

I'm destroyed!

CARMEN

(As though Juanita were a child) There, there . . . , look what I brought you. *(Takes the package that's on the floor and opens it. Takes out several dresses, mantillas, shawls from Manila, and a small box)* Things we're not using, and I detest the idea of strangers having them. *(Another tone)* The most serious problem has yet to be resolved.

JUANITA

How wonderful! Christmas!

CARMEN

I think you'll be able to use them. *(Plays with the dresses and shawls)* Look!

JUANITA

Oh, thank you! I thank you so much! Why have you bothered?

CARMEN

It's a duty, my friend . . . Do a good deed for whoever is in need, so goes the refrain. *(Hands her the small box)* Today it's you, tomorrow it's me.

JUANITA

(Kissing her on the cheeks) How sweet of you! *(Opens the box and bills and coins spill out on the floor)* But why have you done this? I can't accept it! It's too much, Carmen!

CARMEN

Don't be foolish! For you and Gracielita. *(Another tone)* As we were saying . . .

JUANITA

There are problems . . .

CARMEN

(Roundly) One problem, decisive, conclusive.

JUANITA

What is it? . . . , if I'm not being indiscreet . . .

CARMEN

Indiscreet? Why? *(Another tone)* Antonia refuses . . .

JUANITA

Refuses what?

CARMEN

To go.

JUANITA

Who will she stay with? Alone in that huge house?

CARMEN

Don't even think about it! . . Ricardo would like to . . . , how shall I say it . . . *(Another tone)* She won't budge. She has a small income that allows her to live without being a burden, so she digs in her heels. Now then, who can stay with her? Our friends accept her at a distance. Living with her is another story. This would mean a delay. *(Another tone)* I'd never dare suggest that you . . .

JUANITA

Her character is bitter from time to time.

CARMEN

(Fast) Would you accept her?

JUANITA

I'd have to think about it.

CARMEN

The two of you could get along better . . . Favors with favors are paid! (Fast. Shouting.) Alicia! Victoria!

JUANITA

(Overwhelmed) Yes, Carmen . . . (Another tone) Oh my lord, to have come to this! (Crying) Who would have told you, angel of my soul! Your mother . . . , at the bottom of a pit with no way out.

The two women walk upstage toward the darkness.

Scene 9

Rapid light change. Midstage, Paulita and Borrás continue to enter and exit. First they carry on a table, then put a tablecloth on it; they prepare the dinner ceremony. Upstage, Gastón plays with a slingshot and then with an enormous balloon and the little dog Titania. At some distance away, also upstage, Antonia waters the plants and argues frequently with Gastón, who doesn't hide his irritation and stubbornness. Lively, jubilant rhythm. Ricardo and Menéndez enter from the side, downstage. There is a strong tension between the two men. Menéndez wears a heavy linen suit and smokes a Havana cigar.

RICARDO

Careful with the flower beds! The begonias, poor things, this year . . . !

MENÉNDEZ

So tomorrow the lawyer and the notary are coming? Tomorrow at eleven, right?

RICARDO

Yes, I already told you that.

MENÉNDEZ

And you'd rather I didn't come to the meeting, that I stay home contemplating my big toe . . . , and between you and those two good-for-nothings you'll put together the makings of the deal . . . You'll decide whether to sell the property, mortgage it, or rent it, yes or no? (Bad humored and affirmative gesture by Ricardo) So!

RICARDO

What are you thinking, Menéndez! You distrust me that much?!

MENÉNDEZ

I'm being frank with you! I prefer being kicked out on the street like a dog than keep quiet . .

RICARDO

My friend, you exaggerate . . . I talked to you as someone I respect.

MENÉNDEZ

(Laughing) Do you think I'm stupid and suck my thumb?! Since the scandal about the colored boy Patricio, the authorities have kept a close eye . . . ; and now, with the disappearance of the two accountants . . . , who probably took off for the jungle . . . , you deduce, very astutely, that they'll pass the buck on to you. Don't think you're fooling me! . . . That's why you're moving up the date of your trip . . . That's why you're leaving me with this hot potato . . . The land, the houses, and that red herring of a mill! My wife told me, "Don't commit yourself, don't gamble your life away." Yes! My wife was right! . . . Why do I have to be responsible for all this . . . who knows where it will end? I live on my estate, fifteen pieces of livestock . . . That's more than enough for me!

RICARDO

(With contained violence) For you it's a nuisance! We can talk about it . . . But you get riled up, you shout . . . You accuse me. I don't understand!

MENÉNDEZ

(Sarcastic) Do you want me to explain it to you? This is 1896, my dear friend, and at this moment, if a transaction with the Delegate of the Revolutionary Government isn't made, offering him part of the sugar cane crop, they will destroy it stone by stone, and the mill and the land will be a mere shadow of a dream . . . , and if one doesn't proceed with utmost care, the Spanish authorities can interfere, and heads will roll. . . You ignore the fact, of course, that the number of cane cutters has decreased and you have to look for them with tweezers like needles in a haystack . . . , the place is crawling with denouncements, betrayals, robberies, intrigues and endless arbitrary actions . . . ; and if they refuse to work or abandon the fields . . . , we'll have to look for Haitians . . . Enough hypocrisy, Ricardo! *(Gesture from Ricardo. He lunges at him. A struggle between the two men)* Bastard! I've said too much!

Antonia, Gastón, Paulita and Borrás approach, aggressively, to where Ricardo and Menéndez are struggling.

RICARDO

Let go of me! What are you doing?

MENÉNDEZ

You think I'm an imbecile and that your money is some kind of honor . . .

BORRÁS

Criminal, murderer!

ANTONIA

Oh, my god! Gastón, come here!

PAULITA

Miss Antonia, they're killing Missuh Ricardo.

GASTÓN

Why, Auntie Antonia?

BORRÁS

(Pulling the men apart) Enough! That's enough!

PAULITA

Stop it, Borrás! Oh, if Miz Carmen . . . !

ANTONIA

It's a disgrace! *(To Paulita)* Don't shout! The neighbors! Be careful, Borrás! Paulita, come! *(Exiting)* Gastón, don't stay there! What a scene, dear god in heaven! What a scene!

MENÉNDEZ

(To Ricardo, collapsed in an easy chair) You're afraid! I'll be there tomorrow at eleven! To discuss it! I want the papers in order and at hand. *(Straightening his tie)* The house will be rented, without fail . . . The flower beds, the begonias. *(Exits)*

RICARDO

(Stunned) Why has he done this? What is this? Why?

Scene 10

Antonia enters, accompanied by Carmen.

ANTONIA

I assure you, Carmen, outrageous.

CARMEN

Such a way of saying things!

ANTONIA

Yes, outrageous. Ask Gastón, or Paulita, Borrás or . . . your husband. Ask him.

CARMEN

I hate this bickering back and forth. All right. Menéndez may be as you said. Outrageous! You've said it! My lips are sealed. But he still has a heart of gold . . . Your lands continue to produce thanks to him . . . I don't want to hear anyone talk to me about it again, ever!

ANTONIA

(Mocking and sarcastic) Forbidden? I prefer to remain silent!

CARMEN

You always seek the easiest solution! *(Rings the little bell on the table. Paulita enters)* Paulita, please, the meal will be served in five minutes.

PAULITA

At your service, ma'am.

Borrás enters, observes the women and starts to arrange the furniture and clean them downstage. He shows restlessness and the desire to talk to Carmen; but once he finishes, he exits.)

CARMEN

(To Paulita) Tell the children to hurry!

PAULITA

At once, ma'am! *(Exits)*

ANTONIA

(Putting the place settings in order) Were there many people at church?

CARMEN

Packed full.

Gastón enters. Picks up the balloon and begins to play with it.

ANTONIA

(*To Carmen. Reproachful*) Look at him!

CARMEN

Gastón! (*Gastón reluctantly abandons the balloon*) Did you wash your hands and face?
(*Continues supervising the place settings, arranging the flowers in the clay pot that is on the table*)

GASTÓN

(*Offended*) Yes, Mama! (*Goes back to the balloon*)

ANTONIA

Leave the balloon alone, child! . . . He spent the entire afternoon throwing stones at the neighbors' patio . . . , and the next time he startles you using Titania, mortifying her . . . , we'll settle up. You always show off when visitors are around. (*Gastón flops down in a chair.*) You should be much more mature, much more responsible . . . Fix that unruly hair! (*Caresses his hair*) You're a little man now! (*Kisses him*)

CARMEN

(*To Antonia*) You spoil him, too! (*Pulling at the collar of her blouse*) This heat! It's May and we're roasting . . . what will it be like in August. I'm melting!

GASTÓN

I can't wait to be a man!

CARMEN

Gastón, how many times have I told you that I don't like hearing you say things like that? . . .

ANTONIA

(*Interrupting her*) How's Juanita?

Gastón picks up a mandolin and starts to improvise as he whistles the melody of the Cuban national anthem by Perucho Figueredo.

CARMEN

Inconsolable! Terrible situation, Antonia! I wanted to breathe a little courage into her . . . , in vain. I don't think she's at all well. That's why we stayed and had lunch together. (*To Gastón, irritated*) Gastón, stop that racket. (*To Antonia*) Where did he learn that little piece? (*Antonia shrugs her shoulders. Ricardo enters from upstage—with a flower in his hand. Antonia laughs about Gastón, and he throws the instrument.*) What was that, Gastón?

GASTÓN

(*Ill-humored*) Gastón, always Gastón. What a pain!

Ricardo goes to Carmen and kisses her on the forehead.

CARMEN

How are you, dear?

RICARDO

(*Offering her the flower*) Fine, fine!

CARMEN

Thank you, dear. (*Kisses him on the cheek*) How sweet!

Ricardo sits down, picks up a newspaper and begins to read it. Gastón, almost unconsciously, hums in a fragmentary way, out of tune and softly, "La Bayamesa" by Pancho del Castillo.

ANTONIA

(With a certain aggressiveness or irrational bad humor. Knits.) Like all respectable women, alone in the world . . . , without her son, her moral support, Juanita can expect rocky roads ahead. Being respectable isn't easy. The devil is watching at every step. "El Diablo Mundo," as Espronceda would say. *(Draws a smile on her face)*

CARMEN

Paulita, tell Victoria not to be so slow! Gastón, tell Alicia that I've given the order for dinner to be served. *(Gastón doesn't move.)* But, Antonia, do you think that will be Juanita's problem? Or any widow's or spinster's?

ANTONIA

Of course it is! Do you think the spectacle of Beba Martínez is worthy of respect? I think it's denigrating . . . At forty, forty long years, five of them as a widow, to be flirting like that . . . , with a married man. Or Rita Fonseca . . . They say that day before yesterday she was seen leaving a brothel with the Governor's son . . . Or Estercita Gómez's cousin, Margarita Estévez's niece, who was caught in a "private room" outside of town with three men . . . , and one was a mulatto.

CARMEN

(Violent) Antonia! *(She makes a signal: Gastón is present.)*

ANTONIA

(Riled up) Don't Antonia me! No one can stop me from talking. Honor and respectability are the highest moral concepts of men and women; especially women, Carmen . . . Do you approve of all those filthy things, all that depravity?

CARMEN

My word, Antonia, it seems you don't know me! Approve of it? Never.

Ricardo stops reading for a few minutes. Contemplates his wife and his sister and makes a gesture of discontent, shaking his head.

ANTONIA

It's a disgrace for this town of respectable people! It shocks me, Carmen. You never used to see that. But it seems customs are changing, and I can't get used to it . . . Would you want one of your daughters . . . , or both of them? . . .

CARMEN

You know how we've raised them. By the best example! This is a respectable house. What happens outside it is not my concern . . . Let people do as they wish outside!

RICARDO

(Conciliatory) Ladies, ladies . . . *(Returns to his reading)*

ANTONIA

There's promiscuity in the air, a permanent disregard for morality, it's like a virus, like a sickness, like a fluid that must be eradicated. War is a cyclone and with it trains come and go full of young Spanish soldiers, or a roar of horses bringing those big coloreds and mulattos, and

those sickly whites they call “Mambisas” or “revolutionaries,” from deep inside the jungle . . . , and at their retreats, at night, and those public dances they organize, young girls lose their heads and let themselves be dragged into vice, the pleasures of the flesh, filth. That’s why we’re forced into perpetual cloister . . . *(Another tone)* Last night Ceferina’s daughter went off with a young soldier to a dark street . . . A fine example, Carmen! That fifteen-year-old girl, touching each other, kissing each other . . . And she had just met him! A pig! A whore!

CARMEN

To the table! *(Rings the little bell)* Gastón, will you listen to me one day? Tell Alicita. . . *(Gastón exits)* I forgive those things, Antonia, and I don’t talk about anyone, because I’ve seen so much in life . . .

ANTONIA

Well, I talk! I know that other women can’t be like me, I’ve never kissed a man, not even in thought, and I’ve reached fifty-five without anyone boasting that their fingertips ever touched me. That I won’t tolerate!

VICTORIA

(With great contempt. To the audience.) How amusing! I don’t know who would have the bad taste to kiss a hippopotamus like her!

The four stand around the table. Alicia’s and Gastón’s laughter is heard. Noises in the kitchen. Voices of Paulita and Borrás arguing with Gastón. Alicia enters and stands in front of the table, smiling. Victoria looks at her, and Alicia gives her a signal. Carmen rings the little bell. They all sit down. Paulita enters with the soup tureen. Gastón enters, rushing to take his seat. His face reflects a delicious mischief. The prayers begin. A loud uproar is heard. Everyone turns their faces to one side of the stage.)

ANTONIA

What was that? *(Looks at them disconcertedly. Gastón breaks into a nervous laugh.)* Good lord, what is it? *(The noise increases)* Oh, it’s you, Gastón! *(Bangs the table with her fists and exits toward one side of the stage)* Titania, my Titania. *(From offstage, screaming)* What have you done, you dreadful child? *(Carmen and Ricardo are perplexed. The children smile among themselves, covering their mouths with their napkins. Antonia’s screams and sobs are heard. Pause. Enters with a measuring stick in her hand. Threatening.)* Come here, Gastón. *(Another tone)* I never thought you could be so evil. You’re a child of the devil! *(To Alicia and Victoria)* And you two, little Miss Innocents, you knew about it and not a word out of you. Torturing my poor Titania. *(Victoria and Alicia cry, frightened.)* You wanted to do this to me, didn’t you, Gastón? . . . *(Gastón laughs nervously.)* Humiliate me, torture me. *(Moves toward Gastón)*

RICARDO

Antonia, that is no way to talk to the children.

CARMEN

It’s unbelievable that you’d cause such a scene over a dog.

ANTONIA

(Full of hate and fury) No one is to touch my Titania. This dog is better than they are, all three of them. She’s the only family I have. Do you understand me? If you didn’t know it, you know it now, you and your children. I’m glad you’re going away! Go to New York! You’re cowards! Cowards! That’s where you should go! *(Another tone)* Miserable people! . . . I know you,

Ricardo, like the palm of my hand! Good for Menéndez the way he treated you this afternoon! Finally, I'm avenged! May everything turn to salt and water! . . . I know my fate and I'm not afraid of it . . . The day Mama died I saw it before my eyes . . . Scratching, scratching out a niche and finding nothing . . .

Blackout.

Scene 11

Paulita and Borrás enter in night clothes carrying lighted gas lamps. They check out the entire stage. Fierce howls of cats in heat.

BORRÁS

We're living in madness! It's madness!

PAULITA

Quickly! Go to bed! There's no one here!

BORRÁS

Real madness!

PAULITA

Move! It's getting late and I'm tired!

BORRÁS

Where will it end? May the mountain spirits protect us! . . . They're leaving! . . . We may never see them again.

PAULITA

(Offstage, far off) Are you deaf?

BORRÁS

Fifty years of my life down the drain! Loyal servant, forsaken dog! *(Paulita approaches him. Looks at him tenderly)* You're still young, you can . . . But I . . .

PAULITA

(Remembering certain gestures of Carmen) Bah, Miz Carmen has taken care of everything. If the war goes on and the Americans or the English don't invade . . . or maybe the French!, we'll join her, there, in New York . . .

BORRÁS

(Sighing) You could. . . . I . . . , I . . . , a basket of flowers on my head: "Gardenias, lilies, forget-me-nots . . ."

PAULITA

(Amused) I'll even marry a white man, like she says, to advance the race! . . . *(Exits right)*

BORRÁS

A world gone mad! Real madness! *(Exits left)*

Scene 12

Lights fade, creating areas of shadow. The stage is totally empty. Pause. Victoria enters on tiptoe, dressed in a bathrobe. She has a small candelabra with one candle lit. The mango grove at night.

VICTORIA

I'm leaving, dear grove. Ah, knowing that I'm leaving you . . . My trees, my dear trees. We're leaving and I still don't know why . . . (*Sits down. Puts the candelabra on the floor beside her.*) My mother says that . . . , a respectable woman should be . . . , should be . . . (*Yawns. Lies down.*) Mmmm, such a wonderful smell! (*Breathes in the nocturnal humidity. Brief Pause. Sits up*) I just read the story of Romeo and Juliet. (*As dreaming*) Romeo, Romeo . . . (*Gastón enters, in pijamas. He has another candelabra with one candle lit. He approaches her and puts his hand on her head. As if playing blind man's buff with a blindfold over her eyes.*) Who's that? Who? Ah, Gastón! (*Gastón squats down beside her. Victoria kisses him tenderly.*) You know something, little brother? (*Gastón doesn't answer, his eyes are closed.*) I'd like to have a lover.

FAST CURTAIN

PART TWO

Scene 1

The set gives the vague idea of a salon. Victoria, seated on the floor, surrounded by a semicircular array of books and fashion magazines, thumbs through a magazine of a serial novel. Victoria is eighteen, beautiful, dressed in utmost simplicity. Gastón enters. He is nineteen, attractive and chubby. He is wearing a robe and slippers.

GASTÓN

(To Victoria, with tenderness and a certain playful tone) And what does the queen of respectable women have to say? Good morning, dear sister. *(Victoria closes the magazine and doesn't know where to hide it. Near her.)* Today you look like Sleeping Beauty. *(Kisses her. Victoria hides the magazine under her legs.)* Are you still angry with me? *(Sits down with her and noting her nervousness, raises her skirt)* Great legs! *(Sees the magazine)*

VICTORIA

(Trying to hide the magazine) That's rude! *(Slaps his hand)* You're bad!

GASTÓN

Why are you hiding it?

VICTORIA

Gastón! Let me alone!

GASTÓN

Give it to me! *(Embarrassed, she gives him the magazine. Paging through it)* Nice! Isn't it? Some racy story! *(Another tone)* So you rummaged through my papers!

VICTORIA

I was looking for something else! *(Starts to cry)* I swear! You're a..., a pig! *(Gastón laughs)* You see?! *(Cries inconsolably)*

GASTÓN

(Gently) Such a little child!... Reading romance novels! [*See note*⁴⁰] Pull yourself together! Stop crying!... You make too much of it!

VICTORIA

(Wiping her tears) Go away! Go away!... *(Brief pause)*

GASTÓN

You're still angry about last night!

VICTORIA

Yes!... There was no reason to say the things you said to Mama and Papa! None!... Ever since we returned from the United States you've been intolerable..., obsessive, like you had some

⁴⁰ Triana names El Caballero Audaz [The Bold Caballero], the pseudonym for Spanish journalist and writer José María Carretero Novillo (1888-1951), who, between 1916 and 1921, wrote weekly serial erotic, even pornographic, stories published in Mundo Latino y Sanz Calleja. Among the titles were *The Naked Virgin*, *A Loose Woman*, *From Sin to Sin*, *I'll Always Wait for You*. He is famous for his interviews of prominent people of his time, published in the magazine *La Esfera*. Among them were Albéniz, Manuel de Falla, Margarita Xirgú, Marconi, Rubén Darío, Benavente, Pérez Galdós, Hitler, Musolini, Lerroux, Trotsky and many others.

incessant itch ... Just stop it, stop it!... Lucky it was just the four of us! Because if you told that story in front of José Ignacio, Mama would die...

Scene 2

José Ignacio enters, followed by Alicia. Both of them elegant and good looking. He has on a white suit. She is wearing a sheer muslin dress and a hat the same color of her outfit. Gastón puts the magazine in a pocket of his robe, then looks at Victoria, and they both smile.

JOSE IGNACIO

(Authoritative, presumptuous) The keys, Alicia?

ALICIA

Keys? What keys, José Ignacio?

JOSE IGNACIO

What keys? The keys!... You don't know? *(Alicia runs out)* And what do you two have to say for yourselves? *(Gastón and Victoria smile again.)* How do you like the heat these last few days?... Unbearable!

ALICIA

(Entering, suffocated) Mama had them. Take them. She said she'd wait for us to return, even if it's midnight... *(Approaches Gastón and Victoria. Kisses Victoria.)* When are you going to make up your mind?... *(Caresses Gastón's face)* And you, you young stud?... Bye-bye!

VICTORIA

Oh, don't be a pest! Why do I have to marry now just because you did?...

JOSE IGNACIO

(Exiting) Alicia! *(Gesture of disdain from Victoria)*

ALICIA

(Exiting) Ta-ta!

Scene 3

Brief pause. Offstage scattered voices and bells are heard.

GASTÓN

You blame me! It's all my fault!... I was right, Victoria. Papa can't stand the idea of Cuba having its own government. Who knows what the hell kind of country he wants! ... *(Victoria gestures, trying to interrupt him.)* "Evil tyrants, highway robbers!," he shouted yesterday... So where does he stand?... According to him, our government will fail because it does business with the United States, and the United States is lazy and stupid for letting it happen... *(Gesture from Victoria)* Yet he desperately looks for some kind of influence inside the very government he scorns... "He who has connections will go far."

VICTORIA

(An apparently persuasive tone) Please, Gastón!... I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about..., nor do I want to have... Switch your gear, my dear!

GASTÓN

There's confusion from top to bottom, everywhere. Gradually, perhaps... But we pushed the Americans out of the government, they had to leave!...

VICTORIA

Gastón, it's very early... (*Violent*) You keep harping on it! You sound like a quibbling lawyer, and you insult them! They've suffered enough... (*Gesture from Gastón*) There you go again!

GASTÓN

(*Ironic*) Who? Me? Why?

VICTORIA

Yes! You! I see it in your face! Don't count on me!

GASTÓN

(*Pretending to be offended*) I've never counted on you! I am who I am, too!... All of you, the honorable ones...

VICTORIA

(*With a triumphal air and an accent of contempt*) Yes..., and so what! (*The doorbell rings.*) Go see who it is and let them in!

Scene 4

The doorbell rings again. Paulita enters and moves to one side of the stage. She is the character we saw in Part One as an old woman, and later as a young girl. She looks like she's aging. Gastón and Victoria are visibly irritated. Borrás enters.

BORRÁS

I'm spitting fire! ... Bullhorns..., and a street demonstration... Lunacy!... Uff, and this heat is going to kill me!... They're saying that veterans' salaries have been cut... That was what the racket was all about!... with big letters on the posters... Up with this! Down with that!

PAULITA

(*Interrupting him*) You're very late, old man!

BORRÁS

Bad traffic... (*Exits, handing Paulita two letters*) Always bossing!

VICTORIA

(*Sing-song*) Paulita, Paulita. (*Gestures for her to approach*)

PAULITA

Do you want something, my angel?

VICTORIA

Letters? Who are they for? (*Paulita gestures, theatricalizing indifference. Like a spoiled child*) Come on, tell me, Paulita!

GASTÓN

(*To Paulita*) Tell her or she'll have a fainting spell.

PAULITA

(*Mysterious*) One is foreign...

VICTORIA

Foreign?

PAULITA

Yes, ma'am, from Paris.

VICTORIA
That's a lie! (*Another tone*) Let me see it!

PAULITA
(*Arrogant*) It's for Miz Carmen.

VICTORIA
For Mama?

GASTÓN
(*Mocking*) Now we're getting somewhere.

PAULITA
(*Previous tone*) When Miz Carmen...

VICTORIA
(*Interrupting*) Just the envelope.

PAULITA
It's up to Miz Carmen..., child.

VICTORIA
Oh, all right, Paulita. You're impossible ... (*Another tone*) What about the other one?

PAULITA
The other one?... Interesting...

VICTORIA
Who's it from?

PAULITA
Oh, I don't know.

VICTORIA
Let me see. It could be the wrong address.

PAULITA
No, Victoria! It's not the wrong address! It's for young José Ignacio Trebijo...

GASTÓN
(*Interrupting*) Clear as day. It's from Teresa, his sister... Look at the return address!

VICTORIA
Oh my God!

PAULITA
Leave me out of this. It's a white people thing! (*Exits with the two letters*)

Scene 5
GASTÓN

What are you afraid of?

VICTORIA
That horrible woman...

GASTÓN
(*Interrupting*) Horrible, why?

VICTORIA

(*Fast*) Look, Gastón, do me a favor and be quiet. That woman has no excuse. What she does..., is..., so..., so disgusting.

Gastón takes off his bathrobe, which falls to the floor; he is left in his pajama bottoms, his chest bare.

GASTÓN

(*Amused*) She gives to humanity what other women won't... (*Starts to pretend to practice boxing*) I'm in good shape, aren't I?... Life has to be lived. Remember New York?... You have to let yourself go, Victoria. Forget all the rubbish they teach us. That's the important thing!

Scene 6

Paulita enters. She brings the breakfast service and puts it down on a small table near Victoria and Gastón

PAULITA

Breakfast!...If I didn't bring it to you, none of you would eat, and Miz Carmen, there inside, muttering to herself... (*Straightens some pieces of furniture, cleans them, etc.*)

VICTORIA

(*Serving herself and serving a cup of coffee to Gastón*) Thank you, Paulita.

PAULITA

You're welcome, sweetie.

GASTÓN

(*Playfully*) You only see José Ignacio's side..., which fits perfectly with what they've taught you. I see the other side.

VICTORIA

(*Combative*) I'm not interested, Gastón!...

GASTÓN

Too bad for you...

VICTORIA

(*Challenging*) You are so, so good, young man.

Eh, what brought that on?

VICTORIA

You know, you know..., the thing about Luisa!

GASTÓN

The rabbit is finally out of the hat! (*Paulita moves around them pretending to clean.*)

VICTORIA

On Alicia's wedding day you did it deliberately ...

GASTÓN

Did what? (*To Paulita. Violent.*) Leave us alone!

VICTORIA

All that secret stuff in the church and later at the party..., and with her husband right there... I'm not stupid... You ought to respect us..., Alicia, Mama, me... What will our friends think?

PAULITA

For the love of God, Gastón, and you, Victoria...

GASTÓN

(*To Paulita*) Let her get it off her chest!..

VICTORIA

(*Violent*) You, all you men, take advantage... You're miserable human beings! Disgusting!

GASTÓN

Girl, there's smoke coming out your ears.

Paulita exits, exaggerating her gestures, as if talking to the invisible.

Scene 7

GASTÓN

(*Imitates a fencing lesson*) Now I'm a Don Juan. An abuser. A degenerate. (*Another tone*) Aha! Good lunge! All of a sudden your brother has turned into a monster. (*Another tone*) You've made a novella out of a few ordinary things about a friendship... Not Luisa, or her husband, and much less me... I assure you! (*Victoria smiles malicious, untrusting*) As for poor, overwrought Teresa... What do you know?...

VICTORIA

What I know is more than enough for me.

GASTÓN

Do you know her? Have you talked to her?

VICTORIA

I wouldn't be foolish enough to do that.

GASTÓN

My dear sister, what right do we have to judge her?

VICTORIA

(*Inquisitional*) But you've heard...

GASTÓN

(*Laughing*) What José Ignacio says?

VICTORIA

And Papa? And Mama?

GASTÓN

(*Still laughing*) Novellas...

VICTORIA

Alicia does say that Teresa is always respectful in her letters ..., and that she only asks to talk to José Ignacio..., and that when Alicia has interceded... José Ignacio denies... It's like they've made a pact with the devil!

GASTÓN

Our dear brother-in-law is a delicate subject. The excuse of his sister's lover has allowed him to commit any atrocity he likes. In the name of honor, he threw her out of his house... Ah! And he tried to get control of the whole inheritance.

VICTORIA

Mother can hear you.

GASTÓN

Yes, I know. She'll have a fit. José Ignacio is the darling of the house..., because he interests her. *(Another tone)* Just look at Graciélita...

VICTORIA

(At high pitch) Tralalalalalala...

GASTÓN

A few months after she came back from the United States...do you remember?... three years ago, right?... It was the end of '99... *(Counts on his fingers)* 1900..., one and two..., yes!...

Victoria sings loudly trying to drown out Gastón. Realizing she can't do it, she throws pillows at him, jumps on top of him, knocking him down, wanting to manipulate him totally, while he tries to defend himself, creating a strange and fierce rhythm between them. The only words audible from Gastón: "Aunt Antonia"; "Graciélita" and "lovers." Victoria, exhausted, gives up the game. Gastón shows both fury and exhaustion.

VICTORIA

Gastón, life for you... Morality exists, honor exists!...

GASTÓN

(Suffocated) Morality has nothing to do with sex. Look, my dear sister, everything that happens in this house is based on hypocrisy...

VICTORIA

You make Papa and Mama out to be devils... You confuse me!

GASTÓN

(Worked up) Listen, please!... There's Paulita! Good as gold, the eternal spinster, waiting for some white man to marry her..., an idea Mother has put in her head..., an idea that Paulita has made an obsession..., and because this white man doesn't come, Mother takes advantage and manipulates her and uses her like a slave, and the time will come when she won't even pay her, and Paulita will bounce from house to house, first with Alicia, then with you or with me...

(Gesture from Victoria) Is that moral?... Honorable? *(Another tone. Victoria babbles incoherent and inaudible words)* Why won't Mother show us Teresa's letter?

VICTORIA

You think so?

GASTÓN

Let's make a bet!

VICTORIA

So, you... *(Another tone)* Why do you think like that?

GASTÓN

I live, I see and I analyze.

VICTORIA

It's terrible! You have no peace with God, or the Devil! You're crazy. Utterly mad.

Scene 8

Pause. Upstage, off, a big crash is heard. Paulita, Carmen and Borrás enter. The two servants bring Carmen, almost suspended in air between them.

GASTÓN

What happened, Mother?

VICTORIA

(To Carmen) Did you hurt yourself? *(To Paulita)* What happened?

CARMEN

(Weak, gasping) Oh, Victoria of my soul! You won't believe this! The ladder!... The ladder in the kitchen!

GASTÓN

What do you mean, Mother!

CARMEN

Don't talk to me! I forbid you to say a word to me!

BORRÁS

The emotion, Gastón, child.

GASTÓN

What emotion?

PAULITA

Sit down here, Miz Carmen. *(To Victoria)* The emotion.

VICTORIA

What emotion? *(Caresses her mother's forehead)*

CARMEN

(Sits down) Yes, the emotion... It was like a huge electric shock...I went like this..., zaz, zaz, boom..., the ladder collapsed and almost killed me.

VICTORIA

(To Borrás) Why? *(Borrás shrugs his shoulders.)*

GASTÓN

The reason, Mother...

CARMEN

(To Gastón) I've already told you and I'm not going to repeat it! Today I don't want to hear anything from you!

PAULITA

(To Borrás) Bring a little cologne water. *(Borrás leaves.)*

CARMEN

(Still gasping for breath) This letter, child. *(Another tone)* From my brother Dionisio.

GASTÓN

(To Victoria) Who is that?

VICTORIA

I've never heard his name before.

GASTÓN

Probably some old geezer!

Borrás enters with a bottle of cologne and gives it to Carmen.

VICTORIA

(To Gastón) Please, spare us the clever remarks!

CARMEN

(To Borrás, very normal) Thank you, dear. A half-brother of mine, Victoria. My father, may God keep him at his side, any woman he saw was a woman to pursue... *(Lightly dabs her forehead, neck and arms with a handkerchief dampened with cologne)* Oh, men! How they play with a woman's honor!... *(Brief pause)* Well, he met a young girl, from a very good family, of course, he was always hovering, promised her villas and castles, and..., she ended up pregnant... What my mother went through! And us! ...Imagine! When the child was born, the poor girl had to go abroad... To think that he's my brother and I've never met him!... *(Another tone)* How did he get our address? *(Another tone)* Look at him, the one with the little mustache. He looks like Papa.

*The two siblings try to take the photos at the same time. Victoria wins.
Gastón insists on snatching one away from her.*

VICTORIA

Wait! Always so desperate! *(Gives him a photo)*

GASTÓN

Who are they?

CARMEN

His friends, Gastón. *(Another tone)* Give it to me. *(Puts on her glasses. Paulita and Borrás remove furniture and magazines from the stage.)*

VICTORIA

Who's this one?

CARMEN

Let me see. *(Reads the back of it)* "To my sister and nieces and nephew whom I don't know, from London, with Fernando Sánchez del Arco, his wife Magy and an acrobat from the circus. Fondly..."

VICTORIA

What a handsome man!

CARMEN

Child! *(Another tone)* Who? *(Victoria shows her.)* Ah, yes! Fernando, yes, Fernando Sánchez del Arco. A millionaire, my child! He almost never comes to Cuba. He lives in Switzerland. He

looks better in the other one. *(Another tone)* Now I know how Dionisio got our address..., from Luisa. She's a close friend of the Sánchez del Arcos, here, in Havana.

VICTORIA

He looks just like, Mama, that actor... remember? Yes, Mama, during the opera season, when Alicia met José Ignacio... *(Carmen grabs the photo and looks at it.)*

GASTÓN

(Amused. To Victoria) He drives you wild! *(Steals the letter that Carmen has in her apron pocket and drops it on the floor)*

CARMEN

(Unaware of what Gastón has done) Such a disgusting boy!

GASTÓN

(Amused) The ideal man, Victoria.

CARMEN

(Indignant) Despicable!

VICTORIA

(To Gastón) Buzz off, boy.

CARMEN

Victoria, where did you get that vocabulary!

GASTÓN

Me? Your Prince Charming! *(Exiting)* Joaquín Alvareda's rival! *(Paulita and Borrás exit.)*

CARMEN

I'm ashamed that I gave birth to such a creature! *(Victoria gives her the photos. She puts them in an envelope, pats the pockets of her apron)* Oh, I had something here. Where is it?

VICTORIA

What, Mama?

CARMEN

(Innocent) A business letter for José Ignacio. *(Discovers the letter at her feet, picks it up and puts it in her apron pocket. Laughter is heard, the murmurs of voices and the crack of billiard balls against each other. Victoria looks at Carmen.)*

Scene 9

Midstage, Ricardo, José Ignacio and Menéndez with cups of coffee, play billiards.

RICARDO

(To José Ignacio) Yes, I'm worried! That's what's happening!... For several reasons, of course. The children and Carmen, Carmen and the children... *(Startled reaction from José Ignacio and Menéndez)* They fight like cats and dogs. Gastón is practically gone from the house. He continues his studies with good grades... But the people he associates with... The neighborhood should tell you everything!... He gives me nothing but headaches. Someone saw him with a dancer..., one of those girls from the Alhambra!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

You're making a tragedy out of something... come on!..., so insignificant. (*Laughing*) It's his age! (*Playing*) Don't tell me you want the boy to be a faggot. This is the time when pleasure is king...

MENÉNDEZ

(*Playing*) When are you going to let him go?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

He's a man already! When I was twenty...listen!, nobody could hold me down..., worse than a stallion. You have to find release wherever and however you can...

MENÉNDEZ

The same with me! My body had more heat than it could live up to. (*José Ignacio is amused. Ricardo looks at them with obvious discomfort.*) I remember my mother had a young colored who used to help her... I must have been seventeen and she was twenty or twenty-two...I made advances, tried to touch her... "That's enough, young man," she said. Those were the first ripples I felt, and she slapped me up and down, hard, believe me!..., so then I'd follow her around the house, room by room, in the hallways, the kitchen, the patio, and finally we'd come to the carriage house, with all those old iron tools and dust and carriage wheels full of mud and grease...It was like a fever, madness!

RICARDO

With a colored girl?

MENÉNDEZ

Yes, with a colored girl.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

That's what's good!

RICARDO

I could never do that!

MENÉNDEZ

(*Laughing with José Ignacio. To Ricardo*) You've missed out on a piece of heaven!

RICARDO

To come to that! (*The laughter of the other two increases.*)

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Laughing. To Menéndez*) So how did the story end?

MENÉNDEZ

(*Laughing, looking at Ricardo*) And the sweet pleasure of cinnamon!... (*To José Ignacio*) Well, as I was saying, that colored girl made me crazy... The little scamp always asked me for something..., and so I began to steal a few coins from my father..., sometimes I was able to, sometimes it was impossible... "No coin, no boing!" She'd challenge me, and when I refused to humor her, she'd humiliate me, every time she'd see me, she'd say, "Yours is teeny-weeny, yours is teeny-weeny."

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Laughing his head off*) A few pennies?

MENÉNDEZ

Yes, and I had to give them to her!

RICARDO

You were a hair shy of total degradation.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Laughing) That's incredible! It's hilarious!

MENÉNDEZ

The best thing is that instead of satisfying me, it got me more excited, I enjoyed it..., and I'd start all over again!

RICARDO

(Short) Yes, yes, alright...

MENÉNDEZ

(To José Ignacio) He's playing hard to get! ... You'd like it, too, Ricardo...

RICARDO

Don't even joke about it, Menéndez!... I've always felt a kind of repugnance..., maybe there's something in my nature...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

A man, what they call a man, is first a man in bed..., and he shoves it up anyone who gets in front of him...

MENÉNDEZ

Ricardo, who do you tell that fairytale to? *(To José Ignacio)* What a sly sense of humor! *(To Ricardo)* At your age, with everything you've gone through, and you still stand on ceremony with us... Come on, what do you take us for!... And you criticize your son?

RICARDO

That's not it! It's his ideas! It's impossible to talk to him!... He criticizes everything! He alienates everyone..., even me..., talks about my reactionary mentality... We've had several run-ins..., but I've been weak!... I need to take drastic measures! I've made up my mind! The army! They'll make a man of him there!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Turning the screw too tight, dangerous.

MENÉNDEZ

(To José Ignacio) Watch that ball! *(Prepares to make a play)*

RICARDO

(To Menéndez) It's my turn! Wait! *(To José Ignacio)* And what's more, someone is courting Victoria...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Fast) What's his name?

RICARDO

(Fast) Joaquín Alvareda.

MENÉNDEZ

The name sounds familiar.

RICARDO

The same name as his father.

MENÉNDEZ

Wasn't he an old anarchist?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Right you are! (*Another tone*) I've heard some stories...

MENÉNDEZ

At the post office strikes... at Matanzas...

RICARDO

Yes!... He's had it rough, I suppose...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Who? The son? Or the father?

RICARDO

The family!... But the boy is studying at the University..., chemistry, sugar chemistry... I haven't wanted to tell Carmen my opinion yet. It's up to the two of them to decide ...(*Pause. Sits down, resting his heel on the floor. Deep sigh.*), we end up alone, Menéndez...

MENÉNDEZ

Now that I think about it..., yes, you're right... You're a weak man!

RICARDO

(*To Menéndez*) Are you talking to me?

MENÉNDEZ

Yes, to you!

RICARDO

What's the matter with you?

MENÉNDEZ

Me? Nothing!... Why?

RICARDO

You're provoking me!

MENÉNDEZ

I'm repeating your own words.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Please, don't get worked up!

MENÉNDEZ

Frankly, he's impossible.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*To Ricardo*) Come now, sir!

RICARDO

(*To José Ignacio*) Stay out of it! (*To Menéndez*) What right do you have to talk to me in that tone? What right do you have? In the name of what and of whom?...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*To Ricardo*) You're taking it far too seriously, sir!

RICARDO

(Out of his head) How should I take it? *(With infinite contempt)* He's an imbecile!

MENÉNDEZ

Whatever you say, Ricardo!... I'm an imbecile, but you're a weak man..., and one day you'll see that I'm right!... You drown in a glass of water... You've said it yourself!... Your nature! That's what it's about!... Remember the real estate matter... Remember it well... How did that story end, that wild back and forth? The notary turned informer and denounced our strategies, they killed our lawyer, they burned the mill, and in all the turmoil, the papers got lost..., the Holy Grail, everything..., it was a miracle I came out of that one!... And remember I had warned you, and we've talked about it more than once since you returned from the United States... You wanted to play with God and with the Devil, and your nature, yes, Ricardo, yes..., it is what it is.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Why do you take offense? We're talking among friends! Nothing leaves this room... Besides, I agree with Menéndez, you've never done what you had to do...

MENÉNDEZ

For example, Ricardo, do you think that a son of mine is going to do and say as he pleases?... No! I'd kill him!... Why do you think I've had to intervene now, talk to this one, dig my claws into that one, about the problem of recuperating the land?... Even pester the Secretary of Agriculture from the Office of President Estrada Palma!..., and let's hope our affairs will half-way straighten themselves out...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

The problem fundamental...

RICARDO

(Taciturn, strange) I am an honorable man.

Scene 10

Victoria enters; she is wearing a beautiful blue muslin dress. Reads a book, sitting on a bench in the garden. Pause. Joaquín enters; he is dressed with modest elegance. He is a man of twenty-five, tall, slim, dark hair with a small goatee of the same color. Somewhat nearsighted, he wears glasses, and his gaze is a bit peculiar, which makes his facial expression very charming. Silent scene. He sits down, she moves away. He moves away, she approaches. He approaches, she moves away. Laughter.

JOAQUÍN

You're rejecting me, Victoria. *(A shade of irony and subtle playfulness)* I know it. *(Victoria pretends to be absorbed in her reading.)* You avoid me... With every day that passes, I think my insistence upsets you...

VICTORIA

(Without stopping her reading) Don't believe it, my friend. I'm not rejecting you, or avoiding you, nor do you upset me...

JOAQUÍN

Is that so? Why are you lying? It's a dark and gloomy game that...

VICTORIA

A game, you say?

JOAQUÍN

Yes, a game... You...

VICTORIA

(Smiling, frivolous, stops reading) Oh, don't be dramatic. I should be the one who's offended and yet, you see me... Fresh as a daisy! *(Pause. Looks at him, and a feeling of tenderness comes over her, but she hides it.)*

JOAQUÍN

So you should be the one who's offended? Is it possible to know the "mysterious" reason..., or reasons?

VICTORIA

How long has it been since the young gentleman deigned to step foot on the threshold of this house?

JOAQUÍN

Ah, so that's the novella!

VICTORIA

(Firm, dry) Not a novella, reality.

JOAQUÍN

Novella, reality, it can all be a dream.

VICTORIA

Don't start turning things around.

JOAQUÍN

It's true, Victoria. Look... Very simple. You read a book—that's happened to me sometimes, of course when it's a good one—you read it, time passes, and something very strange happens... You think you've lived it or you've dreamt it and it's impossible to distinguish one experience from the other... As far as you're concerned, you've experienced it..., for example, the day I met you I don't know if it belongs to a chapter of a novel that I read or if I've imagined it, or it's a dream I can't get out of my head, that lives here like an idea, or an obsession...an imponderable obsession.

VICTORIA

(Amused) Joaquín, I'm not the one playing a game, you are...

JOAQUÍN

(Interrupting) Game, novella, reality, dream: it all leads me to you, Victoria. Sometimes I think it's as though I were riding a winged horse... Clip, clop, clip, clop.

VICTORIA

(Amused) Clip, clop, clip, clop ...

JOAQUÍN

I feel lost in a sea of light and mist... Clip, clop, clip, clop.

VICTORIA

Clip, clop, clip, clop ...

JOAQUÍN

It's a gift! Life!

VICTORIA

Clip, clop.

JOAQUÍN

Up, up, through sounds, music I've never heard, that very probably exists or will exist perhaps in some other place, in another sky, in another world, and you are there, you accompany me, you're with me... Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and the galaxies. Oh, it's incredible, but it's eternal!... Do you understand? (*Victoria lets herself be carried away by Joaquín's words and they almost dance or spin around, entranced.*) I turn round and round in a grand spiral, and I seem to disintegrate in space... You, Victoria... I, Victoria, I... (*Victoria stops playing the game.*)

VICTORIA

(*Dry, theatrical*) That does not justify your absence.

JOAQUÍN

It's that... I thought... The last time, you were so remote, and I said, "She doesn't want me, I bore her." (*Another tone*) I remember perfectly that before saying good-bye, I described you precisely: "It's as though your imagination were off somewhere else." Be frank now, was I right?

VICTORIA

Oh, so suspicious! So... (*Pretending, but naturally, she looks at his eyes.*) No, Joaquín... Really, no.

JOAQUÍN

You wanted me to leave you alone.

VICTORIA

You're wrong, I... (*Another tone, almost playful*) And if things were different?

JOAQUÍN

Are you taking revenge?

VICTORIA

I'm proposing a possibility.

JOAQUÍN

We could fill the world with possibilities, following that line.

VICTORIA

You're playing dirty.

JOAQUÍN

(*Almost singing*) Clip, clop, clip, clop ... (*Another tone*) Tell me, go on...

VICTORIA

You could be meeting with someone.

JOAQUÍN

Do you really think...?

VICTORIA

Some old commitment.

JOAQUÍN

We go back to the beginning: you reject me, you avoid me, I upset you.

VICTORIA

I could guarantee that you're in love. There is someone, who knows where, who has turned your brains to mush. Anyone could see that!

JOAQUÍN

Perhaps. *(Another tone. Like playing)* But I'm afraid to know what she thinks. What happens, very often, is that when you love, you aren't loved back...

VICTORIA

Ah! *(Pause. With faked innocence)* It's not a reciprocal love? *(Joaquín shakes his head)* Do I know her?

JOAQUÍN

(Vacillating) Well, yes... *(More sure of himself, staring at her. She lowers her eyes, feigning embarrassment)* It's very likely that you know her.

VICTORIA

Oh, excuse my indiscretion! What must you think of me! *(Flutters a handkerchief near Joaquín's face)* Just like my little brother Gastón!

Scene 11

Juanita and Graciélita sit in another place in the garden. One of them embroiders, the other knits. Juanita breathes a deep sigh. Pause. Carmen enters from upstage.

CARMEN

(Shouting, her voice in sing-song) Victoria! *(Another tone)* This girl makes me... Juanita. *(Victoria's voice is heard: "I'm coming, Mama.")* She still won't accept that Joaquín is in love with her. A respectable woman never closes her eyes to that. *(To Graciélita, who smiles)* And every day she needs a different dress. Her armoire is bursting with clothes. And I..., enslaved. *(Another tone)* There's such a rush that I can't even sew for Alicia... And Gastón ... Sometimes I think he's ... *(Moved)* The army is hard, my friends! *(Another tone)* And Ricardo, in his labyrinth..., if they don't sign their names, if tomorrow ..., if..., and on and on!... He insists they return his land to him... And he's right! The rent from the houses is barely enough for us to survive on. We're worse off than we were under Spain!... the shady schemes spread faster than weeds, and he swears that Menéndez has lost interest, and I tell him, "Be patient." And then I'm the one, Juanita, who gets all the grief.

JUANITA

Oh, you're always complaining!... If I were to tell you my tragedy. Because it is a tragedy... *(Looking at Graciélita)* This child..., the headaches she's given me! *(To Graciélita, who utters a sound indicating her discomfort)* Don't grumble! It's the truth!... I planned that wedding kicking and screaming. Pedro Arturo, let's be clear, was a hick... He was going nowhere fast!...No parents..., imagine!... He lost them in Weyler's concentration camps⁴¹, remember?... So use your

⁴¹ Valeriano Weyler (1838-1930) Spanish general who, as captain general of Cuba shortly before the outbreak of the Spanish-American War (1898), used stern anti-rebel measures that were exploited by U.S. newspapers to inflame public opinion against Spanish rule of Cuba. After Marshal Campos had failed to pacify the Cuban rebellion, the Spanish government sent out Weyler, thinking him the proper man to crush the rebellion. While serving as a Spanish

imagination a little and tell me... An orange vendor on Monserrate Street!... A disgrace!... I had to teach him how to sit at a table..., how it's done ..., what knife and fork to use... Then, how to dress..., put on a tie, use a handkerchief ... And that's the least of it!

GRACIELITA

Mother!

JUANITA

Yes, child, yes!

GRACIELITA

You make him out to be a savage!

JUANITA

That's not so far from the truth!... And another thing, you didn't want to, but I made you see clearly... Deny it now!... In your situation...

CARMEN

(Acting surprised) What situation?

JUANITA

(Not knowing what to say) Well... things!... Eighteen years old and making a mistake...

GRACIELITA

(Upset) Mother, hold your tongue!

JUANITA

(Precipitatedly) A husband! A husband! Let someone else take care of this sex-starved young girl! That was my hope!... *(Another tone)* Pedro Arturo has shown me that he's a boy with good intentions..., reliant, honest through and through... *(Looks between Juanita and Graciela)* I'd like you to help me out a little, Carmen..., talk to José Ignacio... There's a business deal that Pedro Arturo is working on, and it seems..., it could be a gold mine... Will you talk to him, dear?...

Scene 12

Alicia and José Ignacio appear, upstage. They are dressed elegantly and conservatively.

ALICIA

(Languid) How are you, Mama? *(Kisses Carmen)* And Papa and Victoria?

CARMEN

(Enchanted) Speaking of the king of Rome... *(Kisses Alicia)*

Juanita and Graciela give hugs and kisses to Alicia.

general, he was called "Butcher Weyler" because hundreds of thousands of people died in his concentration camps. He was made governor of Cuba with full powers to suppress the insurgency and restore the island to political order and its sugar production to greater profitability. Eventually he came to the same conclusions as his predecessors-- that to win Cuba back for Spain, he would have to separate the rebels from the civilians by putting the latter in safe havens, protected by loyal Spanish troops. By the end of 1897, General Weyler had relocated more than 300,000 into such "reconcentration camps." Although he was successful moving vast numbers of people, he failed to provide for them adequately. Consequently, these areas became cesspools of hunger and disease, where many hundreds of thousands died.

GRACIELITA

It's been so many months, my dear!

JUANITA

How wonderful to see you!

José Ignacio coldly shakes hands with Graciélita and Juanita. They only smile politely at him.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Good afternoon, Juanita. Hello, Graciélita. (*Putting his arm around Carmen's shoulder*) How are you doing, my dear Carmen?

CARMEN

(*Kissing José Ignacio*) Fine. The usual complaints. (*Separating from the group. With a certain mystery*) And Alicita? Each day I see her more poorly. Is she doing everything she should?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Dr. Argensola saw her today.

ALICIA

(*To Juanita*) It's been years since I've seen Graciélita. And Pedro Arturo?

GRACIELITA

(*Amused*) Oh, Alicia, it's all about the money with him. If it's one percent, if it's two percent, if it's ten percent, and the interest, on and on. Bills and more bills. It's all he talks about. He and I are perpetual adding machines. He'll probably come by later to pick us up.

ALICIA

I'll be glad to see him.

CARMEN

(*To José Ignacio*) I thought as much. So see to it she gets a lot of rest! Patience and resignation. (*Another tone*) Don't worry. I'll prepare the way, as Jesus said. I'll take care of her! (*José Ignacio goes to join the group. Carmen takes him by the arm, saying something that the others can't hear. José Ignacio responds in the same tone. The group looks at them puzzled and questioning. Guitar music in the distance.*) Yes, I know!... But I was terrified. When I saw that policeman standing in front of me like an ogre with legal papers..., I started to tremble... Desperation gnawed at my fingers, and I couldn't control myself, and I opened it... A scandal, with women..., in the red light district... You need to resolve it as soon as possible... People can't find out about it, son! Oh, that head of yours, child! It's time you learned your lesson! It's no wonder these things happen to you...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Don't worry about it! I'll go see the Senator, he's a friend of my godfather... With a little money, everyone keeps quiet... Blackmail for blackmail...

GRACIELITA

(*To Alicia*) You ought to take something to build up your strength, something to perk you up... You look tired.

ALICIA

Oh, Graciélita, I look like a stringbean.

GRACIELITA

That's the least of it!

JUANITA

Her waistline, Graciélita!

GRACIELITA

It's what she wears!

ALICIA

I've had to alter all my dresses. I'd like to be a little more..., but it's up to God... What luck finding you here!... Mama tells me you always come to take her for a little walk... I was hoping to run into you some day!... (*José Ignacio gives a sign to Alicia to say good-bye*) Yes, dear. Right away. (*To Juanita and Graciélita*) Excuse me, he's getting impatient. (*Another tone*) I'm going to say hello to Papa and Victoria.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

And master Ricardo? (*He takes out a check. Carmen takes it, then gives it back. Energetic*) Take it, dear Carmen. It's necessary! It will help with this month's expenses, and don't let your Ricardo know you need it!

CARMEN

(*Putting the check away. To José Ignacio*) In the library, my son. (*Alicia and José Ignacio exit.*)

Scene 13

CARMEN

(*Looking at Alicia and José Ignacio*) The poor thing doesn't feel well. It's a good thing Dr. Argensola is going to see her once a week.

JUANITA

Ah, yes, they were hiding it!

CARMEN

Hiding what...

GRACIELITA

A little grandson on the way is beginning to show.

CARMEN

No, Graciélita, don't even think it.

JUANITA

So...?

GRACIELITA

Isn't she pregnant?

JUANITA

That's what I thought: "Alicita made her little bundle of joy."

GRACIELITA

It's the most natural thing in the world, Carmen.

JUANITA

Are you sure?... Sometimes...

GRACIELITA

Is it a growth? Some kind of cyst?

CARMEN

Bah! Problems!... In the womb... Dr. Argensola tells her she'll be well soon. Anyway, I'd like Alicia to be with me. That's why I'm desperate for Victoria to decide about her marriage ... Then I could devote myself to taking care of Alicia. Rest is indispensable; and however often she sees the doctor, being alone there on the ranch in Arroyo Naranjo with the servants ..., it's not the same as being here. (*Another tone*) Victoria is taking much too long! ... I want her to marry whomever, as soon as possible... Alicia made a good marriage..., as for the rest, that's their problem.

JUANITA

But tell me, Carmen. Is Alicia truly happy in her marriage?

CARMEN

Very much so, Juanita. José Ignacio loves her and he's good to her. A little jealous..., but that's good when it's not exaggerated... Before they married, I knew he would be a good husband.

GRACIELITA

Will you excuse me, dear Carmen? I want to talk to the girls... It's been so long since the three of us were together!

CARMEN

Go on, child, go on. (*Graciélita exits*)

Scene 14

CARMEN

(*To Juanita*) We're finally alone!... So what we were talking about... José Ignacio is a man who has had a good time, but he knows what responsibility is in a marriage... He has his extravagances, like the Swedish spa and his disappearances after lunch. But I say it's better he go in that direction than another... (*The doorbell rings*) Who could that be? Isn't Borrás at the entrance gate?... Ah, yes! There comes your son-in-law, dear!

JUANITA

(*Annoyed*) Yes?... He clings to us like a leech, doesn't let us breathe... The pot chasing the kettle! (*Smiling and standing up*) Ah, Pedro Arturo, darling...

Scene 15

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Entering, smiling*) What, Mother? (*Kisses Juanita. To Carmen*) How are you, ma'am?

CARMEN

We've been waiting for you!

PEDRO ARTURO

I was held up a little. I'm so sorry!... Never miss an opportunity in business and ...

CARMEN

Yes, that makes sense. (*Affectionately, taking him by the arm*) Juanita told me superficially ... We need to help you, young man! Move heaven and earth! I love bright young people, ready to take on big challenges..., right, Juanita? (*Juanita takes Pedro Arturo's other arm and they begin to walk slowing along the stage.*) José Ignacio is a real angel, I'm sure he'll be interested...

PEDRO ARTURO

Magnificent!... I have some great ideas... I can assure him that with a solid investment ..., that's what I'm hoping for..., we will achieve something that will leave the most powerful magnates with their mouths open...

CARMEN

Wonderful!... We'll talk about it calmly... (*Pause. Neither Pedro Arturo, nor Juanita notice her scornful look. Pause.*) Oh, what Victoria is doing is unforgiveable! Tell me, my friend!...am I right or am I not right?... May she marry, may she marry! (*Pause. Sigh.*) Ah, life, life.

Scene 16

Somewhere on the stage, which should have an air of intimacy, are Graciélita, Alicia and Victoria. Alicia is sitting among pillows. Graciélita, seated almost at her feet, leafs through a newspaper. Victoria, seated with her back to a mirror, takes a hairnet off her head. At one side, a dress manikin.

VICTORIA

Why the rush? That's what I'd like to know. Why?

ALICIA

Because he wasn't decisive. Remember, I had to slow José Ignacio down. Three weeks after meeting me he wanted to get married.

GRACIELITA

He's a dud, Victoria.

ALICIA

I wouldn't be so hard on him. Some men have a lot of trouble making decisions. That doesn't mean they won't be wonderful husbands.

GRACIELITA

Quite honestly, I like him. He has something, I don't know what. Something. Different. He stands out.

ALICIA

(*Laughing*) You'd have to light a firecracker under him!

VICTORIA

That's what's so terrible?!

ALICIA

My dear, it's going to be two years...

GRACIELITA

(*Stops reading the newspaper. To Victoria*) May I fix your hair?

VICTORIA

(*To Graciélita*) Yes. (*The newspaper falls to the floor. Another tone*) And Mama pushes and pushes, Alicia. I wish you could hear her: "It's obvious that he can't make up his mind. I can imagine. His mother. I know her. A tyrant. Hard, selfish. He's terrified of her. You'll meet her soon enough! If he tells her about the wedding, you'll see. She'll explode. He's the only one who helps her, with his salary. His father, an inveterate anarchist who wants to dynamite humanity. A catastrophe. He's given him a lot of grief." And that irritates me, it drives me mad: "For heaven's

sake, Mama, it seems you just want to get me out of the house.” And then she says, playing the martyr: “No, my child. God knows how painful it is for me to separate from all of you. But I won’t rest until I see the three of you married. From that moment on, your father and I will be able to die whenever the Lord wants us.” (*Pause. Another tone*) Everything is so precipitous, so rushed. I should have gotten to know him better...

ALICIA

(*Smiling*) Know him better?...

GRACIELITA

(*Amused*) You’ll know him in bed!

VICTORIA

You never change!... The things you say!...

ALICIA

(*Laughing*) You’re such a prude! You’re wrong, Victoria! Graciélita tells the truth.

GRACIELITA

A spade, a spade... That’s where you get to know each other, where you know each other completely... And then, of course, dealing with each other day-to-day...

VICTORIA

(*Smiling, but bitter*) You’re just like Luisa!

GRACIELITA

(*Fast*) Don’t compare me!

ALICIA

(*Amused*) She says, it’s nasty, but she says it: “Hung like a horse, performing of course.”

(*Laughter from Graciélita*)

VICTORIA

(*To Alicia*) How can you listen to such vulgarity?'

ALICIA

(*Still laughing*) Always the little devil, Victoria. Remember at school, or when she would come here, the terrible things she did... (*Another tone*) Just yesterday José Ignacio and I ran into her... She and her husband were going to the ranch that Sánchez del Arco has in Alquízar...

VICTORIA

Who?

ALICIA

Sánchez del Arco. (*Victoria makes a face as though not knowing who it is.*) Yes, Victoria. Fernando Sánchez del Arco, the friend of Mama’s half brother..., remember? (*Negative gesture from Victoria. Declamatory, imitating Victoria*) The most handsome man in the world! (*Laughter*)

VICTORIA

Oh, Dionisio’s friend!... (*Sarcastic*) So he came back to life!

ALICIA

They say he came back to live here for good. (*Comic gesture*) He was tired of rotten, old Europe!

GRACIELITA

Who is this guy?... They talk about him on the society page...

VICTORIA

They do? (*Another tone*) He's a clown! (*To Alicia*) No further comment!

GRACIELITA

(*To Victoria*) Back to our chit-chat... I think Luisa distorts things a lot. It isn't all about its size or qualities. It's something much more subtle, more delicate... Of course, she's a beast and, from what I've seen, she needs a beast.

VICTORIA

That's stupid! (*Alicia changes her position and emits a groan.*) Does something hurt?

ALICIA

(*Pointing to the left side of her stomach*) When I make a quick movement, it flares up... Oh, my God!

GRACIELITA

It's that bad!

VICTORIA

(*Giving her another pillow*) Take it! You'll feel more comfortable!

ALICIA

Wait!...I feel sharp pains!... Oh!... And I'm sweating!... (*Tries to smile*) Thank you, Victoria.

GRACIELITA

You're going to need an operation.

ALICIA

Who knows! We'll have to see!

VICTORIA

Do you want a sedative?... Maybe Mama has one...

ALICIA

(*To Victoria*) No, no!...Look, I'm soaked!... I feel tired at times..., and sometimes I faint... The treatments are hell, Graciélita! The injections, the enemas... and those damned pills ...and those powders...

GRACIELITA

(*With repugnance*) Ayayayay! (*Another tone*) What's the diagnosis?...

ALICIA

(*Fast, covering up*) Diagnosis? Nothing! The doctors say it's a question of time and the person's nature...

VICTORIA

(*Shocked*) Will they have to operate, little sister?

ALICIA

(*Fast*) Come, come... Please, let's continue...

GRACIELITA

(*Continuing the coverup*) Ah! (*Nervous. To Victoria*) Hold still, girl. (*Energetic*) You've got a bug up your rear! (*Victoria stiffens, like a statue. Continues combing her hair*) Now don't

exaggerate. (*Another tone*) Let's not think of Luisa as an exception. There are many, an infinite number of women who think like that; almost the majority... "Hung like a horse, performing of course."

VICTORIA

A respectable woman would never...

GRACIELITA

Always the same! I'm respectable. I'm respectable. Luisa says what she thinks; she shouts it on every street corner. She doesn't give a damn "what people will say." She is what she is. Always was, always will be. A leopard that never changes its spots. "Luisa, the Titan," Mother says. (*Victoria starts to say something, then abruptly repents.*) Oh, my good friend, if I told you the stories I heard when I worked in the old section of Havana... The women... All of them, without exception, continually talked about it and exaggerated so much, Victoria, that I used to say to myself, "this is over the top." It was hard to take. From eight in the morning till five in the afternoon. It's this way, it's that way, it's better before, it's better after. I'd say to myself, "Have they lost their minds? Mercy, is this possible?" And they...they'd start all over..., the boyfriend, the husband, the lover... I was disgusted with all the bragging and embellishing. Then I realized that they were poor souls who invented things they didn't have. (*Pause*) Should you even talk about what you do in intimate situations? Do you add things?... Is it a grotesque joke or a childish reaffirmation? (*Finishes arranging Victoria's hair*) Do you like it? (*Victoria looks at herself in the mirror, smiles and nods.*) For example, I've never told you about my first love affair... (*Victoria jumps.*) Yes, Victoria, in Santa Clara, when your Aunt Antonia stayed with us... A real fiasco ..., and it was my fault... If Mama hadn't acted intelligently, they would have stoned us in that city... Antonia was one of the instigators. Finally, Mama decided we should move to Havana..., and minimize the scandal...

VICTORIA

Great God Almighty!... Gastón told me that, and I fought so not to believe it... You had a lover!

GRACIELITA

What's so strange about that?

ALICIA

(*To Graciélita*) She's a virgin! Joaquín can only touch her on their wedding day...

VICTORIA

(*Disgusted*) Oh, shut up, Alicia. (*Another tone*) So you think that honor is only appearance, a disguise!

GRACIELITA

Yes, I do.

VICTORIA

(*Aggressive*) You say that..., because you... I'm confused! Well, I don't agree! Really, Graciélita!

GRACIELITA

Tell me your reasons, dear.

VICTORIA

What Papa and Mama say, and Aunt Antonia, and at church and so many people, even Juanita...

GRACIELITA

(Interrupting) Are they respectable? *(Strong laughter)* I even include my mother. *(Another tone)* Tell me what you think you are, and I'll tell you what you're not. *(Brief pause)* People simply live, Victoria.

VICTORIA

(Anxious) What do you think, Alicia?

ALICIA

Leave me out of this.

GRACIELITA

She washes her hands of it.

VICTORIA

(To Alicia) You, as always, hiding things, dear one.

ALICIA

What am I hiding?... That's absurd! Hiding, what? Go on, tell me.

VICTORIA

Graciélita, you see how quickly she reacted. *(To Alicia)* Yes, my dear. You hide things.

ALICIA

Hide? What? Why?

VICTORIA

Don't deny it!

ALICIA

Please, Victoria, what do you mean?!

VICTORIA

(Shy) Remember..., when you were engaged to José Ignacio? *(Alicia nods.)* Well..., do you remember?... yes, one afternoon, it was pouring down rain..., you were going to the Opera ..., you were on the stairs..., Mama and Papa were waiting for you in the car..., and I stayed home... Remember?

ALICIA

(Not knowing, wary) No, I don't remember... You can kill me if you want, I swear..., I don't remember!

VICTORIA

(Triumphant, sing-song) Really, really! *(Another tone)* Don't lie to me! *(Alicia shakes her head)* Well, I saw you!... You and José Ignacio were kissing... You had left the door half open and I went to close it... Suddenly, in the mirror at the bottom of the stairs, I saw everything perfectly.. He was touching your hips, then further down, and you, too..., and he begged you..., and he opened your blouse, and he lifted up your skirt..., and then you didn't want to..., but he forced you... I saw it!... A little later, I went down to clean the stairs... I was trembling... I couldn't sleep that night!

ALICIA

Maybe... Imagine, remembering that!

GRACIELITA

(Amused) Prenuptial mischief, don't you think, Alicia?

ALICIA

(To Victoria) And you haven't done it?

VICTORIA

(Hesitating) No!... I've never dared! *(Pause)*

GRACIELITA

Oh, my friends, we lose sight of the forest and get lost in the trees!... That's what I think!... Only love, love... If only I could tell you..., pull out what I feel inside, deep inside, bit by bit ..., and turn it into words... Something so strange and magnificent, painful..., almost impossible, I'd say... Yes, because we can rarely say, "This is love..." Or maybe we can. Or at most, come close... *(Another tone)* Before I met Pedro Arturo, I must confess... I went back and forth..., not knowing exactly who I was, what I wanted... Oh, it's so hard to put into words!... It scares me!... As though you suddenly learn that to feel human you have to cross a burning road... *(Pause. Surprised at her words, she starts to laugh and gesture with her hands in an emotional, sympathetic way, delirious, ending up by muffled tears)* Oh, I'm being silly! Stupid! What am I talking about? A hopeless chatterbox...

VICTORIA

It was beautiful...

ALICIA

I was hearing music.

GRACIELITA

Forgive me, I'm a unforgiveable romantic...

VICTORIA

So... Pedro Arturo thinks the same way you do about everything, about everything?

GRACIELITA

(Fast) If he didn't, we wouldn't be together.

Pedro Arturo's voice is heard, very nearby.

PEDRO ARTURO

Graciелita, is the meeting over?

GRACIELITA

Listen to him. *(To Pedro Arturo)* We're coming. *(Alicia stands up slowly with the help of Graciелita.)* The important thing, my friend, do you love Joaquín?

VICTORIA

I think so.

GRACIELITA

Fight for him, Victoria! Fight for your love!

Alicia and Graciелita exit. Victoria is left alone and instinctively starts to undress. She looks at herself in the mirror. Pause. She takes a few steps and notices the newspaper. Avidly and fearfully, she picks it up. She looks

for something inside, looks at a photo and, without thinking, she wads it up, wanting to tear it to pieces, throws it on the cushions. Laughs. Starts to say something, but the words don't come to her lips. Looks toward the mirror.

CURTAIN

PART THREE

1906. Paulita and Borrás gradually decorate the stage with colored paper garlands, streamers, balloons and Chinese lanterns. Upstage right an improvised "shop" serves as a canteen. Midstage right, on a tall and lavish chest is a phonograph of the period. Near the phonograph Ricardo and Menéndez are seated, drinking. Stage right, more downstage, Carmen and Juanita are seated, also drinking. Every now and then Carmen keeps an eye on the work of the two servants. Placed here and there all over the stage are wrought iron chairs and small tables -- painted white, very much in the taste of the period -- and open Japanese parasols. A festive, party atmosphere.

CARMEN

(Standing up) Victoria and Joaquín aren't quite ready! I'll keep an eye out! Over there, over there, Borrás!

JUANITA

What?

CARMEN

You love to have people repeat things, like a parrot.

Juanita shrugs her shoulders and drinks. Carmen goes over to Paulita and Borrás, showing them how to do this and that.

RICARDO

Menéndez, we both know very well that Estrada Palma was a useless, incapable fool. Not to mention the subject of honor! He made total chaos of that insurrection . . . the Army . . ., and his own people. Who would ever reelect him with all the problems we have . . ., and he was the one who asked the Americans to come here . . .

MENÉNDEZ

(Uneasy, annoyed) Right! I agree!

Alicia and José Ignacio appear upstage, laughing, having a good time and humming a tune. Carmen returns to her place.

RICARDO

The Mambisa army in power . . . dreadful! They grind each other up and devour each other . . . They don't know, they have no idea of what a government is! All love, all generosity with their tongues hanging out! . . . Then at the moment of truth . . ., they tighten the noose around your neck.

José Ignacio moves in a comical way, doing some dance steps as he approaches the gramophone. Alicia imitates him.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Putting on a record, to Ricardo and Menéndez) Do you like it?

RICARDO

Of course!

MENÉNDEZ

The discovery of the century!

JUANITA

(*To Carmen*) My memory has its lapses, its holes . . .

CARMEN

That damned music!

RICARDO

(*To José Ignacio*) We were talking about the same old subject . . .

CARMEN

(*Referring to José Ignacio*) He's like a child with new shoes. (*Comical, dogmatic, proud*)
Straight from the United States. The last word! It probably cost him a fortune!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Easy there, old man, not so fast! Maybe the bullet will change its course! Come, Alicia. (*Alicia and José Ignacio dance.*)

CARMEN

As I was telling you, Victoria and Joaquín had a very intimate ceremony. We didn't invite you because you're always so busy. Victoria was radiant! We only invited Fernando Sánchez del Arco, who unfortunately had to make a sudden trip to New York.

JUANITA

Who?

CARMEN

Fernando Sánchez del Arco! Joaquín has started working with him on a very ambitious project . . . and I think, I think, I'm not sure, he may stop by here today.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Stops dancing, shouts*) Victoria, Joaquín. (*Goes to the canteen accompanied by Alicia*)

ALICIA

(*Shouting*) Come join us! Victoria! Graciélita, Pedro Arturo! Joaquín! (*José Ignacio pours himself a drink, which he downs in one gulp. Pours another. To José Ignacio*) You're going to cause a scene! Slow down a little!

JUANITA

(*To Carmen*) But, Carmen. Why didn't you tell me? I'm barely presentable.

CARMEN

You are family. Besides, I wanted to surprise you.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Shouting*) Victoria! Joaquín!

VICTORIA

(*Shouting from inside*) We'll be right there.

GRACIELITA

(*Shouting from inside*) In a minute, Alicia!

CARMEN

(*Indicating Alicia and José Ignacio*) Look at them. They're having such a good time, Juanita!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Shouting*) Victoria! Have a drink, come dance! We're going to have the best party ever!

JOAQUÍN

(*Shouting*) We're coming, buddy!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Putting a record on the phonograph*) Always arguing, life this, honor that! Don't solve the world's problems! Let's live! Another record, another tune! (*Staggers a little. Alicia protects him.*)

JUANITA

Such a nice young couple! Aren't they?

CARMEN

It's wonderful to see them like that! . . . Although she . . . , that horrid illness . . . , she gets thinner every day . . . , don't you think? . . . And her color!

ALICIA

(*To José Ignacio*) You're going to scratch the record! Be careful!

RICARDO

(*To Menéndez*) One story after another! (*Stands up*)

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Staggering*) I know what I'm doing!

ALICIA

Let it finish!

RICARDO

(*To Menéndez*) You tell me one thing yesterday and another today! It's enough to drive you mad . . . Mr. Taft is a thousand times better! Let's grab the moment! What do I care what José Ignacio says?

Borrás and Paulita finish decorating the stage and go directly to busy themselves in the canteen. Paulita washes some glasses. Serves small canapés on a tray. Borrás serves drinks in glasses on a tray.

Mr. Taft is a friend of President Roosevelt's. That is a guarantee! Let's make the most of it! They say it's a provisional government, that there will be a change within months . . . Let's do it! . . . It's my fortune on the line, Menéndez! . . . How about a drink? (*Borrás stands in front of him with a tray full of glasses. He offers a glass to Menéndez and takes another for himself.*) It seems you haven't yet heard. When Sánchez del Arco arrives, we'll see how much we can get out of him.

José Ignacio drops a record on the floor and it breaks. Borrás offers a drink to Carmen and Juanita. Paulita approaches them with a tray full of canapés, which she then puts down on a nearby table.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Shit! That had to happen!

ALICIA

I told you, dear!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

You and your advice!

ALICIA

(Picking up the pieces of broken record) Tomorrow we'll get another one!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(As though in a stupor) Another one! . . . Another one!

MENÉNDEZ

(To Ricardo) Relax, relax, relax. That's my motto. I repeat it with utmost clarity. I don't know anyone in that cabinet Mr. Taft put together at the last moment. We can speculate, but . . . Why the rush? No doubt they will receive us as they have before, and the result will be exactly the same.

JUANITA

Did the doctors finally agree on something?

CARMEN

(Sibylline) Trouble with red cells and white cells.

JUANITA

It's serious, then!

CARMEN

What can I tell you! . . . Have you seen Victoria?

JUANITA

Carmen, you're very nervous. We just came from her room a few minutes ago . . .; remember that Joaquín . . .

CARMEN

(Quickly) What do you think of him?

JUANITA

(Quickly) He's so charming, so amiable . . .

CARMEN

(Quickly) Do you think so?

JUANITA

Oh, yes!

CARMEN

Colors were made for tastes! I see him so . . . so I don't know what! I don't see much of anything in him! Something's missing. I would have preferred someone else, someone . . . It's her moment to choose, and choose well . . . She was determined to get married, and she grabbed the first one who made eyes at her and whispered a few sweet nothings . . . That's the truth of it! And a respectable woman! . . .

JUANITA

Carmen!

ALICIA

(To José Ignacio) Stop the drinking, sweetheart! Make a little effort!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*To Alicia*) Don't badger me, girl! (*Approaching Carmen and Juanita*) What were drinks made for? To drink! (*To Carmen*) One drinky more, one drinky less . . .

ALICIA

(*To Juanita*) It goes to his head and then . . . it's frightening! (*To José Ignacio*) You know that very well!

CARMEN

(*Smiling*) One day is one day . . .

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*To Juanita, referring to Alicia*) Bah! She makes a tragedy out of it! (*To Alicia*) Hyperbolic! Hyperbolic! (*Another tone*) Mother Carmen says, "One day is one day." Did you hear her? . . . The Olympic gods drank, why should I, a simple mortal, abstain? (*To Carmen*) Right, Mother Carmen?

CARMEN

Of course, son, of course!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Stumbles*) A great party! A great party! Victoria and Joaquín deserve it . . . (*Shouting*) Victoria! Joaquín! (*Another tone*) A party that will make history! Like when you and I, Alicia . . . when we went on our honeymoon to New York...., what a ball!

ALICIA

Yes, dear. (*To Carmen*) He ought to hold back a little...get some fresh air...Drinking doesn't agree with him, Mama.

CARMEN

(*To Alicia*) Go on, give him a hand... , and let him have a good time. . . What's the harm! . . . What do you think, Juanita?

ALICIA

(*Looks at how much José Ignacio is drinking*) He insists! (*Runs up behind him and takes him by the arm*) Oh, you're a stubborn mule! (*José Ignacio puts the glass to her lips and she drinks.*)

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Singing and dancing*) The crab moves to, the crab moves fro. (*Alicia imitates him.*)

JUANITA

(*To Carmen*) The party hasn't started yet. . . , and already he's three sheets to the wind.

CARMEN

His resistance is amazing, my friend! I've seen him drink ten bottles of rum in one night... and continue...

JUANITA

Unbelievable!

CARMEN

He's used to it, fool!

A car is heard that stops, then a doorbell and lively voices. Carmen is nervous. Juanita smooths her hair.

JUANITA

The guests are arriving.

CARMEN

Oh, dear God! . . . Alicia needs to control José Ignacio... Excuse me a moment. (*Stands up and goes toward Menéndez and Ricardo, who is preoccupied, drinking*) I think he's arrived.

Menéndez jumps up and rushes toward Juanita on tiptoe. José Ignacio drinks in the canteen. Then he dances with Alicia.

RICARDO

Who?

MENÉNDEZ

(*To Juanita*) May I?

CARMEN

Who do you think it is, Ricardo?

RICARDO

I haven't the slightest . . .

CARMEN

Fernando. Fernando Sánchez del Arco.

RICARDO

Oh, yes!

CARMEN

Don't drink so much. Later I'll have to put up with you all night long, and I forbid you to make a spectacle of yourself. (*Goes to Alicia and José Ignacio*) Ali, control him... Neat and clean, as your aunt used to say, may she rest in peace. I think he's here. . .

ALICIA

He is? (*Affirmative gesture from Carmen, who immediately gives discreet signals to Paulita and Borrás. They go to her side to receive precise orders. Carmen is in doubt.*)

MENÉNDEZ

(*To Juanita*) The sugar prices, especially..., two cents is laughable... nothing! . . . Then you'll have the workers making demands and the veterans shouting on every street corner... (*Laughing, drinking and grotesquely eating canapés.*) A barking dog doesn't bite! For now we'll stay afloat like a cork... Who's to say they won't take advantage any way they can! . . . This is a real jack-in-the-box, full of surprises.

JUANITA

(*Cutting him off*) For me, Menéndez, politics . . ., and business..., six of one, half a dozen of the other, as the saying goes.

MENÉNDEZ

Those things are in our blood.

JUANITA

Yes..., but when someone has suffered so.... And their family?

Alicia and José Ignacio continue dancing with great difficulty. José Ignacio staggers now and then; at times he almost collapses in Alicia's arms; she struggles to keep him upright.

RICARDO

(Alone, calculating his thoughts at every step he takes) I'll go back to Santa Clara, next week..., and I'll start raising hell with the town council. So the papers disappeared, well then, we have to look for them, we have to find them... And you'll tell me again that the land swallowed them up, Menéndez. To hell with that! I'll take care of it with Sánchez del Arco. He's the man!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(To Alicia) Leave me alone, woman! *(Shouting)* Paulita! Paulita, another drink!

Carmen motions to Paulita to serve José Ignacio. Paulita runs to the canteen. Carmen signals Borrás certain changes or a new arrangement of the chairs, tables and parasols that are on stage. José Ignacio changes the record. Juanita starts to laugh in a strange, exaggerated way. Menéndez eats and drinks like a gluttonous child and makes gestures, excited; choking and coughing noisily. Paulita brings José Ignacio the drink on a tray.

ALICIA

How many times do I have to say it, dear! Be careful! My medications, José Ignacio . . . Oh, my God, this man! A relapse is dangerous. . . Now that I feel . . . *(José Ignacio looks at her through his excess.)* . . ., so much better.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(His hand trembles, he takes the glass and spills the drink on his suit.) Thank you, Paulita.

ALICIA

You're a lost cause, sweetheart!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Dazed in his drinks. To Paulita.) Give me another one.

ALICIA

(Negative signal to Paulita. To José Ignacio) Come, let's put another record on.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Looking aggressively at Alicia) Stop it! *(To Paulita)* Give me another one.

Paulita serves him another drink. Alicia guides José Ignacio toward one of the small tables downstage. Paulita approaches the area where Carmen and Borrás are, then runs toward the canteen. Borrás moves some of the parasols. Paulita arranges some little tables near the canteen.

CARMEN

(To Paulita) Order. Everything neat and clean.

Upstage a group appears made up of Victoria, Luisa and Graciélita, followed by Joaquín, Adolfo and Pedro Arturo.

VICTORIA

Mommy, Mommy, look who's here.

Everyone talks at once. The group brings whistles and noise makers. They laugh, having a good time. The characters already onstage react in different ways. Carmen, surprised, takes a few steps, then suddenly stops. Alicia leaves José Ignacio's side and runs into Luisa's arms. José Ignacio

stays where he is, tipsy, indifferent, standing in front of the little table. Paulita and Borrás finish arranging things and stand behind the canteen counter; Borrás flicks an electric switch and the Chinese lanterns illuminate. Juanita, startled by the noise and the voices, gets up from her chair. Menéndez, mechanically, follows her lead.

MENÉNDEZ

(To Juanita, who doesn't hear him) After that big hurricane, I decided to come to Havana . . . , where I had friends.

LUISA

(Shouting) They were keeping it a secret! They were going to leave me out of the fun! *(Kissing Carmen)* Oh, beautiful lady! How are you? And dear, dear Ricardo?

Joaquín discretely separates from the group, accompanied by Victoria; they go to the canteen and ask for drinks, which Paulita and Borrás serve them, smiling. Graciélita, Luisa, Adolfo, Alicia and Pedro Arturo gather around Carmen, who sobs. José Ignacio staggers through his alcohol vapors, out of it. Ricardo, trembling, straightens his tie, ready to enter the scene, not understanding what's happening around him. Juanita goes to meet Luisa and they hug each other.

LUISA

It's been so long! Almost a century! You haven't changed a bit! . . . Ah, dear Ricardo! *(Kisses Ricardo)* For you, time stands still! . . . Adolfo! Adolfo! . . . Where did he go? *(Adolfo in the canteen asks for a drink, which Borrás serves him.)* Look at the records I've brought! Fantastic! They're sensational! *(To Alicia)* What a wonderful place, my dear! I would never have guessed! . . . *(To Carmen)* And you, you charmer! . . . From here, straight to heaven! . . . Or hell! You never know!

Joaquín puts his arm around Victoria's shoulder; irritated, she removes it without a word; and the two of them, with drinks in hand, come smiling toward the place where Luisa, Alicia, Juanita, Carmen and Ricardo are. At the same time, Graciélita and Pedro Arturo, having a good time telling jokes or rhythmically blowing their whistles and shaking their noise makers, go to the canteen. Joaquín lags behind marking his steps to the rhythm, midstage, near the gramophone. Pedro Arturo and Graciélita join Adolfo, who is happily drinking and observing the illuminated space. Ricardo joins them, greeting them.

You'll see, wonderful music! It's new! *(Alicia laughs.)* It truly is, my dear! *(To Victoria)* I knew that Fernando gave you the phonograph, and I wanted to bring you this gift . . . Music to dance by! . . . *(Gives her the package of records, which Victoria, smiling, accepts.)*

CARMEN

(To Juanita) That's some nerve! Who invited her? Nobody, I can assure you! *(Looking at Luisa)* So rude!

LUISA

(Fanning herself) How beautiful you look, Alicia! You've become what you promised as a child. And Victoria, an angel! . . . *(Victoria makes a gesture of contempt with her hand, goes toward the canteen, leaves her glass and gives the package of records to Adolfo, who doesn't know what to do with it.)* The same body as your sister's. *(Closes her fan. Victoria returns to the group of Carmen and Juanita.)* And I, as always, thinking the worst . . . *(Pompous laughter. Malicious.)* I have so many things to tell you about my personal life... Today I had the feeling that something was going to happen to me ...

JUANITA

(To Carmen) What we have in store for us!

With great finesse, Ricardo goes someplace to one side of Adolfo. Pedro Arturo and Graciélita join the general group.

LUISA

... something pleasant. I left the house, "Where shall I go? Where shall I go?" I was bored . . . By chance I ran into Fernando, who immediately told me that you, he excused himself, a prior engagement . . . I had to convince Adolfo, my dear . . . *(She whispers to the group, who begin to laugh, except Victoria and Carmen.)*

RICARDO

(Approaching some chairs) I'm glad to meet you. It's an honor.

ADOLFO

(Confused) Are you Victoria's father?

RICARDO

(Laughing, pleased) The very one! Yes, sir, I am!

LUISA

He gets in an ugly mood if we don't take a nap, you know. *(Malicious laugh. To Alicia)* I'll also tell you about my wedding..., when we're alone...

Pedro Arturo returns to the canteen. Joaquín puts another record on the gramophone. Graciélita and Victoria separate from the group. They sit down at a table near the downstage area. Menéndez goes to the canteen.

GRACIELITA

(Indicating José Ignacio) Look at the state he's in! *(Victoria shrugs her shoulders.)* Tell Joaquín to come over here.

VICTORIA

Joaquín can't stand them. Either one of them, Graciélita ... and to be frank with you ..., neither can I.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Shouting) Alicia!

Menéndez talks to Pedro Arturo. Juanita and Carmen, whispering, sit down on some chairs placed stage right.

ALICIA

(To Luisa) I have to go to him!

LUISA

Wait a minute! . . . He won't bite your head off... What happened to the records? My gift?

ALICIA

Adolfo has them. Look at him with Papa!

LUISA

Oh, that's right! (*Approaching her husband, smiling*) You're in good company, dear... (*Takes the records and goes toward the phonograph*) For the toast! Music!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Shouting*) Alicia! (*Alicia goes to her husband.*)

JUANITA

As long as I've known her, Carmen . . . she must have been six...

CARMEN

Incorregible!

MENÉNDEZ

(*To Pedro Arturo*) Very hot, isn't it?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Babbling*) What's going on here?

ALICIA

Luisa and her husband have arrived.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Surprised, in the stupor of alcohol*) What?

ALICIA

Yes, dear. Come, sit down here, rest ... and your wooziness will pass ...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Leaning on Alicia's shoulder*) What wooziness, what shit! (*Collapses in a chair. Alicia sits down beside him and puts a handkerchief over his face.*)

GRACIELITA

(*Referring to José Ignacio*) He's absolutely drunk!

VICTORIA

Nothing new! We'll see how he behaves today!

LUISA

A toast! A toast!

EVERYONE

(*Euphoric, shouting, except José Ignacio and Alicia*) A toast! A toast!

Music. The servants bring trays with champagne, which everyone except for Alicia and José Ignacio drink rapidly as they surround Victoria. Menéndez and Pedro Arturo bring Joaquín, almost dragging him. He sits beside his wife, first embarrassed, then smiles. Carmen and Juanita seem timid and disconcerted.

MENÉNDEZ

(*Smiling. Having a good time.*) Congratulations to you both!

Tears run down Carmen's face.

LUISA

To the newlyweds!

EVERYONE

The newlyweds! The newlyweds!

LUISA

The kiss! The kiss!

Victoria and Joaquín vacillate. Luisa and Pedro Arturo push them. They kiss timidly. José Ignacio tries to stand up. He cannot.

EVERYONE

Another! Another!

Paulita and Borrás throw rice and streamers on Joaquín and Victoria. Applause.

PEDRO ARTURO

To the newlyweds' happiness! To everyone's happiness!

EVERYONE

To happiness! To happiness! (*Whistles and noise makers*)

CARMEN

(*Sobbing, embracing Victoria*) My child, at last, your happiness! (*Embracing Joaquín*) My son!

LUISA

(*To Carmen*) No, no, Carmen! No tears! (*To Victoria*) It's thrilling, for God's sake! Thrilling! Remember, Victoria, and you, Graciélita, when we were children?

VICTORIA

Remember when we all went to the summer resort at "Tres Aguilas"? I was so afraid! . . . You walked ahead of us, very superior, like a queen . . . and that little fat boy who followed you, and Mama and Papa, behind us, shouting, it was mayhem!

LUISA

None of that! You're the queen! You look beautiful! That dress is a dream!

VICTORIA

(*Laughing and whispering to her*) Mama made it for me!

LUISA

Look at those curves . . . , look, like it was designed for Aphrodite . . . What do you think, Graciélita? (*Laughter*)

VICTORIA

Don't exaggerate! Isn't that right, Joaquín, that she's exaggerating?

LUISA

(*To Adolfo*) Stop looking at her, we'll have a good time in bed . . . (*Laughter*) . . . tonight, you and I . . . Restraint, Adolfe!

JOAQUÍN

(*To Victoria*) I agree with Luisa, dear, even though I shouldn't...

LUISA

Nonsense!

GRACIELITA

(*To Luisa*) You are unspeakable!

VICTORIA

The leopard's spots!

LUISA

Let's dance! Let's dance!

Luisa goes toward the phonograph and puts on another record. The group scatters. Juanita and Carmen approach Luisa. Menéndez and Pedro Arturo stand around a table near the canteen. Ricardo and Adolfo sit in the same place as before. Victoria, Joaquín and Graciélita occupy some chairs downstage. Paulita and Borrás offer them small canapés and drinks.

VICTORIA

(*To Paulita and Borrás*) Not for me....Thank you.

JOAQUÍN

Why not, sweetheart? (*Takes a glass*)

VICTORIA

You know, champagne...mixing it...(To Graciélita) You take it. (*Graciélita takes some canapés and a glass*)

MENÉNDEZ

(*To Pedro Arturo*) Don't be afraid, my young friend! If it happens the way they say it will, in a few months old man Maggoon will be here..., and little by little they'll start putting things in order. What needs to be eliminated will be eliminated. He'll make a clean slate. Clean of anarchists, Bolsheviks, free thinkers, who only undermine stability.

CARMEN

(*To Luisa*) How are your relatives from Santa Clara?

LUISA

I stopped seeing them, my dear Carmen, because they became bosom friends with the Montes, and you know how they hate me, and the horrible things they say about me. I'm sorry about it, because family is sacred..., but I say the same thing that Christ said, "He who is not with me is against me." Anyway, with money you can buy the soul...

CARMEN

(*Not knowing what to say*) That's true, child.

Luisa goes toward the canteen, and as neither Paulita nor Borrás is there, she serves herself. Carmen and Juanita sit downstage right.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

I don't want to, Alicia . . . Do you understand that?

ALICIA

My love, how is it my fault?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Get them out of here, tell them to go!

LUISA

(From the canteen) To the dance floor, everyone, come on, eat, drink and be merry!

JUANITA

(To Carmen) A scandal! A major scandal!

CARMEN

We have to calm them down!

GRACIELITA

(To Victoria) Are you going to leave her on her own?

VICTORIA

What should I do?

JOAQUÍN

Stay out of it.

RICARDO

(To Adolfo) The problem with the lands is that I haven't yet found the suitable person...you understand!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Get them out of here! All of them! *(Stands up and staggering, goes toward upstage, waving his arms, indicating for the guests to leave. Alicia breaks down in short-breathed tears. Victoria goes to her side. Alicia rejects her. Victoria, disappointed, returns to where Joaquín and Graciélita are.)* Out!

Paulita and Borrás, after serving the canapés and drinks to the guests, return to the canteen, looking aghast at José Ignacio. Luisa, near the phonograph, sees José Ignacio pass by and gives him a look of utter disdain. Instants later she approaches Juanita and Carmen. Menéndez and Pedro Arturo see José Ignacio and smile.

RICARDO

(Alarmed) What is this? *(Stands up with the intention of intercepting José Ignacio.)* Excuse me, Fernando.

ADOLFO

Fernando? Me?

RICARDO

Yes, you!

ADOLFO

You're mistaken.

RICARDO

What do you mean, I'm mistaken?

JOAQUÍN

(*To Victoria*) I warned you!

VICTORIA

She's my sister, dear.

ADOLFO

I'm Adolfo Valcárcel, Luisa's husband . . .

RICARDO

Oh, so sorry...(*Taking a few steps*) What am I doing? (*In a daze*) I'm losing my mind. (*Goes toward the canteen, asks for a drink. Borrás serves it to him, and he drinks.*)

CARMEN

(*To Juanita*) My dear, between husband and wife . . . (*To Luisa*) Jealousy, my dear! (*Adolfo, disconcerted, comes looking for Luisa*) Any detail, any trifling, and he blows up.

LUISA

Jealousy, my dear? Whose jealousy? (*Adolfo is at her side.*) My husband's? That's crazy! (*Affectionately*) Adolfe . . ., Adolfe. (*Another tone*) This man has no time to think about anything. (*Affectionately*) Isn't that so, my darling? (*Adolfo sits down. Carmen stands up intending to talk to Alicia.*) Alicia probably uses the same method I do...

ADOLFO

(*To Luisa*) Let's dance. These people are batty.

CARMEN

What did you say?

LUISA

(*Standing up*) The same method! (*Adolfo does the same.*)

CARMEN

What method?

LUISA

(*Laughing*) Mine!

*Alicia starts upstage. Carmen goes to her side and they enter darkness.
Luisa and Adolfo put their arms around each other and dance.*

VICTORIA

He makes me so angry! I made it clear to him from the beginning!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*In darkness*) Alicia! Alicia!

*Juanita falls into a state of absolute drowsiness, nodding off, snoring,
opening and closing her eyes.*

VICTORIA

It's really his fault. "Don't do anything," I told him...Look what happened. The people who were invited didn't come, and now this fiasco! Even worse, abusing his poor wife. Joaquín and I had something simpler in mind. Just the few of you, and that's all! At any rate, we'll be away for a year...

JOAQUÍN

Or less. With this sugar cane crop, we'll be back...

GRACIELITA

Look at Menéndez playing up to poor Pedro Arturo! Call him over, Joaquín!

Joaquín stands up, waves to Pedro Arturo, who is deep into the conversation and doesn't see him.

VICTORIA

We need a little money.

JOAQUÍN

Don't worry about it! (*Laughs*)

GRACIELITA

Look at that! (*Referring to Pedro Arturo*) He's so distracted, he doesn't see us! (*Another tone*) Fernando Sánchez del Arco seems very interested in your work. Take him up on it!

JOAQUÍN

Can you believe it? Crucial! A miracle like that comes once in a lifetime. Right, Victoria?

VICTORIA

What José Ignacio has done is..., is... (*To Joaquín*) Yes, dear.

GRACIELITA

(*To Victoria*) Still fretting over him! Let it alone!

JOAQUÍN

I can take him or leave him.

GRACIELITA

Mother can't stand him. What he did to Pedro is enough for us...

VICTORIA

He lives to flaunt.

JOAQUÍN

Come, let's dance! Let's dance!

VICTORIA

You know?

JOAQUÍN

Graciélita, let's get Pedro Arturo..., and do some fancy steps, come on!

VICTORIA

Oh, if Mama finds out! ... They say that music is for coloreds and mulattos... (*Joaquín shrugs his shoulders*) Slowly, Joaquín...

JOAQUÍN

(*Taking her by the waist*) For one week now, you're mine..., mine!

VICTORIA

(*To Graciélita*) Do you know how to dance to this?

GRACIELITA

You make it up, sweetie, come!

Victoria and Joaquín remain midstage. They take each other and dance. Graciélita approaches Pedro Arturo and Menéndez.

LUISA

(*To Victoria and Joaquín*) It was about time!

MENÉNDEZ

(*To Pedro Arturo*) Trust is the decisive factor on this earth . . .

ADOLFO

(*Dancing and shouting*) Sugar plum! Here we go! This is what I call pure pleasure!

PEDRO ARTURO

(*To Menéndez*) You're absolutely right!

MENÉNDEZ

Total trust. The Americans represent democracy. The moral values of the future. Freedom! ... Especially freedom...The future is open to us...

PEDRO ARTURO

(*To Menéndez*) With your permission...The conversation is very pleasant, but ... there's my better half . . .

MENÉNDEZ

(*Standing up. To Graciélita*) Excuse me... Congratulations, madam!

Graciélita smiles at Menéndez. Pedro Arturo puts his arms around her, kissing her on the lips. They dance very closely. A difference is established between Graciélita and Pedro Arturo's harmonious dance, Victoria and Joaquín's vacillating and out of rhythm stance, and Luisa and Adolfo's lustful and daring touch. Gesture of uneasiness and indecision by Menéndez. After a few moments of thinking about it, he crosses the stage and joins Ricardo, who drinks, alone and bitter, at one side of the canteen. Carmen returns to her place, with Juanita. Before sitting down, she sees Juanita snoring and makes a disapproving gesture, then observes the scene. An expression of anxiety, of undecipherable anguish, and also of impotence crosses her face.

GRACIELITA

(*Dancing*) When we're rich you'll have to buy me a place like this for our second honeymoon.

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Dancing*) Hum! Your ambitions are much too high...But, whatever the captain orders ...(*Graciélita hugs him and kisses him.*)

VICTORIA

(*Dancing. Caressing Joaquín's hair with obvious tenderness*) Did you hear that, Joaquín? They're talking about their second honeymoon. What do you think about that?

JOAQUÍN

(*Dancing*) The first one isn't over yet. You look like sweethearts, not a married couple.

GRACIELITA

(Dancing) We are!

PEDRO ARTURO

(Dancing) We're lovers!

JOAQUÍN

(Dancing) That's what I like!

PEDRO ARTURO

We married so people wouldn't bother us with their idiocies and complexes about honor... If Pedro this, if Graciélita that, if they'd go inside, if they'd come outside, if someone saw them... This one has a very independent character, and so do I. And we decided that if we get bored with each other, we'll go our separate ways, with each other's blessings...

ALICIA

(From upstage) Let go of me! Let go of me, José Ignacio!

LUISA

(Dancing. To Adolfo) To have to put up with a doddering ass like that! Alicia is cut from too fine a cloth for that mouth... She should have married a prince, and not that dreary excuse for a man...

ADOLFO

She must like him! It's nothing to you!

LUISA

(Coarsely) Hey, don't pump my juices!

ADOLFO

(Amused. Dancing) Now you're being crude!

LUISA

(Laughing. Dancing) Let it happen, overflow, as Mama says.

Loud noise of pounding on the walls.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(From upstage) Get out!

CARMEN

How rude! What's going on? How can this be happening? Is this what life's all about? Oh, I can't accept it! I try to make things right and I only complicate them.

The musical number ends. Graciélita and Pedro Arturo continue closely entwined. Victoria and Joaquín shake out their sweaty clothes, and Victoria fans herself at the same time.

JOAQUÍN

It's hot! Shall we continue?

LUISA

(To Victoria) I'll put another one on! (She does so. Adolfo goes to the canteen and asks for two drinks, which are immediately served by Borrás.)

VICTORIA

(To Joaquín) If you want to!

JOAQUÍN

So let's go!

Adolfo brings a drink to Luisa. Victoria and Joaquín dance again. Graciélita and Pedro Arturo move slowly and sensually.

LUISA

(*To Adolfo*) Thank you, sweet one. (*Adolfo gestures to dance*) Oh, no! In a bit. You're relentless, young man!

CARMEN

(*Alone*) And Graciélita can't contain herself in public! A spectacle!

Luisa collapses into a chair nearby Carmen's. Juanita sleeps. Adolfo approaches the phonograph with his drink and watches the couples dance.)

LUISA

You have to keep men on a tight leash! Whew, this drink sneaks into your blood! It's suffocating! (*To Carmen*) Though they may sometimes stray, and we have to suffer through it. You understand me, don't you, ma'am? (*Juanita wakes up and listens attentively and amused*) I prefer them like that! Because if they're not in your life, a tragedy! Look at the oldest of the Montes...Isabel...Poor thing! Crazy, my dear Carmen, crazy in a...how shall I say it?...a little...a little on the suggestive side...Oh, it's hot!...She says her virginity comes from Jesus Christ and that it gives her a divine mission to fulfill, which she doesn't explain... They've had to put her in a sanitarium two or three times, totally mad. It's because she's reached thirty with no one to look after her. Poor Jesus always has to be content with things that nobody wants... That's why my method...

CARMEN

Child, you...

LUISA

My method never fails.

CARMEN

Your method?

JUANITA

(*Laughing, to Carmen*) You're encouraging her!

LUISA

Adolfi, bring me a drink, sweetie!

Adolfo takes Luisa's glass and goes toward the canteen. Banging on the walls upstage is heard and shouting or crying from José Ignacio and Alicia. Carmen stands up. Ricardo comes downstage.

RICARDO

(*To Carmen*) Let them kill each other! (*Exalted. To Menéndez*) I know it by heart, Menéndez: that France now occupies both the intellectual and technical hegemony of Europe. But don't forget Germany, England, the United States...please!...watch out! Want it or not, those powers...look...I'm not joking!..., and the Americans, step by step, will start to consolidate...it's a long way off, of course. You and I won't see it...But my problem, what is called my problem,

is something else. I need my lands, what I've lost...*(Beating his chest)* That...*(Like a crazy man)* And I'll move heaven and earth if necessary... Save your stories!... I never want to see you again!

Ricardo, not knowing what to do, takes a few steps as though sleepwalking, vacillates, starts to cry in a corner of the stage and later, proud and stubborn, goes toward the canteen. Menéndez, laughing, sits down, continues drinking his drink and smoking his cigar. His laughter becomes uncontrollable after long pauses of stupor and silence. During this monologue, Paulita serves Adolfo two drinks. Graciélita and Pedro Arturo stop dancing and go to the canteen. Joaquín and Victoria do the same, making silly jokes and comments. Adolfo brings Luisa the drink, and Borrás takes lemonade and small pastries to Carmen and Juanita. Luisa drinks. Paulita serves the two couples. Adolfo is leaning against the large chest, drinking.

JUANITA

(To Luisa) I'd forgotten about that! *(Laughing)* Since time immemorial!

LUISA

(To Carmen) Every woman has her method..., and mine..., simple, very simple...

CARMEN

If you're going to start any gutter talk, you'd better keep quiet, Luisa. This isn't the time or the place!

LUISA

Oh, dear, dear Carmen, you're so old fashioned...! Suppose...

CARMEN

Don't tell me anything! *(Caught up by Juanita's laughter)* Don't come to me with methods! . . . Methods for what?

LUISA

(Looking all around. As Luisa tells her description, Carmen's face gradually reflects her unease, horror and disgust.) The first thing I do is, is . . . *(Whispers)* He still doesn't... *(Whispers)* Naked as the day we were born... Then I..., as if I don't want it, I have fun with ... *(Whispers. Another tone.)* It needs to be a goodly size to be at your best ... *(Juanita's laughter, in multiple tonalities, acts as a counterpoint to the scene.)* If not, it's oh so sad! Gently, very gently and very slowly... *(Another tone)* Listen, dear Carmen, then, like saying Amen, it responds, and fast..., and I position myself and grab it like a lioness and I don't let go...

CARMEN

(Indignant) Holy Mary, Mother of God! *(To Luisa)* You're a pig... *(Stands up, slaps her)*

JUANITA

(Still laughing) He who plays with fire! . . .

When they hear Carman scream, all the characters, except Adolfo, Juanita and Menéndez, look at the scene, upset.

VICTORIA

Mama, what are you doing?

CARMEN

(*Crossing to Victoria.*) She's a disgrace! No shame whatsoever! (*In Victoria's arms*) And that's what you call a respectable woman?

GASTÓN

(*Entering. Having a good time.*) Hey! Hey! This is a respectable house! But what is this? Why the sad faces? (*Pause. Luisa's sobs are heard.*) I don't understand! (*A strange tension builds among the characters.*) Someone tell me, please! (*Totally confused.*) Mother..., Father..., Victoria..., Joaquín... (*Shouting*) Alicia!...José Ignacio!

CARMEN

(*Furious*) Don't shout! They're coming! This is a respectable house, Gastón! . . . Even though you try to make light of it, to disapprove of us! You and many others! (*Indicates Luisa*) That woman is a fox, a degenerate! She came here wanting to degrade us!...To lead us into depravity! Damn you!

RICARDO

Carmen, control yourself.

CARMEN

(*Furious*) You have no idea!

RICARDO

What do you mean!

VICTORIA

Mama! Calm yourself, I beg of you! . . . She is a friend of Fernando Sánchez del Arco's..., remember that!

JOAQUÍN

(*To Carmen*) Can I help you?

CARMEN

(*To Joaquín. Furious.*) No, no, get away from me! (*To Victoria*) It's all right, child . . . But as for me, I no longer know her.

LUISA

(*Sobbing*) Gastón, you know they don't like me. . . Adolfi, I don't feel well... (*Showing signs of nausea, she gets up from the chair. Victoria heads toward her violently. Graciélita stops Victoria.*)

GRACIELITA

Let me!

PEDRO ARTURO

This is none of your business!

LUISA

Oh, I can't take any more, Adolfi! ... (*As she leaves, Victoria stops her.*)

VICTORIA

You have absolutely no scruples or consideration... You're one of a kind!... (*Luisa makes a gesture of vomiting and runs upstage. Adolfo follows her.*)

GASTÓN

Father, I wanted to ...

RICARDO

Is this the way to speak to your father! Carry on in your world, and leave us in ours...

CARMEN

Our world is collapsing...(The two exit.)

GASTÓN

But I came here to see you, Victoria. (Pause) Life isn't like this. (Pause. As in a dream or as if it were an oration) Every morning when I wake up and see the sunlight through the window, I say, "Thank you for being alive and for being simply... a man!"

VICTORIA

(Shouting, furious) That's enough! Enough! (Brief Pause) If you don't agree, leave! You think I'm an idiot and that I have no right to defend them... Papa, Mama, my God...The world...

JOAQUÍN

(Approaching) Victoria! Victoria!

VICTORIA

Don't touch me, leave me alone! I think I'm losing my mind! I don't understand! I don't understand!

JOAQUÍN

Victoria, sweetheart!

VICTORIA

(Sobbing in Joaquín's arms) Joaquín, Joaquín! Help me!...Help me! (Silence. Pause) Gastón...

GASTÓN

(Totally devastated) Nothing has happened... Nothing! (Pause. Perhaps a tear.) A toast!

Pedro Arturo, unconsciously, starts to beat out a rhythm on the seat of a stool.

GRACIELITA

(To Pedro Arturo) A circus, sweetie.

PEDRO ARTURO

The circus of respectability!

GASTÓN

Come over here, everybody, come.

JUANITA

(Waking up) Is the party over?

PEDRO ARTURO

It's just getting started!

JUANITA

Oh, good!

The rhythm of the music increases.

GASTÓN

Everyone to the dance floor.

PEDRO ARTURO

A big circle.

GRACIELITA

(Starting the song) Where is Ma Teodora?

PEDRO ARTURO

(Singing) Splitting firewood, that's where she is.

GRACIELITA

(Singing) With her shaft and her mandolin.

GASTÓN & PEDRO ARTURO

(Singing) Splitting firewood, that's where she is.

GRACIELITA

(Singing) Where is she? I don't see her?

CHORUS

(Singing) Splitting firewood, that's where she is.

The characters move and rhythmically drag Victoria and Joaquín into the group, uniting in a pleasant chorus. Luisa comes from upstage, and behind her, Adolfo; they argue.

LUISA

You blame me! You're a bastard! You abuse me! Everyone abuses me! Monster! *(Adolfo violently grabs Luisa by the shoulders. She struggles and beats him on the chest until she reaches a climax. Crying, she falls to the floor, and her sobs turn into long and loud laughter. Adolfo picks her up and caresses her.)* Don't touch me. You're despicable.

ADOLFO

Darling, why?

LUISA

You don't love me.

ADOLFO

Who told you that?

LUISA

Just for money, for comfort.

ADOLFO

Do you believe that?

LUISA

(Scratching at her blouse) Show me, then.

ADOLFO

(As in a delirium) I like you, I love you, I adore you, there's no one like you, no one! Just as you are, skinny, ugly, titless, buttless, a mere etcetera, a monster. You drive me crazy.

LUISA

Let me go. You're hurting me.

ADOLFO

(Almost coming) My life, my love..., my glory.

Luisa twists and turns and emits some rumblings of a beast in heat.

LUISA

Set me on fire, on fire...

The chorus sings Ma Teodora in crescendo in a circle. José Ignacio's and Alicia's shouting mix in a rage—only sentence fragments are heard—to the sound of breaking dishes and violent blows to the walls, creating an amazing, infernal atmosphere. Luisa, screaming, starts to run; Adolfo follows her. The two enter the chorus.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Not even my sister!

ALICIA

Please, my love.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Your family, not mine!

ALICIA

You're mad!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Don't tell me that, goddam it!

The chorus reaches a state of frenzy. Menéndez, laughing, seated, observes the scene. Victoria leaves the chorus, dazed, out of her head.

VICTORIA

Oh, my God! What is happening to me? What am I doing? Where am I? . . .

CURTAIN

PART FOUR

Scene 1

Center stage, Victoria and Joaquín appear in shadow. They are in bed. Joaquín's heavy breathing is heard.

JOAQUÍN

My darling....my love...ah, ah.

Abruptly moves away from Victoria's body. Pause. He gets up and sits on the side of the bed, almost with his back toward her. Tries to find a pack of cigarettes on the nightstand. His hands bump into a carton of matches, which falls to the floor. Finds the pack of cigarettes and takes one out. Picks up the matches and lights the cigarette. Pause.

VICTORIA

What...?

JOAQUÍN

Me? It's you.

VICTORIA

Me?

JOAQUÍN

Yes, you.

VICTORIA

I'm tired. *(Pause)* Are you upset with me?

JOAQUÍN

No, no. *(Pause)* It's always the same. The more I try...I feel you're like those soldiers who go to pieces anticipating danger, but when they come under fire, they're totally rational, observing every detail of the battle with amazing serenity, even when their flesh trembles with terror...

VICTORIA

Joaquín...

JOAQUÍN

Interrupting, calmly.

I know what I'm talking about, my dear. And so do you—better than anyone! *(Turns on the nightstand lamp. Victoria quickly covers herself with the sheets.)*

VICTORIA

(Recriminating) Joaquín! *(Pause. Another tone of voice)* Listen to me.

JOAQUÍN

What can you say to me?...I've tried every way I know how...At first I thought it might be modesty, inexperience, clumsiness on my part...that my sex didn't fit yours, or that my own pleasure kept you from... *(Puts on his shorts, which had been thrown on the floor near the bed)* ...that I might have overwhelmed you, or perhaps subjected or reduced you to something I wasn't aware of...Might have! Perhaps!...It's a mutual learning process, Victoria. We're not doing anything unheard of! All married couples...

Sometimes I feel a little afraid...

VICTORIA

Afraid of what? Of whom?

JOAQUÍN

Of myself...and...

VICTORIA

And what?

JOAQUÍN

I try to comply, to understand you...

VICTORIA

JOAQUÍN

(Quickly) Oh, my love...We've been together almost a year now, sharing this bed...and still, every time you start to undress, you tell me: "Please, Joaquín, leave the room for a moment!"

(Another tone) Is it that I can't see you naked? I don't have that right? Why are you hiding under the sheets? *(Tries to pull the sheets off of Victoria)* Why are you afraid? Why?

VICTORIA

(Terrorized) No! Don't do that! *(Joaquín stops. Another tone. Like Aunt Antonia's.)* There are things that a respectable woman can never tolerate.

JOAQUÍN

The same old story! Isn't it just an excuse?

VICTORIA

No, Joaquín! *(Ties the ends of the sheet in knots over her shoulders like a roman toga. Sounding like Aunt Antonia)* I've never felt comfortable with that kind of promiscuity, even with women.

(Another tone) I remember from the time I was very young, a child really, I'd never let my mother or my sister see me naked or in my underclothes ...It's a kind of instinct! They used to laugh at me and call me "the little nun" and then I'd lose my temper...and I wouldn't speak to them for weeks...*(Like Aunt Antonia)* So! The little nun! That's who I am! *(Another tone)* In high school, in the United States, you can't imagine what I went through ...I'd see those girls peel off their clothes...as though it were nothing...in front of me, like mechanical dolls, as if it were the most natural thing in the world ...and they had a good time doing it. New York was suffocating for me...Even in the *toilettes*...It was awful!

JOAQUÍN

It's different now, Victoria. Completely different.

VICTORIA

I can't accept that! Not then, not now, not ever. There are limits.

JOAQUÍN

What limits?

VICTORIA

Inconsideration, immodesty...For me it's obscene, ordinary!

JOAQUÍN

Our happiness?

VICTORIA

Is that what it is?

JOAQUÍN

Your body is my body, my body is your body. One inside the other, mirrors...

VICTORIA

(Like Aunt Antonia) That's a lie! You want to talk me into something that repulses me, that I despise. *(Pause. Another tone. Louder)* You'd like me to behave like a Teresa Trebijo... José Ignacio's sister! A common...! Is that what you're looking for? Well, you took the wrong path. I'll never, do you understand me? I'll never play that game. I'll never be degraded. I'm a respectable woman!

JOAQUÍN

(Grabbing her by the shoulders) Victoria! Victoria! I'm your husband!

VICTORIA

And that gives you the right?

JOAQUÍN

I love you, Victoria! *(In tears)* I love you. *(Pause)*

He releases her. Falls to his knees on the floor and starts to pound it.

VICTORIA

(In tears) Joaquín, I'm sorry...I'm sorry. *(Pause. Her sobs increase until they almost swallow her words.)* Forgive me . . . *(Walks around him in circles)* I don't know what I'm saying. I don't make sense. Neat and clean . . . I think I'm going mad. I'm respectable! I'm respectable! *(Throws herself on the bed, buries her head in the pillows and continues sobbing. Joaquín approaches her.)*

JOAQUÍN

It's alright, my little one! It's alright! Don't cry. *(Sits on the bed)* I've never wanted to hurt you. *(Another tone)* Ever since I met you...*(Like a confession, gentle, at times he stammers looking for the words)* Day and night, one lonely thought kept spinning over and over in my brain...that it was impossible, that being with you would be a dream, like reaching the moon . . . I was caught inside a whirlwind. *(Strokes her hair)* You, so high, up there! And me, so low, so low! You, the daughter of an important man...My father, a simple provincial postal clerk . . . And I, in the middle, unable to give you what you deserved. *(Long Pause)* Do you know what poverty is . . . what it means for a family of eight to live on a salary of seventy-five pesos a month, hiding it like a disgrace? *(Pause)* There's my mother still fighting with my father, bending over an ironing board . . . and we, like flies swirling around her, squealing, playing, indifferent, oblivious to what was going on. "This is demeaning. A Divine curse." "What do you want me to do, woman?" "Take them away. I don't want to see them. Leave me alone." *(Victoria has sat up. She takes his hands in hers. Pause)* But it doesn't matter. I swear that I can, that I will do whatever I have to do...You'll never regret my love . . . I'll climb so high, so high, that I'll hand you the moon.

Victoria stands on her knees on the bed, embraces Joaquín and kisses his face, his eyelids, his hair.

VICTORIA

Joaquín, I love you! I can't live without you. (*Joaquín allows himself be taken in by his wife's words and caresses.*) How do you want me to be? Tell me once and for all: lead me, guide me, teach me. (*Joaquín looks at her, moving his head in a gesture of doubt.*) Will you finally tell me what I must do for you to love me... completely?

JOAQUÍN

(*Vascilating, he smiles, very contentedly, perhaps a bit ironically*) Those things aren't taught, my darling, they're felt. They happen, they're inside you... That's the only way they mean something.

VICTORIA

(*Disappointed*) Oh, then...

JOAQUÍN

(*Caressing her waist and her shoulders*) It's a shame life doesn't offer you everything you dream of. (*Pause*) With this house, the size of a shoe box, and the love from you I wish for... no one could be happier than I...

VICTORIA

Good God! Do you doubt that I love you?

JOAQUÍN

(*In a low voice*) Yes, Victoria. (*Pause*) I doubt that you love me the way I love you. It's another way... like a brother... or something else. But I haven't been able to change the way I love you... You are the only woman I have ever loved... and you can't imagine how much it hurts me to think that I upset you, that I offend you, that you don't feel...

VICTORIA

Oh, no! No, my sweet! Offend me! Upset me! Why do you think such terrible things? (*Bursting into tears*) Oh, don't be hurt, Joaquín...

Joaquín embraces Victoria passionately. He lays her down on the bed, wipes her tears from her eyes, unties the ends of the sheets. Victoria reaches up and turns out the lamp. In the shadows we hear the intense murmur of unintelligible words and Joaquín's heavy breathing.

JOAQUÍN

(*Shouting*) It's no use! You're a block of marble!

Scene 2

A sunny morning. Paulita, on stage, straightens the furniture and prepares the breakfast cups. Graciélita enters, Victoria follows in a bathrobe. Outside, announcements are being shouted.

VICTORIA

When I heard that, I froze.

GRACIELITA

I can imagine.

VICTORIA

He was right! Back then, I didn't know how to respond the way I should have; all I could do was kiss him and tell him I had a headache, that some other time, that a woman...

GRACIELITA

Poor man!

VICTORIA

Are you going to have breakfast with me?

GRACIELITA

I've already eaten!

VICTORIA

Come, join me! It's so unpleasant to eat alone...I'm lucky at least to have Paulita here...She's a jewel!

PAULITA

Victoria child, save the sweet talk...it's too early for that!

VICTORIA

I mean it...what would I do here all alone and dejected? I'd crawl into bed, pull the sheets over my head and never see the light of day... *(To Graciélita)* You know it's terrible! Sometimes I'm tempted to lie there...as though I were dead...week after week...

PAULITA

Victoria, what a thing to say!

VICTORIA

(To Graciélita) Do you want toast and butter? *(Takes a piece of toast and covers it with butter)* It's a habit I picked up in the United States...Have some coffee! *(Pours a cup of coffee)*

GRACIELITA

I already had two cups before I came over...And my nerves get...*(Moves her hands)*... like this! Pedro Arturo tells me: You're wired! And it's true! *(Takes a piece of toast and covers it with butter and bites into it)* This is fattening, dearie!

VICTORIA

You're so vain!

PAULITA

Do you children want anything else?

VICTORIA

Are you leaving?

PAULITA

To clean up the kitchen.

GRACIELITA

Stay with us!

VICTORIA

She's always like that, she never stops....From the time she gets up till she goes to bed. *(Paulita smiles proudly)* A real fireball!...do the plants need watering....do the windows need... the dust...the cobwebs...nonstop! She does everything and thinks it's nothing...A husband would be in heaven with her! The ideal woman!

PAULITA

Victoria! I'm too old and decrepit to be thinking about that! Like Miz Carmen says!...Well, I'm going to disappear. Young ladies should have their girl-talk to themselves...

VICTORIA

You're making me beg you!

PAULITA

(*To Graciélita*) Would you like a soft-boiled egg? (*To Victoria*) Graciélita eats like a bird.

GRACIELITA

Paulita, you're spoiling me! (*Negative gesture. Laughter.*)

PAULITA

If you want anything, call me... (*Exits*)

GRACIELITA

What a delightful woman!

VICTORIA

Loyal to the death! So, about what we were saying, Joaquín refuses to understand that I...

GRACIELITA

That you, what?

VICTORIA

That I'm....

GRACIELITA

Like all women! The same problems! The same predicaments!...Our education, Victoria!

VICTORIA

That's not it!

GRACIELITA

Then, what is it?

VICTORIA

It's just that I...I...

GRACIELITA

What are you hiding?

VICTORIA

Hiding?

GRACIELITA

Yes! You reacted the same way your sister did a few years ago...You accused her of hiding something... (*Another tone*) You're hiding something, too. That story about the summer resort, for instance. I couldn't believe it when you started talking about it at your wedding reception! "Now, that's very strange," I said to myself. "Why now?" (*Gesture to Victoria*) I'll never judge you, Victoria! I'm simply making an observation! (*Another tone*) I know that story backwards and forwards. You told me as soon as you came back. Your panic! Your lack of control! Your fear! And it was no chubby adolescent boy chasing after Luisa...It was a mulatto you were attracted to...isn't that right? (*Another tone*) You're hiding something, Victoria!

VICTORIA

(*Fast, authentic*) I swear that what happened with Joaquín...I'm not hiding anything!

GRACIELITA

(*Fast*) What if I had hidden my romance with that boy from Santa Clara from you...my doubts, my self-consciousness, the agonies of the first experience...the pain and the pleasure...

VICTORIA

Not with Joaquín! (*Another tone*) With him, yes...There's more... much more...

GRACIELITA

Of course there's a whole lot more!

VICTORIA

(*Eerily*) I knew, and I wanted it! I wanted it! (*Another tone*) I hate to think about it!

GRACIELITA

Then don't!

VICTORIA

No! Now that we've opened the subject, it's better to tell you...

GRACIELITA

My dear, never force yourself to talk about something...Maybe another time!

VICTORIA

Graciélita, please...I need to tell you. (*Eerily*) He haunts me...He appears and he won't go away...He just stands there, relentless...Even in my dreams! And he changes and sometimes he fills my thoughts and excites me and I push him away and I think... I'm on the verge of madness...

GRACIELITA

Be patient, my friend. Why do you always think the worst?

VICTORIA

To have such illusions!

GRACIELITA

Try to keep disaster at arm's length... If you beckon, it will come!

VICTORIA

I try, dear friend, I try! But there are times when I can't and I'm a hunted animal...back and forth, back and forth, like this...oh!...drifting, worse than sleepwalking...and I see that naked body, gleaming, in the moonlight...(*Another tone*) I had seen him on the street like you see thousands of people...A face in the crowd!...I was indifferent...I swear! And the day we went to the resort—Mama, Papa, Alicia, Gastón, Luisa and I...a Sunday, I remember... Suddenly, like a bolt of lightning, my heart jumped when I saw him...and I got very nervous...and I said to myself, "Victoria....what are you doing? A mulatto, for God's sake. It's horrible... Victoria...be careful!" He was one of the servant men...he was 24 or 25...And I ran off with Luisa...and in little while, there he was right in front of us...and he looked at me and I shrank from his look...I was afraid and disgusted...a mulatto! How dare he!...and at the same time I felt flattered, strangely flattered...and I started to joke with Luisa: "That mulatto is looking at you." "Me?" "Look at him!"...and Luisa, nothing shy or backward about her, she waited until we were alone and asked him some stupid question, and he answered very properly, nothing else....and I was intrigued, full of curiosity...maybe it was my imagination! ...but I felt there was something

indefinable and disturbing... (*Pause. Another tone*) And as we were leaving...we ran into him...and we caused quite a commotion.. “The mulatto.” “Look at him, he likes you.” “Yes, he does.” “No, he doesn’t.” Kid stuff!...And that was when Mama and Papa intervened: “That dirty nigger! Half-breed! Rapist! Lynch him!” and then it was out of control, people started shouting...and I don’t think he even knew what..., it was our fault ...innocence!

GRACIELITA

Or perversity, Victoria!

VICTORIA

No, Graciélita! I almost...without even realizing...

GRACIELITA

You were attracted to him, my dear! (*Victoria smiles. Pause.*) That’s what you told me!

VICTORIA

It was pandemonium, bedlam! “Lynch him. Lynch him!”

GRACIELITA

The fall of Troy!

VICTORIA

I was perfectly calm...even though I was blubbing like a baby...Papa had been so indignant, so violent...I’d never seen him like that before...

GRACIELITA

Fathers are always....If it were my daughter or yours....what would we have done?

VICTORIA

They had no cause!...Graciélita, it was crazy...and the man disappeared through the crowd like a lynx...(*Another tone*) Two or three months went by...When you’re young, you think time is infinite. I had forgotten the incident! One afternoon I was taking a walk, in September, it was almost dusk...I remember it clearly...I was in the orchard, alone...and, suddenly, I heard a noise, there, at the edge, where they used to toss the garbage and broken glasses...and something moved...I was about to run and scream...and then I saw it was him...Him! There he was! He smiled at me and looked at me...and I was fascinated... “Is this real? Am I dreaming? Damned mulatto!...” And his eyes had a strange expression...hungry, gentle, passionate...And I knew, and I wanted it!...and he was repulsive to me, too, but I couldn’t move from that spot...(*Another tone*) Slowly, he started to undress...Oh, it was the first time! I was frozen with fear and curiosity, in a way...it was so bizarre!... and I heard him breathing hard, naked, and he didn’t touch me, or maybe he did, he fondled my breasts...and I felt him crush me...and yet...he was far away, about fifteen or twenty feet, leaning against a tree that I thought had no roots, suspended in air...and time passed and I heard voices calling me...and I couldn’t move, in the distance...couldn’t talk...I only had eyes for that body...I would have run away with him, killed for him!...Nothing mattered to me!...It lasted a few moments, a few hours, an eternity...

GRACIELITA

And did he...?

VICTORIA

(*Totally sincere*) No, nothing. (*Another tone*) When I returned to the house, I was reeling with fever... (*Another tone*) It was a few weeks before we left for the United States... (*Another tone*)

I never told anyone about it! Nobody ever knew! (*Another tone*) When I recovered, Mama had all the trunks and grips packed for the trip...we were in the garden ...Someone came to say goodbye and told us that the resort had been captured by the Mambisa troops and that among the dead they found a mulatto...And do you know what I did? I started singing, singing...singing...as though I were thanking the invisible, as though I were liberated from the weight of a curse, as though that man represented the image of my dishonesty....of my weakness...of my disgrace...I was free! Yes, free! A respectable woman!

GRACIELITA

(*Sarcastically*) Now that poor creature is responsible for what's happening to you with Joaquín...and Joaquín is responsible for that man's very existence!

VICTORIA

(*Indignant*) Do you think I'm that stupid? Really!...That has nothing to do with it, I know it doesn't! (*Another tone*) But it doesn't stop him from coming to me in dreams and tormenting me...Incredible, with a mulatto! It's ghastly!...He should have died!

Paulita is heard talking offstage.

GRACIELITA

How can you even think that!

VICTORIA

(*Wildly sobbing*) A respectable woman can't, she should erase it from... She can't, she can't!

GRACIELITA

(*Gently*) Victoria, Victoria...

PAULITA

Victoria!

GRACIELITA

Just a minute! (*Victoria quickly wipes her tears.*)

Paulita enters; she brings a small plate covered with a napkin.

PAULITA

May I? Is something wrong here?

VICTORIA

We were arguing!

PAULITA

Excuse me, children. (*To Victoria*) That woman from next door sent you this sweet potato dish. Said she made especially for you. I told her you were busy, that you had a visitor. She was most intrigued...I gave her a cold shoulder!

VICTORIA

You did the right thing. (*Paulita exits*)

GRACIELITA

Who, Victoria?

VICTORIA

Luisa...

GRACIELITA

Luisa!

VICTORIA

That's right. From one day to the next she bought that house and threw out the family who lived there..., and there she is, practically cloistered...She separated from her husband and she wants to befriend us any way she can ...I've kept my distance..., after the scandal at the party, remember?

GRACIELITA

You're telling me this, and I don't believe it!

VICTORIA

That's exactly what's happening.

GRACIELITA

That woman!..., but how could she, how?

VICTORIA

The only thing I can tell you for sure is that Fernando Sánchez del Arco comes to see her regularly.

GRACIELITA

What's he like? (*Brief pause*)

VICTORIA

(*Lost in thought, nervous*) What did you ask me?...

GRACIELITA

Him, have you seen him?

VICTORIA

He's not much...

GRACIELITA

(*Interrupting her*) His pictures in the society pages...

VICTORIA

(*Laughing*) Pictures are one thing and real life is another...

Voices of Luisa calling Paulita.

GRACIELITA

And she insists!

VICTORIA

Like a flea. (*Brief pause*)

GRACIELITA

(*Powdering her nose*) I should go, it's getting late, and even though Pedro Arturo knew I was coming to see you, I'd like arrive in time for us to have lunch together...

VICTORIA

Stay for a minute! I'm so alone! I don't see anyone!... It's a shambles in Mama's and Papa's house...Often I have to help them bathe, and they scold me and demand things as though I had signed a contract with them for having been born...They're old! ..., and lately Papa doesn't walk very well..., he forgets things, he leaves his keys all over the place...He keeps repeating the eternal story about his claims, the mill, and his lands..., which no longer exist.

GRACIELITA

What about Gastón?

VICTORIA

Vanished! As though the earth had swallowed him up... He thinks I want nothing to do with him!...

GRACIELITA

The last time you were together..., it's something to think about, Victoria!

VICTORIA

He has his ways, and I have mine...

GRACIELITA

And how's Alicia?

VICTORIA

(Interrupting her) You know, with that husband of her, it's better to keep a distance... Please stay! ... *(Another tone)* So what do you think about our conversation?

GRACIELITA

Uff!... What do I think?... About what happens to you with Joaquín? You're you, Victoria, one of a kind!... It's hard for someone else to make a true judgment! Does he disgust you? Do you feel uncomfortable..., in some way? Do you feel sorry for him?

VICTORIA

No, I don't.

GRACIELITA

Is there someone else?

VICTORIA

(Violently hitting the table. Sympathetic tone.) Graciélita, friend of mine!

GRACIELITA

Why are you alarmed? No one is exempt.

VICTORIA

I assure you! No!

GRACIELITA

Then it's a bad family trait!.. According to Alicia, something like that happens to her..., that she wants ... , not so much ..., that she had to learn, that she had to get accustomed ..., that her pleasure is seeing her husband take pleasure and knowing that she gives it to him... What I'm about to say to you is hard..., you're not normal, dear ones!

VICTORIA

(Not hearing her) Joaquín ought to give a little from his side...

GRACIELITA

Victoria, why do you blame your husband for something that's your problem? Keep that up, and you'll castrate him...

VICTORIA

That's ridiculous! *(Laughing)* Don't worry about that! He's a bull!

GRACIELITA

I mean mental castration!

VICTORIA

(Still laughing) Impossible! *(Pause. Another tone.)* I write him letter after letter...

GRACIELITA

You beleaguer him!.. With your feelings of remorse!

VICTORIA

(Slightly absent) Perhaps, it's the way I'm made... A doctor might... *(To Graciélita)* I know that for Alicia...

GRACIELITA

Nonsense! With Alicia it's something else. José Ignacio infected her. One of those diseases that public women carry, like a cross...

VICTORIA

How do you know?

GRACIELITA

Vox populi, Victoria

VICTORIA

(Surprised) Really?... Oh, oh... *(Another tone)* Mama says... Mama hides ... It's disgusting!

GRACIELITA

Ask Joaquín..., or Gastón, if you see him...

VICTORIA

Oh, Graciélita, we live our lives groping in the dark!

GRACIELITA

But we live, Victoria. That's what's important! Pick yourself up and move on. *(Pause)* Love!... *(Pause)*

VICTORIA

(Transported, lyrical) It's that love..., love..., is so wonderfully beautiful..., so sublime... like climbing a flight of stairs..., and if you are able to have some vague notion of it, it's like nothing on this earth, in heaven, or in any other place imaginable. It's being deep in meditation, in a kind of ecstasy, with eyes that don't exist, eyes of the soul..., and this is only possible in eternity...

GRACIELITA

My friend, that's a romance novel! *(Pause. Another tone.)* Why don't you seriously think of it as ... sacrifice and understanding, pain and joy...? Convince yourself that you're a poor creature with many qualities and flaws, and that so is your husband..., and that together you will create a harmony that can overcome each other's obstacles and deficiencies ..., the poverty of being live bodies on this earth... Why don't you start with your limitations?

PAULITA

(Offstage) Victoria, Victoria! *(Pause)*

Victoria expresses sudden fatigue and low spirits. Graciélita, not seeing the transformation of her friend, takes her purse and hat.

GRACIELITA

Paulita's calling you!

Scene 3

Paulita enters.

VICTORIA

Were you calling me?

PAULITA

That lady says that it's getting late, that she's waiting for you for your painting classes...

VICTORIA

(Far away) Is it getting late?...She's waiting for me?... *(She touches her body)* The keys!... Where are the keys?... Gracielita, did you see where I put them? *(Like a pursued wild animal, she comes and goes on the stage, around the table, the chairs, creating a tension that can reach a stage of being delusional.)* Paulita, where did I put them? ... *(Desperate)* Paulita, Gracielita!... The keys! The keys!

Scene 4

Upstage, Luisa finishes arranging the stage. An air of a pleasant, discreet room. There is a stylistic harmony that makes it charming. Among the furniture are: an iron bed, a mahogany side table with a beautiful curved iron candleholder, an easel with a canvas on its frame, an easy chair, a small table with a chess board and its pieces and a small, old-fashioned armless rocking chair. Luisa softly sings a popular song of the time.

LUISA

(Calling out) Fernandito!

FERNANDO

(Off) We're coming!

LUISA

It's ready!

FERNANDO

Right away...

Luisa makes a gesture of doubt, starts to exit midstage left, then decides to go right. Fernando enters, followed by Victoria.

FERNANDO

(Very theatrical) A respectable woman! ... We'll never agree about that! There's a lot to be said on that subject. But we'll have time to talk about it, slowly and calmly. *(Another tone)* You're so young, and perhaps I'm betraying your trust. You've been married now . . .

VICTORIA

A year and a half... *(She sits down)*

FERNANDO

Ah, now I understand your interest in being with your husband. Yet, I wouldn't recommend it just yet... The place is unhealthy!

VICTORIA

That's what he says. But the months go by, and I... (*Fernando contemplates her. Nervously.*)
We lived for a year at the mill, and now I don't understand...I never thought we would be apart!

FERNANDO

It's completely wild country out there. Draining the land takes time... It's difficult for a man;
worse for a woman...

VICTORIA

I wouldn't mind as long as I was at his side. It's a woman's duty to her husband.

FERNANDO

That's true, Victoria. The thing is that even transportation isn't a sure thing, and it's so bad...

VICTORIA

It feels like an eternity! (*He looks at her legs, she evades his gaze, crossing them coquettishly.*)

FERNANDO

I understand. It's logical. You know something?

VICTORIA

(*Surprised*) What did you say...?

FERNANDO

Did you ever happen to meet Dionisio García?

VICTORIA

Who? ... Dionisio García? ...Ah, no! (*Fast*) He was Mama's half brother. He died in Brazil.

FERNANDO

You look a lot like him.

VICTORIA

(*Pretending*) Did you know him?

FERNANDO

Sometimes we traveled together in Europe. London, Paris... He used to talk about all of you,
about how he would like to know you. He was always homesick for Cuba..., and he never came
back. Even though he was educated in Switzerland and Italy, he kept the best qualities of what
was Cuban..., his generosity, his intelligence, and curiosity of spirit..., a certain sophistication
...

VICTORIA

I've only seen photos of him. (*Embarrassing silence*) It was so long ago.

FERNANDO

He was a close friend of mine..., of my father's, too. (*Pause. He observes Victoria in a
meaningful way.*) When I met you, I wanted to tell you. (*Victoria shifts position in the chair.*)
You felt like family!

VICTORIA

That's understandable! (*Embarrassing silence*)

FERNANDO

Have you seen it?

VICTORIA

(Playing innocent) Seen what?

FERNANDO

The gift I brought you... *(He shows her a black velvet box.)*

VICTORIA

A gift? Impossible! I could never accept something from a man other than Joaquín!

FERNANDO

Are you sure?

VICTORIA

Absolutely sure!

FERNANDO

You don't even want to see it?

VICTORIA

No! *(Embarrassing silence)*

FERNANDO

It wasn't that, exactly, that I wanted to talk to you about.

VICTORIA

(In suspense, a sigh escapes her) Ah!

FERNANDO

It's something deeper.

VICTORIA

So now we're suddenly sharing confidences?

FERNANDO

See how you treat me?!

VICTORIA

I was just teasing.

FERNANDO

Well, it's not a game. Ever since you came to my office..., remember?, to bring me Joaquín's secret report..., he was your fiancé then..., he sent me..., I felt..., how do I tell you?... I'm embarrassed... I don't want to offend you...

VICTORIA

(Anxious. Flattered by the game.) Embarrassed? Offend me?

FERNANDO

(Observing her enigmatically) A thought that obsesses me..., very intimate.

VICTORIA

(In a joking tone, smiling, nervous, always playing a game.) Then let's forget it. It's better that way. And much more correct.

Inopportunately, shouts and noises, etc. of a political demonstration are heard: "Long live the liberals," "Long may they live," "Long live José"

Miguel Gómez,⁴² "Long may he live," "Long live the Republic," "Long may it live," and a chorus of people accompanied by trumpets and drums, singing, "We the liberals will carry the flame, ay, ay, ay, I'm not to blame all the same, ay, ay, ay, ay, it's just part of the game." The shouts and songs rapidly fade in the distance.

VICTORIA

(As though paying attention to the demonstration) Another demonstration!

FERNANDO

Yes, it's election time. It looks like the end of old man Magoon's term. The sooner the better! Let's hope we've learned from this experience..., and don't let the Americans stick their noses in our business again...

VICTORIA

We Cubans still...

FERNANDO

We have to learn to govern ourselves, Victoria.

VICTORIA

(Firmly, with a smile) To tell the truth, I don't understand politics! *(Brief pause)*

FERNANDO

(Pretending to be distracted. He moves toward the small table that has the chess set on it.) Strange figures, aren't they? The king, the queen..., the perfect union of heaven and earth..., sun and moon, gold and silver, sulfur and mercury... The kingdom of universal harmony. *(Victoria attentively observes the figures.)* The queen..., beautiful and enigmatic! *(Close to her)* All of a sudden I thought a goddess had entered, an ethereal creature... A creature where the human and the divine coincided in utter perfection. Like Cleopatra falling at the feet of Julius Caesar. Like Helen, bewitching Paris... Like Venus, rising from the spray of the sea... *(Victoria closes her eyes, sighs deeply)* A once in a lifetime apparition... There was music...

VICTORIA

(Laughs, moves her kerchief, superficially) Oh my, how you exaggerate. To think that I could provoke those sentiments! *(Fernando plays on the board)* I'm much thinner now, aren't I? *(Fernando brushes her hand. Victoria pulls away.)* Why are you doing this?

⁴² José Miguel Gómez (1858-1921; president of Cuba: 1909-1913). Born in Sancti Spíritus, Santa Clara, he took part in the Ten Years War (1868-78). In 1895 Gómez joined the War of Independence, making himself head of the Sancti Spíritus brigade. He quickly rose to the rank of major general, and spent most of the war in Santa Clara, where he became a political chief and a military leader. Went on to serve as governor of Santa Clara and became quite popular in Cuba. Participated in the Constitutional Convention which gave the new Republic its first official constitution. Won the 1908 election as candidate for the Liberal Party. In 1909 José Miguel Gómez became the second president of the Cuban Republic (after the 2nd U.S. military intervention). He inherited a country with a little more than two million inhabitants (70 per cent white), quite a prosperous economy, and a public debt of \$12 million left by Magoon's administration. A congenial, popular man, the president showed respect for democratic institutions, opposed direct U.S. intervention in national affairs and demonstrated, by becoming rich and allowing others to follow his example, how politics could become highly profitable. Affable and popular, he made some attempt to increase Cuba's material progress, but his administration was marred by an era of public corruption, for which he was nicknamed "The Shark." In 1920, after unsuccessfully running against Alfredo Zayas, he charged his opponents with fraud, failed to gain support, and went into exile in New York City, where he died the following year.

FERNANDO

I'm not doing anything! You drive me mad . . . Don't you know that?

VICTORIA

Please!

FERNANDO

Don't go!

VICTORIA

Leave me alone!

FERNANDO

Do I upset you? Understand me, Victoria!

VICTORIA

Let go of me, I said!

FERNANDO

I've sought you out as a friend. Believe me. It may seem inconceivable... I've sought you out as a necessity. (*Opens the box and shows it to her. Victoria becomes pale, immediately composes herself.*) Do you like it?

VICTORIA

I will never accept something like that.

FERNANDO

At least allow my heart to . . .

VICTORIA

Stop, Fernando. It's offensive, horrible. A respectable woman . . .

FERNANDO

A respectable woman!

VICTORIA

Yes, certain things are forbidden to a respectable woman; like this, for example... (*Indicates the box*), and..., and...

FERNANDO

Tell me...

VICTORIA

(*Firmly*) My aunt used to tell me: neat and clean, here...

FERNANDO

I don't understand.

VICTORIA

(*Smiling*) It's difficult to explain...: Sound mind, sound body, they say now...

FERNANDO

I'm still waiting!

VICTORIA

It was difficult enough to agree to come and see you.

FERNANDO

So a respectable woman...? (*Looks at her intently*) A respectable woman cannot do this, or that, or the other. A respectable woman ought to live enslaved by concepts that are so narrow ..., so decidedly harsh, that her existence is reduced to vegetate like a greenhouse plant. A respectable woman is consumed by the poverty of some imposed ideas that she adopts as an absolute of life... Agreed! And you, precisely you, shout that theory from the rooftops. You, who were raised in the United States, who have a different perspective! ... That's why you rejected me that day when I came to see you, when you were in the garden planting rose bushes... That's why a few weeks later, when I invited you to take a walk... remember it well, I can't forget it!, you explicitly refused..., in spite of my pleas, and in spite of the fact that Luisa was willing to go all the way to Marianao...

VICTORIA

The liberties you take ...

FERNANDO

What should I do?... Put yourself in my place!... I'm mad about you!... Should I withdraw? Abandon my dreams?... And so leave..., like a delinquent...

VICTORIA

I'm a married woman. I have my duties...

FERNANDO

Duties you detest, don't deny it.

VICTORIA

You harass me, you pursue me. You want me to lose my head, drag me to the brink, you want me to sink into the abyss.

FERNANDO

I want you to be who you are.

VICTORIA

You and your pat phrases.

FERNANDO

I swear ...

VICTORIA

Don't swear anything to me.

FERNANDO

If you take one step...

VICTORIA

Please ...

FERNANDO

I'm at your disposal. Do with me what you please. Whatever you want. Kill me.

VICTORIA

Oh, my God. You confuse me...

FERNANDO

A man like your husband is incapable..., he doesn't realize the jewel he has in his house.

VICTORIA

Don't speak to me of him! He must be enduring such hardships!

FERNANDO

I've given him every kind of security. He'll never be able to reproach me in the least... He is a hard working man, he knows his business... He will never have a problem with me!... Hasn't he told you that?... *(Pause. Softly)* Victoria... *(Pause)* I'd like to know what you're thinking, what ideas are bubbling inside that head of yours... Will I never be able to caress a strand of your hair? How, tell me, how will I be able to win your friendship..., your love..., yes, your love!..., which I need so much? Perhaps this isn't good enough..., you consider it childish, common...? Have you no heart? Where is your soul?... Oh, forgive me... I'm searching, inventing... I want a life that deserves to be lived..., the pleasure of feeling I'm human... I'm alone, defenseless... Night after night, surrounded by an unbearable emptiness ..., dreadful... If I were to die, now, here, what would you do?...

VICTORIA

(Trembling) A respectable woman...

FERNANDO

(Violent) Yes, now I understand. *(Moving away from her)* You cling to an idea like a curse. *(Pause)* How can someone devote herself to so many things learned by heart and reject what the body constantly cries out for?

VICTORIA

(Violent) Let's talk plainly, Fernando. I'm a woman who is very conscious of her duty and, because of that duty, is capable of giving up everything...

FERNANDO

The painting classes with Luisa?

VICTORIA

If you continue . . .

FERNANDO

(In front of the easel) You're doing well in technique..., and in color, undoubtedly, you know their subtleties, their shades..., that yellow and red...

VICTORIA

Oh, but you're stubborn...

FERNANDO

Are we doing something wrong?

VICTORIA

The real world and society make demands, and no one can avoid them...

FERNANDO

That's your opinion, and I respect it. I have another. In the name of those demands, those values, the most despicable acts are done every day. You yourself could be one of those victims. Don't

look at me. Not exactly... The sanctification of marriage is, for the most part, terribly corrupt. A pitiful parody of love! An imbecile harms a poor young girl full of illusions, and makes her form a sad, sad idea of life and of men..., or he corrupts her or drives her mad or absorbs her into the hateful labyrinths of castration!... Poor, poor women!... When I think about it my blood boils, and the best escape I find is taking refuge inside four walls and thinking pure nonsense... Oh, our conscience, our damnable conscience..., once we stop thinking about it, when we convince ourselves that it is a banal invention of custom, we will be free, that is, we will have the same stature as God... (*Sighs. Brief pause*) Sadly, it all remains trapped in the empty void..., litter.

VICTORIA

What will Luisa think?

FERNANDO

Again, with “what will they say”...

VICTORIA

I’m not accustomed . . .

FERNANDO

(*Laughing*) I laugh at that. It’s just a trick. What does Luisa or anyone care that you and I are together? The problem is yours...

VICTORIA

Let me go.

FERNANDO

Where do you want to go?

VICTORIA

Where I’ll never see you again.

FERNANDO

I’ll follow you wherever you go.

VICTORIA

And I’ll always escape.

FERNANDO

Am I such a monster?

VICTORIA

I hate you. I detest you.

FERNANDO

All right. But before we say good-bye, I want to ask you something...

VICTORIA

I don’t want to see you or hear you.

FERNANDO

Wouldn’t you like to know another man? Know him completely? Be his slave?... A slave to his desires. Be decadent, if necessary. The body is desire. One breathes that freedom, that madness, that happiness.

VICTORIA

Who do you take me for? (*Among sobs*) I beg of you!

FERNANDO

Calm yourself! Don't leave like this! It's not that terrible!

VICTORIA

This cannot be repeated.

FERNANDO

You let yourself be confused by other people's ideas. We live in a country of evil, of false scruples... Anywhere else, nobody pays attention to a man and a woman...

VICTORIA

I know that's how it should be. In the name of everything sacred, I beg of you...

FERNANDO

I know you can understand, Victoria..., put those prejudices behind you.

VICTORIA

(Sobbing) I try, Fernando... They're stronger than I am!...

FERNANDO

Trust me. We..., you and I, Victoria, will invent and build a different world. *(Victoria tries to escape. Fernando stops her with his body.)* We're above all that... You're such a child!... You think that because your husband works for me..., friendship and love, between us, would be totally absurd... *(Victoria wants to say something; she lowers her eyes without uttering a sound. He forces her to look at him.)* Isn't that right? *(Victoria nods.)* You are at my mercy... With a simple twist, I could take you. *(He moves away.)* And you see, I don't do it. *(Looks for the box)* I ask for nothing, I want nothing, listen well!... *(Opens the box)* Nothing!..., but what you want to give me... *(Places the necklace in front of her neck)*

VICTORIA

Fernando, for the love of God... *(Caresses the necklace)*

FERNANDO

Do you want to go? *(Victoria doesn't answer.)* Go. *(Victoria doesn't move. He puts the necklace around her neck.)*

VICTORIA

(Fascinated) It's beautiful! *(Another tone)* You take advantage of my weakness.

LUISA

(From inside) Fernandito... Are you alone?

Scene 5

Fernando rapidly moves away from Victoria. She runs toward another possible window. Luisa enters. She's wearing a conservative street dress.

LUISA

I'm sorry to interrupt...

FERNANDO

Are you going out?

LUISA

Yes, and I hope I can use your motor car. Is that inconvenient?

FERNANDO

Not at all. Take it!

LUISA

Thank you! (*Smiles and gives Fernando a meaningful look.*) I'll see you later, doll baby. (*Exits*)

Scene 6

Slowly, Victoria returns to the middle of the stage. Fernando takes her by the hands and begins to caress them with his lips. Then he embraces her and kisses her on the neck, on her breasts, and falls to his knees before her. Victoria smiles, entranced, looking at him. Gradually we hear the noises of the rattles, the shouts and songs of the political rally, which reaches a grand climax at the end of the scene.

FERNANDO

Mine? All mine. That mouth and those eyes and your body and your heart and your soul..., is it all mine? Answer me! (*Stands up*)

VICTORIA

Yes, yours! (*Fernando kisses her on the lips and takes her upstage, toward the bed.*) Oh, what if Luisa comes back...

FERNANDO

Don't be afraid. (*Violently undresses her*) She'll come back tonight and very late... Ah, every pore of your skin on my lips...

VICTORIA

(*Passionate, submissive*) Finish, for God's Sake, come! (*Her screams and groans of pleasure are mixed with the songs outside.*)

CURTAIN

PART FIVE

Scene 1

The stage has an atmosphere of intimacy. Juanita, Carmen and Paulita are on stage. Paulita knits a bed coverlet, with the help of Juanita.

Carmen embroiders a blouse. The clock rings six chimes. Light of dusk.

CARMEN

Life's little surprises, Lord!... Victoria has taken up with Luisa... She's never done that with anyone! She might as well move her bed over there. And I can't stand her! She's a pig!... I've told her, "I don't like it, don't go over there, child." *(Pause)* It goes in one ear and out the other. I'm old and I know.

PAULITA

She says her painting classes..., that she's improving.

CARMEN

Stories, Paulita!

PAULITA

That's what she says.

CARMEN

From saying to doing, wide spans ensuing. I have a good nose, Juanita. Time will tell.

JUANITA

Your suspicious nature, Carmen, can sometimes verge on madness. Let the girl alone. She will learn.

CARMEN

Crushes! You have to know how to develop a friendship ...

JUANITA

Last week she offered me a little painting of flowers when it's finished.

BORRÁS

(Off. Shouting) Miz Carmen! Miz Carmen!

CARMEN

What is it, Borrás?

BORRÁS

(Off) Missuh Ricardo...

CARMEN

Oh, it's too much!... Do I have to get up and leave this?!... You go see what it is, Paulita! ... No, stay here! Tell me, Borrás!

Scene 2

BORRÁS

(Entering) Excuse me, ladies. *(To Carmen)* Missuh Ricardo got up from his wheel chair... He don't want to take a bath or eat!... He opened the window... He says the sunlight is good for him and that, now, when the sun comes up, it's beautiful outside..., he says he's waiting for Patricio..., that today they're going to visit the whole colony..., that there is a slave revolt, and that his mother is playing the piano..., some music... that he hears it clear as day... All this gets to me, ma'am, deep inside! I'm getting old, too..., and my brain isn't what it used to be..., it's

very sad to see him like this... Ah!..., and that Menéndez is..., a..., excuse the word, ma'am..., that Menéndez is a bastard..., that he robbed him..., that the history of Santa Clara is sheep dip..., and that he has the proof, in some documents...

CARMEN

My God, Borrás...

BORRÁS

Yes, Miz Carmen... Yes..., and that he's going to kill him, and he took the shotgun, and I took it away from him and emptied the shells, just in case..., and he began to look for them, and I hid them..., but he keeps looking and looking... "Hard head," I say to him.

CARMEN

Be patient, Borrás! They are momentary spells!...

BORRÁS

(Interrupting her) I'm afraid, ma'am!... He's not himself ..., goes round and round..., and he grumbles because we got rid of the chickens and the geraniums..., and he says that I'm a conniving nigger... He's not well, ma'am!

CARMEN

Try to calm him down, Borrás... You know there are days when he wakes up with those obsessions...

BORRÁS

There's no way! ... I say yes to everything... And he looks at me with hate in his eyes!..., and he yells that all niggers should die...

CARMEN

Dear Borrás... You know him!... He's ill! That's the reality!... You know that he loves you...

BORRÁS

But, ma'am..., he's out of control... He spit on me!..., and he got the shotgun again to kill me... "You black cur," he said, and he started to cry like a baby and say things like Gastón is a bastard..., a bad son... Ma'am, I can't do it!

CARMEN

Will I have to go, dear God?

JUANITA

Wait a minute, Carmen..., perhaps you can ...

Carmen looks at Juanita in a recriminating way. Juanita shrugs her shoulders and continues her work.

PAULITA

I'll go, ma'am!

CARMEN

No! You tend to your chores!..., tomorrow morning we'll have to take him to Alicia's... Borrás, promise me to see that he calms down..., I beg of you...

BORRÁS

As you wish, ma'am... *(Exits. Pause)*

Scene 3

JUANITA

How is Alicia, Carmen, is there any news?

PAULITA

What she has is dangerous.

CARMEN

(To Paulita) Idle talk! Paulita, you!... What can a twenty-two year old child have that's dangerous and of any importance?

PAULITA

But they're going to operate.

CARMEN

(Irritated) What choice does she have! *(To Juanita)* It's annoying, isn't it?... *(Fast)* How is the business going for Graciélita and Pedro Arturo?

JUANITA

Taking off like wild fire!

PAULITA

Graciélita is smart as a whip.

CARMEN

I'm glad, because they deserve it. *(Another tone)* They say that Pedro Arturo is very intelligent. He doesn't seem so, does he?

JUANITA

A bank offered him a ten thousand peso-a-year job, and he turned it down.

CARMEN

More than Ricardo makes from the rents.

JUANITA

The land purchase in Jesús del Monte..., and now, it's doing well on resale as small lots.

CARMEN

Where did he get the money?

JUANITA

From the same bank, with the lots as guarantee. A perfect transaction!

CARMEN

(To Juanita) You know I'll never forgive José Ignacio for turning down Pedro Arturo's business deal. He lost a great associate! *(Another tone)* José Ignacio is very good..., but so tight with money..., and those quirks of his!

JUANITA

What he did to Teresa, his own sister, is enough for me. *(Lowering her voice)* Alicia has to bear that cross. *(Voices are heard from inside)* Listen! *(Carmen gestures. Another tone)* What if one of your friends were in need, whatever it may be! Carmen...

CARMEN

You see, in that I'm in total disagreement with you, Juanita. You're like a sister to me..., nevertheless, my dear one...

JUANITA

(*Fast*) That man ruined her life, Carmen!

CARMEN

Never! She's the one!... She's the guilty one! A true mad woman. She broke off with her brother, the only family she had, and caused a shocking scandal..., mothering two children with that scoundrel.

PAULITA

(*To Carmen*) The devil tempted her.

CARMEN

(*Heated up*) Listen to that! The devil! Nothing to do with devils!..., they're worse than street dogs in heat. The devil tempts us all; that's his job. (*To Juanita*) Did he tempt you when you were widowed? (*To Paulita*) And you, who are a saint?... The devil! The moment you feel tempted, you think about something else, you pray, you take a warm bath or a cold shower...

PAULITA

The absolute truth, ma'am!

CARMEN

Who forced her to get involved with that man? She did it of her own free will!

JUANITA

We were raised differently.

CARMEN

(*Interrupting*) That's not it, either... My daughters are of today!... Victoria is twenty-two... And I will bet my life and put my hands in the fire that both of them..., in respecting their duties..., and everything!..., behave impeccably... Let me touch wood!

Offstage, violent noises of furniture falling and banging on the walls are heard.

RICARDO

(*Shouting*) Here they are! That damned Borrás!

Anticipation from the characters on stage.

Scene 4

BORRÁS

(*Entering, frightened*) Miz Carmen, excuse me... He's coming!

Ricardo enters, seated in a wheel chair with a box on his lap overflowing with papers. He is terribly aged.

RICARDO

Damned nigger! You're the one who stole the land from me! Look at the papers!... The documents! Now I have my fortune back! (*Another tone*) I have to tell that rotten son of mine, Gastón..., that he has to help me..., yes..., that the land..., that he and I, with Patricio, are going to take possession of the colony and the mill..., and that the Mambisas can go to..., to..., hell!..., and that he should respect his mother, that he has to be an honorable man, whatever the cost...

CARMEN

Ricardo, listen, listen to me...

RICARDO

(With hatred) You old whore..., get away from me!... Oh!, where is my little boy? My only son!
(Sobbing) I love him!... Carmen, where is Carmen?... Alicia! Victoria! Victoria! *(Takes a fistful of papers, throws the box to the floor, and beating his legs with the papers and laughing, exits)*
Victoria, my fortune! At last, my fortune!

Scene 5

Carmen, desolate, cries. Juanita, Paulita and Borrás surround her.

JUANITA

Please, Carmen. Look at me!

CARMEN

Oh, Juanita... What have I done, my God?... Borrás, what evil..., what?... What am I guilty of?... I, who have sacrificed..., who have lived in harsh penitence, shut in..., for my family ..., for Ricardo and my three children! Tell me, Borrás!

BORRÁS

Ma'am...

CARMEN

Tell me, all of you!... Sweet Jesus! Tell me, Juanita!

From upstage a dry explosion is heard, then another.

Scene 6

The set should be the same as Scene 7 of Part Four. Fernando smokes slowly, as though performing a ceremony. Victoria wipes away some tears with a small handkerchief, sits on the arm of an easy chair.

FERNANDO

I suspect you must be very nervous. Your father's death and your sister's operation have been hard on you... I can't understand how José Ignacio could let things get that out of hand. If he was ill, he should have been cured before he married. Subjecting his wife to castration ...

VICTORIA

(Among sobs) I detest him. How I wish!...

FERNANDO

Your parents knew perfectly well...

VICTORIA

(Fast) She is a victim of her husband, of everyone, and she never realized it. *(Another tone)* Do you feel alright?

FERNANDO

Why?

VICTORIA

There's an air of absence about you!

FERNANDO

You're funny!

VICTORIA

Funny!... Silly man!...I think you're betraying me!...You're hiding something from me.

FERNANDO

No, Victoria

VICTORIA

I know it, I feel it.

FERNANDO

(Softly) Calm down.

VICTORIA

Go on, tell me.

FERNANDO

You're overexcited.

VICTORIA

Of course, you..., when it's time to hide something!...

FERNANDO

Say it again, keep saying it.

VICTORIA

(Laughing) You're as hard as nails...

FERNANDO

All those adjectives fit me: silly, hypocritical, hard..., what do you want to know?

VICTORIA

(Passionate) I want to know everything.

FERNANDO

What will you know that you don't already know?

VICTORIA

What have you done in the last two days?

FERNANDO

I played golf with the Menocals...

VICTORIA

Those young girls! Why were you with them? I hate them, I wish them ill!... Always taking advantage!... They're nothing but...! Did you sleep with one of them...? Tell me!

FERNANDO

Victoria...

VICTORIA

(Interrupting) Yes, Fernando... You'd play dead to see your own funeral!

FERNANDO

Another jealous scene!

VICTORIA

(Laughing) Jealous? Jealous? Me, jealous?... When? Not in your dreams, my dear!... *(Another tone)* Do you love me?

FERNANDO

Of course I do, my love.

VICTORIA

I called you on the telephone and you weren't there.

FERNANDO

I've been thinking about that.

VICTORIA

(Precipitous) Did something happen?

FERNANDO

Our relationship, Victoria.

VICTORIA

Ah! You see?...

FERNANDO

You've started to become careless and foolish.

VICTORIA

(Caressing his hair) Fernando..., love.

FERNANDO

(Softly) My dear one..., your indiscretions, your irritability...

VICTORIA

(Mocking) Another story!

FERNANDO

(Firm) You understand!

VICTORIA

You're very strange.

FERNANDO

Sometimes you talk like a person totally absorbed in a problem who wants to resolve it at all costs, without considering the difficulties.

VICTORIA

That I...? What did I do?

FERNANDO

Lately you've been lacking good judgment and tact...

VICTORIA

With you?

FERNANDO

(Obviously annoyed) With me? No!... With others.

VICTORIA

With others? What others?

FERNANDO

You're incapable of understanding..., of stopping to think, to reflect...

VICTORIA

Who are you talking about?

FERNANDO

About your husband, Victoria. About your family.

VICTORIA

(Puzzled) About my husband? You!... About my family? Oh my God! Ever since I met you it's only been you... Believe me!... I never imagined you could ever fault me...

FERNANDO

I'm thinking about you, about me..., and also..., about the others.

VICTORIA

(Passionate) Only you, Fernando. You are the only one I love and will always love... I swear to you, my love. You can boast that for the first time, my heart and my soul and my body are alive..., they live for you, they belong to you. I'm yours. You, always, you...

FERNANDO

(Softly, but firm) Don't say it again, please. We'll solve nothing with that.

VICTORIA

Fernando!

FERNANDO

It's true, my sweet. You, you, you. I've heard that a thousand times over. Remember the story of my first marriage. She was crazy about me, she loved me too much, she died for me..., and one fine day she left me to go off with that acrobat from a circus. From that moment on...

VICTORIA

(Interrupting with sobs) I'm nothing like that vile woman. You have taught me how to live, really live. You and I...we've invented and built a different world. *(Pause)* You're too cruel.

FERNANDO

(Very softly, although his voice denotes a certain annoyance) How am I cruel? By shining a little light on our relationship? *(Victoria looks at him out of control)* Neat and clean, yes. Especially here. *(Points to his head)* You've pounded that into me millions of times! The road we're on..., the scandal and the idle talk. *(Stands up and takes a few steps around Victoria)* You hardly ever take precautions. Week before last, Graciélita saw us in the motor car returning from our trip to Marianao. I thought what we did in the private room was very risky. You push me. You excite me. I lose control. *(Kind tone. soft)* I have begged you, on many occasions, not to call me on my office phone, that the secretaries..., from the clerk to the administrator, everyone...

VICTORIA

(Stops crying, with crazy laughter) I don't believe you! You're teasing me. You want to enrage me. Test me. *(Throws herself into Fernando's arms, passionately)* I love you. I adore you.

FERNANDO

(Tries to escape Victoria's embrace, he can't. Soft. Almost trembling) Understand me...

VICTORIA

(Not paying attention) My love... *(Kisses him tenderly)* The things you ask me to do, then you reproach me. *(Caressing his face)* Remember, you've begged me to act like a whore..., and other nights you'd rave on about nymphomaniacs..., about one you knew in Zurich..., and then..., the

two of you went to Sitges..., and how jealous you were when she'd go off with someone else ..., and on the train..., even with the waiters!... I could never!... Because you, you...! (*Kisses him hard*)

FERNANDO

(*Pushing her away delicately*) I'm talking seriously.

VICTORIA

You're needling me. And I don't care, you big brute. (*In a burst of passion, they fall onto the bed. Victoria, in a flurry of words, undresses him.*) You bought this house so we could meet. You rented it to Luisa to avoid suspicion. You've done one crazy thing after another. (*Embraces him, kisses him*) How can you throw it away now? You wanted me all yours, decadent, too! So, you'll see what I'm made of. If some little floozy makes doe eyes at you, she won't get past me! Neither will Joaquín, or my family... Nobody! I want a child with you. I want it!... We'll go far, far, far away. We're above all that. I'll get a divorce! Here or someplace else! You'll marry me! You'll do what I want, yes, in bed or wherever! You've erased my past! I'm here only because of you, for you! My God! (*Passionately*) You're mine. Forever and ever. (*Falls exhausted beside him. Long pause.*)

FERNANDO

(*Caressing her hair*) Satisfied? (*Pause. Victoria doesn't answer. Her hard breathing is heard.*) My darling, let's talk. (*Softly*) In a few days I have to take a trip... (*Victoria sits up, surprised*) Yes, my love...

VICTORIA

A trip? Where?

FERNANDO

I'm going back, Victoria. (*Victoria lowers her head, containing a sob*) I'm going back..., my darling... (*Victoria's face is covered with tears. He lifts her chin with his hands and makes her look at him.*) I hate seeing you cry. Talk. Reason. Listen.

VICTORIA

What is it that you want, Fernando? (*Among sobs*) You tell me!... I'm not going to force you to love me... You're with me out of kindness, or compassion. Do you think I'm so stupid that I haven't noticed?... Yes, stupid, or crazy! Oh, God, I'll never be able to live!... Without you will be torture! I deserve it! (*In a fit of anger, she pounds the pillows with closed fists. Another tone*) Oh, dear one, let me love you...

FERNANDO

Think about it, little one.

VICTORIA

(*Sobbing*) I've thought about it too much! Too much! I'm not what I used to be! I'm not who I am, I'm someone else!

FERNANDO

In the end, your husband...

VICTORIA

Don't even say his name! I'm yours! I'm yours!

FERNANDO

(Softly, convincing and seductive) All right, baby. I'll never contradict you on that. But the reality is inescapable. I live in a hotel, and if I take you to live with me, can you imagine what that means?... Besides, I confess that I couldn't face the scandal... If I find a house for you, however far away, that wouldn't avoid it, either, and, in the long run, it would make it worse. You know you would end relations with your family?... I won't assume that responsibility. I'm clear about this... A feeling of guilt would begin to undermine our love. And, anyway, you would almost always be alone... Include you in my business?... What role would you play?... A secretary?... Let alone in our social life... The only way, the sensible way... leave things as they are..., and await my return. During that time, perhaps we'll find a solution.

VICTORIA

(Sobbing) Yes, Fernando.

FERNANDO

(Same tone as before) The first thing you need to do is go with Luisa to see a midwife, someone she knows, to see if you're expecting.

VICTORIA

(Enraged) What do you mean? No! Never!

FERNANDO

(Smiles) It's necessary, Victoria.

VICTORIA

(Sobbing) Never, never, never!

FERNANDO

(Softly) No tragedies. Be reasonable. *(Victoria flops on the bed sobbing. Fernando shrugs his shoulders; his annoyance builds; he walks around the room once he's finished dressing, then stops in front of her, composed.)* You may want the scandal, I'm not prepared to allow it. Pure and simple!... I assure you that the moment people learn that the wife of my head employee is my lover, the comments and the snickers will be heard sky high. Victoria... It's not only you who is alone. So am I. Neither of us is free. And it's my right and my duty to demand of you what I'm demanding. Do you understand?... My reputation is at stake. *(Pause. Another tone)* It would be madness for me to make a fool of myself, my love.

VICTORIA

Oh my God, why don't I just die right now?

FERNANDO

Will you humor me?

VICTORIA

Leave me alone! Don't torture me! If I have to die, I'll die... Maybe I'm already dead... What more do you want? Go!

Fernando exits.

Scene 7

Luisa appears with an enigmatic smile. Pause. She slowly moves toward Victoria. The light dims.

LUISA

(Caressing Victoria) My poor friend! *(Pause. She leaves in the semi-darkness.)*

Scene 8

A far-off bell peals eleven times. The stage has an atmosphere of quiet intimacy. Graciélita, Juanita and Gastón have a conversation.

JUANITA

So you're going, son!

GASTÓN

You've heard! Yes, we're going!

JUANITA

Where to?

GRACIELITA

For how long?

GASTÓN

To France!... How long?... Hard to tell... As the situation dictates!... Perhaps..., forever!

JUANITA

You're not serious!... France!... Does Carmen know?

GASTÓN

Not yet...

JUANITA

Oh, Gastón..., you'll kill her...! After Ricardo's death, God rest his soul, it would be a mortal blow...

GASTÓN

What can I do, Juanita? Between her hardnosed position and my hardnosed position... She gets sick every time she sees Marie, and she's done the unimaginable to break us up. (*Convinced*) Juanita, it's better this way!

GRACIELITA

(*To Gastón*) What if Mother spoke to her...

JUANITA

We've talked about it any number of times, child... Carmen is hard... She's closed herself off in a shell and it's difficult for anyone to bring her out of it!

Scene 9

Pedro Arturo enters, dressed as a laborer.

PEDRO ARTURO

And you, gossiping away?... Marie is already helping me carry sacks of cement..., and sand and gravel in the garden...

JUANITA

(*Amused*) Good Lord, quite a young woman!

GRACIELITA

(*To Gastón*) Strong willed, dear!

GASTÓN

(*Laughing, to Graciélita*) You don't know her! In the least!

PEDRO ARTURO

Are you staying or just twiddling your thumbs?

GASTÓN

(To Pedro Arturo) I'm so happy you're adding on to your house! That shows your business is progressing...

PEDRO ARTURO

The three of us barely fit in it now..., imagine when the little ones appear... !

GRACIELITA

He's dying for a house full of screaming: "Poppa, Mamma"!

PEDRO ARTURO

(To Graciелita and Juanita) Only me?...

GASTÓN

The three of you! Right, Juanita?

JUANITA

(Pleased) That's right! *(Another tone)* Although I..., ever since my son died...

GRACIELITA

Mother! Mama!

JUANITA

It's the truth, child. Time doesn't erase his image; on the contrary, it grows and grows with every passing day... Every night I pray very softly, and I'd so like to know that he'll come to see me and that he'll sit down on the bed beside me, like he used to, an eternity ago..

PEDRO ARTURO

(Playful) Juanita..., so you don't love me...

JUANITA

You're such a pest! *(Leaves)* We've forgotten about Marie... Marie! Marie!...

Scene 10

GRACIELITA

(To Pedro Arturo) We continue making things right in this world, sweetie.

PEDRO ARTURO

(To Gastón. Funny.) Careful, eh? *(To Graciелita)* Careful. *(Another tone, still joking, to Gastón)* I know you used to like her, I know it, no one had to tell me. *(Exits)*

Scene 11

GRACIELITA

Always joking. *(Pause)* And what about you two?...

GASTÓN

We have a good time... Seven, together and five, married.

GRACIELITA

That long! Is it possible! That long, yes..., Gastón! Five years!

GASTÓN

It was when Victoria said she was definitively going to the mill with Joaquín ..., Marie and I decided... José Miguel's campaign was starting... "The shark dives deep, but splashes wide...",

Or maybe..., a little later, a few months... It's 1913... Count... (*Counting on his fingers*) Twelve, eleven, ten, nine and eight...

GRACIELITA

Yes, yes! (*Laughing*) Cubans find an evil twist to everything..., and it's the truth: "The shark dives deep, but splashes wide." Graft, with national i.d. cards, from top to bottom... Liberals in power spell disaster!

GASTÓN

(*Sarcastically*) Honorable people, very respectable, dear friend! They falsify documents as a daily routine. They're all generals and doctors... If you want to stay alive, you have to be part of the scheme... It's an unwritten law!... What's your pleasure?... A general?... Done... A doctor?... Just saying it is enough... Ah, yes!... Behind it all, there has to be a strong protector, a good don... Indispensible! The age of plunder, at gunpoint.

GRACIELITA

The country's loans squandered that way..., it's a shame!... (*Another tone*) Yes, time flies. We're getting old!... My wrinkles, my crows feet..., where are they? A mirror! I must look like an old hag..., and hard as it is, I've come to accept it. (*Gastón laughs; his laughter is pompous*) Five years!

GASTÓN

The riper the fruit, the sweeter the juice...

GRACIELITA

Incredible! (*Another tone*) Listen, no more flattery! (*Looks at herself in the mirror*) And how did she take your decision?

GASTÓN

Marie?... To resign from the army?

GRACIELITA

Giving up economic stability can cause big crises...

GASTÓN

Both of us had saved..., and had argued till we dropped.

GRACIELITA

The same with Pedro Arturo and me... Nothing happens in this house until we come to an agreement. (*Another tone*) Your father's death made things worse.

GASTÓN

It put things in their place! Before, I was Papa's son who..., yes, very troubled and politically unsure..., with no revolutionary background..., to the contrary! But, well... The Republic doesn't nourish dissent... Love, honor!...He's young!...He'll be a good citizen in the future... And they allowed me certain missteps! Now the situation has become clear. The colonel calls me into his office... "As an officer of the army, being married to a foreigner..., to be more explicit..., you need to get a divorce, within..., " etcetera, etcetera... The ultimatum was very nice: "Marry a society girl and keep the other one as a mistress." A rage came over me... And I was able to restrain myself!...Jump through the hoop! And he explained very nicely, very gently, that State policy brought with it a sexual policy and that I, as a member of the armed forces, with extraordinary possibilities..., that my career..., that this and that that... (*Laughing*) That guy is nuts! (*Another tone*) I know Mother pressured José Ignacio and he, with the help of Menéndez,

pressured others and others... For her it's an affront... But my happiness is that dreadful dancer, Graciélita. That's why we decided to leave...

GRACIELITA

With the right connections, you can...

GASTÓN

No, Graciélita!... It's the right thing to do. My wife would never be able to live down the stigma of being a dancer from the Alhambra. If I were a millionaire, I'd fight it. (*Another tone*) We'll go to her parents' house in the south of France, *le midi, madame*. We already have our tickets.

GRACIELITA

Gastón, you ought to think more about it... The way the scene in Europe is looking right now..., especially the relations between Germany and France..., and then there's the problem of the workers... It's difficult to find work there. Here you can get by... Talk to Joaquín..., or look, even to Pedro Arturo... Make it work, with no big problems... My friend, you're playing an aggressive hand... You don't know anyone, or... You're an immigrant!... Think about it, Gastón. (*Another tone*) Now, with the conservatives in power, things might improve...

GASTÓN

Simple soul, possessor of blind hope...

GRACIELITA

Yes, Gastón... They say that President Menocal is going to prosecute the embezzlers from "The Shark's" government.

GASTÓN

And he'll be just like "The Shark." Don't kid yourself! Liberals or conservatives, there's no difference... Graciélita, remember his campaign slogan: "Honor, peace, and justice"... A word to the wise. I'm tired of our existence depending on those games!

GRACIELITA

Do you think it will be different in France?

GASTÓN

It's a risk! (*Imperturbable*) It's been decided!

GRACIELITA

Talk to Carmen, please...

GASTÓN

I want to go in peace. Mother would stage the Battle of Saint-Quentin... (*Affectionately, winking at her*) Friend of mine, we've exhausted the subject...

GRACIELITA

Alicia doesn't know, either?

GASTÓN

No.

GRACIELITA

You're terrible!

GASTÓN

Alicia, poor thing, sees through José Ignacio's eyes. Why torment her unnecessarily?

GRACIELITA

That marriage is a disaster.

GASTÓN

Don't be so sure; she's happy. She wouldn't change her life for one of an empress...

GRACIELITA

Better that way! (*Another tone*) And José Ignacio is a first-class scumbag... If you only knew!... I've been too ashamed to talk about it with anyone. Pedro Arturo has asked me about it, too..., but I'm going to tell you: two months ago your brother-in-law took a young girl from this house...

GASTÓN

Praise the Lord!

GRACIELITA

She's the niece of one of the maids..., a fourteen-year-old girl...

GASTÓN

And what did any of you do?

GRACIELITA

Do?... What could we do? Nothing! If only she were the only one!... He has a perfectly organized system for recruiting them.

GASTÓN

He's bizarre!... And you should hear him pontificate about morality, about honor... Blah, blah, blah! He threw his own sister out of his house, a barbarian! His hypocrisy disgusts me more than his insolence...

GRACIELITA

Men, Gastón, are a mystery.

GASTÓN

Do you think I would do something like that to my wife or that Pedro Arturo would do it to you?

GRACIELITA

I reject that idea. It would be devastating... Life...

GASTÓN

(*Fast*) ... has to be lived! A risk! A step to adventure! To enter the door of dreams..., like in a novel, and make it reality. The impossible, possible. Like this trip, Graciélita. A bridge, a magnificent bridge, uniting skies and lands and seas...

GRACIELITA

(*Amused*) You're such a child!... What about Victoria?... Wait for her! (*Gastón shrugs his shoulders.*) The news I have is that she'll arrive next week. She wrote us asking us to find a house for her.

GASTÓN

We're leaving on Sunday for New York, where we'll have a brief stay..., and then Marseille. Postponing the trip would be complicated. (*Another tone*) Victoria, the queen of the respectable women...

GRACIELITA

I'm sure she's changed... After that crisis she went through!

GASTÓN

(*Fast*) Fernando's abortion, you mean... A rather ridiculous story. At home, nobody mentions the incident.

GRACIELITA

Those things are kept quiet, Gastón. (*Another tone*) She reconsidered well..., in the end, Joaquín is the man of her life... The little girl is adorable!... Have you seen her latest photo? A little beauty! (*Looks for an album, finds it*) You could eat her up! (*Shows him the photo*) The beautiful Adriana. She looks like Joaquín, don't you think?

GASTÓN

Victoria is..., is so...

GRACIELITA

(*Fast*) You judge her wrongly, dear. The three of you, each one with a different...

GASTÓN

(*Smiling*) You're fantastic!

Voices and laughter are heard offstage.

Scene 12

Offstage the voices and laughter become louder. On stage, absolute disorder: armoires, beds, floor lamps, book shelves, here and there, different furniture in piles, a large variety of drawers, flowerpots with tropical plants, a cage with a parrot, a large mirror resting on another pile of furniture, some chairs, a table and an icebox. It is Joaquín's new house. Victoria and Alicia enter. Victoria has gained weight. Alicia, emaciated and elegant, looks like a wax figure. Voices and laughter of José Ignacio, Joaquín and Pedro Arturo are still heard offstage.

VICTORIA

(*To Alicia*) Do you feel better?

ALICIA

(*Breathing with difficulty*) It's nothing. A dizzy spell. A hot flash... I'll be alright.

Scene 13

José Ignacio enters. His face suggests a mask.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*To Joaquín and Pedro Arturo, still offstage*) Here?

JOAQUÍN

(*From offstage*) Over there.

VICTORIA

(*To Alicia*) Did you have these spells before the operation?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*To Alicia*) Are you having them again?

ALICIA

(*To Victoria, ignoring José Ignacio's presence*) These are different...they started a few months ago! Oh, forgive me, Victoria! (*Quite agitated*) May I sit down?

Scene 14

Pedro Arturo and Joaquín enter. Joaquín has gained weight and his bald spot is obvious.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

This is huge!

VICTORIA

(*To Alicia*) You don't have to ask me that. (*Sits her down and follows suit*)

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Smiling*) It could be a palace!

JOAQUÍN

(*Cheerfully, to Pedro Arturo*) Come, the view of the sea from this side is extraordinary.

PEDRO ARTURO

(*To Joaquín*) I'm glad you like it. We think exactly alike....

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*To Victoria*) A great pity! It's from not having ovaries, you know? Very concrete...

Pedro Arturo and Joaquín exit.

She feels bad because she forgets to take the pills her doctor prescribed... What...? Where did they go? (*Exits*)

Scene 15

VICTORIA

Is it true that you don't take care of yourself?

ALICIA

Sometimes I forget. (*Voices and laughter of the men are heard*) What for? What for?...What for?... (*Excited, sobbing*) That's not the problem!

VICTORIA

(*Compassionate. Affectionate*) Oh, sweetie... Alicia!

ALICIA

It's time you knew about it.

VICTORIA

You must feel very bad. When I was talking to you before, you looked as though you didn't understand me...

ALICIA

I wanted to come anyway...because...I wanted to! (*Makes a gesture to continue talking and does not emit any sound.*)

VICTORIA

Tell me, my dear...

ALICIA

Some afternoons I hear voices...I see Gastón standing in front of me...why did he go without saying goodbye? *(Pause)* Why?

VICTORIA

The times we had at the mill...

ALICIA

Has he written to you?

VICTORIA

No!... We argued so much!

ALICIA

Does that justify it for you? *(Another tone)* Oh, please, hand me a damp towel, or a handkerchief . . . something cold . . . here on my temples ...I think I'm going to burst ... *(Victoria gets a handkerchief and dampens it, shaking a cologne bottle)* He used to call you "the queen"... How's Joaquín...? Is the marriage working?

VICTORIA

It's fine! The same! I allow him certain liberties...

ALICIA

Oh, Gastón! . . . *(Her pains increase)*

VICTORIA

"The queen of respectable women." *(Another tone)* My poor sister!

ALICIA

(Making an effort) An all-powerful and magnificent queen like a heavenly constellation . . . Andromeda . . . Steady and changing . . .

VICTORIA

Do you want to lie down for a while?

ALICIA

I'd rather talk to you!

VICTORIA

You're feverish! You're delirious!

ALICIA

Because of what I told you about Gastón? Who else can I talk to but you? . . . Certainly not Gastón! . . . And him? He'd put me in an asylum . . . Only you, my beautiful sister! . . . You're afraid! . . . I'll be fine . . . I swear they are not dreams. Sometimes he sits by the window and I throw a glass of water at him . . . which I always have nearby, to ward off the spirits . . . Or perhaps they are dreams. But no . . . he usually comes when I'm awake . . . Or maybe he never left, and he's still here with us, like an elusive form or a butterfly . . . *(Pause)* Now, Victoria, I

tend to dream while I'm awake, wide awake . . . I talk and I see, with my eyes open . . . the sunlight is beautiful! . . . and I'm asleep . . . (*Laughing*) Stupid!

VICTORIA

Who, Alicia?

ALICIA

I am . . . I am . . . , dearest sister! Oh, I've suffered so!

VICTORIA

(*Recriminating*) Only you . . . ?

ALICIA

Gastón, too...

VICTORIA

(*Vacillating, not understanding, softly*) And . . . why does he come and make your head spin?

ALICIA

(*A certain imperative tone*) We've been unfair, Victoria.

VICTORIA

You're not making sense.

ALICIA

It's not Gastón. It's you and me. I'm the one who spins around a problem. Me, Victoria! We've been unfair to Gastón . . . and we've been unfair to ourselves . . . Gastón is just a far off dream! But neither you nor I will find mercy. We'll drag that curse behind us. (*Another tone*) Oh, my dear, I've never been blind. Respectable women, the untouchables, we've made some wrong choices...and, if we're honest with ourselves, one chooses what one has to choose . . . Because what's wrong is inside us . . . Somewhere along the way, we misplaced the keys, we lost them . . . , we used to walk through a labyrinth of keys . . . and it was bound to happen! We wanted to project an image that wasn't who we were, out of principle, whatever that was . . . , and unfortunately we are hounded, tormented by fear and desire . . . Yes, fear! Yes, desire! Let's admit it for once, for all our sakes! (*Brief Pause. Sarcastically*) Ricardo and Carmen's daughters could not be contaminated! We were respectable women! (*Laughs*) Respectable women! (*Long bursts of laughter that become a desperate cry*) Stupidity or madness! Talk to me! Say something! Monsters of false pride! The two of us alone, totally alone!, respectable women, against the world. What a joke, my God! . . . (*In a rage*) Look at yourself in that mirror! Move me closer so I can see myself, too! (*The two sisters are in front of the mirror*) Dirty! Ugly! Manipulators! Castrated castrators! Respectable, rotten to the core! . . . And we're no different from what goes on around us . . . (*The men's voices and laughter*) Listen to them! . . . They're barbarians! . . . Selfish! . . . Vulgar! . . . And we're no better and no worse! Exactly the same!

VICTORIA

(*Frightened*) Alicia, you're hysterical.

ALICIA

(*In a rage*) Hysterical is not recognizing yourself for what you are! That's your problem! I loved my husband the way he was, and I still love him the way he is, knowing that his sin is also my sin, in its most miserable form, consumed by the same flame, by hatred and by love . . .

VICTORIA

(Sobbing) Alicia, you . . .

ALICIA

(In a rage) Yes, Victoria! (Grabs Victoria violently by the shoulders) Look at me! Recognize yourself! Study me! . . . I disgust you, don't I? . . . (Pushes Victoria who falls to the floor) Do you think you're any better than I am . . .? Do you think you're better than Teresa? (Pause) Look at this letter! (Tosses the letter which lands very near her)

The men's voices and laughter are heard very close by. Victoria, like a bird of prey, grabs up the letter and immediately hides it down the front of her dress. Alicia helps Victoria up.

Come outside with me. Let's get a little air...

They exit.

Scene 16

Pedro Arturo enters accompanied by Joaquín and José Ignacio.

PEDRO ARTURO

(To Joaquín) You see? You can put a small lamp near this window by the garden...It will give the room an air of intimacy. A birdcage here...Atmosphere is important. Satin curtains the color of wine. A painting..., let's see...a Romañach, for example...or a Menocal ...Something modern. Important painters...Or a seascape by Sorolla. Leave all that to me...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Mockingly, to Pedro Arturo) You're quite the expert. *(To Joaquín)* The man knows. *(Another tone)* How's the empty lot business?...

PEDRO ARTURO

That I'll never give up.

JOAQUÍN

(Opens the icebox door) How about a beer?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Just what we needed.

JOAQUÍN

(Takes several bottles out and puts them on the table) They're cold. *(Pedro Arturo brings some glasses, places them on the table and begins to open the bottles.)* We need something to nibble on.

PEDRO ARTURO

Don't bother.

JOSÉ IGNACIO takes a glass and a bottle.

JOAQUÍN

A few chunks of ham and cheese.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Pours half of the bottle into the glass) *Boccato di cardinali.* *(Toasts)* To Joaquín and Victoria's new house. Cheers.

JOAQUÍN

(Toasting) Cheers, partner.

PEDRO ARTURO

(Toasting) Cheers, buddy.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Toasting) And to Pedro Arturo's ventures.

General laughter.

PEDRO ARTURO

(To José Ignacio) What a little prick you are!

JOAQUÍN

Slippery as an eel.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

I'm serious.

JOAQUÍN

Right, right. To be sure you are.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

You're doing the right thing by selling them. The plots, I mean. But I pity whoever buys them. Today, there are almost more houses than people in Havana. (*Laughs. The others follow suit.*) It's not a game, gentlemen. It's absolute reality. That doesn't mean I agree. I believe in solid properties that turn into money when you want them to. No ventures or adventures. (*Joaquín walks upstage and exits, whistling and humming a melody.*) Look, I liked your proposition. I always knew it would make money. I didn't accept it because it was against my principles.

JOAQUÍN enters with a bowl. He brings a piece of ham and a piece of cheese.

No business deals and no official posts. That's how to live in peace.

JOAQUÍN

(*To José Ignacio*) Balls! Business deals...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

The big deal here is that piece of ham...

He takes a pack of cigarettes out of his attaché case, adjusts it in its amber holder, and lights it. Joaquín cuts the ham and Pedro Arturo helps him by cutting the cheese as he drinks his beer.

This is an orgy. (*To Pedro Arturo*) What did you get from dividing up Loma Verde? (*Takes a piece of ham and cheese*)

PEDRO ARTURO

Nothing out of the ordinary!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Eating*) Very tempting!

PEDRO ARTURO

In the business world, everything is opportunity...

JOAQUÍN

Sacrosanct word. (*To José Ignacio*) Eat as much as you want. Another beer?

Affirmative gesture from José Ignacio. Joaquín takes some more bottles out of the icebox.

PEDRO ARTURO

Havana is expanding thanks to us, really...But there's another reason: short-term national spending budgets; long-term revenue budgets. (*Joaquín serves a glass of wine. The glass overflows.*) And the millions keep rolling into the treasury...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*To Joaquín*) Give it to me. You're hopeless. (*Serves the beer like a ritual*)

JOAQUÍN

This one is for the saint!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Amused*) A little witchery to boot! (*To Pedro Arturo*) The press has its guns out.

PEDRO ARTURO

The newspapers blab because they have nothing else to write about and also because they're looking for a juicy story...Without private capital and competition...

JOAQUÍN

We agree on that!... What could I have done with my measly savings if it hadn't been for the help Fernando Sánchez del Arco gave me. I could never keep my head above water. And I've worked like a mule. On a salary, life is a rut, my friend. You live day to day, and poorly.

PEDRO ARTURO

(*To José Ignacio*) One must seize the moment, the strokes of luck, the gold fever, my friend...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

None of that seduces me. I'm a conservative, *par excellence*. And the number of shady deals I've had to employ in my lifetime...if I counted them your eyes would bulge right out of your heads! Difficult, difficult!

PEDRO ARTURO

The crisis may come..., for the time being, we'll enjoy ourselves. (*Drinks and eats*) The simpletons of every class think they own their share of the national treasury.

JOAQUÍN

(*Drinks and eats*) You speak with your hand on the Bible. (*Wipes his hands with a dirty rag. To Pedro Arturo and José Ignacio*) So, shall we smoke a little weed?

PEDRO ARTURO

Some weed! Do you have...?

JOAQUÍN

Yes!...One roll a year won't do any harm!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

I prefer *kif*! (*Takes a little box out of his jacket pocket and rolls a cigarette.*) Better and chiquer!...A friend of mine told me that at every elegant gathering in Paris, they never turn down a good smoke...

JOAQUÍN

(*Looking through some drawers*) Ah, France!...Paris, capital of the world!...And here we rot in this shitass country!...

In one of the drawers he finds a small case which he brings and places on the table, offering it to Pedro Arturo, who immediately begins to roll a joint. José Ignacio has finished rolling his. He puts out the cigarette he was smoking and puts this new one in his holder. Rolls another joint.

The women!...The refinement!...The food, the clothes, perfumes, manners! A style all its own!...I've never known a Frenchman who was vulgar! And that's saying something!

PEDRO ARTURO

And what about the British! My friend, their photos! Elegance personified! (*As he talks, he moves, portraying an image*) There they are, blond, neat, and their manner...that distinction, that air...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Seems they're now demanding compensation for damages to their properties during the war of 95..

PEDRO ARTURO

Who?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

The French and the English.

JOAQUÍN

Bah!...A hill of beans!...The embassies will handle it...Diplomats need to occupy themselves with something, so they'll resolve all that...(To Pedro Arturo, referring to the cigarette he is smoking) How do you like it?

PEDRO ARTURO

Good stuff!

JOAQUÍN

I brought it from the Orient...It grows wild there, everywhere...Fields and fields...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Referring to his cigarette) This is glorious! Want to try it?

JOAQUÍN

No, thank you...

PEDRO ARTURO

No mixes! Graciélita and I have had a few highs...But we've given it up for the time being..., with the pregnancy and all..., the doctor told her it could be delicate...

JOAQUÍN

Mine..., Victoria..., resisted at first, then she accepted it..., and indulges...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Alicia had the same misgivings..., until she tried it one day...Now, given her character, she doesn't care one way or the other...(To Pedro Arturo) I'm going to ask you a question. Answer me if you wish; if you think it too compromising, simply tell me no... Would you advise a friend to buy those lots?

PEDRO ARTURO

(To Joaquín) Look what he comes up with, yet again! (Laughing. To José Ignacio) Some yes and others no. And who knows!... We live in a country of strange goings on.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

In other countries..., to be more precise, in the United States...

JOAQUÍN

Please, don't make comparisons.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

I could assure you...

JOAQUÍN

Why must you pontificate...? With twenty days in New York, on your honeymoon, you know, you haven't the remotest idea of what was going on there...

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Upset*) Oh, no! No! Right!... But here, from the wild and wooly streetcars, the stench, the lack of hygiene in the streets..., to the hopefuls wanting some post in a ministry.

JOAQUÍN

From first-hand experience, I can give you a few pointers, José Ignacio.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

On what...? (*He eats*) It goes to your head fast on an empty stomach!

JOAQUÍN

I've worked for certain mills for quite a few years now. I mean, for sugar producing companies that in some way maintain, directly or indirectly, relations with foreign capital . . . and, as you know, I possess sufficient elements of judgment.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Cynical, to Pedro Arturo*) Another little speech!

PEDRO ARTURO

(*To José Ignacio*) Hit it! (*They toast. Droll.*) This beer is a gift of the gods.

JOAQUÍN

(*To José Ignacio*) You're not interested?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Oh, yes, of course I am! (*To Pedro Arturo, taking pieces of ham and cheese*) Delicious!

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Imitating him*) Phenomenal!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Go on, talk!

JOAQUÍN

You don't give a good goddamn.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*To Pedro Arturo*) He's very touchy!

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Droll*) Buddy, don't leaving me hanging . . .

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Eating*) This cheese this cheese!

JOAQUÍN

(*Smoking*) A few days ago I was saying to a friend . . . (*Drinks*) In the first place, they own everything: land and industry. We hand it over to them . . . with the understanding that they leave politics and public destiny to us; plainly speaking: fraud and an easy life.

PEDRO ARTURO

That theory, Captain . . .

JOAQUÍN

They—the manufactures—have no regard for us, Pedro Arturo. The same all over Latin America... (*Takes more bottles out of the icebox. Pedro Arturo and José Ignacio open them.*)

PEDRO ARTURO

Don't you think this theory of yours is a little over the top?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

We're all a little over the top! (*Cuts a slice of ham and eats it. To Pedro Arturo*) Have some...

PEDRO ARTURO

(*To Joaquín*) You paint it all so black...

JOAQUÍN

Think about it, my boy. Whew! This stuff . . . !

PEDRO ARTURO

We're the ones, Joaquín, we're the damned fools.

JOAQUÍN

You want to block out the sun with your finger!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*With a mocking tone*) Putting things in their place . . .

JOAQUÍN

We don't even have that right! If we snarl and show our teeth, they pressure us . . . and we put our tail between our legs. (*Laughter*)

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Not knowing what to say, laughing*) The allusion is enough for me!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

You're generalizing . . . And dramatizing!

JOAQUÍN

They kick us in the seat of the pants, and still . . .

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Mocking tone*) Hey, how could you think that?

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Mocking tone*) Deep down he's an anarchist . . . a true Bolshevik, Pedro Arturo.

JOAQUÍN

You're wrong! I won't repeat my father's life. With a knife between my teeth, I'll . . .

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Laughing*) For you, then...

JOAQUÍN

If you say so.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Laughing*) That way...

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Amused*) Come on, cut the pretensions.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Amused*) You've struck a deep chord. . .

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Amused*) Reality! Oh, *mama mía*, my head is spinning! This stuff, shit . . . strong!

JOAQUÍN

I won't be pushed around, chum! (*Another tone*) I hate politics. It's our ruination... and I think that the worst of our society goes into our politics. A beehive run by drones!

The fragmented conversation between Victoria and Alicia is heard.

Roll another one!

Pedro Arturo rolls another joint.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Laughing*) Don't get upset! (*Eats and drinks*)

Joaquín brings more bottles that he slowly opens.

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Laughing*) Feet on the ground, my friend!

JOSÉ IGNACIO cuts slices of ham and cheese, takes a couple and eats them.

JOAQUÍN

If things continue the way I think they will, we'll go from bad to worse! Always being threatened! Knee deep in disaster! It used to be Spain . . . now the Americans at our throats . . . Any problem we have . . . Cables come, cables go . . . and if they aren't pleased, very slowly . . . boom! the fleet deployed in our faces!

PEDRO ARTURO

Until we've had enough, Joaquín! And we'll fall into the hands of Germany, France, England . . ., or some other country . . . The same dog with a different collar! We were born whores, damn it! Bad whores! Or drones, as you say!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*With an obstreperous laugh*) And such fools! (*Drinks and prepares another joint. Pedro Arturo imitates him.*) Spineless bullies who live off the legend of their bravery that they themselves perpetuate; revolutionaries of '98, when the war ended, they didn't even know the revolution existed; liberating soldiers who never knew the smell of gun powder and out of the blue began collecting benefits that didn't belong to them.

Pedro Arturo smokes, goes to the icebox and brings back bottles that he starts to open in a dizzy daze.

They're the ones who yell the loudest! A beautiful collection of scoundrels! I know one of them, a traitor and a spy for the Spanish government, and now from his high position he doles out patriotic patents to his bosom buddies. Another one, no less exalted, came to see me at the end of the war and tried to swindle me with a story of relief assistance to the liberators. (*Drinks*) Great

beer, buddy! This is the way I like to drink it! He had a strange nickname . . . I'm sure you know him . . . What a bad memory I have! And he talked to me about honor and revolution. . .

PEDRO ARTURO

You're a turd, José Ignacio! (*Laughter*) Why hide it? A turd! (*Laughter*)

JOAQUÍN

Or the weed has gotten to him! (*Laughter*)

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Slightly inebriated*) Gentlemen, gentlemen, gen . . . tle . . . men . . . That's just part of the picture! There are others and others and others . . . *ad infinitum* . . . Things are never so simple! (*Another tone*) Look, Menéndez was a revolutionary, they said he was . . . He got a veteran's pension and, God help me, he killed himself. I told Ricardo, "Don't have illusions, old man." "Oh, my boy, you . . ." (*Another tone*) He stole what he could. The farm and its mangos! Whew, it's hot! My bones hurt! And he ended up hanging himself in that fleabag Two Worlds hotel. A lot of chest beating about honor and revolution; for that thousands of lives and acres were lost. I'm not saying they don't exist. They exist, yes, they exist!

Pedro Arturo, Joaquín double up with laughter as though seeing a clown in José Ignacio.

You hate me, damn it! You can't forgive me!

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Smiling and violent*) What are you talking about?

JOAQUÍN

(*Smiling and violent*) Easy now! It's a joke!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Violent*) None of you, not one, is worth it!

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Challenging*) And what about you, José Ignacio?

JOAQUÍN

(*Challenging*) What right do you have? What morality? (*Pause*)

JOSÉ IGNACIO

Yes! We're talking nonsense! (*Putting his arms on the shoulders of Pedro Arturo and Joaquín*) Let's be serious. This country has its values, too. We shouldn't be so extreme, so inflexible! There is a constant, Joaquín, yes, yes . . . fighting men, who could think, who can think . . . Who are we? Where are we going? Is this the right thing? Or should it be some other way? I was reading . . .

The men back away from José Ignacio, bursting with laughter.

PEDRO ARTURO

(*Amid the laughter, violent*) With that stupid face of yours!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(*Threatening. Feeling hemmed in*) But, you two . . .! What are you doing? Do you think I'm afraid of you? (*To Pedro Arturo*) You want to tear me to shreds! You miserable . . .!

Jumps toward him. Joaquín intervenes between the two men.

JOAQUÍN

(Violent) Back off, both of you! (To Pedro Arturo) You, leave the room! Let me handle it!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Violent, To Joaquín) You back off! Faggot!

Joaquín pounces on José Ignacio's throat

JOAQUÍN

Go to hell, asshole!

Joaquín and José Ignacio roll around, hitting each other, between the table and the chairs, until they fall on the piled up boxes.

Take it, shithead! You dirty son a dirty bitch!! Let go of me, I'm not Alicia!

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Totally vanquished) Christ, this guy!

PEDRO ARTURO

(Finally pulling them apart) Gentlemen, please, enough! Enough! It's a shame to see you...

JOAQUÍN

(On his feet. Brushing the dust off himself) You mocked my little speech . . . and now . . .

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Standing up) Don't screw with me! (Brushes off dust)

PEDRO ARTURO

(Mocking) The man's revitalized . . .

JOAQUÍN

(Mocking) I'd say he's devitalized . . .

José Ignacio plops down on the couch, takes out a handkerchief, wipes his brow and neck. Shakes his head. Breathes deeply. Joaquín and Pedro Arturo, still gasping for breath, are at opposite ends of the room. Pause.

JOSÉ IGNACIO

(Still a little breathless. Sarcastically) You wanted me to come here to give you advice about the house! Huge entrapment! (To Pedro Arturo) You've wanted this for a long time! (Pedro Arturo doesn't respond. Smiles.) Your business deal! Your party! (Gets up, goes toward the table, takes a slice of ham, eats it and takes a bottle of beer) I have my options in life . . . (Drinks) So . . . we're horribly drunk! (Opens a window. Light enters.) Look at that view! So blue, you could reach out and touch it with your hands!

Scene 17

Teresa Trebijo appears upstage. She is a beautiful woman. Dresses with great simplicity and through her movements she signals an air of aplomb and stability. Joaquín, Pedro Arturo and José Ignacio disappear in darkness. Teresa arranges flowers in a clay vase on one of the tables. Hums a song of the period.

Scene 18

Victoria enters. She is dressed in a fancy, luxurious dress in total contrast to Teresa's dress, and it looks ridiculous. A veil covers her face.

VICTORIA

(*Nervous*) Good afternoon...

TERESA

Oh, excuse me, ma'am. I should have met you in the hallway to make it easier for you. Come in. (*Victoria timidly takes a few steps and observes her with curiosity. With tact and subtlety*) Excuse the disorder. We've just moved in, ... and I've barely had time to find a place for everything. I'm totally disoriented..., and the children, instead of cooperating, make a bigger mess... I have two... One, ten, and another, eight. (*Lightly*) Look at this trail! (*Moves some chairs*) They play cowboys and Indians..., Mohicans! Sit down, please... Good Lord, my head is spinning...! (*Another tone*) First of all, thank you for the visit. Very kind of you. (*Victoria sits down.*) Would you like a sherry, a Marie Brizard?...

VICTORIA

Thank you. Nothing at the moment. (*Hesitant. Timid*) Excuse me, could you give me some water?...Those stairs!

TERESA

Right away. (*Goes upstage*) I was expecting you! You're not Alicia..., you're her sister ...Victoria. (*Returns. Observes her*) Yes, the same family air. Oh, the glass of water. (*Returns upstage*) I'm really in a state! Alicia wrote saying that given her illness..., it was impossible for her to come...

VICTORIA

(*Raising her voice*) Her condition is quite delicate.

TERESA

(*With the glass of water on a saucer*) Serious? (*Gives the glass of water to Victoria*)

VICTORIA

She tires easily...Some afternoons she gets out of bed... Walking around the room is an effort. (*Drinks*) A few days ago she had a relapse. (*Puts the glass on the table*)

TERESA

And...?

VICTORIA

Yes! The doctor tells us to expect the worse. (*Wipes some tears from under her eyes*) She had complications with her heart...

TERESA

Oh, I'm sorry...I imagine the imposition for you to come here . . And José Ignacio?

VICTORIA

Desperate! He's like a defenseless child. He never leaves her side...

TERESA

What a terrible thing to happen! (*Tenderly*) I'm sorry ...

VICTORIA

No! It was I who needed to come to see you!

TERESA

You?... Why?

VICTORIA

(Emphatic) I was so surprised to recognize you.

TERESA

Recognize me? You've seen me before?

VICTORIA

Your portrait had made an impression on me. In José Ignacio's house, one of the servants kept it ...

TERESA

Oh, yes! The way I look now, I'm probably unrecognizable... Besides, it's a portrait from my childhood, I mean, from my adolescence... Before I met Rogelio..., my lover... I can imagine how different I am! Look at my face..., and my hands... A mere shadow ... Are Octavio and Angelita still in the big house in Arroyo Naranjo?

VICTORIA

Yes, very frail! I only saw them once, eight years ago. We celebrated my wedding there...a gathering of friends and family...

TERESA

Eight years! The same as I! No, I exaggerate. I left home fourteen years ago. I was sixteen. *(Brief Pause. Victoria takes another sip of water.)* Now you surprise me. Why was it precisely you who needed to see me?

VICTORIA

(Superficial, nervous, smiling) Twists of fate!

TERESA

Fate?

VICTORIA

(Emphatic) Besides, people always talk about you at home.

TERESA

(Softly. With subtle contempt) Not very nice things! Do I inspire distrust in you?

VICTORIA

Oh, no!... The moment I entered this room, I thought about you, thought I knew you..., now, seeing you..., I have the terrible feeling that I was wrong..., and I'm not sure how exactly I imagined you...

TERESA

You're a little novelesque.

VICTORIA

Novelesque? Why?

TERESA

You create stories... You must have been influenced by the image José Ignacio gave of me...

VICTORIA

(Emphatic. Fast. Pointing to some photos that are on a shelf) Excuse my indiscretion, is that your husband?..., and those youngsters, are they your children? Where are they?

TERESA

(Stands up and takes the photos) Yes! The photographs have deteriorated with the humidity ... We've moved so many times!... One day here, another day there. Sometimes they've been stored for months in basements or attics, piled up in those chests... *(Approaches her and gives her the photos)* The boys, in a private school in the afternoons...public schools aren't sufficient. They have to be prepared for life. *(Brief Pause. Another tone)* You knew that we have separated?

VICTORIA

Yes, I knew it... *(Teresa sits down at the sewing machine.)*

TERESA

A wonderful love story!

VICTORIA

Wonderful?

TERESA

Yes, wonderful.

VICTORIA

You say it in such a way! It doesn't make you sad!

TERESA

What do you mean? Make me sad? *(Brief Pause. In a joking, mocking way)* Yes and no.

VICTORIA

To say that I understand you would be a lie!

TERESA

He's been the only man in my life. And I love him! I love him deeply! I met him when I was fifteen... A friend of José Ignacio's... A friend of forays, of good times..., and they worked together.

VICTORIA

(Fascinated) Ah!

TERESA

I'd rather forget!...I'd rather forget, Victoria! *(Stands up. Moves toward a basket and opens it)* For the time being, I get by taking in laundry and sewing. *(Takes out a bottle and two glasses; closes the basket and returns to Victoria.)*

VICTORIA

If you consider it so disagreeable, so intimate . . .

TERESA

Disagreeable, no! Intimate, yes! I would have preferred to talk about it with Alicia, alone...

VICTORIA

I'm sorry, I, only ...

TERESA

(Putting the bottle and the glasses on the table) It doesn't matter much, Victoria... Shall I serve you? *(Victoria nods. She pours.)* At fifteen ..., one knows and wants ... Do you understand? The body is desire... That's how it is, concretely! *(Brief Pause. They raise their glasses.)* A toast? *(They clink glasses. They drink. Pause.)* When my parents died and left a good deal of money..., I became a ward of my brother who immediately took me out of school and subjected me to his every whim. No one could get near me ..., not girlfriends, not classmates, not even the servants... He would follow me..., insult me for any stupid thing. The house was the kingdom of the keys..., and he controlled them. He inventoried my armoires, my bureaux...; he decided whether my hair should be long or short, how my nails should look, what shoes I would wear, what dress. I got to the point of feeling so suffocated..., that I had terrible dreams..., and always, always, always, the idea of killing him would appear in them. *(Pause)* Rogelio was already around the house... He'd come and go with my brother... One day... I don't need to explain it to you! After a few months we decided to flee...

VICTORIA

Innocence, inexperience...

TERESA

Why do you say that? I knew! I wanted it! Rogelio was my freedom.

VICTORIA

You loved him, of course...

TERESA

I needed to get out of that house!

VICTORIA

But..., just like that..., like that...

TERESA

I liked him and I desired him... Love came later...

VICTORIA

(Fast, lying, smiling) Ah, yes, I agree...! Once I had something similar. I met him at a summer resort. I was still young..., ten..., or twelve. We were in an old garden..., we barely touched each other..., and then I never saw him again ... I thought he had died ..., and suddenly he appeared ... It was magnificent and terrible!

TERESA

(With a certain unease) Strange, isn't it?

VICTORIA

(Fast) The shyness..., the fear! Things of the past! And your husband?

TERESA

Please, let me pick up those toys. The boys leave them strewn around, and then you have to listen to them if they can't find them... *(Picks up a chess set that is on the floor. Puts the pieces in order.)* You were asking me?

VICTORIA

(Vacillating) Your husband... *(Teresa starts to laugh as she continues to order the chess pieces.)* Forget my impertinence!

TERESA

My husband..., what? What's he like? All of a sudden, telling you! ... It's hard for me... To be frank with you..., I've had wonderful times with him...

VICTORIA

Like with a god!

TERESA

Better than a god because he's a man. He has his weaknesses, his faults... the same as I do..., as everyone does... (*Sits at the sewing machine*)

VICTORIA

That's why you suffer . . .

TERESA

I love him! If there's any suffering it's because of my selfishness, my customs..., not my love... I was glued to him... I never wanted to change him!

VICTORIA

In that case, you should have asked him ...

TERESA

Who do you think you're talking to!

VICTORIA

Of course, don't think that I'm meddling...

TERESA

(*Gently and firmly*) I shall never ask him for anything, Victoria. That is my happiness ..., the here and the now . . . poor and of this earth! (*Another tone*) Do you mind if I smoke? (*Negative gesture from Victoria. Takes a cigarette from an old cigarette case, puts it in a cigarette holder, lights it and blows smoke rings. Victoria shifts in her seat, disconcerted, restless.*)

VICTORIA

(*With a certain aggressive tone*) Yes, what's the use complaining! You left home to go with a man who wasn't right for you... (*Teresa laughs blatantly.*), of dubious morals...

TERESA

I don't believe it! Just like my brother!

VICTORIA

(*Surprised and aggressive*) That's a lie! (*Pause*)

TERESA

(*Aggressive*) What do you want to know, madam?

VICTORIA

(*Fast*) We're talking about different things!

TERESA

No, madam. We're talking about the same thing. My brother's business is the white slave trade. He has a house in the red light district. I told you at the beginning that Rogelio and José Ignacio worked together... There you have the cause of that separation..., the woman with a dilemma . . .

VICTORIA

A brothel!

TERESA

Are you horrified?... Didn't you know?... How amusing, how comical!... And you're not horrified by what he's doing to me? Declaring me dead..., to inherit my half!... Does José Ignacio think I'm not going to defend what belongs to me? And my children?... What a fool I am, a fool... I thought you came here to meet me with the intention of interceding!... José Ignacio makes up stories, creates intrigue..., among his own... You've come out of curiosity ...

VICTORIA

No!..., at this moment...

TERESA

You've come to see the disgraced woman..., the impure woman... You've lowered yourself to the world of degradation..., what you consider degradation...

VICTORIA

Don't judge me, Teresa.

TERESA

You've already done that to me!

VICTORIA

I beg you to listen to me!... Now that I'm here, I think that...

TERESA

(Furious) Now that you're here..., you don't think anything. Now that you're here, you're purging your pride. *(Starts to laugh)* You've come to make a pilgrimage of redemption... *(Long peals of laughter)* To find mercy! You want to save yourself! Save yourself from what, my lady! ... Purge yourself, punish yourself! . . . The respectable gentry! *(Another tone)* But I have eyes, nails, teeth and hands, and I'll defend myself till the end... I'm alive, Victoria! Alive!

VICTORIA

Oh, you're frightening me! *(Doesn't know what to do. Involuntarily she tries to embrace her. Teresa remains immobile.)* Oh, my God! This woman!

Screams and songs of children playing are heard. The image of Teresa is seen in the mirror. Victoria exits, running.

Scene 19

Victoria enters. Takes off her hat and veil. Her face expresses a certain exaltation and upset. Flops down on an easy chair downstage. Upstage we hear the voices of Carmen and Juanita.

CARMEN

A respectable woman, a truly respectable woman is incapable of doing what Teresa does.

JUANITA

But times change, Carmen!

CARMEN

No they don't, Juanita! No they don't!

JUANITA

You are far too rigid...

CARMEN

That's the way it is, like it or not!

Pause. Noises of rattling plates. Some laughter. Adriana, enters with a rag doll in her arms. When she sees her mother, she stops, looks at her and then approaches her, throwing herself into her mother's arms.

ADRIANA

Mommy, are you sick?

VICTORIA

(Stroking her hair) No, sweetie. A slight headache. I'm sure the cool of the evening will make it go away.

ADRIANA

The sun's almost gone, Mama. Can I go play with my friends?

VICTORIA

(With a sad smile) Run along, dear, run along.

Adriana starts to leave. Halfway, she returns to Victoria's arms and gives her several kisses on the cheek. Victoria returns her kisses. Paulita enters dressed in an impeccable uniform.

ADRIANA

Releasing herself from her mother's arms

I love you so much. Bye.

Adriana exits, skipping, accompanied by Paulita. Maid's voice is heard outside.

PAULITA

Don't run, child, you'll hurt yourself. *(Pause)*

GIRLS' CHORUS

Singing, outside.

My mother made me marry
My mother made me marry
pretty little girl
yes oh yes
pretty little girl.

Victoria stands up and comes downstage. Smiles; then her face contracts. Sits down in the rocker.

VICTORIA

(Sighs, with anguish and sarcasm) I'll always be a respectable woman! Heaven help me. Oh, I'm old, I'm fat, I'm tired!... Whew, it's hot! Like an oven! *(Brief Pause. Desperate.)* Neat and clean...where? Where? *(Another tone of voice)* No! No! No! *(Ferocious)* Respectable women, dear God!

GIRLS' CHORUS

My mother made me marry,
My mother made me marry,
pretty little girl
yes oh yes
pretty little girl
a boy, a little boy
a boy, a little boy
I didn't love
no oh no,
I didn't love.

Victoria rocks gently. Lights fade slowly.

Scene 20

The singing intensifies. Pause. The darkness is almost total. We hear Carmen's voice whispering.

CARMEN

Victoria, Victoria . . . *(Another tone)* It's so dark in here! Aggravating . . . *(Strikes the furniture with a cane)* Where are you? What are you doing there, my child? *(Pause)*

VICTORIA

I was dreaming, Mama.

CARMEN

You were dreaming? *(Pause. Sits down.)* Sometimes I dream, too.

CURTAIN

Havana, 1979-1980
Paris-Sitges, 1986

TRUE TO ‘THE LIFE’ IN THE TEXT
Naturalistic drama translation through the actors’ naturalistic tools.
by Szilvia Naray-Davey

In many cross-cultural romantic relationships there is a desire for our foreign lover to be accepted and loved by our family and wider community. In many respects this illuminates the drama translator’s experience. If we agree that drama translation is an act of love then the drama translator will want the foreign drama that she is translating to be accepted and loved by the target culture just as a lover will want her foreign fiancée to be accepted loved and understood by her British parents.

Let’s stay with the love analogy and move on to the idea of fidelity. Fidelity to that “loved” authorial voice is widely accepted as being one of the translator’s main concerns. The desire to translate the Hungarian drama “*Vasárnapi Ebéd*” by author János Hay into English was in my case an act of love. My love of this play, paralleled with the love of a foreign lover then, led me to wanting to be faithful to János Hay’s voice and style. I wanted it to be performable in English without losing its cultural identity; I wanted my British audience to love it and accept and value its foreignness. This need for acceptance then brings me to the paradox that this paper embraces. In order for the drama translator to be faithful to the original he/she must change the original. I will argue that this faithfulness needs to be faithfulness to the spirit of the original: to “the life in the play” as opposed to a textual equivalence. Hence, ‘performability’ will be the favoured translation mechanism; this might be controversial because, at its core, this mechanism encourages reshaping, in an often drastic way, the target dialogue.

The approach I am proposing is especially recommended for plays written in the naturalistic tradition. The actor’s naturalistic working tools can only be successfully applied to naturalistic text where characters are written with clearly palpable naturalistic traits. We need to be able to discern who the characters are with clarity; we need to know what they want and what their obstacles are even if the characters are archetypal. The translation of absurdist or non-naturalistic plays can no doubt benefit from this method, but only when the characters are clearly defined and can be “psychoanalysed”. At this stage in my own research I have reservations about how I would look into the motivation, aims and objectives of “Lucky” in *Waiting for Godot* for example. Further investigation is needed into how these tools can benefit the translator of non-naturalistic texts.

The translation process was not straightforward though, as I realised that I was torn between two worlds. I wanted to keep some of the foreignness of this ‘loved’ text and chose not to domesticate. On the other hand, the text needed to speak to my target audience without too much of a ‘heavy accent’ that would impede comprehension. I wished the characters to remain Hungarians, living in the suburbs of Budapest and most importantly, thinking in Hungarian, but

speaking in 21st Century British idiomatic English. I wanted my target audience to love the foreignness, while bridging the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and show my British audience that this Hungarian drama has a universal appeal and deserves to break out of the silence and be given a voice of power, i.e. an English voice. It was Ralph Manheim, the great translator from the German, as cited by Grossman, who “compared the translator to an actor who speaks as the author would if the author spoke English” (Grossman 2010: 11). I had set out to become János Hay’s English speech without altering his nationality. My aim was to present a Hungarian perspective, a play that came out of modern Hungary but spoken in highly performable English. I have hence adopted a mixed translation strategy.

The aim of this paper is to argue that the drama translator needs to borrow, and work with, the actor’s naturalist tools to solve translation challenges related to:

- Performability, (a quality that will serve the preservation of “the life” of the play);
- Fidelity to “life in the text”;
- Translation of complicated ‘Realia’ ;

I will focus on performability and call it an enabling mechanism. I propose that in order to improve performability, and capture this “life in the text,” the drama translator needs to use the actor’s naturalistic tools so they become the translator’s tools too. The stock-in-trade tools of an actor, such as character motivation, biography building, and active analysis, will enable the translator to capture “the life” of the original. I build my argument on the notion that it is by embracing the gestic meaning in the text that we can truly translate, or rather rewrite, in a new language, our source drama text. I will argue that the translator needs to use the concealed gestic text, just as the actor does, in order to fully interpret or rather, re-interpret the dialogue in the target language. While doing so I will challenge the assertion that performability has an elusive quality, and will argue that it is inseparable from the “life” or the core of the text, which I define as the dramatic conflict between dramatic characters, constituting, I believe, the essence of drama. The assertion is that what may seem elusive to translators is in fact a tangible, workable quality that the actor works with, and should therefore be “borrowed” and used in drama translation.

While performability is well known to translation studies, it has tended to be debated mainly at a theoretical level. My paper offers concrete working tools which demonstrate how this works in practice. I will also situate my research within the theoretical frame and will focus on how the infamous concept of performability within theatre translation has been described and understood by some major voices in the field. I will assume that my readers are familiar with these debates so I will pay particular attention to the British trend of translation studies, lead by Susan Bassnett. I will briefly start looking at the seminal work of Bassnett and Pavis as their work is an inspiration and springboard to my discourse.

To substantiate my argument I will demonstrate, through using detailed examples from my own English translation of a contemporary Hungarian drama *Sunday Lunch* by János Hay, how the naturalistic actor's tools are indispensable to the drama translator in her quest for fidelity and performable dialogue.

The play was commissioned in 2010 by the National theatre in Budapest under the theme of the Ten Commandments. Ten eminent Hungarian playwrights were asked to write a play as a response to their chosen commandment. János Hay (born 1960) a prolific and often produced writer's chose to respond to the commandment: "Honour thy father and thy mother with his drama "Sunday Lunch." The play follows the life of a family whose members live in bad faith. The artifice of the Sunday lunch ritual is what apparently holds them together. This is clearly expressed by the recurring "powdered cream of parsnip sachet soup" motif that the Mother serves every Sunday Lunch, but adds a bit of "sour cream "to it. The bourgeois pretences and forced civility finally give way to the main character's realisation of her flaws. The anti-heroine finally cracks at the family Christmas lunch. In a moment of lucidity and pain she realises that she has practically sacrificed her relationship with her now estranged adult son from her first marriage in order to remarry and move up the social-economic ladder.

Translating "Vasárnapi Ebéd", "Sunday Lunch", from the Hungarian has been a very rewarding experience as I was able to rely on the tools that I will introduce later on. As this research was influenced by my thespian background I had an in-depth knowledge and feel for interpreting dramatic speech as well as characterisation. I am assuming that most of my readers and drama translators will have a background in theatre and hence an understanding of how drama works in practice is assumed.

As mentioned earlier, increased fidelity will be the one of the benefits of the use of the actor's naturalistic tools. Fidelity in our case also means that we humbly accept the hierarchical position of translating. We want to translate it because we want to trust ourselves with the elevated task of giving it justice in the target language. We want to put our life into the life of the text. We are faithful to the source text because we give it value, in this case, the chosen foreign dramatic text. But we need to go further and ask ourselves: what is the nature of fidelity? In the past, fidelity, or equivalence in drama translation, was the criterion of literary translation. Under this apparent fidelity to the text, the scholarly translator most often ended up killing his loved one, killing the life of the text by asphyxiating , stifling it with too much fidelity so that it could not breathe any more. The result of this overly literal translation was a text that was a chore to read, stuck on the page, lacking in performance energy and therefore close to unperformable. Johnston does not spare this kind of translation and says that "An overly 'faithful' translation, in this sense, like a loving dog gambolling round our feet at the most inopportune moments, can often make a foreign play awkward, torpid, colourless, like a Turkish tapestry viewed back to front, as James Howell

observed in the eighteenth century”(1996:9). It is the idea of this “life that has been killed” that is my interest here. The task of defining this “life” in an academic sense is close to impossible as it carries with it a mysterious and an elusive quality. Nevertheless, I will argue that it is exactly “that life” that we go to the theatre to see and feel. It is this love of some kind of life in the drama that makes us want to see it performed. Well-performed naturalistic dialogue, therefore empathetic drama, elevates us and we vicariously feel alive through the conflicts, trials and tribulations of the dramatic characters. The dramatic text is written with performance energy in mind after all, and hence, contains non-verbal elements that need to be discovered by the most astute of text interpreters, the translator. Naturalistic dramatic dialogue often encourages identification with the character’s predicament and hence the feeling of empathy audiences might feel. The drama translator’s aim needs to be, therefore, to capture this “life in the text”. I offer a new, concrete template for the translator by demonstrating that naturalistic characterisation is the tool to achieve the “spirit “of the original. The idea proposed here is that performability is seen as the preservation of ‘the life in the text’.

Performability duels : The Victory of the “gestic”

As mentioned earlier, I will focus on performability since I have maintained that it is via the use of naturalistic acting tools that drama translators will improve performability and hence liberate and free the “life in the text.” Theories around performability strategy have not offered specific working tools for the translator and the arguments have, overall, been in the theoretical realm. In this paper I propose tools to move from the theoretical to the theatrical. I will quickly situate my work within the field while doing so.

Performability has been a point of debate in the world of translation studies as it is a concept that tries to illuminate what is specific to the field of theatre or drama translation. It boils down to the idea of fidelity, as in drama translation the pertinent question is: how do we stay simultaneously faithful to our foreign “loved “text, as well as reach, and truly speak to, our target audience? It is controversial because at its core it encourages an often drastic reshaping of the target dialogue by fitting it to the demands of the target audience. This practice can therefore create a chasm between the source and target texts. Performability is, however, today’s chosen priority criterion in translations of dramatic texts and mostly involves domestication (Venutti 1995). This is partly due to the socio-economic realities of the translated play market in which, in order to sell more copies, well-known monolingual playwrights have been given translating credits for ‘re – translating’ the work of the bilingual and often bi-cultural translator. Among translation scholars and semioticians (Pavis, Snell-Hornby) and practice-oriented scholars (Aaltonen,

Espasa, Johnston, Zatlin) the consensus is that the dramatic text needs to be realised in performance and that the drama translator is a theatre practitioner, a creative presence whose duty is to re-create a performance friendly text in the target language. My purpose is to rescue performability and redeliver it, making it concrete and turning it into a practical aid.

Although I do not wish to linger on the literature I will nevertheless present Susan Bassnett's and Patrice Pavis's influences in the field of theatre semiotics in order to position myself within the existing research. Anne Ubersfeld's research, deserves to be mentioned, because they all offer important, sometimes diverging, but relevant, points of departure in the performability debate.

Ubersfeld in *Lire Le Theatre* draws attention to two key notions: that theatre needs to consider the text and performance as linked; and second that the text is 'troué' or incomplete in itself. Her point is crucial to my argument since this research is based upon the premise that we drama translators are interpretive artists, writers who need to decode the incomplete text. The existence of the subtext and hence our interpretation or decoding of the "gestic text" contributes to the originality and uniqueness of our work.

The notion of the incomplete text has been the subject of a dialectic debate between Susan Bassnett and Patrick Pavis. Bassnett argues that the written text is "the raw material on which the translator has to work and it is with the written text, rather than a hypothetical performance, that the translator must begin" (Bassnett-Maguire 1985: 2). Bassnett's work stands out within the UK translation studies scholars as she was the first to focus on this notion and one of the first to attribute performability as a criterion for the theatre translator. In her article *Ways through the Labyrinth* (1985) she differentiates performability from two viewpoints, one that is textual and one that needs to be understood as the fluency with which actors perform the dialogue. This is often seen as synonymous with 'speakability'. My main interest however lies in Bassnett's later article *Translating for the Theatre: The Case Against Performability* in which she rejects such a vague notion and says that performability is often used "to describe the indescribable, the supposedly existent concealed gestic text within the written". She goes on to argue that there is "no theoretical base for arguing that 'performability' can or does exist" (1991:102). She rejects the idea of the gestic text and argues that the interlingual "translator's task would be superhuman if she were to be expected to translate a text, a text that a priori in the source language is incomplete, containing a concealed gestic text, into the target language which should also contain a concealed gestic text" (1991:100). Thus, she discredits a performance-oriented translation. This concept of the text "troué" is seen as a component only of what creates a performance. The text is therefore perceived as being conditioned by the idea of performability, which is our interest here. From a performance view point, or from the point of view of the mise en scène, this concept is seen as a translation strategy that includes ways of dealing with dialects

or cultural adaptation, by deletion of text, or by replacing dialectical features of the source language by other target language features.

So, in this duel I am supporting Pavis who argues that it IS the *mise en scène* itself which completes the text (1989) and *that* “a real translation takes place on the level of the *mise en scène* as a whole” (1989: 41; [Pavis’ emphasis]). In this dialectic, I am more inclined to support Pavis’ side. In *Problems of Translation for the Stage*, he concludes that “the translator is a dramaturg who must first of all effect macrotextual translation, that is, a dramaturgical analysis of the fiction conveyed by the text”. (1989:27) Pavis goes on to develop this in *Taking Over the Situation of Enunciation* (1989: 30) “The translation (already inserted in concrete *mise en scène*) is linked to the theatrical situation of enunciation by way of a deictic system.” So once they are linked, then the dramatic text only makes sense in its enunciation context. This however only gets fully realised in the *mise en scène*.” For Pavis, “real translation takes place on the level of the *mise en scène* as whole” (1989:41). He considers the written text as an incomplete entity.

While I share the view that texts get fully realised when produced in their intended enunciation, I would not call it “incomplete”. I argue that it is complete as a text but that for translation and performance the gestic needs to be decoded. The gestic is there, waiting to be discovered and interpreted by actors and by drama translators. Bassnett’s riposte is therefore that Pavis’s “unfortunate interlingual translator is still left with the task of transforming unrealized text A into unrealized text B” (1991:101). So, eventually, I would welcome Pavis’s outcome, and would like the translator to do the dramaturgical job and “effect macrotextual translation, that is, a dramaturgical analysis of the fiction conveyed by the text” (1989:27).

I however propose to take this concept further by saying that the translator not only needs to accomplish a macrotextual translation, but firstly must discover, via the use of the actor’s naturalistic tools, the “gestic text,” which will further illuminate and convey the “life in the text”. Having said that, I must agree with Bassnett’s reservations that it is indeed very hard to illuminate the unsaid. In other words, I am talking about subtext and how that is present and used in scriptwriting, acting and translation. It is an indefinable and perhaps superhuman task to illuminate it if one is not equipped with the right tools. However, I propose that we embrace this difficulty as it is better to have something real than being afraid of attempting it because it may be a “superhuman task”. The translator, being an interpretive theatre practitioner, cannot afford non- engagement with the unsaid because it’s superhuman or nebulous. The solution is to liberate the translator from the fog and give him tools with which to plough through the ‘unsaid’. These tools have to be reliable, methodological and applicable. These tools are the actor’s naturalistic acting tools. Let our translator not be fearful of the unsaid, but give him the opportunity to open the window onto the unsaid. More precisely, let’s allow the translator to be involved with the drama itself. Esslin’s anatomical descriptions of dramatic subtext comes to

mind: "Drama, by being a concrete representation of action as it actually take place, is able to show us several aspects of that action simultaneously and also convey several levels of actions and emotions at the same time"(1976:17). My argument is perhaps most in unison with Mary Snell Hornby, who argues that "the performability of the verbal text depends on the capacity for generating non-verbal action and effects within its scope interpretation as a system of theatrical sign."(Snell-Hornby 1997 as cited in Snell-Hornby 2007). For her, the potential for performability lies in the discovery of the non-verbal actions that the text has within itself. She argues that the dramatic dialogue together with the actor's performance should create a convincing whole and therefore the translation needed for this has to be speakable, performable and breathable (Snell- Hornby 2007). She recognizes the extra-textual aspects of theatre translation.

This is a key point to my argument as it is precisely via the discovery of the non-verbal actions or, in other words, via decoding the gestic meaning in the dialogue, that actors create life on stage. It is the idea of that subtext or this "concealed gestic text " that Bassnett finds so indefinable and woolly. I, on the other hand, would embrace the complexity that this brings up and propose to view this text "troué" as a creative challenge. After all, it is often this challenge which attracts theatre practitioners to a specific theatre text. This is the drama under the words, that each actor or director will interpret uniquely, just like the drama translator. The drama translator is a theatre practitioner and therefore, like his other theatre practitioner colleagues, an interpretive artist who will not be discouraged by this "superhuman" decoding task.

The beauty of the text "troué" is that it creates real artistic possibilities for the actor. It is precisely this incomplete text that allows acting to be an interpretive art. The incompleteness of the text is the meat of the task for the actor, who needs to give flesh to her characterisation. The physical presentation and playing of the subtext is an actor's prerogative: it is this response to subtext, and the decisions about how to interpret the subtext, which can create very exciting and powerful performances; or indeed very dull ones. What Bassnett calls the translator's "superhuman task" of decoding the unsaid part of a text, is in fact a tangible task that actors work with every time they interpret a character and create their characterisation i.e. the physical embodiment of the character. It is therefore a logical step to borrow their tools when trying to translate and find the gaps in this "incomplete text" that is a play. Incomplete, has a pejorative sense to it so I would prefer to see the text "in waiting"; that is, waiting to be met and loved, going back to the analogy of my introduction.

So instead of seeing performability as the 'gestic dimension embedded in the text, waiting to be realised in performance,' (Bassnett: 1991:99) I agree with Pavis and Espasa who see performability as the "pragmatic use of the scenic instrument" (Pavis in Espasa 2000:52). I also see performability as the pragmatic use of naturalistic acting tools as opposed to something that

is a quality inherent to the text. I propose a concrete template for the translator when dealing with naturalistic texts. Hence, in this tool kit I prioritise three enabling mechanisms.

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Performability as Enabling Mechanism

I see performability as a mechanism of drama translation embedded in how the actors play the characters they represent. There are many tools available to actors to assist them in bringing these characters alive on the stage but I will focus on three major tools. I propose that translators avail themselves of these same tools in order to be faithful to the spirit, if not the letter of the source drama text and hence capture the “life” in the text.

Tool number 1:

The Biography Tool.

The actor’s role within the world of a theatrical production is to bring the written text alive via the use of his body and emotions. The dialogue, together with the sequence of actions and stage directions, will give the actor the possibility to bring it to life, and to interpret the text in a unique way. The dramatic text will be the actor’s best friend as it is within the text that he or she will find clues to the past and present life of the character he or she is portraying. The text is the actor’s guide to character building. Actors will begin by building a character biography in search of finding out: Who am I? Who is this character that I am to become? A technique that is often used to help excavate the information about the character is to go through the script meticulously and see what other characters say about the character and what the character says about her or himself. The actor’s very first tool is therefore to find out via the “given circumstances,” (‘The situation in which characters find themselves in an episode or a fact’ (Benedetti 1998: 152)) who the character is by starting to build a biography.

This tool is essential for the interlingual drama translator as he or she needs to get into the skin of the character whose dialogue he/she is translating in order to have a deeper understanding of the actions and conflicts that the character will be involved in throughout the play. This understanding will bring clarity to the translator’s overall interpretation of this life, this dramatic tension within the play that she has to re-create in the target language. The more the translator understands who the character is the more he/ she can be true to the dramatic truth of each scene. Strasberg’s view on what a play is in relationship to the actor’s role fits with the drama translator’s task equally well.”A play is a sequence of various kinds of action. These in turn derive from the given circumstances of the scene, that is, those events and experiences that

motivate the actor to do what he comes on stage to achieve” (1988:78). It would not be a stretch to assume that the drama translator intuitively is already getting into the skin of his characters.

The Biography Tool in Practice

Sunday Lunch revolves around the drama of a family that deals with their marital and other existential problems and conflicts over a period of 10 years. The Sunday lunch, over the years, is their alibi for normalcy. The main characters are the Father, Mother, Girl, Kid, First Man and Second Man. The dialogue is sharp and minimalist in style and has a Beckettian economy and cyclical quality to it.

A problem arose when I was attempting to translate the dialogue between the Father and Mother who bicker almost constantly. The issue was with the ‘Mother’ character’s dialogue as I realised that the “faithful translation” in English sounded impersonal, lacking in characterisation power. In Hungarian, she came across as a powerful matriarchal presence with a clear motivation. She had the voice of Hungarian women I knew. It would not be an exaggeration to say that she was written as a type. My English voice for her lacked dramatic force as she seemed to have become a less defined character. Translating a Hungarian type seemed to be problematic. I was puzzled by this change. I went back to the script and created a biography for her; filling in the gaps of her life based in her Hungarian reality, and thus created a through-line for her past actions. Equipped with concrete knowledge of her life, I was able to feel more confident in interpreting her lines. Here is a concrete example of a *réplique* when speaking to her daughter. My first attempt was as follows: “We’ve always cared about you. You were what our life was about”. After building the biography it became clear that motherhood was the character’s excuse and refuge for not leaving her husband despite his infidelity. She, the character, put all her misplaced energy into her relationship with her daughter to the detriment of her marital relationship, which she decided not to improve on. These biographical details brought a clearer meaning to the text and thus illuminated the life of the character, as well as her motivation, and sharpened the dramatic conflict. The new lines became: “You got plenty of attention. Our life revolved around you.” These lines have a stronger dramatic rhythm to them, as well a stronger interpretive appeal to an actor, because this line now gives room for sub-textual interpretation and hence increases our involvement in the story. One could interpret the “you” in that sentence as the mother’s sub-textual meaning of having neglected herself as she gave and sacrificed so much to her daughter.

I also used this tool when translating the dialogue of a minor character, Kati, who decided to stay in an unhappy marriage for the sake of her young children. She is very disillusioned by love. My initial translation reflected the cynicism, but sacrificed some of the character’s personality and self-awareness. Creating a biography for her helped to identify her inner motivation and therefore gave me the opportunity to translate her with more “faithfulness” to the drama unfolding within her. Here is the first attempt:

“Then twice a week I have to suffer through it. I would have never thought that ten minutes can be so fucking long, and how crap it is to be caressed. I have tried to talk myself into it but it’s my skin that crawls”.

After employing the biography tool it sounds like this:

“Then twice a week I have to put up with his grunting and moaning. I would have never thought that ten minutes can be so fucking long. And it’s disgusting when he touches me, my skin crawls”.

The words “put up” give a whole different feel to the speech as the idea of choice is there. She chooses to put up with him, which is a defining trait of her character. The word “caressed” has now become “touched”, which creates nuance in the character’s attempt to describe her experience. The words ‘he touches me’ in this context feel more like the language of a victim, giving a rawer meaning. This once again accentuates the dramatic conflict within the characters while leaving interpretive space for the actors. These new lines sound more performable because the conflict within her is enunciated more sharply.

Tool number 2:

The objective tool.

When an actor tackles a scene, he or she needs to discover what the character’s motive or objective is in that scene. It is imperative to find the reason or motive behind the words and actions of the character. Everything on stage has to have a reason. Stanislavski said that whether inwardly or outwardly the actor has to act purposefully on stage, meaning that for all actions, even something as simple as sitting in a chair, the actor needs to be motivated from inside and the actor needs to generate that inner motivation. He said in *An Actor Prepares* that the enemy of art is “in general”. He preached specificity. Just as in life, we always have a purpose, a reason for doing what we do even if apparently banal in nature. This is also called motivation. The objective will motivate the way the actor will deliver the line. The objective will drive and influence how he says it and will determine the actions he will choose to do. The objective will be an essential tool for the actor who needs to know precisely what he/she wants to achieve in the scene while saying the dramatist’s words. Stanislavsky, again in *An Actor Prepares*, was very clear about this and emphasised the idea that if the actor does not know where he is coming from, why, and what he wants, he will not be prepared consciously. The drama translator could fall into the same pitfall as the unprepared actor.

The objective tool is especially useful when translating scenes that seem challenging because they contain non translatable *realia* as well as issues related to formal and informal registers. If the translator is facing a challenging scene they can seek clarity by asking themselves the following:

What does the character really want to achieve in this scene? Do they want to confess their love to someone or do they want the other person to confess their love to them? We are talking about the choice of the subtext of course. The choice the translator will make is crucial, as she never translates words, but translates meaning in play, and therefore “the life” within the play. Discovering what the character needs will lead to a clear understanding of the character and therefore give the target dialogue sharpness that will manifest itself in an actor-friendly, performable dialogue. Strasberg (1988) stresses this, when he talks about how the lines uttered by the actor should be part of the behaviour of the character and not just abstract words. It is important to point out that this is not taking away the actor’s work, because the translator is still only dealing with the written language of the text. The actors will bring it to life with their interpretation through their bodies, minds and emotions and so will the director, set designer, composer, lighting designer and costume designer with their given tools. Carnicke (in Zatlín 2005:33) echoes my views as he “treats the play not as a finished work of literature, but rather as a score for performance that maintains areas of ambiguity for which the actors can make interpretive choices”.

This tool is the one that I relied on the most. If we agree that drama is conflict and that characters have different objectives which create part of the conflict, then understanding those objectives is a key to translating the words and meaning of those characters. This tool was an essential aid for the translation of difficult metaphors that were embedded in realia. Knowing what the characters want despite what they say has illuminated many scenes because I was able to ask the question: What does this character want to achieve in this scene? A more active question to find a more active answer is: What does this character want the other character to do? If the answer is (speaking from the character’s point of view): “I want to make her change her mind,” then that is information that bears action within itself. To find the right transitive verb that describes the objective is an invaluable tool for the actor, who cannot and should not act a mood but strive for action. The translator too can use the transitive verb to find the motivation of the character. Finding the objective is linked to finding the subtext of the scene from the character’s point of view. Here is an example of the Mother’s translated dialogue prior to using the tool, before understanding what motivated her to say these lines:

“You couldn’t picture things then. You couldn’t imagine becoming team leader; you thought only others could become it but not you. And without me, you couldn’t have done it.”

The objective here is to convince herself of her own strength, she wants him to agree with her talents. On the surface it sounds as if her aim was to make him feel worthless but I think it’s dramatically much more interesting to make the objective linked to her self esteem. So with that in mind, it changed into this:

“You couldn’t picture things. You couldn’t picture becoming team leader, you thought everyone else was better than you. And without me you couldn’t have done it”.

The repetition of “picture” is also dramatically more powerful because it intensifies and illuminates to herself her strong desire to be agreed with. Another example worth mentioning relates to a case where only one word changed via the discovery of the character’s objective. The Girl, the protagonist, is being interviewed by a matchmaker at an online dating agency. Her objective is to show the matchmaker that she is not going to buy into the idea that the chosen match is perfect and without any flaws. Prior to this awareness my translation communicated a less self-assured character with these lines: “Now then, I had a feeling that there must be something”. The new line is: “I knew that there must be something”. This simple change has brought more dramatic energy to the line and therefore increased performability.

Another example where realia caused an impasse in the translation was my attempt to translate the word ‘mackonadràg’. It is impossible to translate as the literal translation would be “bear cub trousers”. This clearly makes no sense in English. This type of tracksuit-pants was a unique Hungarian piece of clothing during socialism. It refers to tracksuit-pants made out of soft material which have an elasticised edge around the ankles. It is associated with middle-aged working-class and lower-middle class men, a type of home clothing that you pop out to the shops in, maybe, or take the garbage out in. It also has connotations of pensioners in the provinces. A Hungarian professor, though poor under socialism, would not be seen in them. In the play, the ‘Father’ has a particular attachment to this piece of clothing that only a Hungarian audience would understand because this is linked to some kind of nostalgia for goulash socialism, when life had a different rhythm and human relations were more direct. The character is perhaps rejecting the new ‘dog eat dog’ world. I had to work on the objective of the characters to be able to render it to a British Audience. After deciding that the character wanted his wife to understand that those tracksuit bottoms meant a lot to him I was able to tackle the deletion and get across stronger emphasis on the nostalgic aspect of the attachment. In Hungarian this attachment and nostalgia is contained in the word. It’s implicit. As this being a true case of realia I chose to make it explicit by adding the word favourite and “don’t you get it”.

Father: No that is not true, I only wanted my favorite tracksuit bottoms, because I love those.

Mother: But look at the state of them? You couldn’t even have taken out the garbage in them.

Father: But I loved them don’t you get it?

The ‘faithful’ translation of the Hungarian is simply “I love them” but I thought that his objective came across less strongly in the British text due to the failure of translating realia and especially what I call nostalgic realia. These examples will have illuminated the paradox mentioned earlier: that indeed, in order to remain faithful to the original one must change the original.

Tool number 3

The “active analysis” tool.

Bella Merlin (2007) in *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* describes “active analysis” as an improvisation that is done around a scene. It is a highly effective tool to get the actors involved with both their inner and verbal action from the beginning of rehearsals. The aim of such improvisation is to go away from the text so the actors can free themselves and get closer to finding out the actions and meaning of the scene. The actors first i.) read the scene, ii.) Discuss the scene, iii.) Improvise the scene without the text, iv.) Discuss the improvisation, and v.) Return to text and compare the results of the improvisation with the words and incidents of the text. This is equally very useful to the drama translator who may ask actors to improvise around a rough translation. I am recommending that the translator become a researcher by filling in the gaps with the use of this tool. This, again, is particularly useful when faced with realia and when trying to find the right formal register when translating into English. Collaboration with actors has certainly been used by translators who adhere to the idea that the drama translator’s place is the theatre, involved with rehearsals. Phylis Zatlin dedicates a whole chapter in *Out of the shadows: The translators Speak for Themselves* to this actor-translator collaboration, and presents many practitioners who have worked this way with beneficial results.

“Through rehearsals the translator may function as a dramaturg, who clarifies aspects of the play for the actors while at the same time learning from the actors how to improve the phrasing of the text. Through rehearsals Meidrun Adler learned that no matter how good a translation might be, it will never work if the actors can’t move with the text.”(Zatlin 2005.33)

I am building on this practice but suggest something more concrete and methodological by urging the translator to borrow and use the actor’s tools while sitting at his or her desk without the actors being present. Of course, in an ideal world, we would have actors helping out with their expertise by quickly improvising around the rough translation. However, I am suggesting that this tool also works without the physical presence of actors. The translator can create a more performable dialogue by setting the rough translation aside, so that she can improvise out loud around the rough translation, armed with the knowledge of the character’s biographies and objectives in the scene. I would recommend that the translator take a problematic area and simply apply the two main tools. The ‘out loud’ aspect is crucial because hearing it starts a dramatic engagement and therefore brings the theatrical performance potential to the translator’s desk much more vividly. This improvisation needs to be recorded. The translator’s ears, when listening back to his/her improvisation, will serve as a stilted non-idiosyncratic dialogue detector. Rick Hite, as cited by Zatlin, echoes this practice when he “advised theatrical translators to

become actors and listen to their work so that they can perceive problems of translating from spoken text to spoken text” (Rick Hite 1999:304 as cited by Zatlin: 2).

The discoveries, and they may be just a few words or expressions, will then be integrated into the working draft. The next draft will have benefitted from a big performability makeover. This process is not dissimilar to how some dramatists and script writers work. David Johnston’s view (1996) is that the theatre translator is a theatre practitioner and while translating, has to work with the same rules as the dramatist. If dramatists in the source language benefit from speaking his character’s dialogue out-loud to check if they sound performable, so the translator can benefit from the same technique.

Speaking translations out-loud is clearly not a new practice, but what I am proposing is that this out-loud element can only be of real benefit if it is preceded by the methodological application of the first two tools described above. The aim of the whole process is to give tools to the translator so that she can get into their characters’ skins and thus recreate their dramatic experience into another language.

Theoretical to Theatrical: The path to performability.

Armed with the faithfulness debate, I came to conclude that literal fidelity to the author’s voice (theme, style, structure) was secondary to the characters’ lives. My research led me to the idea that the fidelity to the author’s voice needs to be a different kind of fidelity: a fidelity to the dramatic tensions between the characters as it is the life within the characters’ interactions that creates the drama, and therefore the primary fidelity has to be to the “life in the text”. The discovery and practical use of the “gestic text” has been the leading force behind my claims. I have agreed with Bassnett’s claim that this concept of performability as something hidden in the text is an elusive and nebulous concept. However I have argued that the translator should not shy away from what Bassnett calls a “superhuman task” as she or he can responsively engage with the theatrical element that is hidden in the text by seeing performability as a key to accessing this elusive “life” in the play.

I have therefore offered a practical solution to the theoretical performability debate by offering the translator a template, a tool kit for translation, and made a case that performability can then be achieved by using the naturalistic actor’s tools. The realisation being that the translated drama text needs to embrace a dramaturgical fidelity, that of performability and dramatic tension. I have argued that performability is an enabling mechanism for the translator and have offered three specific tools for the translator: the biography; motivation finding; and active analysis tools. Empowered by these tools at his desk, the drama translator will be able to engage with the elusive world of the dramatic text and create through her/his interpretative and artistic skills, a rich, alive

and performable idiomatic text in the target language that will be faithful to the original. Actor's tools enable the drama translator to improve performability, which is itself rooted in the dramatic tension and the life of the play. I have shown through precise examples that the translator, if provided with the right set of tools, can embrace and decode the dramatic text and bring extra life, energy and speakability to it. The use of the naturalistic actor's tools has been especially beneficial in resolving cases of untranslatable realia. The examples from the translation have evidenced and embraced the paradox that it is indeed by changing the original that I have remained truthful to my source text. It may be worth mentioning here that this "loved" play received a warm welcome by British actors whose enjoyment of the staged reading of the English translation was apparent. The humour came across well and they all seemed to have become Hungarians speaking perfect English. A full production of *Sunday Lunch* is planned for the summer of 2014 in London.

By giving the translator specific tools it is hoped that the benefits in the quality of the translation will engender a change in publishing practice and reduce the need to hire well known mono-lingual playwrights and therefore make the unknown, hard-working multi-lingual, multi-cultural translator into the visible presence he/she deserves to be.

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Szilvia Naray- Davey is a scholar, theatre practitioner and drama translator. She holds a lectureship in drama at the University of Salford, Greater Manchester, UK. Her research interest revolves around the issues of translating and staging Hungarian Contemporary drama into English. She runs IgnitionStage Theatre Company which produces Central European drama in translation. In May 2014, in London and Manchester she will direct her own translation of PRAH, a play written by contemporary Hungarian playwright György Spiro. Szilvi is also working on her doctoral thesis.

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