

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 6, Number 2 (Fall 2016)

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

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

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Editor's Note

With this issue *The Mercurian* moves to a new publishing format that we hope will be more pleasurable to the eye as well as provide a platform for greater access to the work of our contributors. I want to extend my gratitude to my Editorial Assistant Sarah Booker for taking on the majority of the heavy lifting that made the conversion to the new format possible.

The issue begins with Margaret Stanton and Anna Donko's translation of El Salvadoran playwright Jorgelina Cerritos' play *On the Other Side of the Sea*. Even amongst Latin American theatre scholars there still exists a great gap in our knowledge of Central American theatre and publication of Cerritos' existential meditation on identity begins to fill that gap. The collaboration on this translation between teacher and student, one an experienced translator, the other a neophyte, presents a potential model for expanding the field of theatrical translation.

We continue with John Thomas Howard's translation of Colombian playwright and director Crispulo Torres' *The Kittens*. As Howard describes in his introduction, *The Kittens* is an adaptation of Colombian short story author Álvaro Cepeda Samudio's "Vamos a matar los gaticos," written in response to the assassination in 1948 of the Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the spark that lit the fire of the infamous period known as *La Violencia* in Colombia. Torres' play, written in 1991, reshapes Cepeda Samudio's story to respond to the wave of violence unleashed by Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel, a period also recently captured to great effect in the Netflix series *Narcos*. Torres' one-act theatricalizes Colombia's seemingly endless state of violence and political conflict.

The Kittens is followed by Manoela Wolff's translation of Jessica Luisa's play *Useful Phones (In Case of Emergency)* from Brazil. *Useful Phones* is a lyrical investigation about the difficulty of sincere communication in contemporary society.

Useful Phones is followed by Sophie Louise Stevens' article, "Distance and Proximity in Analyzing and Translating *Bailando sola cada noche (Dancing alone every night)*." Stevens focuses on the translation process of bringing Uruguayan playwright Raquel Diana's work to a UK audience, and the complications that arise when the subject of the Uruguayan play is the death of the Englishwoman Joyce Vincent, whose body was discovered in London in 2006, two and a half years after her death. Stevens analyzes both the Uruguayan playwright's use of the Englishwoman's death to speak to her own Uruguayan context, as well as the English translator's position and process as she translates a Uruguayan interpretation of an English event for an English audience.

The issue concludes with Alena Aniskiewicz' review of *Loose Screws: Nine Plays from Poland*, Edited by Dominika Laster. *Loose Screws* is one of several recently published collections of Polish theatre in translation and Aniskiewicz' review joins Will Harrington's review of *(A)Pollonia: Twenty-First Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage* published in Volume 6, Number 1 (Spring 2016) of *The Mercurian*.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can be found at: <http://drama.unc.edu/related-links/the-mercurian/> or

under the Index menu of the new website. As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 6, No. 3 (Spring 2017) will be February 1, 2017.

--Adam Versényi

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On the Other Side of the Sea

By Jorgelina Cerritos

Translated by Margaret Stanton and Anna Donko

INTRODUCTION

Jorgelina Cerritos turned from acting to playwriting in 2000 and only ten years later she won the prestigious Casa de las Américas Literary Award for drama with her one-act play *Al otro lado del mar*. Cerritos is among five Salvadoran writers to have been honored with the award, but she is the country's only recipient in the field of theatre.¹ Her success continued with the George Woodyard Theatre Prize in 2012 for *Vértigo 824* (again, the first Salvadoran to earn the award). A student at Sweet Briar College, Anna Donko (2014), discovered the latter play in *The Latin American Theatre Review* (Vol. 45, No. 2: Spring 2012) and was captivated by the originality of the work. After researching the author and finding scant critical analysis of her plays, Donko decided to include the playwright in her senior honors thesis on the theme of identity in four contemporary plays from Latin America. As her thesis advisor, I became familiar with Cerritos' work and have come to appreciate the acclaim she has earned in Latin American theatre circles.

Ms. Donko and I decided to translate *Al otro lado del mar* to English (*On the Other Side of the Sea*) as a tribute to the author and to attract Anglophone readers and audiences to this young writer's contributions to the field of drama. The lyrical beauty of this piece together with its deceptively simple structure makes it deserving of translation and dissemination. Two characters, one setting, six days: *the man* desperately needs a form of documentation that will allow him finally to participate in society on land after having spent his life as a fisherman and not knowing when or where he was born or who his parents were; *the woman* is a civil servant whose office has been banished to the beach as a sign that she is too old to work in a more desirable location. She (eventually revealed as *Dorotea*) has the power to give the man an identity, but being a conscientious employee, she refuses to do so because he has no proof of his existence. After arguing and reflecting for six days, the two form an unlikely friendship and see a way forward out of the static condition of their lives. *The man* realizes that he cannot live alone on the sea and ignore human connections, while *Dorotea* comes to see that her obsession with her job has not brought her complete happiness. The play is a meditation on life and its absurdities: nothing happens and very little changes except the attitude of the two characters, but this has the potential to change everything. Cerritos underscores the power of hope and dreams and empathy as an antidote to the often lonely, fragmented nature of the human condition.

Cerritos' concern with the theme of identity, not as an ethnic construct, but rather as an existential angst, is expressed through techniques of the Theatre of the Absurd such as the lonely desk on an isolated beach, *Dorotea's* insistence that her lone client gets in line and the obsession with documents as proof of existence, documents that cannot be obtained without, ironically, other

¹ The other Salvadoran recipients of the Casa de las Américas Award are Roque Dalton for poetry in 1969, Manlio Argueta for novel in 1978, Claribel Alegría for poetry in 1978, and Mario Lungo for essay in 1991.

documents. The man's tendency to prefer descriptive names, like the one he gives himself (*Fisherman of the Sea*) and *Dog and Mermaid*, contrasts with the complicated bureaucratic system represented by Dorotea.

The translation of the play was straight-forward, the major challenge being the frequent interior monologues that appear without context as the characters recall moments from their past. Dorotea slips into monologues, and actually reverts back to her childhood at times, as she reminisces about missed opportunities that might have resulted in a happy marriage and the children she so desires, and Fisherman relates his story while frequently calling out to those he left on the other side of the sea — his dog, his love, his friend. But since the references to the past are vague, distinguishing dreams and flashbacks from reality proved difficult. Donko's careful analysis of the play helped us sort out the smallest details and made her an excellent collaborator on the translation even though it was her first attempt at the translation of an entire literary work. For example, the subject of the verb does not have to be stated in Spanish and this ambiguity often enhances the literary quality of the play in the original. However, the English version demands more clarity in order to be meaningful, and we believe we have achieved that without losing the rhythm of the original.

With the translation completed, we organized a public reading of the play in November 2015 at Sweet Briar College (VA) with the participation of four students: Tristin Burke and Emelie Wurster of the Theatre Department read the roles of Fisherman and Dorotea respectively, and two students of Spanish, Genesis and Isis Balico, read brief segments of the play in the original Spanish. This format made the event accessible to the English-speaking audience (students and faculty from various disciplines), while also giving language students a taste of the work in Spanish. It was especially gratifying to see how well this work “played” as a reading. Due to the nature of the dialogue, the simplicity of the setting and stage directions and the minimal action, the play loses very little as a reading as opposed to a full production. Although the division of the play into six days is noted in the stage directions, there is little more than a pause in the dialogue to indicate each change, so we inserted an announcement of each time change by the actors to clarify the chronology (“The morning of the Second Day,” etc.). And while the students did read their parts, they also stood at times and moved around using hand gestures and facial expressions as they would in a regular production — the observer barely noticed that it was not the full production. It is the strength of the dialogue and the monologues that facilitates this adaptability. The universal themes of identity, friendship and existence in *On the Other Side of the Sea* make it ideal for college actors and audiences. Especially when resources and time are limited, a play reading that involves students of theatre, Spanish and English can be an outstanding interdisciplinary endeavor.

The student-professor collaboration on this project has been mutually gratifying and completely balanced. Perhaps more undergraduate students would be inspired to explore foreign-language drama if similar collaborative opportunities were available. The translation and presentation processes provide many levels of cross-cultural insight and enjoyment for all involved. We have been invited to take the reading to a neighboring institution (Ferrum College) where the students in Spanish classes will have read and discussed the play in the original language before attending the presentation. The organic character of theatre makes it a natural facilitator of the global

language/culture communication project that should motivate educational institutions. We hope that this translation will contribute to that effort and will enable others to become familiar with this exciting new dramatist from Latin America.

Jorgelina Cerritos, born in El Salvador in 1973, graduated from the University of El Salvador with a major in psychology only because a theatre degree was not offered. Her plays tend to explore social and existential themes, often reflecting on the absurdities of life and the triumph of the human spirit over stifling bureaucratic forces. *Vertigo 824*, for example, describes the last moments of the passengers in a plane that is falling out of the sky, an even more absurdist work. Another, *Respuestas para un menú* (2009), depicts the lack of communication between a troubled couple. A more recent work, *La Audiencia de los Confines: Primer ensayo sobre la memoria* (2012), half-farce and half-truth, is based on El Salvador's colonial history and is the first part of a planned trilogy about memory. The second part of the trilogy deals with the disappeared victims of El Salvador's civil wars of the 1980s. Cerritos travels frequently, giving workshops and directing her plays with her theatre troupe, "Los del Quinto Piso," which is based in San Salvador. She also writes poetry and children's literature.

Margaret Stanton (PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison), professor emerita at Sweet Briar College in Virginia, taught Spanish and Latin American studies there from 1987 to 2013. Her translations include three pieces in the short story anthology edited by Marjorie Agosín, *What Is Secret* (Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 1995) and *The Reef and Exotic Birds: Five Stories with Rare Women* by Reina Roffé (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2011).

Anna Donko participated in the Sweet Briar College Junior Year in Spain Program in 2012-2013. Her senior honors thesis ("Confrontando la identidad: un análisis de *Al otro lado del mar* y *Vertigo 824* de Jorgelina Cerritos e *Eternity Class* y *Mugres de la María* y de *El Negro* de Cristina Escofet") analyzed the theme of identity in two plays by Cerritos and two by the Argentine writer Cristina Escofet. Following graduation in 2014 (Spanish), she spent five months as a volunteer teaching assistant in the English Opens Doors Program in Río Bueno, Chile. She is currently a graduate student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Kansas.

On the Other Side of the Sea

Characters:

Dorotea

Fisherman

The action takes place on a deserted beach that appears to be far from any town.

On the sand near the water, a desk and a chair are arranged for office work. To the right and in front of the desk is a dock that appears to be abandoned.

The sea extends out from the front of the stage into the audience.

When the action begins, she is standing facing the sea and looking toward the horizon. She seems uneasy. He is standing near the desk waiting for her.

After a moment she turns toward the desk and finds the man standing there. She hurries back to her work.

It is the morning of the Second Day.

The woman: You again.

Fisherman: Good morning. *(She doesn't answer.)* How are you? Did you sleep well? *(She doesn't answer.)* I slept fine, thank you . . .

The woman: Sir, please don't start.

Fisherman: That outfit looks nice on you . . . Better than yesterday's. A few little pearls would make the dress even prettier, but that's a good color on you.

The woman: You should find something to do.

Fisherman: Were you able to get some sleep? *(She doesn't answer.)* The mosquitoes on the coast are really annoying, especially if you aren't used to them. It's better if you don't pay any attention to them, then they'll get tired and go to sleep too. A friend told me that one time . . .

The woman: I'm not interested. Leave me alone.

Silence.

Fisherman: *(He takes something to eat out of a bag.)* Do you want some? Did you eat already?

The woman: That's all I need.

Fisherman: Here, go ahead . . . *(Pause.)* Coconut is good, but coconut bread is even better. Too bad they don't make it here. If I had known, I would've brought you some. I really like it, and besides it reminds me of a friend of mine. Have some.

She ignores him. He puts the bag on the desk and stays there, watching the woman closely.

The woman: Why are you looking at me like that?

Fisherman: Like . . . what?

The woman: Like that . . . You've been looking at me like that since yesterday.

Fisherman: How?

The woman: Like that.

Fisherman: No, I'm not . . .

The woman: I don't like it when you look at me that way.

Fisherman: But I'm not looking at you in any particular way.

The woman: Of course you are and I don't like it.

Fisherman: I'm sorry . . .

He steps away and starts to undress.

The woman: What are you doing?

Fisherman: I'm going for a quick dip.

The woman: If you're going for a . . . "quick dip" . . . you should do it over there, on the other side.

Fisherman: But my boat is here.

The woman: I don't think anyone will steal it.

Fisherman: You never know.

The woman: Then take your boat over there too.

Fisherman: I like it here.

The woman: But today do it over there.

Fisherman: But I like it here. The water is clean and my boat is nearby.

The woman: There are plenty of other beaches.

Fisherman: I like this beach.

The woman: This is not a beach, sir. This is my office.

Fisherman: From there to over there is your office, but from here to here is my beach.

The woman: That was before.

Fisherman: It's not my fault the authorities decided to put . . . "your office" . . . excuse me, in such a . . .

The woman: Such a what?

Fisherman: . . . in such an absurd place.

The woman: Well, you're right about that.

Fisherman: Now we're getting somewhere.

The woman: God help me.

Fisherman: It's totally absurd.

The woman: Who are you to talk about absurdness?

Fisherman: About what?

The woman: Absurdness! You said it was absurd.

Fisherman: There's nothing absurd about me.

The woman: You still don't think so?

Fisherman: If you're saying that because . . .

The woman: You still doubt it?

Fisherman: Ma'am, please. I'm not asking much.

The woman: I told you to stop insisting. Find something to do like a decent person. Like a normal person.

Fisherman: I am a decent person and I am a normal person. Decent and normal, ma'am. I don't hurt anyone. I came here and said good morning to you. I smiled at you. I said you looked nice in that outfit, not just to please you but because I noticed that you aren't wearing pants like you were yesterday, that you're wearing a dress and that it looks nice on you. I told you so because I noticed and because that's what I think and because I don't think it's offensive to tell someone, just because they're older, that something looks nice on them. I bought a coconut and I only drank the water so I could give the rest to you, even though I knew you wouldn't eat it and even though I wouldn't find much else to eat today because there's no one here to sell fish, if there are even any fish on this beach. And then, when I told you I was going for a quick dip, I kept myself from saying how stupid it was that your office is on a beach and, on top of that, on a beach without any people! Instead, to keep you from feeling bad, I said it was absurd. I think all of this shows that I am a decent person. I haven't done anything bad since I got here and said hello to you. And normal, because everything I've said and done, I've analyzed before saying and doing it, and a person who isn't normal wouldn't be able to do all that analysis, ma'am. And besides, the word absurdness doesn't exist.

The woman: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you. I think it would be better for you to leave so I can do my work.

Fisherman: No one is going to come to this place.

The woman: But if someone does come, I need to have everything in order.

Fisherman: Nothing is going to happen here.

The woman: But if something does happen, I have to be ready.

Fisherman: Who cares about a census in these parts?

The woman: People . . . young people, old people.

Fisherman: The old, the young. There's nobody here. I roamed around last night and nothing, not a soul, and definitely not anyone interested in identity cards and things like that. You're in the wrong place. You serve no purpose here.

The woman: Go away.

Fisherman: Ma'am . . .

The woman: Leave. You're bothering me.

Fisherman: Ma'am . . .

The woman: I told you to go. Now go.

Fisherman: You should help me.

The woman: I can't.

Fisherman: But that's why you're here.

The woman: Yes, however, in your case I can't do anything.

Fisherman: It's just a birth certificate.

The woman: Here we go again!

Fisherman: You are here to help people, but no one comes. Then I show up and you can't help me. So what good are you?

The woman: Sir?

Fisherman: I'm sorry.

The woman: Get out, sir.

Fisherman: It's the truth . . . A birth certificate, that's all.

The woman: Leave.

Fisherman: Please.

The woman: I believe I've made it quite clear already.

Fisherman: I just don't understand what your problem is. All I need is a birth certificate, you said so yourself. It's nothing. A birth certificate and I'm off to the other side of the sea.

The woman: If it were up to me, you would've been off to the other side of the sea yesterday. You are the one who doesn't understand. Only someone like you would think you could get a birth certificate just like that. No one comes here for a birth certificate.

Fisherman: If no one comes, it's because it wouldn't occur to anyone to look for a . . . government office . . . on a beach.

The woman: You know what I mean. Or you would if you were as normal as you claim to be.

Fisherman: That's a lie. The woman who came by yesterday with the blue-eyed boy, the only person besides me who has come or ever will come, she said she was here to get a birth certificate and you gave her one.

The woman: Yes, to get a birth certificate, one that already existed. That has a date, a book and a page number. Because someone came and registered a date of birth and from that moment on, that person, that child existed. I made her a copy, a duplicate of that certificate. I don't hand out certificates that I just invent on the spot. Now go away because someone else might come along just as she did.

Fisherman: You wouldn't have to invent mine.

The woman: No, I wouldn't, but you were inventing one for yourself yesterday.

Fisherman: I wasn't inventing it. I was giving you my personal information.

The woman: What information?

Fisherman: My first name, my last name.

The woman: What information?

Fisherman: What you asked for. First and last name.

The woman: Leave, Mr.

Fisherman: Look it up, check your notes. That's what I was giving you.

The woman: You know that isn't true.

Fisherman: You know it is true.

The woman: Sir . . .

Fisherman: You know it's true.

The woman: No one in the world is named Fisherman of the Sea. Don't waste my time.

Fisherman: Well, no one was named Fisherman of the Sea before, but now there is someone named Fisherman of the Sea and that someone is me.

The woman: Fisherman of the Sea!

Fisherman: At your service, with pleasure.

The woman: And who gave you such a . . .

Fisherman: Such a what?

The woman: Such an absurd name. (*He doesn't answer.*) Who? Your father, who was a sea fisherman too? Your mother, in memory of your father? Your grandmother? Your grandfather? Who, Mr. of the Sea? Where does a name of such distinguished lineage come from? From no one!

Fisherman: From me.

The woman: Next . . .

Fisherman: From the sea.

The woman: Next, please.

Fisherman: From life.

The woman: Next!

Fisherman: From me.

The scene changes to the morning of the First Day.

She is standing trying to identify something she sees in the water. She hurries to her desk and gets ready to work. He suddenly appears before her as if he came directly from the beach and approaches the desk. They look at each other as if trying to make sense of the other's presence there.

The woman: Good morning.

The man: Good morning.

The woman: How can I help you?

The man: I need something that says who I am.

The woman: That says who you are?

The man: Yes.

The woman: Like what?

The man: I don't know . . . something.

The woman: And what do you need it for?

The man: To fill out a form.

The woman: Ah, you need a document.

The man: Even if it's just a piece of paper.

The woman: Certainly, I'd be happy to help.

The man: You can help me?

The woman: Of course I can. That's why I'm here.

The man: Really?

The woman: I work for the government.

The man: I'm lucky you're here.

The woman: Yes, you are.

She takes out some paperwork. He watches her closely.

The woman: Is something wrong?

The man: What?

The woman: Do I have something on my face?

The man: No, why?

The woman: The way you're looking at me.

The man: No.

He remains silent.

The woman: What kind of document do you need?

The man: I don't know . . .

The woman: What do you need it for?

The man: I don't need it.

The woman: Did someone ask you for it?

The man: The man at the animal shelter. He wants my first name, my last name, my address, and my age.

The woman: *(She examines a sheet of paper.)* An identification card. What he needs is your identification card. Don't you have it?

The man: No.

The woman: A replacement then. Where did you lose it?

The man: I didn't lose it.

The woman: It was stolen. Where did it happen?

The man: No, it wasn't stolen either.

The woman: What, then? Tell me.

The man: What?

The woman: Your ID, why don't you have it? What happened to it?

The man: I've never had one.

The woman: No, that isn't correct. You had to get one when you became an adult. If we weren't so busy with the census, I would have to give you a fine.

The man: Nothing can be done?

The woman: Let's make one now, shall we?

He looks toward the horizon.

The man: Will it take long?

The woman: About an hour. As you can see, there isn't even a line.

The man: All right.

The woman: Are you going far?

The man: To the other side.

The woman: By road?

The man: No. *(He looks toward the horizon and points.)* That way. *(She looks puzzled.)* Yes, that way. Pretty far, isn't it?

The woman: *(After a pause.)* I need your certificate.

The man: My certificate?

The woman: Your certificate, preferably the original.

The man: The original? What are you talking about?

The woman: Your certificate. Don't you have it?

The man: No.

The woman: Well, first you're going to need a certificate.

The man: A certificate? And that's going to take more time . . .

The woman: No more than half an hour, but it's worth the wait. For important things, whenever they need your information, they always ask you for a certificate.

The man: Really? And where do they give them out?

The woman: Here.

The man: The stars, dog, look at the stars. Then give me one.

The woman: I'd be glad to. A certificate then. Birth or death?

The man: Birth. I haven't decided to die yet.

The woman: *(After a pause.)* Book number?

The man: What?

The woman: Your book number. *(He doesn't answer.)* Don't you have it?

The man: No.

The woman: Page number?

The man: What are you talking about?

The woman: Don't you have a book or page number?

The man: No. Is that a problem?

The woman: For some people it would be, but not for me. Don't you worry.

The man: It's a good thing I met you.

The woman: Thank you.

The man: It's really great that I ran into you.

The woman: And I shouldn't even be on a beach.

The man: But it's wonderful that you are.

The woman: I don't like being here.

The man: Me neither.

The woman: *(After an awkward pause.)* Your name?

The man: Did I say something wrong?

The woman: Your name!

The man: Did I say something wrong?

The woman: No, just hurry up because neither one of us wants to be here. Your name.

The man: I don't have one.

The woman: Your name.

The man: I don't have one.

The woman: Your name, sir, yours, your name. The certificate is for you, is it not? Or is it for someone else?

The man: No . . . yes, it's for me.

The woman: Then tell me your name.

The man: That's what I'm trying to tell you. I don't have one.

The woman: What did you say?

The man: I don't have a name either!

The woman: Don't shout at me. I may be old, but I am not deaf.

The man: I'm sorry . . . I thought that . . . nothing.

The woman: It's all right, it's not a problem. Let's start over. Give me your name.

The man: I just don't have one.

The woman: What are you saying!

The man: I don't . . . have one! I'm sorry again, but I didn't think about that before.

The woman: I don't understand you.

The man: The fact is, I don't have a name.

The woman: What?

The man: I don't . . . They never gave me one.

The woman: Well, give yourself one. You are driving me crazy. I can't give you a birth certificate if you don't have a name. Next.

The man: Well . . . I don't know . . .

The woman: Next!

The man: Wait, it's just that . . . I don't know.

The woman: Pedro, Carlos, Arturo, Stanley . . . What do I know? There are a lot of pretty names out there these days. Next!

The man: Well . . . I don't know . . .

The woman: Next!

The man: Wait! There's no one else in line.

The woman: That's right, and that could only happen to me! Last name, while you're thinking about it.

The man: I don't know.

The woman: What?

The man: I don't know. I never knew what it was.

The woman: Then give me your father's.

The man: I don't have one.

The woman: Your mother's.

The man: I don't have a mother either.

The woman: You don't have a father or a mother. No first name or last name.

The man: That's right, not that I know of.

The woman: Then I'm sorry. I can't help you. I can't issue you a birth certificate.

The man: But why? You told me that for all the important things . . .

The woman: Because.

The man: That's not a reason.

The woman: Because . . . because I can't. Don't waste my time.

The man: But why not?

The woman: Because, sir, allow me to say it . . . you have not been born yet.

The action is interrupted as he seems to get lost in his thoughts.

The man: I am a decent person and I am a normal person. Decent and normal. I don't hurt anyone. I sail and I sing to the sea. I go places and I talk to people. I smile. I act and I speak not to please others but because I say what I think. First name, last name, address, age. Fisherman, my name is Fisherman. First name, last name, address, age. Fisherman of the Sea. First name, last name, address, age. He stayed on the dock, waving goodbye to me. Goodbye, Fisherman of the Sea. Mermaid, my Mermaid, goodbye. The stars, the winds, the tides. This is the hour of the afternoon . . .

. Can I take him with me? I will love him, I will take care of him . . . Easy now, Mommy's here . . . This is the hour of the afternoon . . . Will you come back? What's your name? You haven't introduced yourself yet. First name, last name, address, age. Will you return? . . . Dorotea . . . Dorotea? . . . Are you going to come back? This is the hour of the afternoon when life truly seems to end . . . And don't look at me like a lost puppy because we aren't friends and we don't even know each other. I am a decent person and I am a normal person. Decent and normal, and the word absurdness does not exist. Next. Pedro, Carlos, Arturo, Stanley. Next, please. Vladimir, Giovanni, Alfredo, Daniel. How can I help you?

The scene returns to the previous moment.

The man: Fisherman.

The woman: Excuse me?

The man: Fisherman.

The woman: I'm sorry, but I'm not asking what you do.

The man: My name. My name is Fisherman.

The woman: Oh, I'm sorry! There are all kinds of names these days. Surname?

The man: Of the Sea.

The woman: Your last name?

The man: Of the Sea.

The woman: Of the Sea. Fisherman of the Sea. Your first and last name.

The man: Yes.

The woman: Are you kidding me?

The man: No.

The woman: No one in the world has ever been named Fisherman of the Sea.

The man: That was before, now there is. From now on there is someone in the world named Fisherman of the Sea. And that someone is me.

The woman: Oh, really? And who baptized you with that name?

The man: Life . . . and me.

They remain there looking at each other in silence.

A long pause.

The action continues on the afternoon of the Third Day. She is at her desk again.

The woman: You're here again?

Fisherman: And I'll be here until you help me.

The woman: Really?

Fisherman: Really.

The woman: Uh-huh.

Fisherman: Really.

The woman: Is that a threat?

Fisherman: No.

The woman: It sounds like one to me.

Fisherman: Well, if that's how you see it. Take it however you want.

The woman: And rude too.

Fisherman: Whatever!

The woman: Okay, Mr. Fisherman. Have a seat and wait over there.

Fisherman: But hurry up because I don't have much time.

The woman: As you wish, Mr. of the Sea.

Fisherman sits down on the dock and hums a song. At first it is scarcely audible, but little by little he gets carried away with the tune. She tries to ignore him and attend to her work, but she becomes increasingly annoyed. She coughs and clears her throat to make her irritation more obvious, but he doesn't notice because he has become completely engrossed in his song. She can't stand it any longer and explodes.

The woman: Shut up! (*Startled, he stops singing.*) What is wrong with you? Don't you realize that you're bothering me? I have to work, to concentrate. I have to do my job well.

Fisherman: No.

The woman: Of course I do!

Fisherman: No . . . I mean I didn't realize.

The woman: I didn't realize!

Fisherman: I don't have eyes in the back of my head. You could have come over here and calmly told me to be quiet, that I was bothering you, and then I would have shut up because the last thing I want to do is bother you.

The woman: Well, I'm telling you now. You are bothering me.

Fisherman: Do I really sing bad?

The woman: I'm trying to concentrate.

Fisherman: And my singing is bad.

The woman: Trying to work.

Fisherman: Be honest—really, really bad?

The woman: Trying to do my job well.

Fisherman: Tell me!

The woman: Trying to help. (*Seeing that she won't respond, he starts to sing.*) Yes, terribly! But it's not just that, it's my job!

Fisherman: I knew it. I never tried to sing for a living. Thank goodness I don't do it for that reason. Actually, I don't sing because I'm good or bad at it; I sing because I like to. On the high seas singing is a virtue. You sing to the sun, to the water, to the whales . . .

The woman: Mainly to the whales, I assume.

Fisherman: And to the mermaids. Too bad I never saw one . . . I like it, I like singing to the sea. Do you want to try it?

The woman: No.

Fisherman: It doesn't matter if you don't do it well. You should try.

The woman: No.

Fisherman: Just try, don't be afraid.

The woman: I don't like the sea, I don't know why I should sing to it.

Fisherman: Don't say that, you'll make it angry.

The woman: I'm not here on vacation. I'm trying to work.

Fisherman: Oh, that's right! Is it almost ready?

The woman: Excuse me, Mr.?

Fisherman: Of the Sea.

The woman: I know that already.

Fisherman: Then speak clearly.

The woman: What do you mean by "Is it almost ready?"

Fisherman: My certificate, what else?

The woman: Let's not start that again.

He starts to sing again and she looks at him.

Fisherman: Sorry. (*He whistles and she turns to look at him.*) Not even that? . . . All right, I get it: Silence, complete silence. It's better that way. Now we can hear the sea. The sea. I've been listening to it for years. It never gets boring. You end up understanding it, but it never bores you. Never. Pssss . . . ahhhh . . . pssss . . . ahhhh . . . The sea . . . do you hear it? Ah . . . the sea is a wonderful thing, don't you agree? Listen to it closely. At least it speaks to me. And it calls me. Fisssherman . . . of the Seeea . . . of the Seeea . . . Hear it? It's calling me . . . It doesn't speak to you, does it? What is your name? Really, you haven't introduced yourself yet. What's your name? . . . (*She doesn't answer.*) Well, it doesn't matter. Maybe you don't hear it because you don't like it and that's why it doesn't call you. It doesn't call you, does it?

The woman: Listen, don't you have anything to do?

Fisherman: Just one thing, well two. Something here and something else over there. (*He points to the horizon.*)

The woman: Then why don't you go and do it?

Fisherman: Because in order to do that I have to wait here for my birth certificate.

The woman: Go away, mister, and leave me in peace! What right do you think you have to come here and bother me, here where I didn't ask to be sent, the worst place in the world, where I least want to be, where there's hardly anything to do. Go away and let me work. Please, God, let somebody show up so I can do my job!

Fisherman: Who could possibly understand you!

The woman: No one.

Fisherman: That must be because you don't let yourself be understood.

The woman: No one comes to this wretched place. Why am I here, Mr. of the Sea? For no reason, no reason at all. The census, cards, certificates, nothing. I serve no purpose here.

Fisherman: You could give me . . .

The woman: Leave me alone.

Fisherman: My certificate . . .

The woman: You are nobody. You don't exist. Leave me alone!

Silence. He is on the dock, lost in the horizon.

Fisherman: I like the afternoon. The breeze that warms my face, and the salt. I like the salt, the taste of the salt. The sun that's setting here is just coming up over there, on the other side. Far away. And the sound, the pounding. It pounds in my ears. This is the hour of the afternoon when everything stops for a moment and life seems to end forever. My dog is probably sad. Will he keep

waiting for me or has he already jumped into the sea? I told him I wouldn't be away long and it's already been three days. This is the hour of the afternoon when life truly seems to end. (*Shouting toward the horizon.*) I'm coming, I'm coming! . . . I'll be back . . . I'm coming back. (*To the woman.*) Look, look at the sun. It's going, it's going. It's going to the other side where hopefully someone is still waiting for us. Look, look at the sun. I hope someone is looking at it for you and me on the other side! It's going . . . This is the hour when life seems to come to an end. A certificate, give me a birth certificate, please. I have to exist and go back for my dog. (*Looking again toward the horizon.*) I'm coming! . . . (*To her.*) For my mermaid and my friend. (*Shouting again.*) I'm coming . . . I'm coming! . . . (*Silence. To her.*) It's gone. I like the afternoon . . . and the salt . . . This is the hour of the afternoon when life truly seems to end . . .

She has stood up and is now in front of her desk.

Silence.

The woman: We should go to sleep.

Fisherman: Yes . . . we should go to sleep.

The woman: It seems like it's going to be cold tonight.

Fisherman: It's always cold on the sea at night.

The woman: Are you staying here?

Fisherman: On my boat, over there.

The woman: Good night.

Fisherman: Bye.

She is about to leave but stops.

The woman: And . . . if I could get you a birth certificate . . . what would the date be?

Fisherman: The date?

The woman: Yes, the date.

Fisherman: (*He states the current day and date.*)

The woman: That's today's date.

Fisherman: That's why I said it.

The woman: I'm referring to your date of birth.

Fisherman: (*He repeats the current day and date.*) Today. If you get me a birth certificate I will have been born today . . . and you will be my mother.

She sings with a voice that seems to come from another time.

The woman: Here we go round the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush . . .

Silence.

Fisherman: This would have been a beautiful afternoon to be born.

The woman: This would have been a beautiful afternoon to be born.

Fisherman: Good night.

The woman: Bye.

Fisherman: Sleep well.

She starts to leave again but stops.

The woman: Dorotea . . . Dorotea is my name.

She is about to leave.

Fisherman: Listen, maybe it's calling you.

The woman: I don't think so . . . No one ever calls me . . . least of all the sea.

Fisherman: Pssss . . . ahhhh . . . pssss . . . ahhhh . . .

She exits.

Fisherman: Doroteaaa . . . pssss . . . aaaa . . . Doroteaaa . . . pssss . . . aaaa.

The light fades little by little over Fisherman's voice.

The action continues at noon on the Fourth Day. She appears again at her desk.

Dorotea: If I could. That's what I said.

Fisherman: Come on.

Dorotea: It's not the same.

Fisherman: You gave me your word. We had an agreement.

Dorotea: An agreement!

Fisherman: That's right.

Dorotea: I never said I would do it.

Fisherman: Then why did you ask me about the date?

Dorotea: In case I could do it.

Fisherman: Come on, that's an agreement.

Dorotea: It's obvious you didn't study grammar. If I could, if I could, that's what I said. If I could get you a certificate, that's literally what I said.

Fisherman: What am I saying then?

Dorotea: That I made you a promise.

Fisherman: That's right.

Dorotea: Could, conditional mood of the verb *to be able*, conjugated in the first person singular and indicating a probable or possible condition. It indicates a hypothetical situation in the future, an action that may or may not happen with respect to another action. And if we add the conjunction "if," which is conditional—listen carefully—conditional, we form the phrase, "if I could," which means nothing more than a possibility. If I could, if I wanted, if I had. Possibility. Nothing in these expressions indicates that an action is going to happen with certainty. That is, nothing at all is guaranteed, much less promised. If I could get you a birth certificate. A possibility. Do you understand now?

Fisherman: Half of it.

Dorotea: Which half?

Fisherman: The part about possibility.

Dorotea: That's good enough. That's the part I wanted you to understand.

Fisherman: Then tell me if there is any possibility . . .

Dorotea: There isn't any.

Fisherman: None?

Dorotea: None.

Fisherman: If you wanted there to be one, would there be?

Dorotea: There could be.

Fisherman: Come on!

Dorotea: But that's different.

Fisherman: It's clear you don't know anything about everyday grammar where it is very wisely said that where there's a will, there's a way.

Dorotea: Then I'm not willing.

Fisherman: That's the problem. You aren't willing to do anything.

Dorotea: What are you saying?

Fisherman: Exactly what you heard. It's about time someone told you. You aren't willing to take a risk.

Dorotea: Listen, mister, I will not allow you to . . .

Fisherman: But it's the truth. You look ridiculous sitting at your desk, here where you have no one to help and where nothing ever happens, complaining about your fate . . .

Dorotea: Complaining to you?

Fisherman: Complaining about your bad luck and not daring to do anything about it. There's the sea. At least get undressed and go for a dip. I bet you'll go home to the capital where no one's waiting for you, not even a mouse and certainly not a dog wagging its tail. And you won't even have gone for a dip in the ocean when it was right in front of you and you hadn't seen it in years. Forget those papers. Nobody cares about that around here.

Dorotea: I do.

Fisherman: You do what?

Dorotea: I do care. I care about it even though I look ridiculous sitting at my desk where there's no one to help and nothing ever happens, complaining about my fate instead of doing something about it. And no, I'm not going to get undressed and go for a dip in that filthy water to be rolling around in the sand like an idiot when someone comes along who needs my help. A certificate, a card, a record. Do you think I'm here just to have fun? This is the worst place they could have sent me. I don't even like the sea, but I have to be here, waiting for that person who might need me, need my service and my attention. I care, even though I'll return to an empty house in the city where the neighbor's dog won't even be wagging its tail for me. They think we're stupid, that we don't get it. I don't feel old, but I realize that they're getting rid of us old ones. They're keeping the perky young girls in the city. They're sending us mature women to the slums, to the outskirts, so we'll get used to doing nothing. The others might be happy about it, but not me, not me. I like working, being active. I still have lots of energy myself. Go far away where you won't have any clients and it won't matter if the service is slow. Oh no, sir, I am not old. I may not be a spring chicken, but I am not old. It might be too late for things I should have done long ago, but I would still love to see a long line of people I could send home happy with their pretty cards or their original birth certificates in hand. Well done, Dorotea, well done, they would say . . . But now with the census, it's off to the mountains, to the boondocks, to the coast. And Dorotea gets sent to the coast. There are mountains and valleys and quaint little towns, but no, I had to end up on the beach. And that's why you bother me. Your mere presence bothers me because I'm in the worst possible place, trying to deal with it and not run away. And meanwhile, you're so insistent that I can't concentrate enough to be ready if someone does show up. And besides, you're asking me for something I can't help you with. No matter how many times you ask, I won't be able to help you. I can't help you with a certificate that doesn't exist anywhere. Where do you want me to get it? I can't do anything for you when your own mother didn't do what she was supposed to do when you were born. Who knows where you came from? Maybe you weren't even born here! Maybe you were

kidnapped, or maybe you're plotting some crime. No, I am not going to help you. Do you hear me? I'm not going to help you. I'm not going to risk my job for someone who doesn't even have a name just to get sent home, fired, no longer able to serve humanity at all, my useless life over in the very place it began. No. No means no and that's that. Okay? So goodbye . . . And stop looking at me like a lost puppy because we aren't friends and we don't even know each other . . . Next. Next in line, please!

The scene reverts to a moonlit night on the beach.

Fisherman: I have only one childhood memory. Only one and it's strange, hazy, and I don't understand it. I was very young. I was asleep and dreaming that I was afraid. It was one of those nightmares you forget in the morning. I woke up shaking, in a sweat. At the scariest part I screamed and jolted up in bed. When I opened my eyes, she was there looking at me. "Easy," she said, "Mommy's here. Easy, Mommy's here." And maybe she was there because I calmed down and went back to sleep. I slept so soundly that when I woke up she was no longer there and I was no longer a child; I had grown. I slept too long. That's why I don't sleep much now, Mermaid. I prefer looking at the sky and the stars and the sea, knowing that everything I see in the light of the moon is real. I love you my Mermaid, I truly do. *(In the shadows the silhouette of a woman rises up from the sand and kisses him.)*

The scene returns to the previous moment.

Fisherman: It's just me.

Dorotea: I know, I see you.

Fisherman: I am that person who needs you, needs your service and your attention. Help me.

Dorotea: That's different.

Fisherman: Why?

Dorotea: Because it can't be done.

Fisherman: Says who?

Dorotea: Everyone. Everyone says so. The law, logic, life, rules, institutions, common sense. Even mathematics, which is so exact, would say so. Everyone. Go on, ask around to see if anyone would take your side: I, Fisherman of the Sea, I have determined that I am born today *(she states the current day and date)*, here in this lost corner of the world that isn't even on a map. And, what's more, Dorotea Somebody gave birth to me.

Fisherman: We can skip that last part, if you don't mind.

Dorotea: Of course.

Fisherman: I never said I was born here.

Dorotea: I just guessed you were.

Fisherman: You assumed I was.

Dorotea: Even worse.

Fisherman: I just happened to stop here and you just happened to be here.

Dorotea: Unfortunately.

Fisherman: The sea brought us together.

Dorotea: The sea brought us together! The sea doesn't bring people together. What does the sea know about that? I'm just here by chance.

Fisherman: The only thing I need is my certificate. A birth certificate so I can take off again and get my dog. If you want, I'll come back afterward and we can continue discussing this so you can see you did nothing wrong by helping me. But if not, the poor thing is going to get desperate and swim across the sea to find me and make me keep my promise. I'm coming, I told him, I'm going to return, and you should have seen how he wagged his tail. (*Toward the horizon.*) I'm coming . . . I'm coming . . . I'll be back . . . I'm coming back! . . . (*Shouting even louder.*) I'm coming, I'm coming dog, I will not abandon you! . . . (*To her.*) You know I found him. I found him in the animal shelter and at that very moment he found me too. I'm sure he thinks the same way I do in his canine language: that now he is a dog with a man and I am a man with a dog. It was almost six o'clock in the evening. Over there, look, right over there where the sun is setting. He was alone and so was I, without anyone or anything. Both of us in the same circumstances. Then we looked at each other the way you do when you've been searching for someone for a long time, even if that someone is a dog. A big ugly man was there too. He was the guy from the animal shelter and you could tell he didn't like dogs. I told him to give me the dog, but he said I had to go to the office to fill out a form. I went. First name, last name, address, age. All of that to get a stray dog? Just give him to me, I will love him and take care of him. First name, last name, address, age. You're going to be my dog, I said . . . First name, last name, address, age. We will never be alone again, I told him . . . First name, last name, address, age . . . So I began sailing, sailing anywhere to find a place where I could be born, where I could take on an identity so I could return for my dog. When I got tired I let the tide and the wind and the stars carry me to some port. I told him I would return for him and he believed me. He barked. He barked loud and wagged his tail. Then he told me that if I didn't return he would jump into the sea and find me to make me keep my promise.

Dorotea: (*After a pause.*) Why couldn't you be normal?

Fisherman: What?

Dorotea: You.

Fisherman: You're going to insult me again.

Dorotea: No . . . I'm referring to your situation. You should have come here to my office and I would have asked you to get in line so I could help you. You would have been the first person and the last person in line and you wouldn't have had to fight with anyone trying to cut in. I would have

given you your birth certificate in a second and we would have happily gone our separate ways. Today you would leave for that far away place on the other side of the sea where at least a dog waits for you and I would be opening my door at this very moment, feeling I had fulfilled my mission . . . Why? Why couldn't you be normal?

Fisherman: I'm sorry.

Dorotea: I am too.

Silence.

Dorotea: And that dog. What's he like?

Fisherman: What's he like?

Dorotea: Yes, what's he like? Is he pretty? Is he big? Does he have a thick coat?

Fisherman: No.

Dorotea: Then, what?

Fisherman: I don't know, he's just . . . alone.

Dorotea: Oh! Alone.

Fisherman: Yes. Alone.

Dorotea: You probably need a name.

Fisherman: I know. That's why I'm here.

Dorotea: I'm not referring to you. I mean, yes, you too. But I was talking about the dog.

Fisherman: The dog?

Dorotea: Yes, when he's yours, he'll need a name. All dogs that belong to someone have names. Only strays don't have names.

Fisherman: I hadn't thought about that.

Dorotea: Well, think about it. You can choose one. There are so many pretty names out there these days. Rover, Kaiser, Lassie, although that would be better for a female. Nero, Buddy, Rin-Tin-Tin . . .

Fisherman: No. Dog. My dog will be named Dog.

It is the afternoon of the Fourth Day. He is on the dock and she has moved her chair around to the front of the desk and is reviewing her paperwork.

Fisherman: Tell me about yourself.

Dorotea: I don't have anything to tell.

Fisherman: Tell me. We all have something to tell.

Dorotea: Not me.

Fisherman: As you wish.

The scene changes to Dorotea's past.

Dorotea: Mommy, Mommy . . . when I'm big I'm going to be an astronaut. I'll go to the moon and throw you stardust from there. Mommy, Mommy, when I'm big I'm going to be a fireman. I'm going to have a big hose to put out the fire that's burning you up inside. Mommy, Mommy, when I'm big I'm going to be a teacher so I can teach your songs to the children. Mommy, Mommy . . . when I'm big I'm going to be a mommy and teach my kids to play Ring Around the Rosie with their grandmother. Mommy . . . Mommy? Why do you look so sad? Mommy? . . . My mother never became a grandmother . . .

The scene returns to the present.

Dorotea: How long?

Fisherman: How long what?

Dorotea: How long are you going to wait?

Fisherman: I don't know, that depends on you. Dog is probably asking that same question.

Dorotea: Poor Dog.

Fisherman: I'm afraid he'll leave, or that someone might take him, or that he'll die.

Dorotea: I don't think so.

Fisherman: You don't?

Dorotea: He's not going to leave the shelter because he doesn't have anywhere to go. No one's going to take him because he's too . . . alone. He's not big, he's not pretty, and he doesn't have a thick coat, so no one will want him. And he won't die . . . because you have given him hope. And no one who has hope dies.

Fisherman: You don't think so?

Dorotea: No.

Fisherman: Thank you.

Dorotea: It's just my opinion.

Fisherman: That's why I'm thanking you.

The scene returns to Dorotea's past.

Dorotea: I will wait for you. It doesn't matter how long it takes. If it has to be, it has to be. I will be waiting here on the shore for you to return. Go ahead, sail the seas, see the world, become a man, travel many roads, defend your causes, make love, take up arms, follow your dreams, conquer the world, make money, run, escape, write poetry, be careful crossing the border, study. Do whatever you want, create the paradise you see in your dreams. Do whatever, whatever you want to do, but return. Don't forget the waves that will bring you back, and return.

The scene returns to the present.

Dorotea: So many people.

Fisherman: Where?

Dorotea: Here. On these pages. Each page is a name. Each name is a story.

Fisherman: Everybody's there except me.

Dorotea: You don't have a name, but you do have a story.

Fisherman: And what good does it do?

Dorotea: Some good.

Fisherman: Like what?

Dorotea: I don't know, it's good for something. I, on the other hand . . .

Fisherman: You have a name and a story. If you don't want to tell it, that's something else. In any case, no one would refuse to give you a dog, or a house, or a family. And why not? Just because you have a piece of paper with your first and last name on it that says you are a person.

Dorotea: Fisherman . . . Fisherman . . . It could be a nice name.

Fisherman: Who cares?

The past.

Dorotea: When you are born I'm going to give you a pretty name. There are so many pretty names out there these days. A strong handsome name if you're a boy. A sweet, melancholy name if you're a girl. Rain. Rain would be perfect. Sweet and melancholy. And if you're a boy? Lightning, Thunder, Hurricane. Those aren't names for people, so I can't give them to you. Zeus, Apollo, Dionysus . . . They're too Greek, they aren't in style any more . . . Sea . . . Maybe I should call you Sea, although it doesn't sound like a person's name . . . Rain . . . Sea . . . Maybe your father will come back soon and we'll make you be born . . .

The present.

Fisherman: It's late.

Dorotea: Again.

Fisherman: This is the hour of the afternoon when life truly seems to end.

Dorotea: Again.

Fisherman: Dog is probably sad and depressed waiting for me. I hope he doesn't jump into the ocean.

Dorotea: I like the afternoon. The breeze that warms my face, and the salt.

Fisherman: I told him I wouldn't be long and it's already been three days.

Dorotea: I like the salt, this taste of salt.

Fisherman: The sun that is setting here is just coming up over there, on the other side.

Dorotea: This is the hour of the afternoon when life truly seems to end.

Fisherman: And this sound, the pounding. It pounds in my ears.

Dorotea: Again.

Fisherman: Don't go yet.

Dorotea: No . . . I'm not going.

Any time on the Fifth Day. Dorotea is sitting in her chair, which is now almost facing the sea. He is on the sand.

Fisherman: All kinds of things happen in life. All kinds of things. More to some people than to others, you just never know. One day out of the blue, I came across a boat. She was old and looked abandoned. She was old all right, but she could still bounce around flirtatiously on the waves. She swayed back and forth and looked at me. Yes, she looked at me. That's when I understood that she wanted me and that she was calling me. Me? I said. That's right, I asked the boat if she was dancing for me and she said yes. I moved closer and saw that she had a pair of oars, a net, and a water jug. Everything. She was ready. There she was, all ready for me. I assumed that somebody had docked her there so I just went over to check her out. I was still really young then, so I hopped on and imagined that I was the owner of that nameless, neglected boat, that I was her owner and lord of the high seas. Then I left and I waited. Each time I passed by, I looked at her and waited. I waited more than a week. A day and a night, a day, a night, another day and another night, and no one claimed her or took her away. It was a place like this, nobody around, nothing going on, except there wasn't an office and nobody was taking a census or anything like that . . . Well, the point is that the boat was still there flirting with me, looking at me and waiting for me. She was feeling old and she wanted to take her last trip with me and I, well, the fact is I didn't have anybody or anything. I didn't even know how I was born or how I got there. So that very day before noon, I decided to take her and leave. Let's go then, I said, and that's what we did. She's still with me today, she brought me here. She has been rejuvenated.

Dorotea: Hope always rejuvenates people . . . A boat too it seems . . .

Fisherman: It seems so. And she still isn't ready to make her last voyage. Well, off I went to all sorts of places, finally feeling like a young lad with hair on my chest and in other places you can imagine. I wasn't a boy anymore, but I still needed more time to become a man, just more time! Away I went like a ship's captain, with my boat, my net, and my oars. When I was hungry I fished. When I was thirsty I stayed thirsty because in my excitement I had forgotten to fill the water jug. When I got tired I just floated along and in the evening I followed the sunset. I studied the tides, the winds, and the stars. I discovered that they always have something to say. Now I'm an expert. That's how I passed my days, nights, weeks, months, years. I don't know how many. I counted them by the length of my fingernails, my beard, and my hair. Sometimes I would pull into a port and dock. I would look at the people, the streets, the houses. I sold fish and earned enough money to pay for a good soapy bath, a supply of water, and a few things I couldn't get at sea. After a few days on land, I would get a strange feeling. I missed the air, the breeze, the water, the salt, and the rocking of the waves. Being on land was drowning me, yes, drowning me. Then I ran and got on the boat and left, rowing and rowing until I found peace . . . I had become part of the sea.

Dorotea: Part of the sea . . . perhaps that's what happens to everyone who sails . . .

Fisherman: Could be . . . it very well could be . . .

Dorotea: Part of the sea . . .

Fisherman: I tried staying on land twice and each time it turned out bad. One time I arrived at a port, a small one, just a dock really . . .

Dorotea is lost in her thoughts.

Dorotea: Rain, Sea, forgive me. I had always thought that you would both come by sea. That the father of my children would return by sea. Do whatever you want, I told him, but don't forget the waves that will bring you back, and return. I waited for him, I really did. Maybe that was the problem, that I waited too long. Then suddenly a man arrived by land. By land, not by sea. He came in a rundown bus that had to spend the night in the capital. It was packed with people and covered in dust. Those of us at the city hall found the passengers a place to spend the night. And there he was in the midst of the dust and the people, tired but smiling. I didn't know anything about stars or seas then; I only knew that he had arrived by land, not by sea. There he was with his soft eyes and his mischievous grin, approaching me with a sweet innocence. I was afraid and shy. Now I think that maybe my fear and timidity kept you from being born. There he was, sent by the stars perhaps. I didn't know his name or how old he was. We didn't talk about those things. All I know is that I didn't let his hands caress my body and now I regret it. Rain, Sea, I'm sorry. I always thought that the father of my children would come by sea.

Fisherman continues.

Fisherman: Am I boring you?

Dorotea: No.

Fisherman: Are you sure?

Dorotea: Yes.

Fisherman: Should I continue?

Dorotea: If you want to.

Fisherman: Why don't you tell me about yourself?

Dorotea: I've already said that I have nothing to tell.

Fisherman: There must be something.

Dorotea: Nothing interesting.

Fisherman: It doesn't have to be about the sea and the stars. Come on, tell me something.

Dorotea: Let's leave it for another day.

Fisherman: I've bored you.

Dorotea: No, but if you don't want to tell me any more, I can't force you.

Fisherman: And what if someone comes?

Dorotea: No one has come and no one will come.

Fisherman: But if they do?

Dorotea: Then . . . let them wait.

Fisherman: Well, in that case . . . I was saying that I tried to stay on land twice. The first time I arrived at a small port during the hustle and bustle of the afternoon. There was a big, strong man there, a black man with big feet and small eyes. We looked at each other as if we were old acquaintances. He worked carrying goods to businesses around town. He smiled at me and kept working. It had been a long time since someone had smiled at me. I followed him to return the smile, but I lost him. Actually, I was the one who got lost, and then I saw a church. I went in to rest. It was a little old church that made me feel something between devotion and fear, but it was very peaceful too. I somehow thought that I had arrived, that this was the place where I should stay and make a friend. The man was a good guy, lucky for the rest of us because he could've killed anyone with a swing of his fist if he felt like it. He liked me too, hardly anyone else talked to him. He would find me a job carrying loads. The small ones for you, he said, and the heavy ones for me. I could rent a room in his boarding house and I could even go to night classes with him, where the older folks studied, because after all, he said, God created light so men could work. I liked the idea: being on land wasn't making me seasick anymore and I thought that it was time to give my boat a rest. But, guess what happened? I applied for a job: first name, last name, address, age. I tried renting a room: first name, last name, address, age. How can I give someone my address when I don't have one? I went to the night school and the same thing: first name, last name, etcetera, etcetera . . . you

know better than I do . . . My friend spoke to the pastor about me, but the pastor convinced him that if I didn't have a name or an age, then I was trouble. That day even my friend became a little suspicious of me, so I left, rowing away from the port about to burst into tears. Only my black friend said goodbye. He came to the dock when he finished work and stood there looking at me trying to wave goodbye. Maybe if I had invited him, he would have come with me . . . The second time was worse. By now I knew I couldn't have a house, a job, friends, or go to school, but somehow I didn't need any of that. But this time, this time, I thought I was dying, I really thought I was going to die. My heart was pounding, my palms clammy, I couldn't breathe and I felt . . . I felt . . . that somewhere . . . don't take this the wrong way . . . down there . . . that I would explode with desire. She was the most beautiful woman in the world. The most beautiful. It wasn't like I had seen many women in my life because when you live on the ocean all you see are whales, jellyfish, and manta rays. But I'm telling you, this woman was like a real mermaid. I do think mermaids are extinct by now after so many years and so many myths, but there is one left, mine, my mermaid. I saw her on the beach when I went ashore for water. We looked at each other like old lovers and, without saying anything, she told me to make love to her. And I, I made love to her. We were like young lovers, playing in the waves and rolling around in the sand. I discovered love between her legs, and that urge I told you about—I just couldn't resist it. We met on the beach every afternoon and I became an expert in other kinds of tides and winds and stars. I was happy. I lived on my boat, fishing for my meals, selling what was left over, and bathing with scented soap every morning. In the afternoon we played, at night we made love, and at dawn we sang like mermaids. But one day it happened. We were together, silhouettes in the moonlight, and I was telling her my adventures. I could feel her close to me, lying naked on the sand. When I finished my story she got up and gave me a kiss. Let's get married and live like this forever, she said. Live like this forever, I thought, my head spinning. I saw her there, naked on the sand in the light of the moon, lying there forever, forever at my side. Let's get married, I said suddenly without even thinking. She said we had to get dressed up to get married properly, so with the money I made selling fish I bought a white shirt and detergent to wash my pants because I didn't have enough to buy new ones. She got all dolled-up in a white dress with little pearls and flowers that I would get to rip off her later, she said. The priest was standing in front of us frowning and then it happened. First name . . . last name . . . address . . . age . . . the priest said. My mermaid thought I refused to say them because I was hiding something, because I didn't love her enough to marry her, and she spent the entire afternoon crying on the beach. I don't understand . . . I just don't understand . . . I am who I am, it doesn't matter if I'm twenty or thirty or forty. You can call me Pedro or Tree or Star—I won't stop being who I am . . .

Dorotea: Shakespeare already said that . . .

Fisherman: Who?

Dorotea: William Shakespeare, a poet.

Fisherman: Well, he must have been in love with a mermaid too.

Dorotea: I suppose he was.

Fisherman: I don't understand . . . I am who I am and I was the one who loved her . . . Then I rowed away until anger and tears overcame me. When I got tired I was over there, where the sun sets, and when I docked to stretch my legs, I found Dog. You know the rest. We looked at each other the same way my friend and I had looked at each other and the same way my mermaid and I looked at each other, with eyes that said we had been searching for each other for a long time. I saw him and promised to return and he threatened to jump into the sea to find me if I didn't go back for him. That worries me because he didn't seem very patient or willing to stay alone like my friend and my mermaid were. Dog is over there, right over there, where the sun sets, waiting, but ready to jump into the sea if I don't return, even though he doesn't know anything about compasses or tides. The wind and the stars brought me here; I didn't do anything, too tired to even row. I don't know how or where I was born, I was so young then and I can't remember anymore. My only childhood memory is a night when I woke up crying. I don't know who my parents were or why they abandoned me, but I know I am who I am and that I'm the one who has a black friend on a small dock, who loves a mermaid who's crying on the beach, and who promised Dog to return in a boat to get him. I know I am who I am and that I am here now, in this place and in this moment (*toward the horizon*), and that's why I'm telling you, Dog, that I, Fisherman, Fisherman of the Sea was born on (*he states the current day and date*), in this lost corner of the world where no one comes and where nothing happens, at the side of Dorotea, a woman of a certain age who accompanied me at my birth and is therefore my mother.

A brief pause.

Dorotea: Don't go . . . please . . .

Fisherman: No . . . I won't go.

Silence.

Time seems to stop.

Dorotea: Why are you looking at me like that?

Fisherman: Like what?

Dorotea: Like that . . . like you did the first day.

Fisherman: I'm not looking at you in any particular way.

Dorotea: As if you didn't . . . that way . . . as if . . .

Fisherman: As if we've been looking for each other for a long time?

Dorotea: I don't know . . . that way . . . like on the first day.

Fisherman: I'm not looking at you in any certain way and if I am, it's just because, even though that's not a reason.

Dorotea: Who are you?

Fisherman: Fisherman, and you?

Dorotea: The black friend, the mermaid, and the dog.

Fisherman: No. You are Dorotea.

Dorotea loses herself in the past.

Dorotea: My name is Dorotea and I do not know who I am. I live on the street next to Central Park in this country's capital and no one visits me. I prefer to forget my age and my last name was swept away by time: I don't know if it left on a dusty bus carrying a memory with it or if it grew fins and swam away in the sea. My children were never born and no one ever called me mommy. No one waits for me when I get home—not a man, not a child, not a dog. Not even a mouse, although I suspect there's one snooping around when I'm not there. I like my job and I strive to do it well. When I do, I sleep at night with the great satisfaction of having served a purpose, of being useful to someone, someone other than myself. I have a first name, a last name, an address, and an age but no one with whom to share them, not Rain or Sea, my children, my lost, forgotten children . . . This is the hour of the afternoon when life truly seems to end.

Dorotea and Fisherman are on the dock. The Sixth Day.

Dorotea: What's over there?

Fisherman: Where?

Dorotea: Over there. On the other side.

Fisherman: Nothing.

Dorotea: Nothing? Then why do you want to go back?

Fisherman: Just for Dog.

Dorotea: And then what?

Fisherman: Then what? . . . I hadn't thought about that.

Dorotea: Well, you'll have to think about it.

Fisherman: I don't know . . . maybe nothing.

Dorotea: You'll have to take Dog something.

Fisherman: Take him something? I hadn't thought about that . . .

Dorotea: More waves, more water, more wandering?

Fisherman: Maybe.

Dorotea: Nothing will be the same when you have Dog.

Fisherman: I hadn't thought about that.

Silence.

Dorotea: What's he like?

Fisherman: Who?

Dorotea: Dog.

Fisherman: Dog?

Dorotea: Yes, what is he like?

Fisherman: Alone.

Dorotea: Scrawny, old, and sad.

Fisherman: Small, actually. Small, scrawny, and sad.

Dorotea: Alone.

Fisherman: Yes, alone.

Dorotea: Then he must be old too.

Fisherman: Not necessarily . . . Look at me . . . (*Pause.*) I think with a little effort, I could even get his hair to grow.

Silence.

Dorotea: And the town?

Fisherman: What?

Dorotea: What's it like?

Fisherman: The town?

Dorotea: Yes, the town, the place. What is it like?

Fisherman: People coming and going. Steep streets. Docks. Fishing boats. The same.

Dorotea: The same?

Fisherman: The same as the docks in any small, scrawny, sad town. With the illusion of activity and light.

Dorotea: Activity and light . . . sometimes illusions help . . .

Fisherman: A lot.

Dorotea: With your certificate, Fisherman, you could return to your friend on the dock, rent a room, get a job, and study at the night school. You could go back to the dock where your mermaid

is waiting and marry her, in her dress with pearls and flowers. You could go to church, have children, and take care of Dog.

Fisherman: I don't know.

Dorotea: Why not?

Fisherman: By now my friend has tripped on a coconut while carrying a huge load of fruit and has thrown out his back and he can't even walk let alone carry a load. They closed the night school because there weren't enough adult students and they tore down the church and replaced it with a new one that doesn't inspire devotion or fear. All the boarding houses are expensive and my mermaid has four kids by two different men who took her to the beach just to sleep with her.

Dorotea: Who told you all that?

Fisherman: Nobody.

Dorotea: So?

Fisherman: I just know.

Dorotea: How? (*He doesn't respond.*) How do you know?

Fisherman: I don't know how . . . I just do. Just like I know that all this sun and salt water has dried up my brain and made me invent all this shit.

Silence.

Dorotea: I'm leaving tomorrow.

Fisherman: What?

Dorotea: I'm leaving tomorrow.

Fisherman: What do you mean you're leaving? Where are you going? Why?

Dorotea: I'm going home, where else?

Fisherman: Why?

Dorotea: What do you mean, why?

Fisherman: Just that, why?

Dorotea: Because my time working here is up and now I have to go back.

Fisherman: But no one is waiting for you.

Dorotea: That's true.

Fisherman: I thought you were going to stay . . .

Dorotea: It's my home . . . that's where my seas and stars are.

Fisherman: But no one ever came, so you didn't do your job and they'll fire you.

Dorotea: Next! Next, please! It's your turn Fisherman, Fisherman of the Sea. Fisherman of the Sea, Book 9-A, page 404, male child born in the town of Hidden Harbor, a place where no one ever went and where nothing ever happened. Born on *(she states the actual day and date without mentioning the year)*, in whatever year of Our Lord, in this lost corner of the world, where the tides, the winds, and the stars reign. Having provided this information, Mrs. Dorotea of the Sea, who professes to be his mother and midwife . . . *(Silence.)* Keep it, Fisherman, it will be useful.

Fisherman: *(Toward the horizon.)* Dog, Dog . . . now I'm coming to take you home! . . . Don't jump into the sea, don't jump . . . stay there . . . wait for me!

Dorotea: Anyway, I don't believe it. I think your friend, the black man, is still on the dock waving goodbye and I think your singing mermaid is still on the beach in her dress with pearls and flowers. You should go back to them, Fisherman. Fisherman of the Sea . . . you should go back. And watch your mouth—I hadn't heard a bad word from you all week until just now.

Fisherman: What are you doing?

Dorotea: I'm getting undressed. I'm going for a dip.

The Sixth Day, just before dusk. Both are soaking wet.

Fisherman: Thank you.

Dorotea: Be safe.

Fisherman: You too . . . Do you think he's still waiting for me?

Dorotea: I think so.

Fisherman: It's been a long time. What if he jumped into the sea?

Dorotea: I don't think he did.

Fisherman: And if he did?

Dorotea: Then he will find you.

Fisherman: Do you think so?

Dorotea: Yes.

Fisherman: You know something . . . the day I found you, you got upset at the way I was looking at you. Do you remember?

Dorotea: Yes.

Fisherman: Why?

Dorotea: Why what?

Fisherman: Why did you get mad?

Dorotea: I don't know.

Fisherman: Dorotea . . .

Dorotea: Because you were looking at me . . . in a way . . . as if . . . the same way you looked at your dog.

Fisherman: And at my friend and my mermaid.

Dorotea: Well, I wasn't your dog, or your friend, or your mermaid.

Fisherman: No, you were you, Dorotea.

Dorotea: Get going now.

Fisherman: And you know what else?

Dorotea: Get going, I said.

Fisherman: You looked at me that same way too.

Dorotea: That's not true.

Fisherman: Yes, you were looking at me like that.

Dorotea: For me you were just someone who showed up from who knows where, from the other side of the sea.

Fisherman: Exactly.

Dorotea: Exactly what?

Fisherman: Because you have spent your entire life waiting for something from over there . . .

Dorotea: No.

Fisherman: Yes.

Dorotea: No.

Fisherman: I know you have . . . And one day you'll tell me your story.

Silence.

Dorotea: Will you come back?

Fisherman: What?

Dorotea: Nothing.

Fisherman: Here?

Dorotea: Yes . . . here.

Fisherman: I was born here.

Dorotea: But some people leave and never return.

Fisherman: Would you . . . would you like me to come back?

Dorotea: What do I have to do with it? I don't even live here.

Fisherman: No, but . . .

Dorotea: Forget it.

Fisherman: Would you want me to?

Dorotea: Forget it . . . We have to go.

Fisherman: Yes, I will come back. You can take me to the capital. I've never been to a capital city before. What's it like?

Dorotea: The same. With the illusion of activity and light, but more.

Fisherman: Illusions help.

Dorotea: A lot.

Fisherman: I'll come back. I'll go get my Dog, say hello to my friend, find my mermaid, and come home . . . and I'll make you a grandmother.

Dorotea: You're impossible!

Fisherman: Wouldn't you like that?

Dorotea: Goodbye.

Fisherman: I know you would like it.

Dorotea: Goodbye . . . and be careful with the tides.

Fisherman: And with the winds . . .

Dorotea: And with the stars . . .

Fisherman: Goodbye.

Dorotea: Goodbye.

Fisherman leaves. Dorotea remains on stage trying to wave goodbye as the light starts to fade. She exits.

Before the stage becomes completely dark, a wet dog appears. He shakes himself. Running and barking, he crosses the stage and exits. Blackout.

The Kittens

By Crispulo Torres

Translated by John Thomas Howard

On August 24, 2016, news outlets around the globe reported on what some are calling a new chapter in Colombian history: a joint communiqué issued by the Colombian government and the FARC announced a final and lasting accord that would end Latin America's longest running war, an internal struggle between leftist guerillas and the Colombian republic that has lasted over five decades. But peace is not guaranteed. The Colombian Peace Plan must be ratified through a plebiscite to be held in October; and already, there are detractors who argue that guerillas should not receive pardons for the atrocities committed throughout the many years of war.

For those who support the plan, the opportunity to secure lasting peace is a much-welcomed change. The Colombian people have lived through countless periods of bloodshed, for generations now, and heinous acts of violence have been committed by numerous groups over the years. This includes the FARC and other left-wing guerilla groups, as well as rival drug cartels and their warrens of street-level gangs, right-wing paramilitary squads, not to mention the Colombian military, police forces, and political groups of various shades and sizes.

In 1991, the FARC entered into an earlier unsuccessful round of peace talks with the government. That same year, the Medellín Cartel, led by the all too infamous Pablo Escobar, was also very much at war with the Colombian republic. Escobar's biggest grievance was the government's extradition of drug traffickers to the United States. To force an end to this practice, Escobar ordered scores of assassinations, as well as any number of bombings.

The bloodiest year of Escobar's war may have been 1989, when close to fifteen bombs were detonated throughout different cities across the country. Of these fifteen terrorist acts, at least nine are known to have been perpetrated by the Medellín Cartel, including the downing of Avianca Flight 203 in November. With a total of 110 fatalities, this one act is considered to be the deadliest single crime to be orchestrated by Pablo Escobar—deadlier even than the 1985 Palace of Justice siege, if allegations of Escobar's connection to the M-19 guerilla group-led siege are true. Between September and December of 1989, five of these bombs exploded in the capital of Bogotá, killing upwards of sixty people. The following year another bomb rattled the capital, killing seven. All of this to illustrate how bombings in particular—especially car bombs—and violence in general were a way of life for Colombians in the years leading up to 1991, when Crispulo Torres B. completed work on and directed his one-act, "Los Gaticos."

Torres' play is an adaptation of "Vamos a matar los gaticos," a short story by Álvaro Cepeda Samudio, a respected Colombian writer and journalist best known outside Colombia for his connection to Gabriel García Márquez. In 1950, when Cepeda Samudio's story was first published in a journal called *Cronica*, it was accompanied by one of García Márquez' illustrations. The story, told mostly in direct dialogue, follows three children who must decide when and how to kill a litter of

stray kittens they have found while playing. Just two years prior to the story's publication, the Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated, setting off *El Bogotazo*, a series of bloody riots that marked the beginning of a ten-year-long wave of violence referred to simply as *La Violencia*. Reading Cepeda Samudio's story, one can see the effects that intensified levels of bloodshed and violence can have on the games of schoolchildren, not to mention the effects such violence had on artwork being produced within the country at the time.

Fast-forward to 1991, to two years after the downing of Avianca Flight 203, to Torres' reimagined and reshaped version of Cepeda Samudio's short story: like its antecedent, the one-act follows in the wake of another wave of bloodshed that inundated the Colombian people. In the play, Torres swaps out children for a pair of elderly siblings, a brother and sister named Vetustio and Artaita. The pair ends up trapped in an elevator after having received an inheritance from a third sibling, another sister recently killed in a gang-related shootout. The inheritance the siblings receive is a basket filled with kittens; and because the dead sister's last will and testament requires the killing of all the kittens, Vetustio and Artaita have no choice but to return to the same horrid conversation haunting the dialogue in Cepeda Samudio's story. Like those children scarred by the early years of *La Violencia*, the elderly siblings must decide when and how to kill the litter of kittens their sister has left behind for them.

Add to this macabre situation the spectral appearance of the sister's ghost, the occasional mentioning of a dead mother's presence, and the unnatural (dare it be called magical?) appearance of any number of outlandish props the elderly brother and sister use to kill time and to kill kittens during their confinement in the broken-down elevator, and what you have is a work that ventures into Theater of the Absurd territory. Similar to the post-war French tradition, Torres and Cepeda Samudio both wrote in the wake of great suffering and unrest, during moments of Colombian history when any and all understanding of the ongoing Colombian conflict was muddled by the trauma suffered when having to live through an endless barrage of bullets and the continual detonation of bombs, not to mention the egregious loss of life to be mourned. But unlike the end of the Second World War, the conflict in Colombia seems to be a conflict without end, especially in 1950 and again in 1991. Instead of progress, there is a hornets' nest that is time and time again unsettled by stones thrown by different hands. Instead of any resolutions, there is a kind of frenzy in which it becomes difficult to distinguish one culprit from another when faced with so many stone-wielding instigators. Instead of peace, there is a cyclic nature to the violence, a horrid pattern that can easily make it seem as if the conflict is a never-ending curse cast against the Colombian nation and its people.

Torres' adaptation and evolution of the Cepeda Samudio story is also an adaptation and evolution of the ideas put forward by French dramatists and writers of the Absurd. Forget existentialism, forget all loss of meaning, forget the irrational and illogical leading down a rabbit's whole to absolute silence. Instead, follow the irrational and illogical roadmap Torres supplies, to a place you have no ability to escape from. Follow along that path and you will find those places where the Colombian people live, in Bogotá, in Medellín, in Cali, in Cartagena, in the mountainous country sides between these and other cities, and they will tell you there is never any silence, no matter how irrational and

illogical the violence becomes, or continues to be. For them, for all Colombians who have lived through the conflict, there is no silence whatsoever; there is only the endless report of bullets, the continued sound of explosions going off in the distance, and the sirens and the screams that accompany these things. For those close enough to have survived the fire-blast and the shrapnel-spread of any bomb planted by any instigator, there is also the endless ringing and droning hum that fills the ears and refuses to leave. And there are painful memories to tend to, ones that are difficult to leave behind, to forget, to bury. Violence reverberates this way, endlessly, absurdly so—an absurdity which can sound like the preposterous and senseless things people say when trying to decide how and when to kill a litter of unwanted kittens.

Addendum: Sadly, the conflict without end seems to continue. On Sunday, October 2, 2016, in a nation-wide referendum plagued by poor voter turnout (only 37% of Colombians went to the polls), Colombians voting against the plan defeated efforts towards peace by a slim margin. 50.2% voted *no* and 49.8% voted *yes*, with a difference of little more than 50K votes, leading to a rejection that baffled many Colombians and spectators watching results from outside the long-embattled nation. Detractors of the plan were led by former president Álvaro Uribe. Criticism against peace efforts brokered by the current president, Juan Manuel Santos, included rebuke of the following: amnesty for FARC leaders and rank and file combatants; the disregard of victims' rights; provisions to provide financial support for former guerillas reintegrating into society; as well as the proposal to include FARC in the governing process, permitting the former guerilla group to function as a political party, and provided them with a small number of guaranteed seats in both the Colombian House and Senate. Many of the critics felt the plan was too lenient on guerillas, while President Santos, throughout the long negotiation process, made it clear that the guerillas would not come to the negotiating table if they were asked to do so with their backs against a wall. On Monday immediately following the difficult vote, both Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri (better known by the alias Timochenko) vowed to continue efforts towards peace. And on Friday, October 7, 2016, news from Sweden underscored that vow: just five days after the *no* vote had left efforts for a Colombian Peace Plan up in the air, the Nobel Committee announced that they had awarded the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize to Juan Manuel Santos. The award was conferred on Santos to recognize the difficult work that had gone into the process of brokering peace with the FARC, and hopefully, to spur continued work so that peace in Colombia might soon be agreed upon by all parties, including the Colombian people themselves.

Críspulo Torres B. is a Colombian playwright and director. His career spans nearly four decades, and his work has received numerous awards, including the recognition that his first play, *Domitilio, el rey de la rumba*, is considered one of Colombia's most important dramatic works of the 20th century. He is founder and director of Teatro Tecal, one of the nation's leading theatre troupes, a group known for street theatre productions since its 1980 inception, when Tecal first performed *Domitilio* on the streets of Bogotá. A decade later, Tecal and its founding director added indoor efforts to work accomplished outdoors, opening a small theatre in the historic district of La Candelaria. Since that time, Torres and Tecal's work has shifted between indoor and outdoor spaces,

using both the stage and the street to explore and expand aesthetic and thematic possibilities for their continued creative output.

John Thomas Howard is a writer, translator, and educator who holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Indiana University, and currently lives in Indianapolis, where he is working on a first novel and a collection of short stories. His birthplace is in New York State, but he has spent time in Medellín, Colombia, the South American city where his mother was born. His writing and translation projects are informed by an ongoing and evolving relationship to his mother's birthplace; in addition to writing fictional works that explore such geographical, cultural, and personal displacements, he specializes in the translation of Colombian literary texts.

The Kittens

Translated from "Los Gaticos," a one-act by Crispulo Torres

Two aging siblings, ARTAITA and VETUSTIO, are in an elevator. They are quite upset and refuse to speak with one another. They scowl and make childish faces.

ARTAITA pushes the button for the first floor. VETUSTIO changes it by pressing the button for a different floor. ARTAITA presses the button for the first floor again. VETUSTIO persists, and this back and forth continues until ARTAITA pulls out a knife. She tries to stab him but he jumps out of the way, and the blade pierces the control panel, damaging the elevator and plunging them into darkness.

A long, uncomfortable silence follows.

VETUSTIO: (*Groping in the dark*) Now look what you've done!

ARTAITA: It jammed.

VETUSTIO: You broke it.

ARTAITA: It got jammed!

VETUSTIO: Vandal!

ARTAITA: (*Addressing an imaginary person*) Teddy, can you find Mama, wherever she is in heaven, to let her know that the elevator isn't working, and ask if she can fix the lights at the very least... (*The elevator lights turn on*) Thank you Teddy!

VETUSTIO: (*Persistently*) Look at what you've done!

ARTAITA: It got jammed.

VETUSTIO: You're such a troublemaker! (*Pause*)

ARTAITA: Why did you have to go tell the judge that Teddy was insane?

VETUSTIO: All I said was that she had dementia. There is a difference.

ARTAITA: Still, you didn't have to mention it right there in the judge's office.

VETUSTIO: Who in their right mind goes outside during a shootout? What was she thinking? She was off her rocker!

ARTAITA: It was called for...

VETUSTIO: What was? The shootout?

ARTAITA: No, she suffered from symptoms of claustrophobia.

VETUSTIO: Anyone would suffer from “symptoms of claustrophobia” if they hadn’t stepped outside in twenty years.

ARTAITA: She locked herself away voluntarily.

VETUSTIO: Still, she could have picked a better moment to step outside.

ARTAITA: You’re no different. Neither am I. It’s been over twenty years since either one of us set foot outside.

VETUSTIO: With so many shootouts?

ARTAITA: Why would you take the psychiatrist’s side? Insinuating that Teddy might have had sexual problems like that!

VETUSTIO: Who doesn’t have sexual problems when they’re ninety years old?

ARTAITA: It was a stray bullet that killed her.

VETUSTIO: Yes, but it was penetration, and the psychiatrist insists that that’s a sexual matter.

ARTAITA: She left you the inheritance.

VETUSTIO: The kittens.

ARTAITA: The judge handed it all over to you.

VETUSTIO: That’s why we’re here...but...now we’re stuck, trapped on account of your criminal tendencies!

ARTAITA: It jammed, period. You’re the one that jumped out of the way. Besides, she left you everything. Why go and badmouth her in front of the judge like that?

VETUSTIO: Wasn’t me. It was the judge. And that psychiatrist. Put a sock in it!

ARTAITA: Those good-for-nothing psychiatrists!

VETUSTIO: (*Furiously*) No need to go and get all anti-psychiatrist...you’re always speaking poorly of others.

The elderly brother and sister exchange silent blows. Their movements are absurdly slow, but they’re able to engage in a substantially physical brawl: a jab is thrown, whining is heard, there is a masterful headlock reversal, the twisting of an arm, sneers, a bear hug, some biting, and a bit of hair pulling. Their scuffling is interrupted when someone asks if they need help; the voice is heard coming from somewhere outside the elevator, muffled and unintelligible.

ARTAITA: (*Speaking to the voice*) No sir, we haven’t the faintest idea what went wrong. (*The voice responds*)

VETUSTIO: (*To the voice*) Looks like it could be faulty wiring. (*To ARTAITA*) You vandal! (*The voice asks a question*)

ARTAITA: No, no sir, we can't fix it...maybe if we had some tools. *(The voice suggests something)*

VETUSTIO: No, unfortunately we don't even have a screwdriver, let alone a screw...yes sir, we'll wait right here...we're not worried...thank you.

ARTAITA: *(Mischievously)* Why don't we kill the kittens while they're fixing the elevator... We are going to kill them, and I know how to do it, so let's just finish them off.

VETUSTIO: No, not yet.

ARTAITA: But Teddy left you the kittens on one condition: that we would kill them before they had a chance to grow any bigger. She spelled that out in her will.

VETUSTIO: Absolutely, I want to make sure they're dead too, just not here!

ARTAITA: How many kittens are there?

VETUSTIO: I don't know, looks like there's four to me.

ARTAITA: *(Singing)* Two plus two makes four, and four plus two's six more, six plus two makes eight, and eight plus two's ten straight.

VETUSTIO: *(Singing)* I've gone and dressed my kittens, dressed them all in blue, they're wearing lil' white booties, and aprons made of tulle.

ARTAITA: *(Abruptly)* Are they cute?

VETUSTIO: I don't know, I haven't seen them yet. The judge handed me the inheritance all bundled up like that, just the way it is. *(Searching his pockets)* Hey, give me a smoke, will you?

ARTAITA: Don't be a pain, you know we don't have any cigarettes here.

VETUSTIO: *(Addressing an imaginary person)* Teddy, can you find Mama, wherever she is in heaven, to ask her for a cigarette. *(A cigarette appears out of thin air)* Thanks Teddy.

ARTAITA: *(Swiping the cigarette away from him)* You can't smoke in here.

VETUSTIO: Why not?

ARTAITA: Because smoking in elevators is prohibited.

VETUSTIO: Yeah, well this elevator's out of order.

ARTAITA: Nevertheless, smoking's not allowed.

VETUSTIO: If an elevator's out of order that means any of its rules and regulations are also out of order, which means that smoking is permitted.

He lights his cigarette, inhaling and exhaling often, filling the elevator with smoke. ARTAITA pulls out an oxygen mask and puts it on. Outraged by her actions, VETUSTIO stamps the cigarette out.

ARTAITA: (*Threateningly*) Now that you've finished smoking that cigarette...well then I'll just go ahead and listen to the ocean. (*She pulls out a large conch shell*)

VETUSTIO: (*Frightened*) Will you keep your voice down! And don't do that! It isn't safe. They'll hear you. It is illegal.

ARTAITA: Who cares, I'm going to listen to the waves anyway.

VETUSTIO: Please don't. They'll hear you, and they could lock us up. It's prohibited.

ARTAITA: Why am I not allowed to listen to the ocean?

VETUSTIO: Well, because it's...unconstitutional!

ARTAITA: What's so unconstitutional about it?

VETUSTIO: I don't know...but doing it in an elevator's even worse.

ARTAITA: But the elevator's out of order.

VETUSTIO: Nevertheless, listening to the ocean in an elevator is prohibited.

ARTAITA: If an elevator's out of order that means any of its rules and regulations are also out of order, thus I can and will listen to the ocean's waves. Besides, I won't just be listening; I'll be savoring my time at the beach.

She puts on sunglasses, lays out a towel, and opens a parasol, then settles down contentedly, preparing to listen to the ocean as if she really were at the beach.

VETUSTIO: (*Addressing an imaginary person*) That's how vices get started, Teddy, how people turn into junkies. They start off listening to the ocean casually, but after a while, they need to hear it three times a day. Eventually, just hearing it doesn't do the trick. By then they've gotten the giggles and they go bonkers painting pictures of little fish on walls. After that, they're no longer content with just listening to the ocean. They start smelling it too, until finally, they're shooting sea water right into their own veins; that's how they all end up, wanting to carry an ocean inside of themselves. Teddy, can you find Mama, wherever she is in heaven, to let her know that Artaita doesn't want to stop listening to the ocean! (*To ARTAITA*) Junkie!

ARTAITA: Fine, I'll stop, but only if you let me see the kittens. (*Excitably*) Come on, let's have a look...

VETUSTIO: No, not yet. Help me open the elevator hatch first. (*He kneels down so she can climb onto his shoulders to reach the hatch*)

ARTAITA: No way, I'm not going up there.

VETUSTIO: Why not? Why won't you climb up onto the roof?

ARTAITA: I don't want to. Not if it means I have to climb up the shaft.

VETUSTIO: Why aren't you able to go up there?

ARTAITA: You know why...

VETUSTIO: You're scared, aren't you?

ARTAITA: I'm not scared, it's just, it makes me feel self-conscious.

VETUSTIO: Why would it make you feel self-conscious?

ARTAITA: (*Mortified*) Because I'm not wearing any underwear!

VETUSTIO: (*Trying to hit her with a cane*) Again! You were strutting around like that just yesterday. Who wouldn't notice? I'm going to have Teddy find Mama, wherever she is in heaven, to let her know how much of a slut you've turned into.

ARTAITA: You knew I wasn't wearing any underwear, and here you are asking me to climb up on top of you?

VETUSTIO: It's really very dangerous for women to walk around here like you do, always hung up on your sexual fantasies like that. This isn't a nudist colony; it's not like we live in Europe. We are an undeveloped nation! Tease! Whore!

ARTAITA: (*Seductively*) Jealous? Better to be the focus of another person's jealousy than to find that you're the one going green with envy.

VETUSTIO: Tease! Tease! Strutting around stirring up jealousy with that figure of yours...

ARTAITA: What figure?

VETUSTIO: Yours of course! Just look! What a disaster!

ARTAITA: What's wrong with my body?

VETUSTIO: Nothing, there's just always a slight difference between Greek figures and the bodies of farm girls from Cundinamarca.

ARTAITA: My body is a work of art, my curves are baroque...

VETUSTIO: Broke for sure! Your curves are falling into decline! (*Laughing wildly*)

ARTAITA: (*Arches her back and gets down on all fours*) That's enough! That is enough! I'm not falling into decline like some kind of old-fashioned art form. Besides, you're older than I am and that means you'll be the first to go. Teddy, can you find Mama, wherever she is in heaven, to tell her that I'm going to change! I will be an independent woman! The men of this world can all burn in hell.
(*Singing*)

Long live the women of the world

Rise to your feet, slaves, rise up.

Die! Die! (*She climbs on top of him*) I will be remembered throughout history as the liberator of all women! Long live Policarpa Salavarrieta! Long live Joan of Arc! Long live Mama! Long live Teddy! Death to all fathers! Death to all brothers! Long live feminism! (*He falls over as if dead*).

A long silence follows.

ARTAITA: I dreamt that I killed you.

VETUSTIO: (*Startled*) That's funny, I'm having pretty much the same dream. Better yet, come help me climb up there instead.

ARTAITA kneels down and gives him a hand; he starts to rise, but is gripped by fear, screaming as if he's standing at the edge of some dizzying height; in reality, though, he has barely lifted one foot an inch from the floor.

VETUSTIO: (*Giving up*) The thing is I'm terrified of heights, climbing up that high scares me to death.

ARTAITA: They're still taking forever to get us out of here; we're going to kill the kittens.

VETUSTIO: No, not yet.

ARTAITA: We are going to kill them.

VETUSTIO: No, not yet.

ARTAITA: I'm going to tell Teddy wherever she is in heaven.

VETUSTIO: Go ahead, tell her; how are you planning on getting in touch with her?

ARTAITA: (*Using a telephone*) Hello, is Teddy there? (*To VETUSTIO*) Teddy's on the line asking for you.

VETUSTIO: That's bullshit, where's she calling from?

ARTAITA: From heaven, of course!

VETUSTIO: Bullshit, they don't need phones in heaven, everyone up there uses divine powers to keep in touch.

ARTAITA: Fine, then it's hell she's calling from.

VETUSTIO: That's impossible, everybody knows telephones melt in hell.

ARTAITA: Then it's purgatory she's calling from...

VETUSTIO: That can't be true either. They keep everyone there sequestered, and they're certainly not allowed to use telephones.

ARTAITA: Fine...from the moon then.

VETUSTIO: That's even less likely. Everyone knows telephones get unhinged when the full moon's out.

ARTAITA: Fine...from any country anywhere in the world whatsoever then...I don't know...I don't know... (*Begging*) Let's just kill the kittens...

VETUSTIO: Okay, let's do it, let's go ahead and kill them. Hold the basket steady while I take them out.

ARTAITA: No, they'll bite me.

VETUSTIO: They don't bite, just hold on to it. (*Rifling through the basket*) Hey look, Teddy's tarot cards, they're another part of the inheritance.

ARTAITA: Here, let me read your cards... (*Towards heaven*) Help me to concentrate Teddy. (*To VETUSTIO*) I'm going to read you your past, your present, and your future...hold the cards up. (*Magically, the tarot cards move in the directions she mentions*) In the past you used to sway towards the "left." In the present, you've shifted earnestly towards the "right," (*The third card falls*) and in the future you'll plunge violently towards the floor!

VETUSTIO: Teddy never read anyone's cards like that. (*He puts the tarot cards away, and plays with the kittens*).

ARTAITA: I can't see them that well, are they cute?

VETUSTIO: Yeah, they're cute. Two of them are black, and the other two are gray.

ARTAITA: (*Mischievously*) You promised the judge you'd carry out Teddy's last wish.

VETUSTIO: I know, they all have to die. I swore an oath before the law, and laws are ironclad, unless of course modifications are made—and yet, I promised to kill them all, and that's what I intend to do. Watch and learn: (*He takes one out*) you can strangle them by the throat just like this...see? Choke them firmly for just a moment. It's easy...you see? This one's already dead; you can try by killing that one.

ARTAITA: Kill it yourself...I'll finish off this gray one instead...no, I don't want to kill any!

VETUSTIO: Don't freak out, they're not going to bite you, haven't you noticed they don't even have any teeth?

ARTAITA: No, I don't want to kill any of them; on second thought, let's take a picture instead, as a memento of what you've inherited from Teddy.

VETUSTIO: Sure, let's get them smiling.

ARTAITA: Animals are never that happy.

VETUSTIO: None of them?

ARTAITA: Well, can you name any animals that can smile or laugh?

VETUSTIO: No...maybe...no...not really.

ARTAITA: (*Gravely*) "Laughter is the one and only thing there is to distinguish men from beasts." That's Aristotle! Say cheese, and help it to smile, will you!

VETUSTIO: It kind of looks like it's laughing when it meows like that.

ARTAITA: Not at all, it still looks pretty miserable. Make it smile.

VETUSTIO: (*Putting his fingers into the kitten's mouth*) Like this? Or like this? How about like this?

ARTAITA: Yank on its tail to see if that gets it to smile.

VETUSTIO: Like this? That whimpering sure does make it look real happy.

ARTAITA: Something's missing...something's a little off...the paws, cut off its paws.

VETUSTIO: (*To the kitten*) Smile...it's a keepsake, smile.

They kill the kitten trying to take the photograph.

ARTAITA: Perfect, now it really does look happy.

VETUSTIO: It's dead already. What a pretty picture!

ARTAITA: Fortunately, it kept smiling. (*Astonished*) See! We've proven Aristotle wrong. (*Happily*) I think that's that for scholasticism.

VETUSTIO places the dead kitten next to the other dead kitten.

ARTAITA: (*Calming herself down*) I'd like to take one of the little black ones home with me. (*She grabs one*).

VETUSTIO: You can't, we've got to carry out Teddy's last request.

ARTAITA: (*Placing it on the floor*) This kitten's adorable.

VETUSTIO: It deserves to die a poet's death!

ARTAITA: What? You don't even know what poetry is?

VETUSTIO: That's a cinch, poetry is...poetry is...

ARTAITA: How could you think of trying to kill the black kitten poetically when you don't even know the first thing about poetry? Empiricist!

VETUSTIO: Poetry is a logical vehicle, and like logic itself, it demands a certain synthesis, tending to be conclusive, therefore structured with the formal logic of sweeping action, as well as being exclusive in a genetic, biological, and substantial sense.

ARTAITA: (*She applauds without understanding a word he's said*) You always were the smartest one.

VETUSTIO: (*Pleased with himself*) Poetry is a logical vehicle... (*He takes out a remote control toy truck, and steers it towards the kitten*).

ARTAITA: No, I don't want to kill any of them...Hey! It's going to get away! (*She pins the kitten's tail down as the toy truck runs it over*).

ARTAITA: (*Crying*) I didn't want to kill the kittens.

VETUSTIO: Shut up, shut up, shut up, put that one next to the others.

ARTAITA: No, don't kill them, I don't want to kill them. (*Pointing one out*) Look, there's another, you haven't managed to kill that one.

VETUSTIO grabs it and ARTAITA hands him a meat grinder. VETUSTIO grinds the kitten up. After he's done, VETUSTIO starts to organize the dead kittens in the basket.

ARTAITA: What are you doing?

VETUSTIO: (*Unhappily*) Putting them back inside the little basket...

ARTAITA: Why don't we bury them out on the patio? We can have a funeral march or a big public ceremony? Those are fashionable these days. (*Searching around*) Want me to give you four small cardboard boxes? I have a bunch of boxes like that in my bag.

VETUSTIO: (*Distraught*) No, we're putting them back in the little basket. It's an inheritance! And we're leaving it just the way it was when they first gave it to us.

ARTAITA: (*As if nothing had happened*) It's hot in here.

VETUSTIO is inconsolable and doesn't respond

ARTAITA: I'm hungry, I've got some cookies and a little bit of coffee with me, want some?... Teddy, can you find Mama wherever she is in heaven, tell her that he won't drink his coffee...go right ahead Teddy, you drink it. (*Magically, the coffee begins to disappear from the cup*). See? She drank it already. She's always so well-behaved...why are you crying?

VETUSTIO: I'm not crying.

ARTAITA: (*Eating cookies*) Yes, you are crying.

VETUSTIO: Leave me alone!

ARTAITA: (*Mischievously*) You didn't want to kill the kittens.

VETUSTIO: Yes I did!

ARTAITA: Don't be afraid, wherever Teddy is up there in heaven, she's not going to mention anything about it to Mama.

VETUSTIO: I am not afraid.

ARTAITA: So then why are you crying?

VETUSTIO: No reason...no reason...

Long silence

ARTAITA: *(Taking a tool out of her bag)* Look, I had the right tool all along...I tend to be a little forgetful...fixing the elevator will be a cinch, the only problem is that disconnected wire...all set. *(She fixes it instantly)*. Relax, don't be scared. Wherever Teddy is up there in heaven, she isn't going to mention anything to Mama.

VETUSTIO: I'm not scared...

ARTAITA: So then why are you crying?

VETUSTIO: No reason, no reason, no reason at all.

Embracing, ARTAITA and VETUSTIO walk out slowly. The basket is left behind in the elevator. The lights turn off, and the only thing that's visible are the shadows the elderly pair cast. These shadows change into the shape of red paw prints, and hover in the air before being swallowed up by the rest of the darkness.

Useful Phones (In Case of Emergency)

By Jessica Lusia

Translated by Manoela Wolff

A POSSIBLE SYNOPSIS

Clair is a woman that calls strangers in the middle of the night. We don't know when she lives or where, she is a habitant of nowhere, of non-time. She calls Rudolf, Phillip, Peter and Pierre to tell them clichés, which makes her sounds mysterious. Somehow she delights the boys she randomly picks out of the yellow pages. But Rudolf has a girlfriend, Anna, who is not a big fan of the girl that keeps calling her boyfriend.

In a fragmented style and absolutely un-compromised with the writing reality, Jessica Lusia conducts us in a contemporary play that somehow talks about the cruelty and individuality of the society, of the ability of becoming vulnerable, and of our difficulty to communicate. The play, written in the south of Brazil, composed in a lyrical and yet simple language, discourses about the universe of the relationships around the globe. Clair could be a woman in São Paulo, in Seoul, in Berlin, or in New York. But she has a need to say something. Something that even she does not know what it is.

Jessica Lusia is a Brazilian playwright and a graduate student of Theatrical Direction at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. She was born in São Paulo and currently lives in Porto Alegre. In 2013, she worked as a playwright and a director's assistant in the productions of: "Biografia Colecionáveis" (Collectable Biographies, *free translation*) and "Efeitos colaterais da falta e do excesso" (Collateral effects of lack and excess, *f.t.*). In the same year, she won the third place in the Vianninha Award – National Competition of Texts for the Young Public (Concurso Nacional de Textos para Público Jovem), promoted by the Centro de Pesquisa de Teatro Infanto-Juvenil, for the play "Anteontem" (Before yesterday, *f.t.*). In 2014 she was a director's assistant in the production of "Medida Provisória" promoted by the acting course of Casa de Teatro de Porto Alegre, and composed the dramaturgy of "Amor, amor, amor" (Love, love, love, *f.t.*) staged by Grupo Jogo de Experimentação Cênica. Winner of the 5th edition of the competition New Theatre Directors (promoted by Porto Alegres' city hall and Goethe Institute), she staged the German play "A coisa no mar", nominated for three categories of the Prêmio Açorianos de Teatro 2014 (Açorianos Award, *f.t.*), including Best Director.

Manoela Wolff was born in Igrejinha/Brazil but currently lives in Porto Alegre. She has a degree in Theater - emphasis on Acting – from the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and now she's working on her Master's degree in Literary Theory at the Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS). She studied English during her childhood and at college she participated in a research group about the European Avant-gardes (1900-1930) and took special interest in Dadaism. She translated from English to Portuguese Tristan Tzara's playwrights (unpublished) and two works of Nicky Silver (*The food chain* and *Pterodactyls*), staged by other college

colleagues. From these experiences, she decided to study the translation process in the contemporary theater of English language, which is her research in the Masters Degree. *Useful Phones (in cases of emergency)* is the first complete play she has translated from Portuguese to English.

Useful Phones

Characters:

Clair

Rudolf

Anna

Peter

Phillip

Pierre

CLAIR: If you knew that your heart would stop in the next second, to whom would you dedicate its last beat?

PIERRE: How many times have you asked this question today?

ANNA: Are you not going?

RUDOLF: No...

ANNA: Are you sure?

RUDOLF: No...

ANNA: I think you should.

RUDOLF: I don't know.

ANNA: So at least get up to find out.

RUDOLF: You could go there and find out.

ANNA: But she called you. It's your name she knows. Go there and find out.

RUDOLF: And what if it is a trap? And what if she has a gun?

ANNA: Rudolf, you were a boy scout. You'll know how to get away with this. People always told me that a brilliant life should be branded by traumas. This is an opportunity of being someone really interesting! And, besides...

(The phone rings)

RUDOLF: I don't know if I should.

ANNA: Pick up. Why do I always have to tell you to do the most obvious things? If a phone rings, you must answer it. If she asked for you, you go.

(Rudolf answers)

RUDOLF: Hello?

CLAIR: Are you coming?

RUDOLF: Don't know.

CLAIR: And how will you know?

RUDOLF: How am I going to know how to get there?

CLAIR: I'll tell you. First, go out.

RUDOLF: But...

CLAIR: Open to any page. Call anyone. Say anything that makes this person think a little. It didn't matter who she was. To them it only matters who I am. It doesn't matter that the words aren't mine, sometimes I just get a book and read any random phrase, but they will find a reason for it. I don't care about the nights of sleep they are going to lose. I could buy a gun and shoot any tramp in a dark alley. It would be less cruel. They won't get any sleep. They'll be watching the blurry world drags itself by the night. Echoes. I have as much fun as a psychopath. I don't need to stain my hands with blood. It's not wrong. There is no crime, nor punishment, just a discomfort, like a buzz in the ear, I'm a fly or a bee adrift, a bird seeding weed. Next *(Open the Yellow Pages)* P! Who is it? *(With closed eyes, slides her fingers down the open page, dials the numbers on the phone)* Is Phillip there? *(pause)* The white benumbs...

RUDOLF: Here I am, sitting on a rusty bench in front of your house. Surrounded by orchids and violets. You should water your plants sometimes. I should be afraid and leave. I shouldn't get too close. How did we get here? Why did you bring me here? I'm one step from your door and everything has the texture of your voice, these walls have your taste that is still unknown to me. What's your name?

CLAIR: I'm not going to tell you.

RUDOLF: How am I going to know who you are?

CLAIR: Don't you already know?

(Silence)

CLAIR: There is absolutely no shape for truth. Put it in any box and it will fit. There are no lies when the truth can be shaped. Have you ever really found something?

RUDOLF: I lit a cigarette to postpone the answer. She just said a cliché.

RUDOLF/CLAIR: The emptiness is full of air.

RUDOLF: She said. Who was he?

CLAIR: Who?

RUDOLF: Who were you talking to when I arrived?

CLAIR: I don't know who it was. What do you do when you need to fill a blank space?

RUDOLF: Me?

CLAIR: No, not you. I'm just talking. I didn't ask you that.

PHILIP: I know, I know... It's just that I can't sleep again. Yes, it's the same story. All the time I ask myself "why?" It's been more than a week. I already said. I didn't hang up because she said my name and I thought it was something important. She said something about white. That the white is intimidating, challenging to smudge. I'm trying to stop thinking. But let me tell you how it was. She said a lot of things... I remember little by little, I have flashes all the time. And today, like, today the clouds are like this, white. When I woke up, I looked to the sky and wished that this white darkened until it started raining.

RUDOLF: Who did you call then?

CLAIR: He never picked up again.

RUDOLF: What happened?

CLAIR: I don't know. He closed all the windows, he told me he was going to. He was afraid. He seemed to be. Dropped the phone twice. Stuttered. Philip, it doesn't matter anymore, you can't run away. Hold your breathe a little. You're not going to die because of this, this heavy air that lives in your lungs and makes everything meaningless. That makes everything empty. That makes your

legs move without your willing them to. It isn't my fault. Don't blame me. You can't stop the carbon in your veins.

RUDOLF: Was that all?

CLAIR: I don't remember now, but I said something else and hung up.

RUDOLF: What do you think happened after?

CLAIR: I don't think about it. I never think about what happens after a call ends. I just make some tea and sleep. You should leave now.

RUDOLF: But I need to know if...

CLAIR: You don't need to know.

ANNA: How was it?

RUDOLF: It wasn't a big deal.

ANNA: How is she?

RUDOLF: I don't want to talk about this right now.

ANNA: So it wasn't a big deal, was it? Rudolf, I need you to tell me.

RUDOLF: I'm not going to tell you.

ANNA: I can ask her. Is this the number?

RUDOLF: You aren't going to do this.

ANNA: Why wouldn't I?

RUDOLF: It's necessary that the phone rings. One more dose. It's necessary that the phone rings. The vocabulary always ends and she'll have to use her own truths. To complete this. To not leave more blank spaces. Even if it they are indecipherable scribbles, it's necessary that something fills this space.

ANNA: Why wouldn't I do this, Rudolf? Can't you even answer me?

CLAIR: Every astrologer is a necrophiliac. Leave a gulp in the bottle. For luck. When it darkens, the sky is like a recently opened cemetery. Make a wish on the first gravestone. I just need to survive a few more hours, stand the unbearable white of this self-centered moon above us. Just a few more hours. If you connect the dots you won't go anywhere. Try! Trace a path outside your

window, connect the dots, the dots up there, connect this shining dots over our heads, they don't take us anywhere.

PETER: What do you mean?

CLAIR: I'm just saying. Do you see any sense in it?

PETER: In the stars?

CLAIR: All lifeless, but moving too fast. Good night. Don't hang up. As uncomfortable as this is, they want to listen until the end. As if in the end there would be a way, a new way. Maybe a change. They ask questions and blindly believe in the answers. At the end of it all, everyone wants a map, for all can stray. Everybody wants something, even if it is just an impulse.

RUDOLF: What do you mean by that?

ANNA: I need to open this window.

RUDOLF: Isn't the air enough?

ANNA: You steal it all for yourself.

RUDOLF: Don't open it.

ANNA: Why not?

RUDOLF: It's windy.

ANNA: No, it's not. It's suffocating. Can you stop being a child now? Turn off this light and come to bed.

RUDOLF: I need all the lights turned on.

ANNA: For what?

RUDOLF: Then she knows I'm still here.

ANNA: She can't even see you from so far away. She must be sleeping with no worries now. Softly.

CLAIR: I don't even remember anymore. I don't feel when the words pass through my throat because they are weightless. Not even my head aches. As if everything I used to think or be had become air. Evaporating. Why am I telling you this? Tell me, why do you think I'm telling you this? I don't know. I don't know where everything would go if I didn't dump this in someone else's ear. Leave me here with my loose thoughts.

RUDOLF: This house has started to make too much noise after she stopped calling. It's this emptiness, that's what she wants me to feel. It's this meaning that doesn't exist. There's nothing here besides this dead phone. I don't exist for the rest of the world while I'm lying down on the living room sofa just to be around if she calls. I don't sleep. I don't move. I'm disappearing here in this room. Little by little. I want to stare at her empty look again.

CLAIR: And what if you opened the door of the apartment and everything started to disappear until there's only you and the door?

PETER: And what if I didn't care about this?

CLAIR: Then you start playing. What disappears doesn't care about you.

PETER: Do you care?

CLAIR: No, I'm going to disappear as fast as you turn off the phone. So will you.

PETER: And what do I do when the day comes?

CLAIR: Peter, the day was only a lie the sun created so we could believe we are still alive.

ANNA: I'm leaving.

RUDOLF: Why?

ANNA: Because I can't stand to see you like this anymore. Get away from this phone! She's not calling you again! Or stay there and get full of dust from it! I don't care anymore. You can do whatever you want. I already packed.

RUDOLF: I'll go mad!

ANNA: It's too late. You've already gone mad, Rudolf... When are you going to turn off the lights and lose the fear of her forgetting you? Maybe she already has! The game maybe ended while you took a nap. What to do now? You put away the cards, wash your face and live. I don't want to see you like this.

CLAIR: Rudolf, I need to know something.

RUDOLF: But you said I do not need to know.

CLAIR: I said you didn't need, but I do. Who would I be if you didn't come to see me?

RUDOLF: Somebody who called me. Whispered the whole time, talked too low, I understood barely anything that you were trying to say. I don't know what you're talking about, I told you. I still don't know, even with your voice becoming clearer. You leave spaces between the words.

CLAIR: I'm not building anything.

RUDOLF: Who would I be?

CLAIR: I don't know who you are, Rudolf. I don't know anything about you. I don't need to. Try to sleep.

RUDOLF: Who are you?

CLAIR: Why should I tell you something now? There are millions of people like you. Do you think you're special? We all want to feel unique, chosen. That's why you came here. There's no "faith." There are facts randomly thrown in the air. Why did you waste your time organizing it?

RUDOLF: So why did you call me again?

(Silence)

CLAIR: I don't know. I don't have answers.

RUDOLF: You should.

CLAIR: It doesn't make sense. You need to understand that I could be doing any other ordinary thing. I never finish my crosswords. I never read until the end of the book. I don't want to know the end. I won't continue this with you.

RUDOLF: But you do continue. I need to understand, at least a little. I need to know why you call me in the middle of the night. Me, not others. Listen, I'm not saying I'm special and that's why you're wasting your time with me. If there are so many numbers, why mine? What do you want?

CLAIR: I need to sleep.

RUDOLF: I need to see you.

CLAIR: You've seen me, isn't that enough?

RUDOLF: No, and for you it wasn't enough either, because if it was, you wouldn't be calling me right now. Why can't you sleep?

CLAIR: Today I don't have enough courage to face my dreams. I couldn't even turn off the light. I never know what to do when it darkens. Maybe tomorrow I'll know.

RUDOLF: May I see you when the day comes and you know?

CLAIR: You know where I am. It's too easy to grow old seeds. You don't need to teach them the way. They sprout all the flowers that the ground needs. They carry the experience that they haven't lived so deeply, it is as if they have already been trees before touching the ground. I let the flowers die just to know how much they last.

PETER: You're cruel.

CLAIR: It's another way of feeling time. How many petals did you age today?

PETER: I need to tell you something.

CLAIR: Tell me.

PETER: Yesterday I almost fell from the edge of the window. Almost. I think about what you meant when I pick my shoe's colors. "You trust your luck to corpses and still think things will work out."

CLAIR: And what if? And what if you were one of the stars? And what if you have been dead from the beginning? You are dead, shining up above. You are this absurd being that keeps the stars nailed in the sky, exclaimed the hyperbolic lover.

ANNA: Where are you going?

RUDOLF: Out.

ANNA: To meet her.

RUDOLF: Weren't you leaving?

ANNA: I was, Rudolf. But I am really concerned about you. Where do you think it is going to take you? I'm here, I've always been, what do you want now? A little adventure with this crazy woman who calls in the middle of the night? Why do you need this?

RUDOLF: Anna, I need this, why must I have an explanation?

ANNA: In what world do you live? If you can't explain why you need to go out, then you mustn't go out. Or you will get lost.

RUDOLF: Whatever!

ANNA: I'm not going to be here when you come back.

RUDOLF: Maybe I won't come back. Maybe I lose myself.

CLAIR: Have you waited for me too much?

RUDOLF: No, not much.

CLAIR: I almost never leave home; I think I unlearned how to walk on the streets. It seems that everything goes slowly, dragging itself, as if...

RUDOLF: Have you been talking to someone else?

CLAIR: I talk to a lot of people.

RUDOLF: Someone special?

CLAIR: No. You put too much sugar in the coffee, it's going to make you sick.

RUDOLF: I can't drink it without it.

CLAIR: So you don't like coffee, you like sugar.

RUDOLF: Maybe. Did you sleep last night?

CLAIR: No, because it rained. I spent the whole night in the window, while the world was falling apart. I made an apple tea to see if I calmed down, but it didn't happen. I don't know what is going on. It's as if suddenly I lost my umbrella during the storm. My storm. I shouldn't be telling you this.

RUDOLF: You've told me worse.

CLAIR: But that is literature, not what I feel. I just speak, don't even think about. Otherwise I would have the same headache you have and I would become the victim of my own... Why are you looking at me that way?

RUDOLF: Because you're afraid of your words and still seem confident in this fear.

CLAIR: I know very well how to hide myself.

RUDOLF: Why do you try so hard to do this?

CLAIR: Because no one needs to know. It's not interesting for anyone, you see?

RUDOLF: And when you call what you say is?

CLAIR: If it wasn't, you wouldn't be interrogating me right now.

RUDOLF: You need to stop depriving yourself from futile moments.

CLAIR: Why would I break down all of my futilities in front of you?

RUDOLF: Because I want to listen.

CLAIR: I can talk about anything. Choose.

RUDOLF: And if I choose to talk about you?

CLAIR: I would say that it all went too far, would leave the coffee money on the table, would get up and leave.

RUDOLF: I said. Why didn't you do this?

ANNA: I see a man with a dull face in the subway. He moves slowly, minimal gestures. Takes two stations to turn the magazine page that he browses almost unwittingly. The ads can't cage his inaccurate eyes. He almost doesn't breathe. The air enters unwillingly and exits impregnated by fear. I feel that there's still something pumping inside of him, something there, unstoppable, a thought

with callused hands for insisting on the same key. Maybe that's why he seems so tired on the outside. I just watch, sitting in front of him. He doesn't see me. I think he doesn't see anything or almost anything surrounding him. Are you ok? I don't ask because I'm comfortable just watching. No word during the whole trip. In the final station, he automatically gets up, doesn't look at me, doesn't look around. He goes towards the door with precise steps, even without a real goal. Exits.

CLAIR: Philip I just called to tell you that...

RUDOLF: Who is it?

CLAIR (*hangs up*): No. No one. I was just leaving a message.

RUDOLF: To whom?

CLAIR: I'm in my house, I call whomever I want. I just...

RUDOLF: Wanted to talk to someone?

CLAIR: You need to leave, it's getting late.

RUDOLF: Do you want me to go now?

CLAIR: You have to go.

RUDOLF: No. I need you, why don't you let me prove that you also need me?

CLAIR: Because I really don't need you.

RUDOLF: You need to talk to someone. Talk to me then.

CLAIR: You'll never understand me.

RUDOLF: I won't try too hard. I'm in love with your mysteries.

CLAIR: Please, don't do this.

RUDOLF: Do what?

CLAIR: This. Liking me.

RUDOLF: Too late.

CLAIR: Just don't say I didn't tell you so.

RUDOLF: I'm taking a risk to see when all this charming stands.

CLAIR: I'm not trying to be charming. I don't want these little games.

RUDOLF: No?

CLAIR: No, I don't like it.

RUDOLF: If you don't like games, why are we still just talking?

CLAIR: Are you the kind of guy that calls the next morning?

(Silence)

CLAIR: Today he read to me all the letters he has ever received. The sweet letters, the bitter letters, the love letters, the bank letters: all of them. And he put on all his favorite songs to play, all the songs he has ever listened with someone, thinking about someone, crying for someone. He talked all the time and all the time seemed that I was actually speaking, not him. Those words could be mine, I also listened to those songs and cried, our way of comparing things is very similar. But it wasn't me, it was him. All my loves, there, in front of me...

PETER: And are you in love with him?

CLAIR: No.

PETER: So why do you sigh so much?

CLAIR: I shouldn't tell you this, Peter. But I looked for other things, the things I usually talk about, these philosophical wanderings, but nothing came. I'm sorry.

PETER: I feel a little betrayed, but it's all right.

CLAIR: Betrayed?

PETER: It's like if you came back from a date, I'm waiting for you in the living room, ready for you, ready to listen to you describing in details a love that isn't ours.

CLAIR: We're not a couple. And there is no "other love," there is no love, nor a next love. I just call you and say stuff. That's all I have to say right now. Do you want me to stop?

PETER: No. Absolutely not.

ANNA: How was your night?

RUDOLF: You don't need all the irony. I thought you wouldn't be here when I arrived.

ANNA: Was it a good night?

RUDOLF: Stop it.

ANNA: I just asked you one question. How is she?

RUDOLF: You asked me once. Why didn't you leave?

ANNA: I was waiting for you to come back, so the house wouldn't be empty. I love you.

RUDOLF: I still love you too.

ANNA: Is there much left?

RUDOLF: Of what?

ANNA: Of the love or whatever you *STILL* feel for me. Is there much left? Do I still have time to convince yourself of the stupidity of your doing? Why are you throwing all this away now?

RUDOLF: It was you who packed.

ANNA: Do you want me to understand this now? Do you want me to accept her, to ask her for a tea or for a movie? She doesn't like you. I bet she does it with everyone. Then, she stops calling. Then she leaves you, just for fun. You're not going to change it.

RUDOLF: I want to try.

ANNA: I feel happy for you.

RUDOLF: You're completely insane.

ANNA: Rudolf, finally fighting for something. I'm not being ironic, I'm proud. Help me with the bags?

RUDOLF: Won't you fight for me?

ANNA: Not today.

PHILIP: I tried to sleep, but I felt the weight of your body over me. You moaned in my ear, repeated words wantonly. I shut you up with a long kiss and your phrases wrapped in saliva traveled over my body. You never finish speaking, it all gets locked in my throat. And it hurts. With the pain comes the fever. I believe in this sparkle, that's why I stay here, shrunken in a corner of the living room, waiting for another round of the clock. I wait, I'm waiting, but I have this sparkle that dreams to be fire. It got so hot I was afraid my blood would boil. A heat that wouldn't let me remain still. I walked whole afternoons through the city, without a destination. I can hear your voice calling me. You say my name and give me this uncontrollable urge. I know every centimeter of this town and still don't know where you hide. Where are you? I walk, walk, in vain, looking for your face. Searching to know about you, I lose myself. I just need to hear you voice again. I want you voice turned into skin, in touch.

(The phone rings)

CLAIR: Hello? Who is it? I know you're there, why don't you tell me what you want?

RUDOLF: I wanted your eyes following me from the corner, before you got to your house. You spying on my steps from above your stair. I wanted you. I want you. I wanted you even more after your first "good morning" colored by sleep. I wanted you. Now, when all the sincerity pulses in an undecipherable beat, I want you to hold my shaking hands and tell me I need to sleep a little. I told you I loved you, but you had already fallen asleep.

CLAIR: Me and my selfish sonnet, like this wine I open after the visitors leave. People are always wanting too much. Each one looks for a way of making life vibrate, but the world will only be ours, really ours, when we are assaulted by boldness. To not have time to think and just go. What does it mean to you to be bold?

PHILIP: Do I need to answer?

CLAIR: You know you don't.

PHILIP: I'm bold every time the phone rings and I answer, already knowing it's you. Why do you insist so much on this?

CLAIR: I can't stop.

PHILIP: Me neither. I can't stop thinking about what you say. I don't think about you, I don't know you. These are just your words that keep floating through my head. You impregnate the air. I'm emboldened to stay in your game. What does it mean to be bold for you?

(The phone rings)

CLAIR: Where are you going?

RUDOLF: This phone doesn't stop ringing.

CLAIR: Leave it, come back to bed.

RUDOLF: Won't you answer it?

CLAIR: No.

(Silence)

PHILLIP: I wake up shocked and looked for your body in the sheets until the day finally brings me back to the ground. Not for long. Two seconds. Then I go back to this white and empty space you put me in. I said your name out loud repeatedly and it seemed so real that I almost believed. Hopelessly, I find myself in your unknown eyes. These eyes I invented so sweet and calm. I create the tone of your voice, your skin, your breathing. Now, suddenly, I've stopped looking at you as if you were really here and everything is so perfect and light that I linger looking at the you that isn't here.

ANNA: I want to rip it all off of you. Take off your costume. I had learned every word until she answered and it was just as if a white smudge took my throat and erased everything leaving the stains of what should have been said. I hang up on her so strongly that the phone fell from the cheap desk it was on and maybe doesn't even work anymore. I'm sure I'll never to be able to face her. I'll not be able to face you. I say it out loud, so the walls of the apartment will hear. But you'll never know.

CLAIR: Who is it?

PHILLIP: The way you throw your hair to the left, letting your hand go through your hair for a moment too long for this simple task.

ANNA: Who are you?

PHILLIP: You drink another gulp of scotch.

ANNA: Let me only know it, just this.

PHILIP: I see your eyes weep.

ANNA: And then I will know how he feels. I need this feeling for myself, even knowing it's nothing but fun for you. Even knowing that you don't care. I contaminate myself with the same illusion everyone does just to have it for a moment. Any call. Make my heart beat for the same reason.

PHILIP: She walks plainly with her red *scarpin*. Goes towards the bar, tilts over the counter, raises her forefinger so the waiter will notice her. Asks for one more drink. Wrong again. It's not her voice.

CLAIR: Where is the fun of being a passive smoker? Feel your lungs getting infected by someone else's addiction?

PETER: Maybe they don't have the courage.

CLAIR: They'll die anyway, with or without courage. What difference does it make? People need something to fill them, something that can get them free of the emptiness. Need something besides pain. Need to feel something, need to pulse. Movement. Life is based on that. The world goes round and round because it's used to it, just as the sun always rises because it has learned this path, as a spinning ballet dancer stuck in a music box. They don't know how to make it differently. It doesn't know another way of wasting its light than making us sweat so much. I can't stand the summer and there's nothing I can do to not feel it in my skin.

PETER: There's nothing I can do.

RUDOLF: That's all?

CLAIR: I hung up.

RUDOLF: Why?

CLAIR: Headache.

RUDOLF: Did you give up?

CLAIR: On what?

RUDOLF: This conversation?

CLAIR: It's not a conversation. I don't care about the answer.

RUDOLF: But you expect it.

CLAIR: No.

RUDOLF: Then why do you ask?

CLAIR: Habit.

RUDOLF: And can't you change it?

CLAIR: I'm fine this way, thank you.

RUDOLF: It doesn't matter to you that they are not?

CLAIR: I'm not responsible.

RUDOLF: Of course you are!

CLAIR: They do what they want. I do what I want.

RUDOLF: But every act has a consequence.

CLAIR: It doesn't have to. It's all a matter of choice. I don't suffer any consequence.

RUDOLF: Me being in your bed isn't a consequence of your call?

CLAIR: No, it's a choice. I could have stopped you in the door. You could be in Anna's bed right now.

RUDOLF: Who?

CLAIR: Anna, your girlfriend.

RUDOLF: How do you know it?

CLAIR: If you weren't here you would be there. Logically.

RUDOLF: How do you know about Anna? I never told you about her.

(Silence)

PETER: It's impossible to run from you.

CLAIR: Just don't pick up.

PETER: Now you're over everything, it doesn't matter if I do or don't pick up this fucking phone. You'll always be here.

CLAIR: If you create an illusion of someone it's your responsibility, not that of the object of illusion.

PETER: Then I get addicted on it. I wake up because I have to work, pay my bills, because I've got to live. I wake up because I know that at some point you're going to call. I want to be awake to hear you.

CLAIR: And what if I stop?

PETER: Why would you? That's what you want, isn't it? Everyone submerged in your wishes.

CLAIR: I don't want that.

PETER: So what is all it for?

CLAIR: He asked me and I hung up. What is all of it for? Why do you always walk on the left side of the sidewalk? Why do you bite your nails? Why don't you ever finish your drink, always leaving a little bit at the end of the glass? Why can't you sleep without talking to strangers for hours? I can't think. It's too soon for new names. I need a surprise that makes me breathe better, some unprotected ear that doesn't know me enough to pressure me against the wall.

ANNA: But a public phone? You gave yourself the trouble of getting a public phone number?

CLAIR: I just passed by it and noticed. It's that one in the corner. From my bedroom I can see who passes by there.

ANNA: No one answers it.

CLAIR: I also thought no one would do it.

ANNA: I wouldn't.

CLAIR: He did.

ANNA: Do you remember his name?

CLAIR: No. I didn't ask.

ANNA: Why not?

CLAIR: I don't want to know. And I didn't say mine.

ANNA: Why this now?

CLAIR: Because sometimes names screw things up.

ANNA: I thought you didn't care about it.

CLAIR: Cared about names?

ANNA: About how to screw things up.

CLAIR: You hate me, isn't it? Is it all just a little revenge?

ANNA: No. I don't understand why he is in love with you.

CLAIR: I see someone who wants to find hope where it will never exist.

ANNA: But you act as if it existed. And that's what makes us get closer each time.

CLAIR: Why did you want to see me knowing that there was only this false hope?

ANNA: Because I know how to fool me as well as they do. But don't you ever worry about anyone?

CLAIR: I don't think so.

ANNA: Think so?

CLAIR: Maybe... but it is more a curiosity than a concern. I just wanted to know why he doesn't pick up the phone anymore. Where his thoughts wander... Nothing that keeps me up at night anymore.

ANNA: Who was he?

PETER: Every day, the same path. She passes by the same street mechanically, has already learned where to go, so she just goes. Every day I pass by this same street, nothing too interesting. I have seen him sometimes, nothing that jumped out. As ordinary as me, he was walking by the empty street. The street behind the coffee house was shy and deserted, too grey for tourists, too unpleasant for the rest of the city. But I used to pass by it every day, indifferent. Until one day the phone that I haven't ever noticed rang and I tried to cross the street as fast as I could. An impulse. But he got there first, so I stopped. I stood on the other side of the street. The time between one and another answer. His face discoloring little by little. I was sure that it was her calling.

ANNA: What do you want?

RUDOLF: What have you done?

ANNA: Why do you want to know?

RUDOLF: You shouldn't have done it.

ANNA: I didn't do anything big, Rudolf. I just called her.

RUDOLF: That's not how it works.

ANNA: How does it work then?

RUDOLF: She didn't chose you.

ANNA: What difference does it make? None to her.

RUDOLF: You can't!

ANNA: What stops me?

RUDOLF: Why are you doing this to me?

ANNA: Doing this to you? Your egocentrism has reached the top. Have you been working on it?

RUDOLF: I forbid you to see her again.

ANNA: Do you have this power? I don't even have to meet her, the phone is enough. You can even listen with her, by her side. Now I don't care too. You want me to give up but you can't get off this ship. Will you stop?

(Silence)

ANNA: Will you? Well, so neither am I.

PETER: Are you having fun?

CLAIR: That's not the point.

PETER: Looks like you advanced.

CLAIR: On what?

PETER: On the game.

CLAIR: I already told you, there is no game.

PETER: You haven't told me that. Was it you?

CLAIR: Where?

PETER: On the phone of the coffee house street.

CLAIR: What?

PETER: You called that phone.

CLAIR: It wasn't you who answered it.

PETER: But I knew it was you who called.

(Silence)

CLAIR: Do you always pass near here?

PETER: Here?

CLAIR: From my window I can see everything that happens in the street.

PETER: Why are you telling me this?

CLAIR: I just wanted to know if you were nearby.

PETER: I pass by that street every day.

CLAIR: Can you pass by tomorrow?

PETER: To see you?

CLAIR: Don't you want to?
PETER: You're alone, aren't you?
CLAIR: Of course I am.
PETER: Did he leave you?
CLAIR: Rudolf? He needs to think a little, be by himself a little.
PETER: So he left you?
CLAIR: No.
PETER: And you miss him, don't you?
CLAIR: No, that's nothing like it. I just thought maybe you would like to...
PETER: You didn't think, you know, I want to see you. Why wouldn't I?
CLAIR: Meet me.

PHILLIP: The red window. I don't know what brought me here, but I abruptly stop in front of it. Something tells me that you... I don't know if I can stand it.

ANNA: You're platonically in love with someone you invented.

RUDOLF: I need you.

PHILLIP: My most devastating experience of near-death was to forget you for two seconds.

ANNA: Your face in my lap without any meaning.

PHILLIP: What do you mean?

ANNA: What do you want?

RUDOLF: She falls asleep with the phone in her hands. Groping other people's lives.

ANNA: I have to see you.

RUDOLF: Me too.

ANNA: I need to end this.

RUDOLF: It already ended.

ANNA: No. I need to talk to you.

RUDOLF: We are talking.

ANNA: Not like this.

RUDOLF: Meet me then.

ANNA: At the same place?

RUDOLF: The last one.

PHILLIP: I dream about your face while I walk.

ANNA: Don't be late.

RUDOLF: I'm not going.

PHILLIP: The face I have already seen somewhere. Yell to me so I'll be sure.

PETER: Too close to see the whole.

CLAIR: Just a little bit more.

PHILLIP: I can't anymore.

CLAIR: I click for the first floor. But something stops me. You know that feeling you forgot something, like you left the gas open, when you feel you forgot something too important as soon as you leave your house and need to go back to be sure? I go back.

ANNA: 15 minutes.

RUDOLF: You told her?

ANNA: No. she doesn't want to know.

RUDOLF: Don't tell.

ANNA: Is your time over?

RUDOLF: Like if there was an expiration date.

ANNA: Perhaps it has.

PETER: Why today? I can't take my eyes off the corner.

PHILLIP: I enter without knowing why. No thirst, no hunger.

PETER: She said she didn't want to stop existing.

RUDOLF: I don't know another way to solve this.

ANNA: You're scared, that's all. Let's go home.

RUDOLF: No.

PETER: No. She's not coming. She just wanted me to keep waiting. She wants to always have someone waiting for her.

CLAIR: It seems it's going to rain.

PETER: It won't stop.

RUDOLF: She's coming.

ANNA: Why?

RUDOLF: Just a feeling.

PHILLIP: The shaken hands don't know what else to do.

PETER: Why this now?

ANNA: It seems like everyone here doesn't sleep in ages.

RUDOLF: I need to.

CLAIR: I can't be without...

PETER: No.

PHILLIP: The last impulse.

ANNA: No.

RUDOLF: That's what she wants.

(A shot. The phone rings.)

CLAIR: Everything is a great illusion because you only have one point of view. And you'll never know what truly is, because you're addicted to the things you know, that usually aren't real. This is my addicted view as well, and I don't fit in the world either. Even if I try to put it out. The air passes spreading chaos, we don't even need to touch to destroy. There is someone to do it for us. After I said that, he kept himself in silence for an agonizing time.

PIERRE: Who did you tell this to?

Distance and Proximity in Analysing and Translating *Bailando sola cada noche* (*Dancing alone every night*)

By Sophie Louise Stevens

This article focuses on the process of translating *Bailando sola cada noche* written by Uruguayan dramatist Raquel Diana in 2008. In 2010 the play was awarded the first prize for Theatre (Comedy) in the Premios Anuales de Literatura del Ministerio de Educación y Cultura del Uruguay. In 2013 the play was selected for inclusion in the series of rehearsed readings held at the Asociación General de Autores del Uruguay in Montevideo and organised in conjunction with the Escuela Multidisciplinaria de Arte Dramático (EMAD), and it has not yet had a full production. The text was published by Editorial Yaugurú in 2013 and this edition was awarded second prize in the drama category in the Premios Nacionales de Literatura del Ministerio de Educación y Cultura del Uruguay in 2015.²

Bailando sola takes as a starting point the true story of the death of a woman in London, Joyce Vincent, who was found dead, slumped in front of her TV, having remained there for approximately two and a half years. Her body was discovered in her flat in Wood Green, North London, in February 2006 when local authorities entered in order to investigate rent arrears. The play presents an imagining of Joyce Vincent's experience of death. Raquel Diana dramatizes Joyce's death by ascribing actions, gestures, words and songs to the period of time about which it is practically impossible to ascertain any details; that is the period of time between her death and the discovery of her corpse. Some aspects of the experience of the protagonist of *Bailando sola* coincide with the story of the real Joyce Vincent, in particular both women experienced domestic violence with their ex-husbands. The play is set in the enclosed space of Joyce Vincent's living room and the playwright uses the artifice of the private to provide an insight into the protagonist's afterlife. This dramatic artifice also serves to establish a sense of intimacy and proximity between audience and actors which is enhanced through the performance because what the audience witness in the theatre is immediate, transient and unique.

The experience of abuse is brought to light in Joyce's opening monologue during which she tries desperately to describe, understand and remember what she was doing before a sudden pain to her head occurred:

Lo último que recuerdo es un dolor de cabeza... Un dolor absurdo de tan grande. Insólito por lo repentino...Así: ¡stue!... [...] Hice una rápida comparación con los golpes que me daba mi marido... No...éste dolía más... Mi marido me pegaba de

² Raquel Diana, *Bailando sola cada noche*, *Dramaturgia Uruguay* (2008), <http://www.dramaturgiauruguay.gub.uy/obras/bailando-sola-toda-la-noche/> [Accessed 17 September 2016]. The play shall be referred to as *Bailando sola* throughout this article. On *Dramaturgia Uruguay* the link to the play is called *Bailando sola toda la noche* but the text is entitled *Bailando sola cada noche* and Raquel Diana confirmed this to be the title in an interview that I conducted with her on 30 November 2013. I have translated the play and have chosen to share my translations here to demonstrate my work. The title in English is *Dancing alone every night*. It is interesting to note, for the purposes of this study, that the Spanish adjective 'sola' necessarily denotes a woman because it is the feminine form of the adjective 'solo.'

frente, como un hombre. Éste golpe fue como por atrás, a traición... Era como una aguja de tejer clavada con un matillo...

The last I remember is a headache... an overwhelming, staggering pain. Strange because it was so sudden... like: bam! ... [...] I did a quick comparison with the blows I used to get from husband... No... This hurt more... My husband always faced me when he hit me, like a man. This blow came as if from behind, treacherously... It was like a knitting needle nailed into my skull with a hammer... (4-5)

Her previous experience of abuse becomes a point of comparison and in this way, the playwright indicates the significance of repeated acts of violence on the physical and mental wellbeing of the protagonist. This comment also implies a sense of integrity and purpose associated with the violence committed by Joyce's husband and other men, thus forming a link between men and a type of violence that is both controlled, and used to control others. It implies that, due to the repetition of this violence, Joyce could always predict it and knew what to expect: despite the fact that it completely violated her safety, her rights and her happiness, there were rules which governed the domestic attacks, unlike the unpredictable and unexpected violence of the pain to her head. In scene six, after the character of the Woman states explicitly that Joyce is dead, Joyce suggests that the pain to her head was a brain haemorrhage which caused her death at the very beginning of the play. The control surrounding the execution of domestic violence is evident in these opening lines but the idea of control also manifests itself through the ongoing impact of the domestic abuse, even after Joyce separated from her husband, because the aftermath of violence continues to govern her experience in her afterlife.

Marjorie Agosín asks 'How to speak with the dead?' in the title of one of her essays about human rights in Latin America.³ This question is provocative and the way in which it is phrased allows for two readings of it: it asks how might we be able to establish some line of communication to the dead? And, what might we be able to speak to them about? What might they be able to tell us? It is also significant that the use of the connector 'with' suggests a dialogue rather than one-way communication. These questions are pertinent as we approach the analysis of *Bailando sola* in which the playwright creates a dramatic space that allows the audience to come into contact with the dead protagonist in her afterlife. In *Specters of Marx: (Spectres de Marx)* Jacques Derrida highlights the link between the afterlife of the spectre and dialogue.⁴ Colin Davis explains that, 'Derrida's spectre is a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate.'⁵ In this comment Davis suggests that the in-between space occupied by the spectre affords it a unique function: it is precisely through this in-betweenness that the spectre is able to interact with both of these spaces and challenge established ideas.

³ Marjorie Agosín, *Ashes of Revolt: Essays on Human Rights* (Fredonia, N.Y: White Pine Press, 1996), 53-63.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York; London: Routledge, 1996).

⁵ Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11.

In *Bailando sola*, Raquel Diana creates a dramatic space in which Joyce's death is played out in the recognizable domestic setting of her flat where she carries out familiar tasks and actions rooted in a recognizable reality surrounding her everyday life. Throughout the play it seems that Joyce does not fully realize that she is dead and as the action develops, it becomes evident that no one else in her life has realized this either, due to her extreme isolation. Diana therefore constructs an in-between space for Joyce located in her flat where the protagonist seems to hover between life and death as she must wait for her corpse to be discovered. In this way, the dead protagonist in *Bailando sola* poses a challenge to the audience's understanding of death as the end of presence and, as my analysis will demonstrate, provokes questions around security, isolation and vulnerability.

Colin Davis develops the link between the spectre and knowledge: in challenging what we think we know, what might the spectre tell us? For Derrida, 'the spectre's secret is a productive opening of meaning rather than a determinate content to be uncovered'.⁶ By adopting an approach to the afterlife of Joyce Vincent as portrayed in *Bailando sola* as a 'productive opening of meaning' we can understand the dramatic space as a constructive and creative one through which meanings continue to be generated. By identifying these openings of meaning within the play this article will show how continuity is central to both the experience of the protagonist and a key aspect of the dramatic structure of the play. This article identifies the techniques employed by the playwright to provoke and sustain a dialogue with the audience that has the capacity to continue to resonate in the future and creates the possibility of retellings through translation and future performances. The key questions underpinning this article are: how does Raquel Diana create ways for the audience to establish contact with the protagonist's situation and how does this contact function when the play is translated into English?⁷

As part of the lengthy prologue, which includes extracts from both a British and a Spanish newspaper from around the time when the real Joyce Vincent's body was found in 2006, the author gives a warning to the reader:

*Hasta el momento nada más se ha sabido sobre Joyce y su vida.
Así que esta obra sólo contiene hechos imaginados por quien la escribió.*

At present no further information about Joyce and her life is known.
As a result, this play only comprises facts imagined by its author. (3)

The story of the real Joyce Vincent has generated a striking number of responses in the form of blog posts and opinion pieces which appear when one searches for further information via the Internet. It has also generated a myriad of unanswered questions, for example, 'How on earth can a woman lie dead for two years?' asks one of the writers for the 'Comment' section of *The Telegraph*. He goes on to speculate what Joyce might have been watching when she died and how a TV could play

⁶ Colin Davis, 11.

⁷ This article is developed from a conference paper that I was invited to present at the UCL Society for Comparative Cultural Inquiry's annual conference in 2014 at which the key themes were distance and proximity.

continuously for over two years without anyone complaining, including the licensing agency.⁸ The documentary film by director Carol Morley, which postdates the play, also started with a question: do you know Joyce Vincent? She affixed posters in the area in which Joyce had lived, displayed it on the side of London taxis and asked it via social media. The resulting film, *Dreams of a Life*, seeks to provide an insight into the type of woman the real Joyce Vincent was and to explore how she became so disconnected from those around her - even those who loved her.⁹ In fact, towards the end of the documentary a former boyfriend of Joyce's, with whom she stayed shortly before she disappeared, declares his love for her. The extensive research by Carol Morley has provided an important point of reference when researching this play.

Joyce Vincent's story originates in North London but through *Bailando sola*, Raquel Diana shows how it is able to resonate within the cultural context of Uruguay. In an interview in 2013 Raquel Diana explained how she initially interacted with aspects of the story through the information available via media reports and this enabled her to form connections with the remoteness of the experience of Joyce Vincent's death, which then formed the basis of the play.¹⁰ Therefore, distance and a sense of mobility are fundamental aspects of the creative process of writing the original dramatic text. The prologue to *Bailando sola* instantly signals this distance to the audience through the inclusion of extracts from two newspapers reporting the death of Joyce Vincent: one in English and one in Spanish. They are articles released by the press in 2006 to report the discovery of the body of the real Joyce Vincent. They highlight the role of the media in disseminating the story internationally and thus enabling it to transcend linguistic and geographic barriers. By including them in the prologue to the play the playwright acknowledges the interaction and intertextuality with the story of the real Joyce Vincent and alludes to her own creative process by showing how she came into contact with this story through the media.

In order to maintain the emphasis on the diffusion of the story, to signal its movement into Spanish and provide a way for an audience in the United Kingdom to interact with the way in which the story was transferred into the Spanish media, in the English translation I have presented the extract from the Spanish media in the original Spanish accompanied by an English translation (and so not removed the original text in this part). This places emphasis on the way that the original story crossed huge distances and entered into different languages and provides a way for the audience in the United Kingdom to access one form in which the story was communicated outside the United Kingdom.

The Internet and media played a fundamental role in initiating Diana's work on the play and so it is significant that the playwright chooses to introduce the media through the prologue and to make references to the news (29), the headlines (9) and the Internet (19) throughout the play. These references underline the important role of the media in the world today, the constant flow of

⁸ Sam Leith, 'How on earth can a woman lie dead for two years?', 'Comment Section', *Telegraph*, 15 April 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3624355/How-on-earth-can-a-woman-lie-dead-for-two-years.html> [Accessed 06 October 2016] (paragraphs 1, 3, 4).

⁹ *Dreams of a Life*, dir. by Carol Morley (Dogwoof, 2011).

¹⁰ Raquel Diana, Interview conducted in Spanish, Montevideo, 30 November 2013.

information with which one is faced and how this information enters and disrupts spaces that previously were disconnected and private. In scene four, the playwright highlights this invasive and incessant nature to modern communication when Joyce says:

Hay tanta gente allí afuera, por todas partes, que es imposible estar solo. Y teléfonos, mensajes de textos, emails, televisión, satélites, internet.

There are so many people out there, everywhere, it's impossible to be alone. And phones, texts, emails, television, satellites, Internet. (19)

However, the irony in this statement is evident as the protagonist is lonely and extremely isolated; despite all of the means of communication that she mentions, from her accounts, Joyce's experience of living alone in her flat is notably marked by a lack of interaction with others. Joyce has a television, which she explains was the first thing that she bought when she moved into the flat, and in the opening scene she says that she uses it to drown out the silence (7). The television is important to Joyce and she relies on it for company as a way to combat her solitude but it does not facilitate the exchange and intimacy with another person that she so greatly desires. There is a telephone in her flat which could link her to others but when it rings at the start of scene two, her reaction is one of fear and panic and this causes her not to pick it up as she calculates that the risk is too great:

Cada vez que ese teléfono suena mi corazón se detiene... (*alegre*) ¿Quién será? (*el teléfono sigue sonando*) Cada vez que ese teléfono suena mi corazón se detiene... (*entre alegre y asustada*) A lo mejor es él, me está buscando, me encontró. (*el teléfono deja de sonar*).

Every time that phone rings my heart stops... (*Happy*) Who could it be? (*The telephone keeps ringing*). Every time that phone rings my heart stops... (*Part happy and part scared*). Perhaps it's him, he's looking for me. He's found me. (*The phone stops ringing*). (14)

A link is established between Joyce's isolation and her security: she actively ignores the telephone call in order to protect herself from her ex-husband. The fact that Joyce begins by saying 'Every time...' highlights the idea that she repeated this action of ignoring the phone throughout her life and she continues to do this during her afterlife. Therefore, the audience is confronted with the aftermath of domestic violence as an integral part of Joyce Vincent's afterlife, which provokes questions about the repercussions of this type of abuse.

The extreme isolation of Joyce's situation evidently made an impact on Raquel Diana and the playwright highlights the loneliness of women as a primary concern through the inclusion of a dedication in the prologue:

*Con todo amor, respeto y solidaridad con aquellas que están solas.
Con miedo y horror de la soledad.*

With unending love, respect and solidarity for all women who are alone.
With fear and dread of being alone. (3)

In an interview in 2013 Raquel Diana stated that through an understanding of the type of loneliness experienced by women, she formed a connection with the story of the real Joyce Vincent. Diana stated:

Yo creo que hay muchas más solas que solos, que los hombres además tienen un poco más de habilidad para buscar compañía o viven la soledad de otro modo. Pero nosotras, me parece que las mujeres, que las vivimos de un modo muy patético, y patético es una expresión, como, interesante porque es una mezcla de tristeza y al mismo tiempo de cosa ridícula.¹¹

I think there are many more women alone than there are men but also that men are slightly better at finding company, or they experience solitude in a different way. But we, women, I think that we experience it in a pathetic way and pathetic is an interesting expression, because it's a mixture of sadness and at the same time something sort of ridiculous.

The idea of *patética* is presented in the subtitle to the play; 'comedia más bien negra y patética', a black pathetic comedy. *Patética* refers to both an intensity of feeling or reaction and a complex mixture of sentiments, as Raquel Diana's comment above suggests.¹² In *Bailando sola* I understand the idea of *patética* to underpin the play and the constant movement between the extreme horror of the protagonist's isolation and the decomposition of her corpse as she waits to be discovered, which is juxtaposed with the recognisable domestic routines she performs. In this way *patética* indicates the extreme nature of Joyce Vincent's afterlife but it also serves as a way to mediate the most extreme aspects and sustain the engagement of the audience by opening up the possibility to explore Joyce's afterlife as multifaceted. As Joyce hovers between life and death her experiences shift between humour and horror, familiar and remote and so the play paints a complex picture of her afterlife.

Raquel Diana's comment also highlights her understanding of loneliness as gendered and she specifies the identification of a uniquely female experience of loneliness as a key point of contact that allowed the story of Joyce Vincent to transcend evident cultural and geographic barriers. Through this gendered understanding of loneliness, Raquel Diana was able to establish a sense of proximity with the remoteness of the story of a woman in an extreme situation, in another part of the world. This comment from the playwright demonstrates that whilst the accessibility of information can serve to enhance awareness of issues occurring in other parts of the world, contact results from the identification of a specific link to some aspect of that remote situation which creates a route into it from afar. The contact established through the recognition of a female experience of loneliness then created a way for the story of Joyce Vincent to become mobile and move into the context of Uruguay. This type of interaction through specific points of contact is central to my conceptualisation of how we can begin to move narratives across cultures.

¹¹ Raquel Diana, Interview conducted in Spanish, Montevideo, 30 November 2013.

¹² I consulted *Diccionario de la lengua española*, 21st ed. (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1992) and María Moliner, *Diccionario de uso del español*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Gredos, 1998) for the definition of 'patética.'

The process of making contact with the culture where the text originated involves identifying in the text in the source language a specific link to the target culture. The author or translator identifies in the source text, for example, a certain discourse, or the way in which a particular group of people is represented or a concern affecting a community is depicted. This is exemplified by the link to and identification with the real Joyce Vincent's experience of loneliness that Raquel Diana specified as a key starting point for the play in Spanish. In many cases, the translator identifies connections between the two cultures concerned in their first encounter with the dramatic text in the source language and this may be what attracts the translator to it and motivates them to translate it. It is through the analysis undertaken in the translation process that the translator examines how this initial connection can function as a productive point of contact between source and target cultures so as to allow the source text to become mobile and to create a specific trajectory from the original place, language and culture to the target ones. In this way, the process of movement across cultures is able to create a link from the roots of the original to the new text in the target language so that these connections can be explored through the creation and performance of the new dramatic text in the target language.

Therefore, this translation process does not seek to eliminate cultural differences through assimilation but rather to allow for a proximity to the culture of the source text that can provide an insight into cultural similarities and differences. In order to determine how this contact functions, I refer to Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of 'touch' between two singular entities: '[t]here is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up.' For him, "to come into contact" and 'to begin to make sense of one another' is not to penetrate or to engulf the other but to establish a closeness that recognizes that there can simultaneously be space for differences in between.¹³ Rather than effacing the distance between two cultures, the identification of points of contact allows for a simultaneous acknowledgement of proximity, through the connections identified, and distance as the source language text indicates aspects of a cultural reality that are less familiar. The specificity of the points of contact, which allow the text to move into the target culture and to take root there, are central to how I understand the creation of a performable play for the target context, otherwise the translator risks creating a universal play, which can only ever say universal things, which do not resonate within the target context but rather float above it.

This contact occurs as part of the initial analysis of the original dramatic text before the creation of the new text in the target language. Patrice Pavis refers to the translator as 'a dramaturge who must first of all effect a *macrotextual* translation, that is a dramaturgical analysis of the fiction conveyed by the text'.¹⁴ By referring to it in this way, Pavis draws the translator's attention to the dramatic text as a complex construct which serves to indicate not only the verbal utterances of the actors but their interactions on stage through gestures and movements. These strands of action are woven together in the text to develop the plot. It is through this type of analysis that the translator interrogates how the dramatic text functions as a drama and what is at stake in the play. In *Bailando*

¹³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5.

¹⁴ Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, trans. by Loren Kruger (London: Routledge, 1992), 139.

sola a link is created between the protagonist's solitude and her security, which causes her to become extremely isolated during her life so the question of how the vulnerability of solitude will continue to shape her experience of afterlife and to haunt the in-between space that Joyce now occupies is at stake throughout the play. The dramaturgical analysis also provokes the translator to engage with how the play functions within its cultural context, so in the case of *Bailando sola*, it prompts the questions of how the issues of domestic violence, isolation of women and the discovery of a corpse interact with specific discourses present in Uruguay today?

Pavis denotes this stage in the process, prior to the writing of the new dramatic text, as preverbal. For Pavis, the preverbal does not exclude the verbal but necessarily includes it along with the multiplicity of elements present in the theatrical *mise-en-scène*. He states that the preverbal is an 'ante-textual magma' in which 'gesture and text coexist in an as yet undifferentiated way', meaning that it incorporates all 'the sign systems that make up the theatrical situation of enunciation' of which the dramatic text is just one, alongside the actors' movement, tone of voice, costumes and set design.¹⁵ This is useful in pinpointing a creative conceptual space prior to the creation of the new written dramatic text that takes into account aspects of the performance. By specifying a dramaturgical analysis, Pavis asks that the translator approach the text as a text to be performed. In this way, the dramaturgical analysis is an essential way for the translator to engage with the performability of the text. The dramaturgical analysis informs the choices that the translator makes regarding the new text in the target language so that she is able to develop a new text that is performable in that target culture. The preverbal is not concerned with generating specific meanings: it constitutes a conceptual space which centres on forming links which indicate the final performance and impact the dramatic text created in the target language. Through the dramaturgical analysis the translator establishes links between original and target cultures in order to allow the original play to become mobile and move into the target culture. The preverbal space allows for a conceptualisation and consideration of the dramatic text as inherently linked to all aspects of the final performance and existing concurrently in that performance. The dramatic text is created in the verbal phase when the translator begins the process of choosing the words that make up the verbal utterances, stage directions and all the other information indicated by the written dramatic text and necessarily informed by the links established prior to writing the new dramatic text.

For the audience of the original play in Uruguay, *Bailando sola* provides a window into close and distant cultural realities. There are references to aspects of life in London, such as commuting on the underground as well as names and song lyrics in English, which serve indicate that the story originated in the UK and that the play is located there. However, through the dramatic action on stage, the playwright constantly brings to the forefront and interacts with issues which are relevant in Uruguay so that the scope of the play is not limited to Joyce's flat but opens up a dialogue between her experience portrayed on stage and the reality of Uruguay, which exists beyond the theatre. Raquel Diana created *Bailando sola* in the context of a Uruguayan reality in which a woman dies on average every two weeks as a result of domestic violence and the number of reported attacks against

¹⁵ Patrice Pavis, 148.

women is increasing.¹⁶ Therefore, the representation on stage of the afterlife of a woman with previous experience of domestic violence forms a connection with the reality and severity of this problem.

In *Bailando sola* the impact of domestic violence is brought to light because Joyce Vincent recalls and retells aspects of her relationship with her former husband who had violently abused her. Through Joyce's monologues and conversations with the other two characters, El Tipo y La Otra, the audience learns that the protagonist separated from her husband and received assistance from a state-run Housing Association to move into her current flat on her own. In my translation I called these other characters 'The Bloke' and 'The Woman' and these would primarily be indicators to the actors and director (or a reader) rather than the audience as the names are never verbalised on stage. I experimented with different options for 'La Otra' which could be translated as 'The Other Woman' and so sparks questions as to her relationship to Joyce: is she another representation of Joyce, such as an alter-ego? Does she represent another woman in the relationship between Joyce and her husband? Is she a spiritual 'other' being? Through my analysis of the play I identified that the roles of the two other characters seem fluid as their dialogue often evokes characters and relationships described by Joyce and so the character of 'La Otra' changes at different points in the play to represent aspects of Joyce's relationships with these different women. I chose to call her 'The Woman' as this allowed for a fluidity and transition between these different roles and characteristics, which I thought would be hindered by calling her 'The Other Woman' because the connotations of the mistress of a married man would be predominant.

The Bloke also transitions between different roles in the play and this is particularly striking when he flirts and dances with the protagonist thus acting out part of her fantasy about her noisy upstairs neighbour. In this fantasy, Joyce knocks so hard with the broom handle on the ceiling in an attempt to get her neighbour to quieten down, something which she has done on many occasions, that the plaster breaks and he falls through into her flat and lands on her sofa: they are finally united and able to talk, drink and dance. Following the articulation of this fantasy, the Bloke takes Joyce's hand and momentarily fulfils her desire for companionship and intimacy by dancing with her. In the original, Joyce says:

Canté un bolero muy dulce y me invitó a bailar...

I sang a sweet bolero and he asked me to dance... (20)

I chose to keep the reference to the bolero, a Cuban form of music that is popular throughout Latin America, as a hint to where the play was written. This also echoes some of the stylistic choices of Raquel Diana in the original in which the song '*Knock Three Times*' is sung in Spanish and in English at different moments throughout the play to highlight both where the story originated and the context in which it is now being told. The title of the play is taken from a line of the song *Knock*

¹⁶ 'Violencia doméstica: una mujer murió cada 15 días', *El País*, 24 November 2014, <http://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/violencia-domestica-mueren-mensualmente.html> [Accessed: 31.08.2016] (paragraphs 4, 5).

Three Times by Tony Orlando and Dawn and Raquel Diana explains in the prologue why it attracted her attention:

Joyce Vincent se llamaba la mujer inglesa en la que se inspira esta obra, igual que la cantante del grupo Dawn que acompañaba a Tony Orlando, famoso por "Knock Three Times" [...] Su letra refiere a vecinos que no se conocen a pesar de vivir en un mismo edificio y que podrían haber tenido una historia de amor.

Joyce Vincent was the name of the English woman who inspired this play. She shared her name with one of singers in the group Dawn, who accompanied Tony Orlando. They are famous for *Knock Three Times* [...] The song is about a romance that could have flourished between two neighbours, but they don't know each other despite living in the same building. (3)

The Bloke seems to grant Joyce the affection that she has constantly been seeking and even to give her hope:

Es todo lo que quiero, un abrazo, un poco de música, un hombre que me ame y quizás un par de proyectos juntos.

It's all I want; a bit of music, a man to hold me, love me and maybe even a few plans for the future together. (31)

The sense of intimacy created through the dancing is brutally ruptured by the Bloke's raucous laughter in reaction to Joyce's comment above, and by the Woman, who intervenes and forcefully separates them. The violent rupture of the intimate moment evokes Joyce's experience with her ex-husband in which the relationship was brutally distorted through physical abuse and so serves as a dramatic device to indicate aspects of the experience of domestic violence without depicting this type of violence on stage.

In the play Joyce Vincent speaks explicitly about the violent attacks when she is alone in the scene three. She states that she was hospitalised five times as a result of the injuries that she sustained from the abuse but that she hid it from everyone she knew:

Lo de los golpes era mi secreto.

The thing about the blows was my secret. (15)

It is poignant that this revelation about the violence that she suffered occurs when she is alone on stage: the ringing of the telephone signals the departure of the Woman. The secrecy that she has maintained around the abuse indicates her feelings of shame and embarrassment about the violence and creates the impression that this is a moment of confession. The fact that the protagonist makes this revelation whilst alone on stage serves to create a sense of intimacy with the audience as she confesses her secret to them. In this way, the dramatic space creates a way for the audience to establish a relationship with the protagonist. The audience is able to learn about her previous experiences, understand aspects of her isolation and empathise with some parts of this experience,

despite the fact that Joyce Vincent is a dead woman.

By depicting the dead woman on stage the playwright poses a challenge to the notion of death as the end of existence. Joyce's experience of afterlife raises pertinent questions about the significance of the discovery of the body after death and throughout the dramatic action, particularly in the second half of the play, emphasis is placed on the urgent need for this moment of discovery as the Bloke and the Woman seem to anticipate it and prepare Joyce for it. For example, the Woman becomes impatient about the need to leave the flat and is angry when Joyce says that she hardly ever opens the windows in her flat because there are revolting smells in the hallway. The Woman is frustrated that even the smell of Joyce's decomposition won't draw attention to them amongst the other odours and so they will remain in the flat even longer:

(con gesto de fastidio) ¡Qué desgracia! Por el olor no nos van a encontrar. No nos vamos a ir más de acá.

(Screwing up her face, annoyed) This is a nightmare! The smell won't give us away. We aren't ever going to get out of here. (21)

As the play reaches its climax the Woman states that the neighbours will want explanations from Joyce about her lack of contribution to the maintenance of the building. When Joyce asks why people are knocking at the door, the Woman makes explicit reference to the process of decomposition, when she states what people will want from her:

Que abras. Qué más. Que pagues los gastos comunes del edificio. Que le pagues a la compañía eléctrica, que expliques por qué salen esos insectos negros por debajo de la puerta y ese olor nauseabundo, que bajes el volumen de la tele.

For you to open the door. What else could they want? For you to pay the service charges for the building. For you to pay the electricity company, for you to explain why those little black bugs and that nauseating smell are creeping out from underneath the door, for you to turn down the TV. (30)

Raquel Diana uses the character of the Woman to explicitly place emphasis on the physicality of Joyce's presence as a corpse and its ongoing decomposition. The explicit references to decomposition also serve to locate Joyce's experience in the context of a block of flats: the bugs and odours emerging from her flat become a link or a sign to other people beyond her front door, which are ignored. Emphasis is placed on the fact that Joyce's body continues to rot in a hot, poorly ventilated flat. When Joyce voices her concerns about aging through referring to the flaws in her skin, she reinforces the idea that her body is deteriorating. These references are juxtaposed with Joyce's concerns about preservation as she describes the ritual of applying makeup and the products that she carefully selects (*Bailando sola*, 5-6). This is echoed in scene six when she says that she ought to put on some make-up (*Bailando sola*, 28). Her concerns about aging and improving her appearance draw the attention of the audience to her body and so these familiar concerns, which allow the audience to identify with the protagonist, actually serve as a reminder to them of her situation: for Joyce, the aging process now constitutes the rotting of her corpse which she continues

to embody. The body is central to the afterlife depicted on stage and this is reinforced by the ending of the play where the stage directions specify that the character of Joyce Vincent remains alone and slumped in front of the television until the last audience member leaves the theatre.

The final image offered by the playwright through the body of the actor is that of the corpse waiting to be discovered. This is powerful as it is a representation of the way in which the real Joyce Vincent was discovered and so the end of the play forms a direct link to the story that inspired Raquel Diana to write the dramatic text whilst evoking the horror of the situation encountered by those who discovered the decomposing body. It is also significant that the ending reinforces the idea of waiting which is present throughout the play. For example, Joyce says to the Woman:

No me acuerdo qué es lo que estamos esperando... En realidad lo único que recuerdo es un dolor de cabeza... Voy a lavar los platos.

I can't remember what it is we're waiting for... To be honest, the only thing I can remember is a headache... I'm going to wash the dishes. (10)

She echoes this comment in scene four:

No puedo recordar qué estamos esperando.

I can't remember what we're waiting for. (18)

The ending not only serves as a reminder of the length of time that Joyce had to wait to be discovered but it also forces the audience to actively participate in an act of abandonment of the protagonist. Prior to the end of the play there is a knocking at the door, which creates the impression that the moment of discovery has arrived. The Bloke's comment increases the expectation that the audience are about to witness the discovery of the body:

Es el problema con los cadáveres. Se empeñan en ser encontrados.

That's the problem with cadavers. They insist on being found. (35)

These comments reinforce the idea that the protagonist, Joyce Vincent, has not disappeared completely, her cadaver remains and it is imperative that it is discovered. Therefore, despite the fact that she was ignored by her family, neighbours and the housing trust, it is essential that this moment of discovery occurs. The invisibility during her life and afterlife will be interrupted when her body is discovered and so the emphasis placed on this moment of discovery suggests a type of closure or end point towards which the characters have been working.

This idea of the importance of closure through the discovery of the body interacts with current discourses around the *desaparecidos* in Uruguay. It is for this reason that in the translation into English I decided to use the word cadaver, which echoes the original Spanish, rather than opting for the word body, which is used more frequently in English and which I have used in other instances where *cadáver* appears in the text. In this way, I sought to highlight this line and to create a sense that this text has previously been inhabited by voices of actors from in a different culture and language. For the audience of the Raquel Diana's original play, the dead protagonist whose body remains

undiscovered also conjures up the cultural memory of those people who disappeared during the Uruguayan military dictatorship.¹⁷ Diana Taylor states that ‘the *desaparecidos* (the disappeared) are, by definition, always already the object of representation. The flesh-and-blood victims, forcefully absented from the sociopolitical crisis that created them, left no bodies. Those disappeared.’¹⁸ The absence of a cadaver creates an ongoing void that can cause family members to separate the spiritual death from a physical one or cause them to question whether the individual has actually died. As Francesca Lessa points out, in recent years advances have been made under the leadership of the first ever Frente Amplio presidents, Tabaré Vázquez (2005-2010, 2015-present) and José Mujica (2010-2015), in proceeding with prosecutions for offences committed during the dictatorship and excavating military sites.¹⁹ Raquel Diana created the play in 2008 when these issues were attracting continuous attention from human rights groups, politicians and members of society who demanded that action be taken to find the remains of those who disappeared. The topic of disappearances in Uruguay also emerged following a reading of a draft translation of the play at the Out of the Wings Theatre Research, Translation and Performance group at King’s College London on 1st April 2016 that the playwright attended.

By depicting a dead protagonist, one could argue that Raquel Diana perpetuates the representation of the disappeared by evoking the memory of their absence. But she also poses a challenge to the concept of the disembodied *desaparecido* by depicting the dead protagonist as a body and as inseparable from that body. Joyce’s presence in her flat and her experience of afterlife are marked by their corporality and the audience’s attention is drawn to her body particularly through the references to the decomposition of the corpse. At the end of the play an uncomfortable tension is established between the permanence of Joyce’s isolated body on stage, which indicates an ongoing experience of disappearance, and the final moments of dramatic action, including the knocking from outside, which seem to indicate the moment of discovery presented in the newspaper articles in the prologue. The relationship established with the audience throughout the play makes this moment more poignant because Joyce Vincent is portrayed as character with whom they can identify but nevertheless they must actively abandon her.

¹⁷ Francesca Lessa gives an account of key aspects of the dictatorships in Uruguay (1973-85) and Argentina (1976-1983) in her chapter ‘The Downward Spiral toward Dictatorship’, including a definition of *desaparecidos* as ‘persons apprehended at home, work, or on public thoroughfares; after abduction, seized persons disappeared: never to be seen again’. Francesca Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against Impunity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 31-47 (40). The chapter on ‘Pacification or Impunity? The Ley de Caducidad and the Interweaving of Memory and Transitional Justice in Uruguay’ (163-213) discusses the ongoing impact of dictatorship crimes and unresolved cases. Lawrence Weschler points out that during the dictatorship ‘[f]rom having been the freest nation in Latin America, Uruguay had transmogrified itself into the county with the highest per-capita rate of political incarceration anywhere on earth’. *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers* (New York, Penguin Books, 1991), 85. The chapter on ‘The Reality of the World’ (81-236) provides a detailed account of the dictatorship period.

¹⁸ Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 140.

¹⁹ Lessa, 147-148.

The dramatic structure of the play and the ongoing presence of Joyce's body suggest, rather than an open ending, continuity; an unending and unresolved nature to the experience depicted on stage. Joyce Vincent's body is an essential part of the afterlife depicted in *Bailando sola* and so the permanence of her corpse indicates that this experience is not concluded. The unique dramatic space is significant precisely because it remains uninterrupted until after the audience leave the theatre. The prolonged nature of Joyce's situation highlights both her lack of agency and control over her situation and reinforces the significance of the discovery. The continuity serves to make the questions posed through the experience of the protagonist in the play more pertinent by suggesting their ongoing resonance. In this way, the playwright creates a way for the afterlife of the protagonist to enter into dialogue with the reality of the issues presented in the play.

Joyce Vincent's afterlife does not serve to communicate a specific message but seeks to provoke and sustain a dialogue with the audience. For Derrida, the link between the spectre and the future is essential:

There are several times of the specter. It is a proper characteristic of the specter, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the *revenant* may already mark the promised return of the specter of living being.²⁰

Returning is inherent to the behaviour of the spectre and is explicit in the word *revenant* from the French *revenir*. Derrida's focus on temporality forces us to recognise that the spectre is necessarily and absolutely linked to the future. For the spectre that enters an afterlife, which we might refer to as returning or coming back from the dead, does not go back at all. The spectre remains and participates in the future, precisely by coming into their afterlife and prolonging their presence. In a similar way, if we interpret spectres as possible manifestations of the future then they signal something yet to occur and through their presence they challenge our understanding as to what that future might be as they function to open up new meanings by which they indicate aspects of this future reality. In both cases the spectre, through their continued presence, is necessarily linked to the future. It is also crucial to note that Derrida states that we may not be able to distinguish between these two possible functions and so we are required to, in all cases, examine the spectre as living past and living future. This conceptualisation of the spectre ascribes function rather than meaning to the afterlife: it is characterized as productive and provocative. In *Bailando sola*, Joyce shows limited awareness of the real time but she is aware of waiting. The Woman and the Bloke signal the passage of time in familiar ways by referring to the seasons whilst Joyce continues to participate in everyday rituals and to speak of her plans and ambitions. The sense of continuity established by Raquel Diana from life into and through death sustains Joyce's afterlife. The dramatic space created by the playwright allows for a dialogue to occur and the protagonist serves a dramatic and spectral function in provoking questions and indicating a wider reality beyond the boundaries of her own life and death. The concept of the spectre as harbinger of a living future is present in the idea of continuity

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, 123.

inherent in the play. It is central to the existence of the protagonist linking her to both a living past and a living future. The link to the future opens up a space for retelling and recreation through translation which allows a new manifestation of this prolonged afterlife in a new cultural context.

It is essential that the translation into English maintains this trajectory in order to encapsulate the integral movement and continuity of this dramatic text. Through translation, the afterlife of the protagonist is perpetuated through the replaying and retelling of her story. *Bailando sola* is a mobile dramatic text but a key challenge in translating it for performance in the United Kingdom is not to assume, because the target culture and language were those of the real Joyce Vincent, that the task was to somehow bring the play 'back'. It was essential to interrogate and analyse *Bailando sola* as a Uruguayan play. It is for this reason that the process detailed in this article is crucial to understanding how specific links can be created between two cultures to recognise differences as well as proximity between two cultures.

This dramaturgical analysis ensures that the text moves across in a way that can be performed in the United Kingdom and allows for the creation of a new dramatic text. The afterlife depicted in the new translated text then reverberates with questions which speak specifically into this new context whilst creating a sense of a wider discussion: a dialogue which transcends perceived boundaries. Through the performance of the play in the target culture new audiences participate in this dialogue. In translation for the audience in the United Kingdom, the depiction of the aftermath of domestic violence would evidently interact with this issue in the United Kingdom.²¹ Furthermore, in London in 2016 the references in the play to social assistance and isolation are evocative of recurring discourses about a welfare system which cannot sustain the welfare of all members of society and in which some people are treated like a persistent burden and constantly moved around, causing them to become invisible within the system itself, whilst others remain isolated from it altogether and struggle to find any kind of support and security. These discourses represent ongoing issues that remain unresolved. A link can therefore be established between these issues and the unending nature of Joyce's situation. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that whilst researching the translation of this play in 2014, *Woman's Hour* on BBC Radio 4 ran a series of discussions about loneliness and isolation in women perceived from different viewpoints thus highlighting the importance of this issue in the United Kingdom.²² I was able to draw on the interviews on *Woman's Hour* to find examples of how the discussion of isolation in women is framed in the UK today and draw on some of the words and phrases used to inform my translation into English. These links established with current discourses in the United Kingdom allow the play to enter into a discussion of issues and topics, beyond those immediately presented in the play, which are significant now. Points of contact between Uruguay and the United Kingdom allow for this discussion and interaction to begin in the United Kingdom through a play that was written in Uruguay.

²¹ Domestic violence is a serious issue in the UK with one in four women suffering abuse from their partner. There is a current growing concern with domestic violence amongst teenagers in the UK. 'Beaten by my boyfriend', BBC Three, 25 March 2015. Information and clips are available at the programme website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0480qvx> [Accessed 25.01.2016]. See also, 'Murdered by my Boyfriend', BBC Three, 23 June 2014, 9pm.

²² *Woman's Hour*, BBC Radio 4, 23-27 June 2014.

A rehearsed reading of *Dancing Alone Every Night* was performed at King's College London on 7th July 2016 as part of *Out of the Wings 2016: Play Readings from Spain and Latin America*, a sharing of work and performances created by the Out of the Wings Theatre Research, Translation and Performance Group.²³ The reading was directed by Camila González and performed by three professional actors following a two-day rehearsal process. This reading provided an opportunity for the words to be tested in different voices and the robustness of the dramatic text created for the target context to be examined through the rehearsal processes, the performance of the reading and the discussions after the reading. On occasions this centered on the robustness of a particular line or an image conjured up by a word in the moment of the exchange, such as the use of the word *cadaver* in the example cited above which I discussed with some audience members after the reading because it had stood out for them. Another example is when the Bloke appears in Scene five:

La Otra: (*a El Tipo*) Te pido por favor que nos dejes en paz.
El Tipo: (*cantando*) Noche de amor, noche de paz, todo es calma, todo es paz...
Woman: (*To the Bloke*) Would you please just leave us in peace.
Bloke: (*Singing*) Silent night. Holy night. All is calm. All is bright.

During the rehearsal process we discussed why the Bloke begins singing at this point. We talked about how he sings in order to make the Woman quiet and demonstrate that he does not intend to leave them in peace. By singing, he silences the Woman and hints at his manipulative character, which is signaled later when the Woman states that he is deceiving Joyce by dancing with her. Furthermore, in scene seven he taunts Joyce with possible outcomes to her situation and life had she not suffered the brain hemorrhage when alone at home, which exemplifies a cruel side to his character. In the rehearsal room we did not discuss the original Spanish but it is interesting to note that, as can be seen from the original and translation above, in Spanish the Bloke echoes the words of the Woman: he is able to effectively reuse her words to silence her by repeating the word 'paz' (peace) as part of the song. The song that he sings is a Spanish version of *Silent Night* and, after experimenting with some other constructions and Christmas songs to create a repetition, I decided that this was the best option and that the repetition would be lost in translation. However, in the rehearsal and performance, following our discussion of the characteristics of the Bloke, the actor began to emphasize the word *silent* as he started to sing and even raised his finger to his own mouth and then to that of the Woman's as a sign for her to be quiet. In this way, the actor emphasized the line, silenced the Woman and hinted at the manipulative nature of the Bloke through the combination of word and gesture. Through exploring the dramatic function of the line with the actors in the rehearsal room, the Bloke was able to play creatively with the song in order to make the reply equally effective for the performance in translation.

Following the performance, there was a space for informal discussion and this centered on the resonances of the different types of disappearance: from society, from a violent ex-partner, from the social system. In some cases, this paved a way for discussions about disappearances during the

²³ *Out of the Wings 2016: Play Readings from Spain and Latin America*, <https://ootwweb.wordpress.com> [Accessed 29 September 2016].

military dictatorship in Uruguay and other places in Latin America. Several people commented on how the fact that *Dancing Alone Every Night* was a translation, which centered on a story occurring in the UK, made them consider how the extremity of Joyce's situation might be viewed from elsewhere. They were interested in the way a playwright from another country could shed a different perspective on it, including moments of humor, whilst drawing to their attention how aspects of how this problem might be lived and experienced in Uruguay. The play allowed for a broader awareness of how the aftermath of domestic violence and the reality of isolation might be experienced in a different country. Through the creation of the play in Uruguay and the translation into English a dialogue was opened between these two countries which allowed voices from elsewhere to contribute to a relevant discussion about isolation of women, violence against women and the failures of a social system.

In this way the translated play maintains an essential movement between familiar and remote, as the audience are able to gain an insight into a close and distant cultural context. A link between the severity of the issue of domestic violence in Uruguay and the welfare of vulnerable people in the United Kingdom is created but this proximity is achieved without effacing all aspects of cultural difference. What makes the translation so relevant and impactful is that it opens up a space for the voices in *Bailando sola*, which may seem to emerge from such a distant and different context, to speak in the context of the United Kingdom. Through Raquel Diana's depiction of Joyce's afterlife, the audience are also forced to confront familiar and remote experiences. The constant interplay between the recognisable and unfamiliar enables and obliges the audience to relate to the protagonist whilst forcing them to engage with the wider questions provoked by the play. The sense of recurrence in the play is an important dramatic device in opening up a dialogue that transcends perceived boundaries of life and death, but also geographic and cultural context. Raquel Diana opens up a private space in which to portray a protagonist who, whilst obliging the audience to confront key themes of domestic violence, isolation and insecurity, also serves as a 'productive opening of meaning' so that the play is able to interact with specific discourses in the United Kingdom. In this way the translated text allows the audience to enter into a dialogue with the protagonist and creates a dramatic space in which we can dialogue with the dead.

Synopsis of Dancing Alone Every Night

Characters:

Joyce Vincent

The Bloke

The Woman

Dancing Alone Every Night takes place in Joyce Vincent's living room and the stage directions specify that the set should include a television. Joyce refers explicitly to the TV at several moments in the play and there are stage directions that indicate that the characters are watching something. The

flickering of the TV screen indicates movement from one scene to the next. The play occurs during the time between Joyce's death and the discovery of her corpse.

Scene 1 is a monologue from the protagonist, Joyce. She is alone and recalls a pain to her head like none she has ever felt before. She tries to describe the pain using the semantic field of the domestic, which includes a reference to the domestic violence that she suffered from her husband. Joyce tries to remember what she was doing before the pain started and sings *Knock Three Times* by Tony Orlando and Dawn whilst trying to distract herself so that the memories come back. Joyce works backwards from recent memory to recall and describe familiar rituals of preparation: she remembers the frustration of wrapping and curling the bows on the Christmas presents, she describes bathing and applying her make-up. There is a sense of anticipation and of preparing to leave, which remains constant throughout the play, but at this moment Joyce cannot remember where she was going: the last she can remember is closing the door and leaving the key in the lock, something which she used to criticize her ex-husband for doing.

In the scene 2 the character of the Woman (La Otra) appears and in scene 5 the character of the Bloke (El Tipo) appears. Through Joyce's conversations with these characters the audience learns that the protagonist separated from her husband and received assistance from a state-run Housing Association to move into her current flat on her own. The Woman talks to Joyce about waiting, memory and decomposition, all of which serve to reinforce the idea of the passage of time.

Scene 3 is a monologue during which Joyce reveals the extent of the violence from her ex-husband and the feelings of shame she experienced. She describes her fear when the phone rings and she does not answer it in case her husband has tracked her down. She verbalizes a series of tags to attach to Christmas presents addressed to her family and social workers through which the audience gains an insight into the challenges of estrangement and her efforts to reconnect by performing familiar Christmas rituals.

In scene 4, the Woman states that they are waiting to leave but she does not say where they will go and instead criticizes Joyce for her fear of solitude. They discuss an internet post about Joyce, which is a reference to Carol Morely who made a documentary film, *Dreams of a Life* (2011), and who was conducting research at the time where Raquel Diana wrote the play.

In scene 5 Joyce expresses her love for singing and performs for the Woman, who sleeps and snores throughout Joyce's singing. They are interrupted by drilling from upstairs. Joyce blames her upstairs neighbour for the noise and explains how she often hits the broom handle against the ceiling to get him to quieten down, even though she has never met him. The Woman appears frustrated that Joyce's isolation, even from her neighbours, will mean that they will never be able to leave the flat.

The Bloke appears and says that he responded to her knocking. The Woman seems to know him and asks him to leave. The Bloke says 'Merry Christmas' and sings *Silent Night*. Joyce is confused about the passage of time and asks if it is still Christmas, which would allow her to deliver the presents to her sister and niece and nephew. She states that she bought a gift for her ex-husband but decided not to give it to him because she feared that he would find out where she lived. She labels

the presents for her parents and remembers that she was going to take them to the cemetery.

In scene 6 Joyce and the Bloke watch TV and she explains a fantasy about the man in the flat upstairs in which she knocked so hard on the ceiling that it gave way and he fell through. She dances with the Bloke and he sings *Knock Three Times*. There is loud knocking at the door and the Woman tells Joyce to find a photo and that Joyce cannot open the door because she is dead.

In scene 7 Joyce is watching the TV. The Bloke explains that it is her third Christmas as a dead woman. Joyce appears on the television in a singing contest. The voice of a presenter off-stage announces it and the three characters sing *Knock three times* in Spanish. The singing is interrupted by an announcement that Joyce's body has been found. Towards the end of the song, the two other characters leave, moving backwards as if inviting Joyce to leave with them. Joyce sits down in front of the television. She remains staring at the television until the final person has left the auditorium.

Raquel Diana is an actress, dramatist, theatre director and philosophy teacher. She has written more than twenty-five plays and created adaptations of texts for theatre, plays for children and *murgas* (satirical carnival shows). She trained with the Independent Theatre, Teatro Galpón, in Montevideo from 1985 until 2007. She began writing in 1997 after attending a playwriting workshop and her plays have since been performed in Latin America, Europe and the United States of America. Her work has been awarded prizes from the Ministry of Education and Culture in Uruguay, the Asociación General de Autores del Uruguay (Uruguayan Author's Association) and the Federación Uruguaya de Teatros Independientes (Uruguayan Federation of Independent Theatres).

More details about the author and her work can be found at the website: <http://www.dramaturgiauruguay.gub.uy/obras/autores/raquel-diana/>

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Review: *Loose Screws: Nine New Plays from Poland*

By: Alena Aniskiewicz

Loose Screws: Nine New Plays from Poland. Edited by Dominika Laster. London: Seagull Books, 2015.

Debates over the past, present, and future of Poland have long played out in the nation's dramatic writings. Over the 123 years when Poland disappeared from the map of Europe – partitioned by its neighbors – the Romantic national bard Adam Mickiewicz positioned his dramatic work as a means by which to keep the nation alive. His (often unstageable) works have set the tone of Polish theatre as formally experimental and socially and politically aware. In 1901, Stanisław Wyspiański's symbolist drama *The Wedding* brought together ghosts from Poland's past with representatives of all strata of contemporary society in a cutting critique of political stagnation and social fragmentation. Wyspiański's works again made waves in Nazi occupied Kraków – defiantly staged by Tadeusz Kantor's underground theatre company in private homes across the city. In the subsequent decades under the shadow of Soviet domination, Polish dramatists continued to compose and stage works that critiqued the society around them. Following the end of communist power in 1989, Polish theatre has remained politically and socially engaged, now often turned inward to interrogate what “Poland” means today. What is the character of the nation – now more open to influences from the outside and no longer necessarily defined against occupying powers?

Loose Screws: Nine New Plays from Poland brings together a diverse collection of works engaged with these very questions of Polish identity. This beautifully presented volume offers nine contemporary Polish plays that “revise, rehearse, and unmake found notions of individual and national identity,” (xiii). Together with a *(A)pollonia: Twenty-First-Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage* (edited by Krystyna Duniec, Joanna Klass, and Joanna Krakowska; 2014), *Loose Screws* is the culmination of an international effort to assemble lively and accessible translations of Polish plays into English. The translations in this volume are the products of an international collaborative project that involved playwrights, translators, dramaturges, and scholars from Poland and America. The diversity of perspectives involved in the project underscores the plurality of voices and viewpoints at work in this volume. These wonderfully accessible translations bring to the English speaking stage a vision of Poland that is challenging, in conversations with the world outside its national borders, and critical of a monolithic view of the world inside its borders.

The work that has gone into selecting these texts, facilitating their translation, and compiling this volume positions *Loose Screws* not only as a valuable contribution to an ongoing conversation about the future and possibilities of Polish identity, but also as an accessible introduction to Polish theatre. Dominika Laster's introduction to the work provides a concise and illuminating overview of the Polish theatrical tradition, as well as an insightful discussion and contextualization of the collected plays. Though the volume does not include detailed profiles of the playwrights, those looking for information beyond what is offered likely will be able to find more, given the details provided. Many of the plays in the volume are accompanied by at least one photograph of a staged performance and, where included, these help visualize the complex worlds brought to life in the text.

Organized into three thematically linked sections, the collection begins with three plays that explore contemporary Poland's relationship to its history. The first play in this section, *The Files* (Teatr Ósmego Dnia, translated by Bill Johnston), reads and recontextualizes voices from the past, imbuing them with new significance in their contemporary performance. This piece of documentary theatre from Teatr Ósmego Dnia (Theatre of the Eighth Day) – a politically engaged theatre collective founded in 1964 – finds original members of the group presenting a textual collage of personal letters, literary quotation, and excerpts from the surveillance files kept on them by the secret police in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (which were made public in 1998). As the work unfolds, it not only reveals a troubling history of government surveillance and civilian informants in which the lines between perpetrators and victims are not always evident in the historical record, but also explores questions of historical and personal truth and textual representation. Though it is difficult to imagine the text performed by anyone other than the individuals whose story it tells, *The Files* is here presented in an engaging and accessible translation.

The veracity of historical records and memory is further contested in *Eat the Heart of Your Enemy* (Michał Bajer, translated by Benjamin Paloff), which travels back in time to explore the very contemporary question of how Polish heritage is created, manipulated, and exploited. Situated in Chopin's apartment hours after the composer's death, Bajer's darkly comic work finds acquaintances (and sly opportunists) gathered over Chopin's corpse, looking to claim their piece of him, both figuratively and in the final grotesque act of the title – literally. Paloff's translation of the work retains the humor and spark of Bajer's bawdy, irreverent critique of the "national heritage industry."

The final drama of this section strikes a very different tone. Set in the midst of a rising tide of fascism, *Helver's Night* (Ingmar Villqist, translated by Philip Boehm) evokes a tension and mounting violence that might call to mind the atmosphere of Europe on the eve of WWII – or the threat of a future where jingoistic nationalism has developed unchecked. Set within the home of a mentally disabled man and his caretaker, the emotional drama finds the domestic sphere invaded by the militarism and ideology outside its walls. With its emotional conclusion, *Helver's Night* speaks to human suffering and the vulnerability imbued by otherness in a stirring drama that should resonate with English-speaking audiences.

The second section in the collection examines ideas of domesticity, interpersonal relations, and the ways in which these concepts are rehearsed and performed in everyday life. In *Daily Soup* (Amanita Muskaria, translated by Margarita Nafpaktitis) a television serves as the main conduit of the outside world into the domestic life of three generations of Poles. As voices from the screen punctuate the routine of home life and meals, even the most essential act of eating is subject to incursions from outside influences. American audiences will no doubt see themselves in some aspects of this Polish family's interactions.

Though set in a distinctly post-Socialist bloc of identical concrete apartments, *The First Time* (Michał Walczak, translated by Benjamin Paloff) similarly illuminates the recognizable practice of social performance – of perfecting our "roles" in everyday life. As "She" and "He" "rehearse" the scene of their first sexual encounter – one that "She" has plotted, but is unable to achieve in real life –

Walczak's sparse text explores the ways in which narration, performance, and revision shape not only the theatre, but lived experience.

Like *The First Time, Let's Talk About Life and Death* (Krzysztof Bizio, translated by Mira Rosenthal) is highly conversational and performs the language of daily life. Organized as a montage of telephone conversations, we learn about the lives and domestic dramas of a father, mother, and son through their conversations with those on the other end of the line. Closing this section on domesticity, Bizio's work offers a look inside a Polish home that focuses not so much on the narrative of the family, but on the ways in which those in the home communicate with the world outside. In all three of these plays, "home" and interpersonal relations are permeated by social and cultural forces.

In the trio of plays in the volume's final section – "Unmaking Poland" – each interrogates the character of "Poland" in a contemporary context, pushing on entrenched notions of what it means to be Polish. In her introduction to this volume, Dominika Laster describes the first play in this section, *Made in Poland* (Przemysław Wojcieszek, translated by Dominika Laster), as a "punk manifesto in dramatic form," (xxix). This "manifesto" finds Boguś – a 19-year-old, newly tattooed with "Fuck Off!" across his forehead – rebelling against anything and everything. Both his character and his rebellion have been "made in Poland," yet for all their brutality and vulgarity, have no real direction forward. Presented as a series of short vignettes – some without any spoken dialogue – the work is highly cinematic and ripe for creative staging (a 2004 Polish production was staged in an abandoned supermarket within a 1970s housing complex and opened with its star destroying a car parked in the adjacent lot).

The vulgarity and ruthlessness of Wojcieszek's work is also evident in *A Couple of Poor, Polish-Speaking Romanians* (Dorota Masłowska, translated by Benjamin Paloff), which follows two Poles masquerading as "Romanians" (representative of the ultimate "other") on a drug fueled ride through the countryside. As their journey progresses, characterizations based on nationality, class, sexuality, and religion become entangled and increasingly fraught – who are these people other than the labels given to them by society? Are these Poles – by virtue of their poverty, drug use, and poor hygiene – also somehow excluded from that label? The text presented here maintains Masłowska's frenetic and idiomatic style, offering a tragicomic work that critiques Polish fantasies of ideological and national purity, while also making us question our own.

Closing out the volume, *Loose Screws* (Malgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, translated by Benjamin Paloff) is a highly associative, at times dreamlike text that paints various elements of contemporary society in broad strokes – the typical politician (Mr. Blah, who does not say anything meaningful), the idealized woman, the threatening other (terrorists who are little more than living stereotypes). Here, the terrorists threatening Poland are a domestic separatist group – thus recasting the threat of the Other as internal. Though the specific references to Polish territory may be foreign to English speaking audiences, the discussion of internal threats, vapid politicians, and blurred lines between public and private spheres should certainly resonate.

This diverse collection of works illuminates the questions and contradictions facing Poland today. Funny, heartbreaking, violent, and introspective, these provocative and challenging plays represent

an excellent sample of the work being done in Poland's dynamic theatre community. Bringing together voices that represent a range of perspectives, identities, and literary styles, *Loose Screms* provides the English speaking world with a look into the complexities of Polish social and national identities and rejects a traditional monolithic view of the nation. In so doing, it also provides a trove of immensely entertaining and relatable dramas. A number of these plays were staged in New York in conjunction with the assembling of this volume, and one hopes that the fine translations collected will find a place on stages and in classrooms across the United States. They have a lot to tell us about Poland – and about ourselves.

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