

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review

Volume 2, Number 1

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

The Mercurian publishes translations of plays and performance pieces from any language into English. *The Mercurian* also welcomes theoretical pieces about theatrical translation; rants, manifestos, and position papers pertaining to translation for the theatre; as well as production histories of theatrical translations. Submissions should be sent to: Adam Versenyi at anversen@email.unc.edu or by snail mail: Adam Versenyi, Department of Dramatic Art, CB# 3230, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3230. For translations of plays or performance pieces, unless the material is in the public domain, please send proof of permission to translate from the playwright or original creator of the piece. Since one of the primary objects of *The Mercurian* is to move translated pieces into production, no translations of plays or performance pieces will be published unless the translator can certify that he/she has had an opportunity to hear the translation performed in either a reading or another production-oriented venue.

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Table of Contents

Correction	3
Editor's Note	4
Apocalypse Tomorrow By Ricardo Monti, translated by Jean-Graham Jones	9
HereThere By Boguslaw Schaeffer, translated by Magda Romanska	29
The Right to Die By José Luis Ramos Escobar, translated by Dr. Bert Patrick	127
Translation for Production Roundtable By Adam Versényi	210
Translation for Production: Difficult Dialogues and the Art Of the Multi-disciplinary Collaboration By Oliver Mayer	211
Translation for Performance: Another Chekhov Play? By Allison Horsley	214

A Correction for “He Who Opens the Door: A Black Comedy for a Theatre of National Tragedy” by Neda Nezhdana from The Mercurian Vol. 1 No. 4: Regretfully, the playwright’s name was misspelled and the play’s subtitle *A Black Comedy for the Theatre of National Tragedy* was miswritten. The editors regret these mistakes in editing and thank Anatole Bilenko for his contribution to The Mercurian.

Editor's Note:

Although there was snow on the ground and temperatures in the teens only a week ago, the daffodils are now in bloom and the irises poking through the ground in North Carolina making this a perfect time to launch the first issue of the second volume of *The Mercurian*. Thanks to all who have come with us this far and welcome to our new subscribers.

This issue begins with Argentine Ricardo Monti's play *Apocalypse Tomorrow*. As Jean Graham-Jones describes in the introduction to her translation of *Apocalypse Tomorrow*, Ricardo Monti is one of Argentina's most important contemporary playwrights. Theatrically complex, his plays are both rooted in his cultural context and offer a forceful critique of modernity performable worldwide. *Apocalypse Tomorrow*, Monti's most recent play, is an excellent example of his work. Next is Magda Romanska's translation of Polish playwright Boguslaw Schaeffer's *Here There*. Schaeffer's 1992 work melds the great Polish playwright Witkacy (Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz)'s notion of 'pure form' with Piradellian metatheatricality and calls for an acting approach similar to that demanded by Tadeusz Kantor to create his own existential approach. *Here There* is followed by Bert Patrick's translation of Puerto Rican playwright José Luis Ramos Escobar's *The Right to Die*. Ramos Escobar's first work to move beyond the exploration of specifically Puerto Rican experience both on the island and in New York City, it is an important step in the evolution of one of Puerto Rico's most prominent and prolific writers. This issue concludes with two more presentations from the August 2008 ATHE roundtable, "Translation for Production: Difficult Dialogues and the Art of Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration." Playwright Oliver Mayer makes a call for a gestural approach to theatrical translation and Allison Horsley describes the challenges she has encountered translating Chekhov's major plays as a theatre practitioner.

As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 2, No. 2 will be May 1, 2009.

--Adam Versényi

Ricardo Monti, a personal introduction.

By Jean Graham-Jones (CUNY Graduate Center)

Ricardo Monti and I first met in 1992. I'd gone to his Buenos Aires apartment to interview him while conducting research on Argentinean theatre produced during that country's last military dictatorship. A moment of that initial encounter still stands out in my mind: it was one of those rare but resounding experiences for young scholars. After talking our way chronologically through his works, I took a deep breath and proffered my own interpretation of the climactic scene in his 1989 play, *Una pasión sudamericana* [A South American Passion-Play]. My take countered every work of criticism I'd read, but to my delight--and relief--Ricardo fixed me with his gentle stare and said, "Sí. ¡Sí!" As I left his apartment that afternoon, I knew that I wanted to translate Ricardo Monti's plays into English. Fortunately, once again, Monti agreed with me, and thus began a decade-long project of translating his plays, published in 2004 as *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti*.

Arguably Argentina's most innovative, individual, and influential contemporary playwright, Ricardo Monti (b. 1944) is one of those rare dramatists--Athena's male counterpart springing to the Argentinean stage fully formed. In his first play, *Una noche con el señor Magnus e hijos* [An Evening with Mr. Magnus & Sons], premiering over 35 years ago when its author was in his mid-twenties, Monti demonstrated a mastery of multiple theatrical genres and texts, literary and cultural motifs, and mythical and historical moments. In *Magnus*, a young woman joins forces with three sons to kill their repressive father, but not before the entire family has engaged in an evening of internal performances, cycling through absurdism, naturalism, tragedy, expressionism, farce, mystery play, and even children's games. Yet *Magnus* is no mere

exercise in theatrical experimentation, nor is it an over-simplified indictment of the "older generation"; it signals the first contribution to a body of work through which the legacy of the modern Argentinean and Western traditions will be examined, the Enlightenment's underlying repression exposed, and that very critique turned on its own head.

Ricardo Monti's plays have represented Argentina at international theatre festivals in Latin America and Europe; they've won him every major municipal and national prize available to an Argentinean dramatist; and Monti has received awards for his overall achievement in the theatre, including the Kónex Foundation's prestigious Diploma of Merit--twice.

Monti's critical gaze is fearless and culturally vast: 1980's *Marrathon* [Marathón] is set in a 1932 Buenos Aires ballroom, where couples participate in a never-ending dance contest reminiscent of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* They lose themselves in private dreams and collective historical memories--the latter staged as five myths in which the dancers perform historical and symbolic figures of their shared cultural past. In 1989's *A South American Passion-Play* [Una pasión sudamericana], a Neapolitan clown and his troupe of crazies act out the tragic love affair between a nineteenth-century Argentinean woman and her priest-confessor, during a passion-play whose structure mocks Dante's *Divine Comedy*, all for the entertainment of a military brigadier who must determine the fate of the two lovers. In 1993's *The Obscurity of Reason* [La oscuridad de la razón], Aeschylus's *Oresteia* is transformed into a critical reflection on the early years of Argentina's independence. 1992's *Asunción* is set in 1537 in the Paraguayan jungle, as a European concubine of the conquistador Pedro de Mendoza, now fatally ill with the syphilis that killed her lover, slowly and agonizingly dies while at her side an indigenous girl gives birth to the land's first mestizo.

As might be surmised from this brief overview, history for Ricardo Monti is an immediate and subjective confrontation with the present, straddling life and death, representation and reality. In 2003's *No te soltaré hasta que me bendigas* [translated into English and French with its subtitle "Hotel Columbus"], a "film-noir" encounter between a presidential security agent and a transvestite in a hotel suite in some unnamed South American capital includes a mutually constructed delusion (or is it?) of a previous love affair between Sarah Bernhardt and Julio Roca, the nineteenth-century hero of Argentina's "conquest of the desert." The two are inseparable, as the transvestite Sarah says, "To us. Art and power. Politics and theatre." This line between reality and representation is perhaps most blurred in Monti's 1977 play, *Visit* [Visita], which premiered at the height of military repression. A stranger, Ex, has entered the closed world of Pearl and Lolly, apparently with the intention of killing the old, odd couple and their equally strange servant / child / slave / lover, Casper. The play ends with more questions than answers: Are Pearl and Lolly alive, dead, immortal? Is Ex the prodigal son, the messiah, or just a murderous burglar? Is he Casper's replacement, a younger Lolly, or an alternative to their obsolete yet still powerful world?

By choosing to stage his own analysis of the "modern" through multiple histories, texts, and theatrical levels, Ricardo Monti helped move Buenos Aires's theatre scene away from the realist-naturalist aesthetics frequently associated with the theatre of dissent (and to which Latin American theatre has so often been reduced). In pursuit of what he has called a "broader realism," Monti has willingly retooled even his own plays to create streamlined versions that are entirely new works. A scene from 1971's *Biased History of the Argentine Middle Class*--Monti's most overtly political play--is expanded in *The Beaded Curtain* [La cortina de abalorios], a play he wrote for the influential 1981 Teatro Abierto [Open Theatre] festival. In 1990 he produced

yet another version, a one-act morality play simply titled *A Biased History*. 2002's *Finland* [Finlandia] follows the basic story line of *A South American Passion-Play*, but without any specifically local references and with the cast pared down to four characters: a military leader, his aide, and the Mezzogiornos (brother and sister twins whose genital conjoining leaves them in a state of perpetual orgasm and fluid gendering). This non-possessive, indeed regenerative, attitude toward all texts, his own included, enriched Monti's remarkable twenty-five-year working relationship with the late director, Jaime Kogan. Together, they premiered four plays, created a 1994 stage adaptation of Julio Cortázar's complex novel *Hopscotch* [Rayuela], and staged an operatic version of *Marrathon* (which premiered in 1990 in Buenos Aires's world-renowned Colón Theatre, as did a 1995 opera based on *The Obscurity of Reason*). In recent years Monti has worked with Mónica Viñao, director of four of his plays, including the most recent--a monologue entitled *Apocalypse Tomorrow* [Apocalipsis mañana], commissioned for 2003's International Festival in Buenos Aires.

History / myth, life / death, truth / fiction, reality / representation: Ricardo Monti's great theatricality, his self-positioning within the larger Western cultural tradition while writing from very local cultural duress, and his overarching critique of modernity hold enormous potential for translation to other international stages. It is no surprise that they've been performed throughout Latin America as well as in Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, and now--finally--in the United States.

APOCALYPSE TOMORROW

by Ricardo Monti

(Translation by Jean Graham-Jones ©2004)

CHARACTER:

Bianca, an elderly woman of about 75, with a pleasant and formal appearance. Carefully and elegantly dressed. Her face is framed by bluish-white hair in an impeccable and slightly out-of-date hairstyle.

BIANCA:

No, Rosie, you died on December 20, 2000, not 1999. You're so vain, you're even shaving years off your own death. I remember only two dates in my life. The day you died, and August 6, 1945, my first and last orgasm.

As you certainly can imagine, I remember the day you died very well.

We were right here, working on the daily crossword puzzle, when suddenly you looked at me with a strange smile and said, "Bianca, I think I'm going." "Quit screwing around," I told you. And then you died. My God, and you know how panicked I get around dead bodies. (*Miles away.*) Panic, disgust, fear... What can you do with a dead body? It's something not very ... presentable. Honestly, I don't remember what I did with you. I only know that they took you away while I was in the bathroom. I stayed shut up in there for days. I'd hear knocks on the

bathroom door and men's voices calling me, panting... *(Turned on.)* "Lady ... hey, lady ..." Men in our house, Rosie! I was so panicked I masturbated. *(Miles away.)* Panic, disgust, fear ... One day they finally went away. And I felt like that door closed behind them forever. Click, done. Click. And it was only then that I came out of the bathroom. I'd wasted away terribly, I'd lost something like 20 pounds. And I was dirty. How strange, I'd been in the bathroom all that time, and it never occurred to me to take a bath

You were the first dead body of my life. And to think that the next one ... the next one ...

(She has something like an asthma attack and cannot breathe. She searches desperately for an envelope containing some cocaine, finds and opens it, makes a line and snorts it. She relaxes. In a dream.)

I'm happy ... I'm happy ...

(She regains her earlier formality.)

Yes, Rosie, you always act like you don't remember when it comes to the date of your death, but you always remember exactly when I had my orgasm. You're always reminding me, kind of like saying, "See what you did?" And how was I to know, huh? How was a poor little girl from this

corner of the world to know that that day, that very same day, at the very same time, they would drop an atomic bomb on the planet...? (*Miles away.*) Hiroshima ... Hiroshima ... Hiroshima ...

That man swept me away, Rosie, he was like an atomic hurricane on top of me ... He uprooted me from our house, he carried me outside ... God ... He did everything he felt like doing with me ... And when I came back home, torn to shreds, devastated, when that word exploded out of all the radios and all the newspapers ... Hiroshima ... and those undone bodies ... those corpses wandering around in warm flesh ... those corpses with their burnt hair ... you ... back at home you flew into a rage ... "You bitch, you stole my man!," you screamed. And I was only trying to explain to you that I was just one more victim ... that I was one of those disheveled dead bodies that wandered around a disintegrated city in the middle of an explosion of light ... Anyway, Rosie, how could I steal your man ... Who did he belong to? We're like an empty house ... A man comes in, he occupies us, then one day he moves out ... How can a house say that a short-term tenant is "her man..."?

In the end, he didn't belong to either of us ... or maybe he belonged to both of us ... the man of our lives. He disappeared into the radiance and left us with nothing more than a tumultuous day and his rough boy-smell forever ... Because our man was only a boy. With dark eyes. ...

(*Pause.*) Afterward, you and I made up ... And we took control of him ... I told you everything, every detail, and so many times, that you began to tell my own story back to me, adding things, and then I would retell the story to you, adding other things ... It ended up our shared memory ... Maybe it really happened to you ... How can we know at this stage of the game? (*Pause.*) That

beautiful way we had of mixing together everything we had, Rosie. (*Pause.*) The sisters Bianca and Rosie, the cleverest crossword puzzlers ... Fifty years making up new words to cross, revolutionizing the genre ... Guess what word I chose today! Eight letters, beginning in "H" and ending in "Y." (*With a little clap.*) Yes, you guessed it! "Humanity!" Let's make up the clue. How about five down? "Sensitivity, compassion toward the misfortunes of our fellow-men"? You were always the moralist. Always into noble causes. You liked the world so much, Rosie. You were always walking this way and that. Going after one thing or another. You liked the streets, the crowds ... And all I had to do was see how enthusiastic you were, getting ready to go out, and I became all dizzy ...

I waited for you, just like Penelope...weaving and unweaving the crossed words... And then you'd return, a female Ulysses, exhausted by the world, covered in all those miasmas... I'd have the bath water already drawn... When you got out, your hair wrapped up in a towel, you'd tell me all the latest news... I listened to you absentmindedly. Sometimes I didn't even listen... In reality all those things never really interested me that much. I'm too impressionable. When we got television, then, well, I became a little more connected. I saw the world through our television. But that was the only way. If there was something that suddenly overwhelmed me, then, I simply changed the channel. It was so deliciously easy ... changing the channel ...

And you used to yell at me for not wanting to see reality. So what? Is that mandatory? Each of us knows how much reality we can take. Why the need to fill yourself up with so many deaths of other people? Could anyone possibly remember all those dead bodies? And then take on the guilt

of forgetting them? When it's all said and done, every one of us will be forgotten. Some sooner, others later, but all of us will be forgotten. Only God will remember us. One by one.

(Pause.)

But let's keep working on the crossword. Humanity. For the "Y" I need a five-letter word. What do you think of "BOGEY"? *(She laughs with pleasure.)* We used to really like that word. We had so much fun with "BOGEY." *(From memory.)* "Imaginary figure used to frighten children."

(Singing softly.) "The bogey man'll git ya if ya don't watch out..."

(Far away, almost unreal, the sound of a knife-grinder's whistle is heard. Bianca gives a start. Rosie has now taken over Bianca's body.)

"Bianca, we have to get the knives sharpened. I've told you a thousand times that when the knife-grinder comes by ..."

He doesn't come by anymore, Rosie.

"He'll come by early tomorrow, but since you like to lie around in bed all day long ..."

Sometimes I'd hear it in my dreams, Rosie. What a lovely sound he made. I never saw him. How did he do it? (*We hear the knife-grinder's whistle.*) It must have been a ... very rare instrument. It made me dream. Why wouldn't Mama let us go down and see him?

"Apparently he was a very strange guy. Dangerous. He looked at women."

He looked at them?

"Yes, he looked at them like this. With a penetrating stare. That's why he had so many customers. And the husbands were jealous. He undressed all the women with his eyes. (*Brief pause.*) While he sharpened their knife, he looked at them like that, like he was saying "I'm going to plunge this knife right into your soul, and I'm going to twist it and twist it until all your blood runs out, until you're empty, drained... dead from pleasure."

(*Pause.*)

Knife-Grinder, Mr. Grinder ... where are you, Mr. Knife-Grinder? (*Brief pause.*) He doesn't come by anymore, does he?

"Who knows? If you say that you hear him..."

Who knows ... Now, he comes by at night, by the light of the waning moon ... and he goes up to his customers' bedrooms ... When the moon turns into a sliver in the sky, white, sharp, cold ... Maybe one of those nights a jealous husband killed him.

(Pause. Rosie leaves Bianca's body. The last whistle of the knife-grinder..)

That boy tried to sharpen us both, Rosie. But I don't know why he chose me. Because I was the one who stayed home ... That must have been it. You were always down on the street, and men don't like girls like that. He took me out. He looked at me and he said: "Come." It was impossible to say no. Those dark eyes were so intense and mysterious ... implacable. I don't know where he took me. I only know that he let my hair down and took off my clothes. And then he caressed me .. I knew exactly how he felt, because I was him. And you can't imagine what a man feels, Rosie, when he caresses a woman. Imagine a wild tiger. I mean, standing on his back legs, slightly off-balance. Well, so, in a state like that he'd have to balance himself delicately over the white body of a virgin, her skin almost transparent... The tiger feels her little veins beating in agitation under his nails. His carnivore's instinct makes him sink his claws into that trembling body, scratching her tenuous skin, opening it and tearing it apart, until he reaches her deepest viscera, and then he devours it all. But no, for some mysterious reason he not only holds back

his instinct but he doesn't allow even the slightest loss of balance to cause him to accidentally wound her.... *(Brief pause.)* I was the caressed virgin. His desire was so intense. It was like I had to save him from... As if I, only I could rescue him from death, give him life... How could I deny him, Rosie? How could I deny my virginal light to those dark, dark eyes, so dark, so dark ...?

On the first anniversary of your death, the emptiness you left was so great that I had to turn myself into you, Rosie. It was another December 20th. I can't remember which year anymore ... I put on your clothes, I brushed my hair like you used to, I made myself up like you, I painted my lips into a little heart, like you used to do. Yes, I knew how to do it, don't be so surprised Many times, while you were still alive, I did it too ... In the bathroom ... all alone ... Yes, my bathroom's become like a second home to me. I put on your shoes. They were a little tight because your feet are smaller. And you know what I did then, Rosie? *(Brief pause of suspense.)* I went out. *(She laughs heartily, covering her mouth, as if it were some mischief.)*

Yes, I did ... little Miss Bianca ... I went out ... like you used to go out. ... At first I thought that everyone would think I was you ... But no, nobody looked at me. I went around absolutely unnoticed. Can you imagine me, Rosie, walking down the street? I hadn't gone out since my orgasm in 1945. If you could see how everything is. So dirty. The first thing that caught my eye were all the roaches. They were running all over the place, like crazy electrified things. "They know something's going to happen," I thought. You know that they're the bugs best prepared to survive. "Something serious is about to happen," I thought. And yes, you could feel it in the air. There was a commotion in the city; was it the revolution you always wished for, Rosie? A

sharpness in the air like the Apocalypse. The crowds went by very fast. And I couldn't get a fix on them. Of course, I'm not used to looking. They were almost invisible, they were moving so fast. They cut through the smoke. Because you could see smoke. Black smoke, really thick, it was filling up the street. I coughed. And between the smoke and the coughing I didn't see where the boy came from. He was like a live wire. At first I thought he seemed nice, but then I saw that he had a knife. He suddenly stopped smiling and said to me: "Give me all your money, you rotten old bitch." No, I wasn't scared. I simply looked him in the eyes and answered: "Son..." I don't know why I called him "son." I could have chosen another word, but that's the one that came out. "Son, I don't have a farthing." I don't know why I said farthing and not penny. It was true. I'd forgotten that outside they use money. The boy looked at me for a little while with his mouth wide open and his eyes filling up with tears. He was dark, puny, in pain ... At that moment, I thought indifferently: "Now he's going to kill me." But he repeated "you rotten old bitch" and ran off. At that moment I should have turned around, I'd been given a sign. But no. The street swept me along. As I'm sure used to happen with you, right, Rosie? Invisible people pushed me. Sometimes somebody would stop moving and I managed to fix them with my eyes. But nobody looked at me. They were terrible, distorted faces, filled with anger ... Something was pulling me toward the bonfires. Yes, there were fires spread about in the streets. Why? What did they mean? What were they purifying? On a wide street covered in rubble, a man in a tree was crying out or swearing, I couldn't tell which. I stopped to listen to him, but it was impossible. The sirens were howling very hard, just like the trumpets on Judgment Day. The air had turned acrid, unbreathable. Explosions wrapped themselves around me. Suddenly I was in the middle of the multitudes. I don't know how but all that invisible presence suddenly became corporeal. I suppose that I must have caught up with its speed, entered its dimension. In the uproar I was

stepped on, pushed, shaken... Everything inside me was coming apart. My makeup, my little hat, I lost my shoes and one of my gloves, my stockings ran. I wanted to fly away, get away from so much.... But it was like I was being hauled along between the bodies. And then I saw him, Rose, I saw him again and I couldn't stop myself from looking at him.

(Pause.)

He was a boy with dark eyes. So, so much like ours, Rosie... He was across the street, stretched out on the sidewalk. Terribly white, as if all the blood had run away from his face and gone and soaked his clothes and hands and his dark curly hair. And his dark eyes were glued to mine, just like on that day long ago, and he looked at me exactly the same way, Rosie. Those dark, dark eyes ... they looked at me with so much despair, so much desire, they were like silent cries ... And like the other boy, he begged me in silence to save him from ... that I give him life ...

Someone blamed the police. Others yelled "Murderers!" Afterwards there was an enormous silence. Everything disappeared. And the only ones left in the universe were this boy and me. Me, with my little hat knocked over to one side ... unable to move ... unable anymore to give away my virginity, rotten old bitch ... seeing how from one instant to the next the glow of desire was fading away ... how what was once there in that same look was ceasing to be ... The entire cataclysm in a single glance.

And my boy with his dark eyes lay dead on that sidewalk.

And this time I couldn't change the channel.

(She stops breathing; she appears to be suffocating. She desperately looks for her cocaine, makes a line, and snorts. She relaxes. A vague, dull smile. She sings softly.)

I'm happy. I'm happy.

BLACKOUT.

Jean Graham-Jones is a professor of theatre at the CUNY Graduate Center and Hunter College. The author of *Exorcising History: Argentine Theater under Dictatorship*, she has published two booklength collections of Argentinean plays in translation: *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti* and *BAIT: Buenos Aires in Translation* (four plays presented in 2006 at New York City's Performance Space 122). She is currently translating Buenos Aires troupe Timbre 4's latest play.

Boguslaw Schaeffer's 'HereThere' – The Return to 'Pure Form.'

By Magda Romanska

Although his plays have been regularly performed since 1960's, Boguslaw Schaeffer did not come into prominence until 1990's, at the time when the ideological vacuum left after the fall of communism, demanded a new, politically disengaged theatre. Schaeffer's plays, which avoided traditional political subtext and instead, opted to return to the concept of theatre as an art of 'pure form', notion borrowed from Witkacy, filled this cultural gap in Polish consciousness of the 1990's. Playing with language and metatheatrical self-referentiality, Schaeffer's plays reflected new times and quickly gained in popularity, making Schaeffer the single most often performed playwright in Poland. By the time he wrote *HereThere*, Schaeffer was already a respected and sought-after playwright. *HereThere* is one of his most popular plays, and it represents some typical elements of Schaeffer's dramaturgy. It was written in 1991, in Salzburg, Cracow, Rabka, Paris, and Florence. In other words, here and there. The play premiered in February 1992 at the Theatre Powszechny in Warsaw under the direction of Marek Sikora, with a set designed by Grzegorz Malecki. The music was written by Schaeffer himself. Critically acclaimed and well received by Warsaw audiences, the play has been performed on and off since then more than 300 times, always to a full audience. The two main characters are flamboyantly portrayed by Joanna Żółkowska and Janusz Gajos, Poland's two leading actors. Both Żółkowska and Gajos have worked for such famous Polish directors as Kieslowski, Wajda, and Zanussi. Gajos has achieved cult status as Poland's top actor. The actors' interpretation of the play brings out both the drama and humor of the situation, with all the nuances of the Old and New World the play entertains. Their acting skills as well as their general popularity made *HereThere* a "must do" affair for the

Polish intelligentsia as well as for the newly emerging bourgeois class. It has become a play one can see multiple times.

The play consists of 19 short scenes that take place in a corner café. It is an unconventional love story of two couples. One of them is a pair, described as VOICES, of uneducated wait staff at the café. He is a crude and vulgar macho man with pretenses and an over-inflated ego. She's a bemused, uncouth kitchen helper dreaming of a prince charming who will save her from an all-too-predictable future, but also, to some degree, from herself. The other couple, HE and SHE, are sophisticated urbanites who regularly visit the café to read and drink coffee. HE is presumably a not very successful writer. SHE is an intellectual with an air of self-importance. Discussing love, death, and fate over their books and coffee, they slowly fall in love. Their story takes place at the front of the café, and it is presented as the main plot. Although the VOICES appear on the stage periodically (mainly to serve the front guests, HIM and HER), their story, on the contrary, takes place in the shadow of what happens *Here*, at the front of the café. *There*, backstage in the kitchen, love is a brutal and lonely affair of underdogs. *Here*, at the forefront of social facade, love is woven from a web of illusions, structured and sustained by conventions and convenience.

The play opens with HIM entering the café. HE waits for a while for a waiter, and when no one shows up, HE decides to bring himself a cup coffee. When HE returns to his table, SHE is sitting there waiting for service. SHE mistakes him for a waiter and scolds him. HE protests, trying to explain that he is not a waiter, but SHE is adamant. Worn down by her persistence, HE agrees to play the part of the waiter for the moment. And that's how the game starts. The VOICES become

alter egos of the two socialites. The reality of the play constantly alternates: are these two different worlds, or one world with two different faces? Who are the VOICES? Are they real, or are they figments of the couple's imagination? Is this an erotic game or social drama, or both?

The dynamic of the play questions the illusory mechanisms of love and lust, and their fundamental dependence on class and social relations. Initially, the kitchen VOICES act as a buffer for the elegant couple in the café, but once the bond between the front houseguests appears strong enough to maintain their intimacy outside of the café, they disregard their servants with visible contempt. The play ends with the elegant couple "getting rid of" the wait staff. They no longer need them. Now the underclass couple act as a despised Other from whom the two intellectuals distance themselves in order to maintain the necessary air of superiority that initially binds them to each other. Although at first the relationship of the two servants inspires the kind of raw, brutal emotions needed to spark the two guests, eventually the same raw emotions are viewed as crude and animalistic compared with the supposed refinement of feelings shared by the two sophisticates. Yet the love of the two café guests is so fragile and so dependent on the presence of the two underdogs that the audience cannot help but think it will not survive beyond the walls of the café. The backstage kitchen love, on the other hand, although rough and cruel, ironically appears much more lasting. Like Genet's *Maids*, the backroom couple are locked in their own power struggle. Although as dependent on the presence of those whom they serve as their customers are on them, the servants are condemned to each other. Their misery and poverty seem to bind them more than the freedom of the elegant couple ever will. Yet, are they real, or are they just the characters in the erotic game played by the two yuppies? Or, to complicate the matter even more, are the two yuppies real, or are they just the characters played

by the VOICES in their erotic game? Thus, Schaeffer's play asks not only about the nature of theatrical illusion, but also about the nature of love and sexual attraction.

The structure of the play also reflects some of the principles of the Instrumental Theatre: the interaction between the socialite couple and the back-room VOICES is fundamentally framed by the movement/sound dialectic that dictates the rhythm and the progression of the plot. A Polish critic compared Schaeffer's *HereThere* to Aleksander Gelman's 1988 *The Bench*, which incidentally played at Powszechny Theatre six years earlier with Gajos and Żółkowska as the two leads (Zalewska 1992: 349). In Gelman's play, a disheveled drunk and a seemingly airheaded single mother find themselves occupying the same park bench while looking for a one-night stand. Although the parallel seems appropriate, the double pairing of Schaeffer's plays is more reminiscent of Heiner Muller's *Quartet*, particularly the complex interconnection between sexual economy and social relations. Marta Karasińska (2002) points out that there is an almost mathematical structure to Schaeffer's play: the number of female and male roles is doubled according to a particular formula:

$$V_f = s(s-1)(s-2)\dots(s+f+1)$$

$$V_m = t(t-1)(t-1)\dots(t+m+1)$$

V_f and V_m designate the number of female and male roles, respectively, when s is s and t is always equal to or larger than f and m " (71).

Karasińska suggests that the structure of *HereThere* reflects Schaeffer's interests in linguistics relations as framed by and initiated by the mathematical formulas, similar to the way musical compositions can be framed: "The code with which Schaeffer's heroes communicate is not a natural language as we know it," Karasińska writes, "but an artificially built 'language of relations,' defining the relationships between particular speech segments" (111). Thus, Schaeffer's dialog ranges from poetic to trivial, from lyric to vulgar. Like Muller's drama, Schaeffer's play celebrates the in-betweenness of cerebral and sexual, of intimate and public, of true and staged. With the theatricalized power struggle of empty masks and mirrors, with its solipsistic, self-enclosed sexuality, the play challenges the borderline between safe and dangerous liaisons.

In the staging of Teatr Powszechny, Żółkowska and Gajos played both couples, and their transformation from one role to the next took place in front of the audience. The transitions showcased the acting skills of both and added to the humor of the situation. Since both actors have been extensively trained in method acting, their portrayal of each character had a degree of specificity that made their instant transitions astounding. Critics raved about their chemistry, the sharpness of their exchanges, and the humor of the situations (the scene depicting them pulling each other's fingers that leads to a kind of orgasmic exchange was particularly admired for its craftily paced humor and tragicomic undertones). The set design also helped to separate the two couples. The VOICES were placed behind a wooden wall with two holes from which the waiter's and waitress's heads would peek out. Since the characters spoke more to the audience

than to themselves, these scenes had an airy quality reminiscent of Beckett's 1963 *Play*, in which three disembodied heads struggle to tell their stories, trapped in the solipsistic predicament of both form and content.

Drawing on Pirandello, the play also engages in subtle metatheatricality. Occasionally, HE and SHE get impatient with "acting," so they begin, as if on the sly, to comment on the situation. In other instances, they repeat their lines, as if trying them out, or they run off the stage laughing. Thus it is as if the play has six characters: HE, his VOICE, and the ACTOR who plays them, and SHE, her VOICE, and the ACTRESS who plays them. Zalewska pointed out that thanks to their acting skills, Gajos and Żółkowska were able to express and play with the three layers of their roles (Zalewska 1992: 349). Schaeffer said about his work, "The reason that my theatre is interesting is that it derives from the music and in music every ten seconds is important" ("Moj teatr"). Indeed, in his plays, every ten seconds is important because every ten seconds can change one's position from servant to master and vice versa. The Schaefferian actor, self-conscious of his position as actor and moving seamlessly between the roles, has been called by Polish critics and by Schaeffer himself "the Baggage Actor." This is a nod to Kantor and his Wandering Artist, an existential metaphor of life and theatre.

In 1994, *HereThere* was adapted by Krzysztof Buchowicz for TV Theatre and ran on Polish public television as part of the season's regular programming. The TV version was directed by Marek Sikora and Krzysztof Buchowicz. But although played by the same actors, the TV adaptation was not as successful as the staged production. When questioned, Gajos suggested

that TV production lacked the necessary intimacy that made the theatre production such a smash hit with Polish audiences. The excerpt you are about to read is part of a full translation I did while a student at the Yale School of Drama. Happy to hear from someone from the U.S., Schaeffer was thrilled with the way it turned out, sending me a congratulatory note, relieved that I had salvaged all the language jokes he had labored over. Some things, as always, are “lost in translation,” but this is the closest one can get to the language of this absurd yet fundamentally transnational love story. Although in the last five years Schaeffer’s popularity has given way to the influx of contemporary Western drama that currently dominates Polish theatres, he nevertheless remains one of the most significant Polish voices.

PHOTOS: Joanna Żółkowska and Janusz Gajos in the production of *HereThere* at Teatr Powszechny, dir. Marek Sikora, 1992.

ENDNOTES

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HERETHERE

Written by Boguslaw Schaeffer

Translated by Magda Romanska

DRAMATIC PERSONAE

HE = VOICE M

SHE = VOICE F

(VOICE M and VOICE F are also on the stage)

Yale - Cornell

Inside of a café. There is a large space with a few tables and chairs on both sides. At the center, in the back, there is a backroom/kitchen. The characters who enter the kitchen should not be seen. Only their voices should be heard. The entire play takes place on two planes: HERE – in the front and THERE – in the backroom. There are only two characters: HE (= Male Voice or the Waiter,) and SHE (= Female Voice or the Waitress). There is a soft, quiet music in the background.

SCENE ONE

HERE

HE

(sighing) O God! One always has to wait. I ordered a coffee and now I am waiting. I did not order waiting. I ordered an espresso with cream. And they are talking over there. What about? You can hear them in here.

VOICE F

(as Waitress) (you can hear some noise as if someone was moving something) Wait, let's leave this table for now. Someone has been waiting there for a while. *(silence)* Well, he always has time anyway. He comes here early morning, and just writes something in his notebook. No, leave those plates. The smaller ones, yes, put them away, and anyway... *(silence)*. I don't know what he is writing there, probably something important because he erases many times what he just wrote. I like standing behind him and looking. Do you know that sometimes he is even drawing something? *(noise)* Leave it, you pig, don't touch it! *(silence)* Ok, take it, but this is the last time. The chief does not like it when something is missing! *(silence)*

HE

I think I'll go and bring myself my own coffee. *(He leaves, and returns in a minute with a coffee on a tray. He playacts a waiter to himself. HE does not see that he's watched by HER).*

SHE

Can I have a tea with lemon, please, double lemon.

HE

(looks at her for a long while. First, like a man, he does not understand what she's asking, then, he smiles to her and speaks slowly) I am not a waiter. *(silence)* Do I look like a waiter?

SHE

The waiter does not have to look like a waiter to be a waiter. If you attend cafés and restaurants, you know it as well as I do.

HE

(offended) If it weren't for the necessary touch of fantasy which allows me to break away from the mold, my appearance could certainly testify to it. Look! You see, I am not a waiter, but for you, I could become one - for the moment. So, you order a tea with juicy double lemon? In an instant, Madam.

SHE

So, after all, you are a waiter. I was right.

HE

Yes, now I am a waiter, but later I won't be.

SHE

Later – that means after work. Of course, then, you are not a waiter. And what do you do after work?

HE

For the first time in the history of food industry, a woman – and more so, an elegant woman, because you are elegant – asks a waiter what he is doing after work. Usually, it's us, men who ask waitresses what do they do after work, idiotically, I must admit, since everyone more or less knows what the waitresses do after work.

SHE

Will you bring me this tea or not? I asked you what do you do after work out of courtesy which one bestows on waiters, *too*. Out of courtesy, not curiosity. For God's sake, what's with this tea?

HE

(leaves and returns in a minute) There isn't any tea. Is coffee ok? There isn't any water in the tea pot.

SHE

Why don't you then pour the water that was meant for the coffee into the tea pot?

HE

Oh, that's right... I didn't think of it. *(leaves)*

(A moment passes, he returns but she is gone)

Here's a tea for Madam...O! And where is our beauty? She's gone *my* coffee got cold.

VOICE F

(from the kitchen, vulgar voice)

You come here and bother me. Don't you understand that I work here? Over there, a man is waiting for his coffee for half an hour and I am here with you... Leave me alone, you pig, he can enter here anytime ... all right then, but quick, quick...

HE

(loud) Goodbye!

SCENE TWO

HERE

SHE

Do you know Jerkowski, the actor?

HE

No, I do not have the pleasure.

SHE

Who's talking about the pleasure? I asked if you know him.

HE

No, I don't.

SHE

I thought so, I was even sure you don't.

HE

Why, then, did you asked me if you were sure that I don't know him?

SHE

Oh, almost everyone knows him.

HE

Everyone! I don't know him.

SHE

You are not interested in the theatre.

HE

No, I *am* interested in the theatre, but I am not interested in your Jerkowski. And who is that Jerkowski? Nothing that spectacular.

SHE

Oh, so you *do* know him. I was wrong.

HE

No, I don't know him. He does not interest me.

SHE

But you say "nothing that spectacular" as if you knew him. If we don't know someone, we speak indifferently about him.

HE

If we don't know someone, we don't speak of him at all.

SHE

That is true, but with famous people, we speak about them even if we don't know them.

HE

And that your Jerkowski is that famous? I have never heard of him.

SHE

Because he is modest.

HE

Oh, maybe *that's* why. (*to himself*) Modest, and everyone knows him! Perhaps *because* he's modest. He is known from his modesty. Very interesting!

SHE

Didn't I tell you so!

HE

What did you say?

SHE

Oh, I regret I even started on the subject.

HE

No, why? That's a very good subject. About modesty. De.... Wait a minute, how is it in Latin? A very good subject. But, I have to go now.

SHE

I am also leaving (*They leave but not together*).

SCENE THREE

HERE

SHE

(*SHE sits by the table, drinks coffee and eats croissants*)

HE

(*HE enters quietly. HE does not sit but walks around the café, pretending to look at the decorations which he already knows. HE stops by some picture.*)

SHE

Someone will come in a minute.

HE

(HE sits by the separate table, does not say anything)

SHE

(shrugs her arms, drinks coffee)

HE

I am expecting.

SHE

What are you expecting?

HE

That someone will come. Someone must be in the kitchen since you are already drinking your favorite coffee.

SHE

I don't really like coffee. I prefer tea, but today, I am very sleepy.

HE

Surely, you go to sleep late.

SHE

Yes, indeed, I read a lot...

HE

...and these books are so interesting that you read until late.

SHE

As if you were there...

HE

If I were there, I wouldn't let you read. Darling, don't read so much, it's not healthy. You have such swollen eyes in the morning, and one doesn't really get any smarter from all these books.

SHE

But it's so beautiful, I have to finish it. "Don't be angry with me, my love," I would have said.

HE

And I would have shouted that the bed is not a reading room. And that I cannot fall asleep with the lights on. (*after a while*) What's with this coffee? Did you also wait that long? I think this waitress does not like me. They can do that, like or dislike us, damn it!

SHE

Maybe she is in love with you? She is looking at you now in adoration and thinking what would have happened if you approached her and put your arms around her and told her something very tender.

HE

If I approach her, she will hear something the very opposite of tender. (*suddenly*) I have to go already. I have an important meeting. Can you tell her that I was here and that I waited in vain. And that – I left very angry. Please, tell her that. (*he leaves*)

SHE

I won't tell her anything. I also have to go. (*she leaves some change on the table and leaves*).

SCENE FOUR

HERE

SHE

(entering) No one's here yet! How empty!

VOICE M

In the morning, it's always empty. What else do you expect. People come later. I saw that you were coming, so I brought you your coffee and croissants. They are on the other table.

SHE

You're so nice.

VOICE M

I am not nice. I only serve here, not even for that long. *(He appears for an instant)*. I will tell you something, I am *nice* to the little boys. For the ladies, I am just courteous. *(he disappears. Noise of plates in the sink)*.

SHE

You don't have to be so obvious. Such information you should keep to yourself.

VOICE M

What information? I was only kidding. *(yawning and stretching, he talks to himself)*. You know, life is, generally, shitty. Did you notice that? You're bright, so you must have noticed that.

SHE

Shitty, shitty- what a stupid word! Why are you living then?

HE

I said, generally. This and that in life is not bad. But, I probably bore you. Leave the change on the table; nobody will take it. I will take it!

SHE

I am not leaving yet. (*quietly to herself*) It's empty here today. (*silence*)

VOICE M

She left. (*sighs*) And where is my Queen of the Sink? We were going to divide the work, and here I am, doing everything by myself. This cow comes on to me, ha! I had to pretend to be gay. Terribly smart she is! I don't like them smart. I knew one of them once, terribly smart she was! She didn't know how to deal with me to make me ready. And there are help books in which she could have, stupid cow, read. I - even without the books - know everything.

SHE

What do you know without the books? You don't know anything!

VOICE M

Oh, I am sorry. I thought you had left already. What am I saying was: I was certain that you have left already. I apologize for my honesty. It's just the way I am.

SHE

No problem. Now, I know who you are. I particularly didn't *have* to know it, but I know it now. Goodbye. I am leaving now for real.

VOICEM

(Decisive) I will never say anything else out loud, if I don't check first! We have so few clients and even those few we have, we repel.

SCENE FIVE

HERE

SHE

(entering) Good morning.

HE

(sitting already by the table) Good morning, I wanted to ask you...

SHE

(interrupting him) Have you ever been to Paris?

HE

(as if defending himself) Yes, I have, not a big deal. Champs Elysee, Montmartre, Eiffel Tower, height 320 meters and 80 centimeters with the antenna. Such a tower, every country could afford; Macedonia, for example. It's only a question of money.

SHE

Why would Macedonia need the Eiffel Tower?

HE

So they wouldn't have to go to Paris. The trains between Istanbul and London are already overcrowded.

SHE

If every country could afford the Eiffel Tower, La Scala and the Armitage, there would be no reason to visit foreign countries. And it is nice when we visit Paris and see the Eiffel Tower.

HE

You exit the train in Zagreb or Oslo and you also see Eiffel Tower, all right, what's the difference?

SHE

(calmly) I meant that Paris *is* Eiffel, and la Scala *is* Bologna. The cities identify with - something; that isn't so bad.

HE

La Scala, that's - I am sure of it – I think, that's Milan, but it isn't so important right now.

SHE

And what is important now?

HE

It's important that I have to leave. I have to be somewhere at nine and it's already eight thirty. I will be late!

SHE

Not at all. You have plenty of time.

HE

No, I don't. I promised my friends that I will walk their dog and they live on Macedonia Street. That's forty eight minutes one way!

SHE

Ok, go then. You don't have that much time.

HE

Do you know where Macedonia Street is?

SHE

One bus stop after La Scala, and then, pass the Eiffel Tower and turn left, sixth or eighth street. Don't ask. Run! Poor dog!

SCENE SIX

HERE

HE

(sits by the table, drinks coffee, talks to the Waitress) So you are saying that all men are alike...
But how alike?

VOICE F

(from the kitchen) They only want one thing.

HE

And women don't?

VOICE F

Yes, but differently.

HE

How differently?

VOICE F

I am sorry, but I have to clean up. The other customers will be here soon...

HE

I can help you.

VOICE F

It's better if don't help me. You know how such help usually ends.

HE

I don't intend to be rude. If I say that I want to help, it means that I want to help, nothing more. But, you do it better anyway.

VOICE F

What?

HE

Whatever you do... / have to concentrate. Morning hours are the best. You know this already. (*he writes*) "He: So you are saying that all men are alike, but maybe not all of them." No, better: "Alike, but how alike?" "Voice F: (you can't see the person from behind the curtain) They only want one thing!" He, of course, replies: "And women don't? And he adds: women are fickle, changeable. Verdi already knew it. But they are also *un*changeable in their changeability."

SHE

(*entering*) Oh no, what are you saying? Rather, women are changeable in their *un*changeability.

HE

I knew you would help me.

SHE

No problem. (*looks at her watch*) I need a coffee. Today's such a gloomy day. (*suddenly*) You know what, I will have a sip of your coffee, would you be offended? (*she drinks*)

HE

Cold.

SHE

It's ok. I am going! (*she leaves*) Goodbye.

HE

(*picks up the cup, puts it away, picks it up again, drinks from it gently and for a long time*) Really, what is there in them that attracts us? (*leaves slowly*) It's difficult to say...

SCENE SEVEN

THERE

(early morning. The noise from the kitchen)

VOICE F

Yes, more or less, it's all cleaned up. When he comes, he'll be surprised. He constantly repeats that the *cafe room* should be clean, but since nobody comes to the backroom, it could be like his apartment, that is – I presume – dirty. But he'll be surprised... Jesus! What are you doing in here?

VOICE M

I am resting. Why it's so wet in here, something spilled... God, how dirty it is all over here!

VOICE F

Dirty? Who has left this mess? You said that you were leaving for two days. No, how did you say that, wait... I won't be here for two days. When man is alive – he exists, that is, he is... And you're saying to me: I **won't be**

VOICE M

We were as if we weren't, do you understand?

VOICE F

I understand too well. For two days, you drank until you dropped. God, look at yourself! Get up, you won't be lying here like that.

VOICE M

You're mistaken. I will be lying here like that. Really, what do you know about me? What do you know about my *inner* life? What business is it of yours that I took a lawyer of great rhetorical talent and even greater speculative abilities, and almost brought him to the very bottom of servitude, to being a waiter...

VOICE F

You could have been a waiter at the Imperial Hotel, you told me so yourself.

VOICE M

What did I tell you? Ah, at the Imperial Hotel. I just said so because I wanted to impress you. They told me that they only hire educated waiters. I told them, though it was a lie, that I have two doctorates, but it didn't impress the hotel chief. He said: 'Maybe the honorary ones. Every idiot can get these as long as he knows how to impress other idiots.' You know, he wasn't all that stupid, that hotel chief. When he was throwing me out of his office, he admitted that he himself had a Ph.D. in philosophy. He specialized in Nikolai Hartmann. He asked me not to tell it to anyone.

VOICE F

Get out of this bed at last, will you? Not a bad hideout you've found yourself here. I have been cleaning for an hour and haven't noticed you at all!

VOICE M

It's probably because you clean only on the surface and since I wasn't on the surface...

VOICE F

You know why I bother with you? You always have an answer for everything. My ex - he was also a waiter here - was very quiet...

VOICE M

I am not a waiter...

VOICE F

Who are you then? My ex, every time I told him something interesting, said only one thing: you don't say. Of course, then, I was talking even more. I would tell him how I once stole flowers from the botanical garden...

VOICE M

You don't say!

VOICE F

Why I won't say?

VOICE M

Jesus Christ, when I say *you don't say*, that means as much as *what are you saying?* I am not saying that you won't say. I am not asking you to be silent. I am only articulating something that now in the everyday speech has replaced the saying: *what are you saying*.

VOICE F

What are you saying? If you want to say *what are you saying*, say *what are you saying*, not *you don't say*. I also reproached him about it. Finally, I understood that those were only his sayings. He wasn't very intelligent, but he had a lot of sayings. He used to say for example: say it like you mean it. Or: if you ain't got it, you ain't got it. He called the clients jerks.

VOICE M

Look and see if someone's not there, some – how was that ? – jerk. I think I heard something...

VOICE F

I haven't heard anything. If you want to see your post-alcoholic deliriums, go yourself. Get out of this bed, damn it! Do you intend to stay there for the rest of the day? Do you know how much work we have?

VOICE M

If it were earlier, you could have lain down next to me, here...

VOICE F

I could, sure. But this couple will be here in a minute. You know, I think they've got the hots for each other...

VOICE M

You don't say. Sorry: What are you saying?

VOICE F

Ooh, finally, you got up. Pass me the clean towel. This one smells of carcass, of decaying flesh, strange. For the smell of carcass, you need meat, and all we have here are fresh cookies and croissants.

VOICE M

It smells because it's dirty. At the Imperial Hotel, you have to know, everything was clean. Oh, if you only knew how clean it was there!

VOICE F

It was clean because you didn't work there. He saw right through you, that philosopher.

VOICE M

O, what a headache I have. I am falling off my legs. You've got to serve today. I will fall down on the first client and that'll be the end of me.

VOICE F

Well, you'd better stay here. You'll scare the customers and no one will come any more. The owner should've closed this joint a long time ago anyway. A few years ago we had a lot of regular clients, but now, only this writer comes. Maybe he's in love with me? (*She comes out. HE is at the table already*). Oh, you're here. I was just thinking about you.

HE

I hope I am not interrupting anything. I heard a fragment of your conversation. It's nice when people who work together are so polite to each other. These days, nobody is interested in anyone anymore, unless it's a matter of business. My business you already know: a coffee with cream and a plain croissant, please.

VOICE F

Right away. (*she leaves to the kitchen*). Leave this bottle alone. At least, pour it into the glass. Leave me alone. Can't you see I have a customer. Thank God there are still people who drink coffee.... Should I turn the music up for him? He doesn't like music coming from the speakers, but I'll turn it up for him anyway... (*music*)

HE

(*Gets up, approaches one of the walls, looks at the picture, returns to his table, puts the notebook into his pocket. To himself*) Good bye.

SCENE EIGHT

HERE

HE

(drinks coffee, browsing a journal) So, you're saying that he beats you up. Maybe from love. There are such men. Perhaps, he had a difficult childhood and that's where you find the roots of his current behavior...Do you hear me? *(he goes to the kitchen)*. She's not here. She left. They both always leave so quietly.

HE

(entering the cafe) You're here. How nice that you're here already. What are you reading, if I may ask? Is it something serious?

SHE

Something serious? That's how one speaks about sickness, not a book.

HE

Right. How then should one ask about the book?

SHE

Is there something in it for us? I'm reading about Schopenhauer. Written by some idiot. You know, there are such types. They negate everything. I know Schopenhauer pretty well and I can see right through this nonsense, though it is nicely written. A lot of readers like this kind of style. Do you know what he is criticizing? Schopenhauer's philosophy of life, his greatest success.

HE

I never really liked this philosopher, so I don't know that much about him. And you can't really summarize it.

SHE

Why not? We have time. I can summarize it for you. If you'll pay attention, you'll understand everything. Don't dream; treat everything you own like a lost object; be polite; find happiness in limiting yourself; not being in pain is already a pleasure, you do not need any other; don't run after happiness; find balance between the present and the future; don't let yourself be taken by affectation; don't complain; keep private matters private; know that life everywhere is the same; don't take anyone as your role model; as long as you're healthy, be happy...

HE

There is a lot of it...

SHE

More than you think. So: don't argue; be enough for yourself (*omnia meum mecum porto*); don't meet too often with your acquaintances and even with your good friends; don't forget about the effects of time and the temporality of things; state your own opinions coldly, passionlessly and without pressure. Briefly, that would be all.

HE

Oh, how suggestive it all is coming from your mouth. Reading Schopenhauer, one gets terribly bored before one gets to the bottom of things. One gets discouraged and picks up another book. Unfortunately, most of us are content with our *OWN* wisdom. And here - who would have thought - there's a gold mine of thoughtful advice that make sense. But don't you think that the philosopher had in mind common sense rather than godly wisdom? Schopenhauer, as it would seem, wasn't interested in the absolutes, in God's laws. He treated man too individually, as if man was supposed to be a temple for himself. After all, the religions of Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism and even Christianity take under their wings the masses of believers and give them the commandments, which I wouldn't disregard too quickly.

SHE

Wisdom spoken to many cannot be equaled with the wisdom spoken by a genius, one individual who hit the bull's eye of things. You see, Schopenhauer translated, and without too much effort, Gracian, this wonderful Spanish abbey, who wrote his own commandments but didn't discard. Many of abbey's thoughts went into Schopenhauer's thinking. He didn't have a problem being influenced by the thoughts of the Catholic. Obviously, he selected them carefully.

HE

Gracian is virtually unknown.

SHE

Too bad.

HE

When you were summarizing the German philosopher's maxims, I was thinking that they are also my maxims. For many people though, the advice not to have any dreams isn't too appealing.

SHE

Well then, what are your dreams?

HE

I dream of a good coffee.

SHE

No one is in there. I already looked, but / can make you a coffee (*she leaves*).

HE

How good you are.

SHE

(from the kitchen) Not at all. I am just being helpful. Wouldn't you make me a coffee if it were my dream? See. *(she brings the coffee)*.

HE

Thank you. Thank you very much. One sentence in Schopenhauer made me somewhat anxious. Finding happiness in limiting oneself? How should I understand it?

SHE

That's simple. You have a relatively small apartment. If you had an eight room apartment, would you be happy? No, you would be annoyed that you have to clean up all the rooms or that you have to pay someone to clean them up for you. You would have to fill them with the furniture. During remodeling, you would have to move out for the entire week to the hotel. Would you be happy? Not at all. Schopenhauer is right.

HE

I am content with what I have. I don't like owning too much. I have as much as accumulated by itself throughout the years, without my will, without any aspirations.

SHE

You could be a monk then.

HE

I once lived for a few days at the temple. It was interesting. I felt peculiar, but it's not for me. My temple is my art. Big words, but that's how it is. I am a monk in a certain sense. Why are you laughing? I am a monk.

SHE

Would holy father Eugene allow that I say goodbye. Unfortunately, I have to be somewhere at ten. (*she leaves*).

HE

Sister Eugenia, hurry up, it's ten o'clock. (*starts singing to the tune of well-known Russian tune*). 'It's ten o'clock and I can't get up from my bed. Don't be mad my love about our date. Just think it could have rained, lalalala....'

VOICE F

So, the normal women are not enough for you now? You started hitting on the nuns?

HE

Yes, but we talk *only* about the spiritual issues. Sister Eugenia takes care of the spoiled children. They are supposedly more unhappy than the orphans. We know nothing about the world, or so little that it makes us cry.

VOICE F

Why then, instead of crying, you sing about the bed that you can't get out of? I got up somehow even though I also didn't feel like it, you know? You don't know.

HE

No, I do know! Of course, I know. You didn't feel like it, terribly didn't feel like it. Not the first time, and perhaps you're not the only one. (*starts leaving*). Good bye. (*leaves*)

(music, soft and pleasant)

SCENE NINE

THERE

VOICE M

Great! I had everything nicely arranged here and some worm got everything messed up. Now I don't know where anything is.

VOICE F

You had everything in such a disorder here that I had to arrange it somehow. I don't know who has taught you to make such a mess.

VOICE M

I thought myself. I am very talented, maybe you noticed that. I didn't need a mentor.

VOICE F

Mentor? What is it? Some sort of tool? Never heard of it.

VOICE M

Mentor, my dear missus ignoramus, is a teacher, a wise man. The word derived from a Greek name. You know where Greece is, right? On the very bottom, to the right, where you put your jewelry in the closet. In Greece, there was a man who walked around and advised and bothered people. But the Greeks liked him so much that they started calling every man who made sure that the young wouldn't diverge from the path of virtue by his name. (*enters the café room*) By virtue, they didn't mean sexual abstinence like we mean today, but a set of positive character traits...

VOICE F

(*bringing the napkins and flower vase*) You already told me about virtue, did you forget? It was at the beginning, when we met. I was reading Mary Cheerup's book then. There was a sentence there: 'The count made attempts at the virtue of the beautiful Organtine for many years.' I started laughing though the book was kind of gloomy, and then you...

VOICE M

I hope that such books do not interest you any more. “They are substitutes for the real desires of young, inexperienced women. We should have weeded them out from the body of our living dying culture a long time ago.” This isn’t mine. The guy who comes here every morning said it. He’s not here yet. I asked him once if he has read Mary Cheerup and that’s what he told me and because I liked it, I memorized it for the rest of my life. I could deliver lectures on this topic at the University.

VOICE F

Are you kidding? Over there, one sentence is not enough. At the lectures, they speak for an hour and don’t stop even if there isn’t anything else to talk about. I once went to the lecture of Professor Stupidman, art historian. He is dean now. It was an open lecture. Someone had asked him about the famous painting by Rembrant *Dr. Tulp’s Anatomy Lesson*. The woman wanted to know if the man on the table was just sick or already dead. The professor hesitated for two hours. About fifteen people asked if they could leave to the bathroom, or maybe to watch TV, and he still hesitated, gave different hypotheses, recalled different authorities. We all felt stupid...

VOICE M

You’re saying, darling, that they dreamed of leaving? Why then did they come in the first place? I always stay until the very end, until the janitor wakes me up. Once, I fell asleep and I heard: ‘Young man, get up, we have to turn down the lights and close up.’ And once, such a young janitor has told me: ‘Sleep, sure you can, but under the bridge or at the train station. It is the university here, with doctors and professors.’ I opened my eyes and told him a few such sentences that one English professor who was sitting nearby began taking notes. We met with this professor a few times at the café later on and a book came out of it, even a big one. The experts praised it a lot, and the professor thanked me on the acknowledgment page; he was very touched. What I told this cave man janitor then, he had put as the motto for the entire book. “Here’s your motto,” he told me when he gave me the book still warm from the press ... (WAITRESS = VOICE F *left already at his first sentence*). You know, you have to meet him. The old man is ninety two years old, and he is still participating in marathons, as a viewer of course. He says that at his age he would be embarrassed to run around in shorts. (*he turns into the direction where the WAITRESS used to sit*).

SHE

Sure. But do you know that this old man of yours is my great-grand-pa? His entire life he studied languages of different elements: peasants, workers, crooks, union people, pimps. He even published a dictionary of the language of thieves. He was very methodical. Do you know how many words for a *mistress* he has found in the language of criminals? Seventeen! And his German friend from Heidelberg found only two. He was furious. He calmed down only when he has learned that in our country, statistically, crooks have a high aptitude for language. He was convinced and even sent grandpa a package. What wasn't there! Soap, dried bread, even *Mein Kampf*, and, translated by him personally, a collection of Mussolini's aphorisms! His grandson invites us now and then for the week-ends at the Lake, but we rarely take advantage of his invitation. If you could bring me tea and two croissants, I would be very grateful...

VOICE M (=WAITER)

While you were talking about your German friend from Hilderlberg, I already brought everything. It's on the table on your left. Bon appetite.

SHE

Oh yes, indeed. That is very nice of you. So my grandpa sent him back *Mein Kampf* thanking him and saying that he already has an earlier edition from which he took many notes. My father who was a boy at the time, reproached grandpa that he *simply* send it back, but fortunately – though without any point - he had a sense of humor and he drew a hammer and sickle on the first page and signed it – in his childish handwriting – “we will win.” Father wasn't too smart. He should have written it in German: “wir wollen siegen” or something like that. Then the German linguist would have been transferred to Dachau, but either way it was good enough.

HE

(*entering*) Not: wir wollen siegen, but: wir werden siegen. (*to the WAITER in the back*) My dear, please, don't bring me anything. I just finished a coffee in the cafe at the corner. I met

a childhood friend who confessed that he had been drinking all night, so I made a sacrifice and drank a strong coffee with him. I am kidnapping you! You have to see the exhibit of the young Beuys' graphics. There are eleven works and the exhibit lasts only for a few hours, that's how popular it is. *(they leave)* Good bye.

SCENE TEN

HERE

SHE
(sits reading a book)

HE
(entering) Good morning!

SHE
(looks at him for a long time absentmindedly) Good morning.
(someone has turned up music loudly for a second, as if by mistake)

HE
(sits down by the second table; again, loud music) Why don't you turn it up if you want to but quietly, like usual. *(takes out some papers)* Which horse would you bet on? I think that Fantasia first, and the second...? Maybe Melissa, what do you think?

SHE
(lifting up her head) The world is not well arranged. Why can't horses cannot bet on people? Where does such inequality come from? The old stud enters a coffee house, sits down and says to a young, beautiful mare: I bet on Wajda, Milosz second, but he was weak lately, so maybe Skubiszewski!

HE
(silently, and deeply taken) Why did you call me an old stud? *(after a while)* Wajda won't come first. His rider has a bladder infection. I know something about it....

SHE

Skubiszewski's rider weighs only sixty pounds, so maybe him?

HE

You think...?

SHE

Yes, my old stud, sure, he's fast... Lapicki is also fast... so maybe him?

HE

Yes, he's fast, but you can't count on him. Do you know that one time he started running in the opposite direction? I would never bet on such a horse.

SHE

What do you think about Waclawik? His latest book does not seem to be so trustworthy as the previous ones?

HE

Yes, the previous ones were more trustworthy, that is true.

SHE

The new one is as if less trustworthy. The reality is real if it is not real enough to be reality. That's simple, but not convincing. Not me.

HE

His intentions are in the right place. You see, I didn't even get a chance to drink a coffee, not to mention to order one! I have to go already. Goodbye!

SHE

Good bye.

SCENE ELEVEN

THERE

VOICE F

Where have you been? There is all this work here and you're walking around God knows where. There were a lot of guests yesterday. You weren't here so you don't know. And now, we've got all this cleaning to do, damn cups and saucers! Come here and help me!

VOICE M

I am out of strength. I had some strength yesterday, but it's all gone. I don't have such a strong head like they do, I have to admit that.

VOICE F

Why do you hang around them?

VOICE M

Not I with them, but they with me.

VOICE F

I don't understand.

VOICE M

Sure, sure, you don't understand. You never understand anything! One of them is a famous actor and the other works at the court. And me, I am only a waiter. They tolerate me only because we went to school together. When I meet them, we always go drinking. I like talking to them. We talk about everything.

VOICE F

I can imagine those talks of yours. (*she leaves, looks at the cafe room and since no one's there, she returns to the backroom*).

VOICE M

What are you looking for there? I have a good ear for these things. If someone's coming, I can sense him instantly with my intuition. Do you know what intuition is?

VOICE F

I *happen* to know that. 'A kind of imagination that makes us believe reality is the way we think it is.' You always talk about your intuition, so I felt like learning the definition. I memorized it. Yesterday, the one who always orders double lemon also asked me if I know what intuition is. What the hell do you all want from me?

VOICE M

I am leaving. I'll be right back. In the meantime, you wash those dishes. They look disgusting. I could puke. (*you can hear he's leaving*).

VOICE F (= WAITRESS)

(*Entering the room*) He won't sit for a minute. It is true that there isn't any place to sit in the kitchen, but still, he could sit comfortably near the sink and talk to me like a human being. No! He constantly runs off. Like a bird.

HE

(*entering*) Bird, you say. The bird just pooped on my collar. Do you have something I could clean it with? Of course, it wasn't your bird.

VOICE F

(*looks at him mute*)

HE

Why are you looking at me like that? Intuition says to me that you have some trouble. I know nothing about you, but intuition tells me... do you know what intuition is?

VOICE F

(pensive and shocked at the same time)

A kind of imagination that makes us believe reality is the way we think it is.

(she cries) Why do you all humiliate me so much?

HE

(embarrassed) I don't understand, really - I don't. Who is *you*, and why humiliate? I am talking to you so sometimes, I can ask you about something. I admit, it wasn't in a good tone, I admit, but that's not humiliation. Please, calm down...

VOICE F

I can't calm down... *(she cries)*

HE

(takes her by the hand, and hugs her tenderly, looking at the door). My friend is coming. She'll see us. Please, let me go. She'll think something. ...Please, why don't you go already! And please, stop crying. I haven't done anything wrong to you! Let me go! She saw us! She probably saw us! You see, she didn't come in. You did it on purpose! On purpose! Your place is in the kitchen! Maybe I can still catch her! *(he leaves in a hurry)*

VOICE F

How cruel men are! And just think of it, I wanted to buy him a teddy bear for his birthday... He told me that when he was a child he liked to play with a teddy bear... when he was a child... And now, he's a big boy and a pig! (*she enters the kitchen*) Oh, you're here. Well, let's get to work. No! All the dishes cleaned up! You're so wonderful. Simply – unpredictable! You surprised me completely...

SCENE TWELVE

HERE

SHE

(*Enters as if anxious, dreamy, hesitating, sits at one of the tables.*) Today, I have more time, but I would be very grateful for a cup of coffee. I didn't eat breakfast. Somehow, it didn't occur to me to make myself one.

VOICE M

(*subdued*) Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. It's a base. (*louder*) The coffee will be right there. I am making a whole pot. Maybe a few croissants to go along with it?

SHE

You're so nice. Why don't you tell me, but honestly, why men are so nice at the beginning and so cruel at the end?

VOICE M

There are exceptions.

SHE

I am looking for such an exception. But where is a guarantee that I won't be mistaken?

VOICE M

There is no guarantee. There is a coffee instead. I have a big favor to ask you. I promised my friends to let their cat out. If I won't do it right now, I won't be able to do it later. The cafe will get filled up and I won't be able to leave. Could you help yourself to coffee and croissants? They are freshly brought from the bakery.

SHE

(Enters the kitchen and returns with coffee and croissants). They are fresh indeed.

HE

(Enters)

Good morning. I will never forget yesterday. It's so wonderful that you also like theatre. The play was horribly directed though. I saw much better Mary Stuarts. In this production everyone played for himself. Only Mortimer was good.

SHE

Not only Mortimer. (*Thinking*) You, too, seemed to me exceptionally good yesterday.

HE

Me? Well – me? We are talking about the play.

SHE

No, we are talking about you. When we were looking at the city later on, so beautifully light and visible, I thought: God, how good that there is someone like him. That's what I thought. (*silence*). We are still strangers to each other and I already feel like I can't live without you. Do you hear me, honey?

HE

I hear you. I could say the same thing, but I don't dare. One should avoid grand words.

SHE

I said: honey. That isn't too grand of a word.

HE

But it's tender. (*he takes her by the hand.*) And I need tenderness. Do you think I could live without you? There is no world besides you. And you have known about it for a long time. Tell me, did you know about it?

SHE

I didn't know. I suspected it.

HE

That's good that we seem strangers to each other. Nice perhaps, but still strangers. You know, I am completely unable to compare the time when we didn't know each other to today. I think the other time didn't exist at all though I did feel right away that we were close.

SHE

Let's go. We'll say more to each other, but not in front of other people.

HE

Remember that we're in the theatre and we play for other people.

SHE

Oh, God, I completely forgot about it. But let's go.

(music, then silence)

THERE

VOICE F

As always: he came, he left. How can you leave everything like that? But he just left. It's a good thing no one's here yet. No, someone was here already: the empty cup. *(she comes out)* It's such a nice day and I have to work instead of taking a stroll in the park. *(returns to the kitchen)*. God, what a mess. He never cleans after himself, that's how his mommy raised him. That's how mommies are today!

VOICE M

You leave my mommy alone!

VOICE F

Oh, you're here!

VOICE M

Sure, I am here. I am talking with you so I must be here.

VOICE F

But in what condition? Shirt unbuttoned... Where have you been?

VOICE M

Here and there.

VOICE F

God, why do I bother with such a jerk!

VOICE M

Don't despair, baby. There is no one here. Let's turn on some music, caress each other a bit, and everything will look better. (*music*).

(*voice overs: No, leave it. Wait a moment. Wait, I'll do it myself. Etc.*)

SHE AND HE (*enter*)

SHE

You're saying you don't like Maria Stuart?

HE

No, not at all, I don't like her prepared this way. You can't mix politics and eroticism in this way. Schiller did write a multilayered work but also a very precise one. When I read this play, I see Schiller-doctor, psychologist, who reveals the secrets of human souls. He knew what was happening *in* the souls. I am writing right now about the grand love between two people and I feel like I am on the scaffold. A small, regular love, that I can write about without any problems. (*they leave*).

SCENE THIRTEEN

THERE

(scene in the dark. One cannot tell if it's late evening or early morning)

HE

We have nothing to do. We can play bridge. I brought you here because you can play very well. I don't.

SHE

Well, let's not exaggerate. Sure, I can play well. Who's dealing?

VOICE M

I can deal. I don't mind.

VOICE F

You always don't mind. The point is to win.

VOICE M

What are we playing for? Money? I don't have a penny on me. I can bid my vest. It's too tight anyway.

VOICE F

No, let's play like real gentlemen, like the sportsmen – for honor.

HE

Like sportsmen, you're saying. In that case, I must ask for a doping. A large coffee, not too much cream.

SHE

I am sorry, but you *arranged* the cards.

VOICE M

Not at all. They were already arranged. I arranged them at home, carefully. In my own way, but very carefully.

SHE

I am not playing. The cards should be arranged here, in front of us, not at home. Who knows how you arranged them!

VOICE M

I know. I arranged them like they were supposed to be arranged.

HE

Are we playing or not?

SHE

Very well, I'll play, but after we deal, everyone will give his hand to his neighbor on the left.

VOICE M

Missus neighbor on the right, I will tell you something... All right then, well. Two clubs.

(whispers).

SHE

In the game of bridge, dear ladies and gentlemen, we communicate by bidding, not by whispering.

VOICE M

Good, four clubs then.

SHE

I am sorry, but you can't change your decision during the game. You would have been thrown out from even the worse team.

VOICE M

No, we won't play. You ... me. *(quietly but clearly)* This witch annoys the fuck out of me. If she were a man, I would have punched her in that stupid face so hard she would end up in the sink.

SHE

You ... me. Why do you whisper? In the game of bridge, you bid out loud and – shut up.

VOICE M

I speak as loud or as quiet as I want to. I have a coarse voice, so what? Do you know what I went through? Should I change my voice? The voice changes when you're in the urn!

HE

No, I can't play under these conditions! You will excuse me. I am going outside. It's dark out there, but maybe not as stuffy as in here. And as if it wasn't enough, you're smoking.

VOICE F

I can go out with you and turn up the lights. (*they leave, lights up*). I have to apologize for my partner. He is so sensitive.

HE

Sensitive does not use the word *fuck*. Don't deny it, he said it! I have heard that he has some sort of doctorate, but as a waiter, he's very vulgar. How can you put up with him?

VOICE F

I knew you would ask that. You're in love with this lady and what do you know about her? That is true, she is very intelligent, knows how to play bridge. But I also know how to play bridge. And when I want to I can be intelligent as well, that's right! I once participated in a seminar on normative poetics. At home, I read everything written on the subject by Stalin. I analyzed his every sentence and raised a big argument in the class that no one had seen yet, that's what they

told me later on in the bar. One linguist who remained influenced for years by this idiot, Noam Chomsky – which I didn't take against him – timed the ovations and told me that they lasted exactly three and a half minutes. That is as long as the famous song by Hugon Wolf.

HE

Hugon Wolf, you're saying. Do you think they are playing or waiting for us? Maybe they are playing without us, with two dummies. That's very popular right now in the loners circles.

VOICE F

You know, even Stalin in his bottomless stupidity would notice that you aren't too strong in formalized, logical language. If one is a loner, what circle one can have? You disappoint me. (*to WAITER, loudly*). You know what, my teddy bear, pour us four glasses of Campari. Maybe it'll make the game easier. (*she looks into the kitchen*). They left. Through the kitchen door, just look, not even a trace. No, they left a note; no, two notes. One says: 'I'll shall never return here.' The second one says: 'We played with two dummies but the old geezers cheated so much that I left. Don't wait for me. I will return when I feel like living again. Then I'll return.'

HE

I don't know what to think of it. You know, you have to close up right now, so I'd better leave. I'll come tomorrow, for sure.

VOICE F

You'll be welcomed. You bet.

SCENE FOURTEEN

HERE

SHE

(enters happy and cheerful)

VOICE M

O, I see you're in a good mood today!

SHE

Yes, somehow everything works out the way I want it to lately. Can you imagine? Everything happened the way I had hoped it would.

VOICE M (= WAITER with tray and tea)

And what did you hope for, if I may ask?

SHE

It's my secret.

VOICE M

Can you tell a little bit of your secret? We, waiters, once we know our clients, we want to know more about them. Well, we know this and that anyway.

SHE

(laughing) And what can you know about me?

VOICE M

I said: this and that. It's not too much but also not too little. One has eyes so one sees. Adding to it brain, intuition and smell, yes, smell...

SHE

Smell? What did you snuff out about me?

VOICE M

You're a person... sophisticated, with independent opinions and highly selective sense of beauty. A person, perhaps good, sensitive, and most of all, intelligent, standing out from the gray mass of

other women. I want to stress that because – excuse me – the person with whom I am living, is completely void of these characteristics.

SHE

Interesting. You're idealizing me and the person with whom you share life and perhaps more, you degrade. Even though you're right, she does belong to a rather not interesting kind.

VOICE M

You see, that's what annoys me about her! You know, before her, I had many women, and can you imagine, she resembles them so much that she is almost their primitive synthesis. Do you understand what I mean? She epitomizes all the features which I already know and have had up to here (*he shows*).

SHE

(*pensive*) And that – if I may use your favorite expression – annoys the fuck out of you... I understand, but I have to go now. Goodbye! (*she leaves*)

VOICE M

She understands! She understands nothing! I shouldn't have told her all of this. I suffer, but well, not that much. After all, she's not the worst of them. I knew some who were real bitches. One of them even infected me with some syph! I couldn't get rid of it or *her!* She said that a friend called for her. God knows how she went for it, like a moth. I threw her down the stairs. She broke a leg and dragged me into the court! But I like processes and I was all right. I even had a short romance with the lady judge who was really taken by my honesty.

VOICE F

You didn't tell me anything about it! You stay away from the courts and the police! The chief does not like delinquents. (*she enters the room carrying clean napkins*) Why are you looking at me like that?

VOICE M

(*looks at her silently*)

VOICE F

You said that I am like all the other women! Pig! I will *get* different from all the other ones, all right, so you'll remember me your whole life "I had many women before her ..." Why didn't you tell me that? The only one you mentioned was a doctor who treated you for some disease.

VOICE M

You were listening!

VOICE F

You know who you are?

VOICE M

And you, do you know who you are?

VOICE F

How can you talk about us to any stranger?

VOICE M

Why not? We have nothing to hide. No, except maybe those private watered down drinks that we sell to those idiots on our account. Do you know that at the store they would pay one eleventh of what they pay here. One eleventh, do you understand that? My private life is clean and simple. I could talk about it even to children if they wanted to listen. But today's children are somehow very scatterbrained...

VOICE F

What children?

VOICE M

Today's children.

VOICE F

You know what, you are a child yourself. Child, go to the kitchen and wash all this crap.

VOICE M

(leaving) Wash it yourself, you'll do it faster than I would. Dante already said that everyone should be doing what they do the best. I'm leaving. I will be back in half an hour. *(slam of the door)*.

VOICE F

What a piece of work! Wait a minute... there is a lunch break now at the court. He's still having an affair with the lady judge who even has hots for the waiters. No wonder, she sits for hours on the little stool, listens to the cases, her ass gets bigger and bigger until she finally has enough. But what does she see in him?

HE

(entering) I am sorry, was my friend here today?

VOICE F

I don't know. I came in later today. Maybe she was here before me. Probably yes. I see a cup with her lipstick on it. Yes, she was here.

HE

(absentmindedly) And what did she say?

VOICE F

I don't know. This, the lipstick won't tell us. The tea is not finished so she must have been in a hurry. Though maybe not. The crumbs from the croissant are long and large, so she must have been eating it slowly, piece by piece. No, she wasn't in a hurry... she was here for a long time... Wait a minute... There is a letter under the saucer. It's for you. (*she hands him the letter*)

HE

(*reads quickly*)

VOICE F

What does she write?

HE

Nothing important.

VOICE F

The usual things. But we like when someone writes to us the usual things, even though we know them by heart. Mine never leaves me letters like that. He even says he has – pen phobia.

HE

You know that he is well educated in his own way. In his profession, he used to be very talented...

VOICE F

(furious) Pen phobia, water phobia, soup phobia, ass phobia...

HE

Why don't you calm down. *All* of them are like that. They say they love you, but never move their little finger to prove it.

VOICE F

(*sad and in tears*) Finger? What – finger?

HE

I am leaving you with your pain. I have to go. Please, don't worry. One day, you'll find someone who likes to write. I am sure they are out there. You just have to look well. Don't take just *anyone*, be picky! Like with the salad! I won't be here tomorrow. After tomorrow – maybe. After, after tomorrow, I'll be here for sure. Goodbye. (*he leaves*)

VOICE F

(*entering the kitchen*) Like with the salad! It's easy for him to say! (*she murmurs something to herself, suddenly*). It's here! A letter! What is he writing in here... What a horrible handwriting... 'I have to go to the court. We are accused of illegal sale of alcohol. All my hopes are in the lady judge. I kiss you in your...' something unclear here. My little bunny is not very prolific and does not write very well. But he wrote!

SCENE FIFTHTEEN

THERE

VOICEM

Tell me my dear, where did you put my shoes? I can't wear slippers to serve people! When you're a waiter, they look at your shoes first. Men look at your shoes. Women look at the shoes and up. The older ones end looking somewhere at the fly. Nobody looks at your face and that is why our faces are unknown to them. Can you call your friend," an idiot says to me who just ordered an orange juice with me. "I want to pay you," says a young moron though she has ordered from my colleague and even listened to his stupid comments.

VOICE F

And you think that your comments are smart? "Life is shitty, did you Maam, noticed that? You're smart enough so you've probably noticed that" - you say it to each one of them. And they - silly idiots - take your thought - what a brilliant thought ! - as aphorism. Idiots.

VOICEM

Aphorism, not aphiorism.

VOICE F

Very well, aphorism. (*silence*)

VOICE M

Where the devil have you put my shoes?

VOICE F

You probably put them away somewhere. Why do you drop everything like that? Jobs, curses, dirty bags, shoes? Probably women too. Pretends to be in love, oh, how madly in love, and then, he drops you. How dirty everything is! Here, one is here. (*she throws the shoe to him*).

VOICE M

You could have given it to me. You didn't have to throw it like that. I've never hurt any woman. Do you understand that, you stupid cow? They have hurt me. They could never have lived up to my level. They always took me – you know for what?

VOICE F

...for a waiter, and they were right, you are a waiter. No! They took you for a prince because of your manners and refined vocabulary. The prince's favorite word: fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck. You're fucked yourself!

VOICE M

And you? What are you?

VOICE F

Fucked, how could it be otherwise.

VOICE M

(calmly) You're good. But with goodness you won't win anything.

VOICE F

And what am I supposed to win here? *(furious)* Do you know how you behave? As if I wasn't here. I am an object. You take me into your hand like – a bike, when you want to ride me - I am sorry - ride it. You're a pig! God, how could you have allowed me to fall in love with a pig! You drink like a pig! You behave like a pig! You dress like a pig! You eat like a pig! *(pause)* Well, all right, I feel better now.

VOICE M

Dear God - whom you blame for me - does not only dispose of princes. Well, you should know that the aristocratic men of the highest order are all homosexuals. You could do nothing with such a prince. Pain, suffering, sadness, disappointment. I know something about it. It is true that they look for companionship among the lower classes – store managers, chauffeurs, waiters, young poets or painters, but they all have to fulfill one condition: not to be women.

VOICE F

Here's your other shoe! Why it's so used up? No, this one is from another pair. Maybe you left it somewhere? Call your lady judge. Maybe she'll find your fucking shoe under her bed or on the table. Just how will she recognize that it is your shoe?

VOICE M

Stop being jealous of every woman!

VOICE F

There is no one to be jealous about. Do you think I am interested in every bitch? That's how interested I am. (*she shows*). I am not interested in them *at all*.

VOICE M

(*entering the room*) Good. Look, it's already ten o'clock and no one's here, not even these ones who come here all the time.

VOICE F

(*entering the room*) They are nice, just don't order too much. Sure, they live on something else, on love.... (*dreamily*) They live on love. That's such a beautiful saying, just a few words and so beautiful.... And we? – what do we live on?

VOICE M

On looking for the second shoe, that's what we live on. It won't be here. No, it's not here.

VOICE F

Maybe, my dear, your beloved shoes separated: one's hidden behind the bucket. And the other one wandered off somewhere... Maybe it loathed the other one. Think: left shoe, maybe it had leftist convictions, maybe it went to Cuba, don't you think? Could be, could have such caprice. It enlisted in Fidel's army, and maybe it's already a general. After all, they could tell right away it was a leftist. Castro hugged him during the first meeting. Have you seen him doing anything else? No, not at all. He simply likes hugging his friends. Poor boy, he has less and less of them...

VOICE M

We will telegram Cuba! I am going to the post office!

VOICE F

No, leave it alone. A telegram from today's Poland means a life sentence for the most accomplished ideologist. Look, they are passing by and don't even drop by. She waved her hand, sees us! (*she waves her hand*) Happy, my God, how lucky they are...

VOICE M

Wait, this old prosecutor who salivates over his cookies comes at eleven. We have twenty minutes to find my shoes. That's impossible that one is here and the other one – not?

VOICE F

Like in life: one can find himself and the other one behaves like a jerk. A genuine, thoughtful jerk this left shoe of yours is! We won't find it here. Let's go. Maybe you threw it into the sink? (*they leave*)

VOICE M

(after a while) Heere it is! You know where it was? You'll never believe it! Well, you never were too bright... Next to the toilet, exactly where I took it off! You returned, you returned all clean from a long voyage? My darling! Did they interrogated you hard? But you didn't squeal! You're so smart. Why do people say – stupid like a left shoe? In the toilet it hid, sneaky. Sneaky snake. That's how it is. What a pair of shoes!

SCENE SIXTHTEEN

HERE

HE

(entering) Good morning!

VOICE F

I don't understand why people come so early. *(peeking out of the kitchen)* It's you. I'll be right there!

HE

We have great weather today. *(takes out his notes and writes something)*

VOICE F

Fresh croissants, just got here from the bakery. And you work as usual. I won't bother you then.
(she goes to the kitchen)

HE

Nothing can bother me.

VOICE F

I noticed that. I bother mine even if he's just reading a newspaper. I looked once and do you know what newspaper he was reading so passionately? From two months ago!

HE

(absentmindedly) Terribly interesting.

VOICE F

You say so? But if you only knew what he was reading?

HE

No. Yes. What he was reading?

VOICE F

Horoscope! Two months old!

HE

People like reading such nonsense...

VOICE F

No, horoscopes are real. But they have to be current.

HE

What does your horoscope say for today?

VOICE F

That I'll experience a great love. But it's wrong. I already have it behind me. Unless it'll be something totally new, but how? In the movie – that's different. Ball, music, beautiful lights, everyone looks at me and I am having a time of my life. They are playing the pasadoble which I love so much. Can you hear it?

HE

No, I can't. Can I have one more coffee, please. If the music bothers you, you can turn it off. Right! Why do people always turn up the music? I was once at friends' house and their child had everything turned on: radio, record player, CD player, video player - everything. This child should have a button on itself that would hook up to all the rest of its equipment! I told it to the parents, as a joke, and they got offended. Maybe they love their over-amplified child too much. In the old days, children at least were nice, but now... They scavenge over the poor children and make customers out of them. I have heard that one child promised his father to cut his throat if he wouldn't buy him a new Batman figure that his friend had. The idiotification of the society has reached its apogee. And we thought we could go much farther in our stupidity.

SHE

(entering) My dear, it's bitterness speaking through you. The world can become stupid, but what's that got to do with you if you're an individual? People always live in the times that they praise and geniuses in the times that they loathe, in the same époque, but how the geniuses loathe it. They speak of it with joy and morbid satisfaction.

HE

You should become a writer! I knew you possessed talent. I was even certain of it.

SHE

Well, all right, but say it normally. You don't have to use the word **possess** if you can say **have**. What is the difference if Mr. X **has** a mistress or – **possesses** a mistress?

HE

Sure. Did you ever think why we use this idiotic word **posses** as 'to bring about the sexual intercourse'? It comes from 'seating:' *potis* – able and *sedre* – to sit. What does sitting have to

do with sex? All right, a baron possesses money. Great, he sits on money. But: A baron possessed a young maid in mute ecstasy – that’s sounds idiotic. Unless, the moron actually sat on her out of love.

SHE

I understand why this philosophical question intrigues you, but I don’t understand why do you add the silly ‘mute ecstasy’ in there?

HE

The baron couldn’t say anything to her. All he could do was to mumble, as men usually do. So ‘mute ecstasy’ is quite fitting, though, I admit, it does smell of nauseating literature.

SHE

Let’s go! Goodbye! Nobody’s there again. Sometimes, I have an impression that we are running this coffee house. Someone came in there. Let’s go, or rather, let’s run away from here.

HE

Run away from here! Like in some stupid operetta.

SHE

Maybe life’s a stupid operetta?

HE

Life is beautiful and with you - even more beautiful. (*they leave*).

SCENE SEVENTEEN

THERE

VOICE F

Don't explain anything. I know where you were, at your lady judge! That she even bothers with a waiter!

VOICE M

I am not just a waiter. Everyone can see that, women in particular because they are intelligent.

VOICE F

And who? Prince of Wales? Famous writer? Or maybe a soccer player, what's his name, Maradona?

VOICE M

Maradona, not Maradonna. Maradona is more famous than all the writers put together, including the county writers, who as a matter of fact, are extinct.

VOICE F

Wait then, until the waiters will be more famous than the soccer players. (*mocking him*) You know, dear minister, our hotel paid eight millions dollars for this old waiter from Bristol....

VOICE M

The world changes. Everything is possible.

VOICE F

But it's not possible or fitting for you to have anything to do with the women from the court! *If*, that is, you want to be thought of as a waiter with class! You have to keep your dignity!

VOICE M

I can see how *YOU* keep your dignity. You make eyes at this morning bird, as if there weren't any other men in the world besides him. And he does not even look at you, and if he does – only critically. That's all you got from your flirting.

VOICE F

(enters the room carrying flowers) I don't have to flirt. Everyone finds me attractive anyway.

VOICE M

(brings napkins) What kind of attribute is it – to be attractive to everyone. To be attractive to one person, someone special – that is something! I found *you* attractive. You don't have any charm, that's a fact, but you have something in you, a kind of familiarity, and – how to say it – an honesty which is rare in our circles.

VOICE F

Do you think you have charm? You know when you had charm? When you were limping but you tried to serve with grace despite of it. Then, you had charm. One lady even noticed it. She said to her neighbor: you know what, there is something in this crippled waiter, I don't know what, but there is something. – I don't know either.

VOICE M

I know but won't tell you. Let's go. There is nothing here for us to do. *(they go to the kitchen)*

VOICE F

Stop it. Are you crazy? All right, if you really want to, but try to be quiet.

VOICE M

I don't have to try. I am quiet by nature. The quietest mouse could learn something from me. *(lovmaking sigh)* Don't scream! *(loud)* If someone's listening out there, they should be sorry,

not us. Anyone there? (*silence*) I am almost done, pardon, I am coming. (*silence*) Something got stuck in this meat grinder. Don't put your fingers in there, while I am turning the handle. Use the spoon. We can't even mince our own meat here. (*mocking his boss*) 'There is no place for meat balls in our coffee house.' That's easy for him to say. He's a vegetarian!

SCENE EIGHTEEN

HERE

(very enigmatic conversation – about getting a dog)

HE and SHE *(at the same table, looking at some books and magazines)*

HE

You really think it is a good solution?

SHE

Yes, good and maybe even practical.

HE

But you have said before that you want peace and quiet.

SHE

Because we didn't have the same possibilities that we have right now.

HE

You almost convinced me, but not quite.

SHE

So you don't want to?

HE

Not at all. I was thinking about your considerations not mine. I, in fact, don't have any big considerations.

SHE

But small ones?

HE

Ach, you're thinking about the other conversation...

SHE

What conversation...?

HE

When we didn't know yet.

SHE

Oh, then... You know, I feel so comfortable here, I can bring my own coffee. (*she goes into the kitchen.*) What a mess! I can put the sugar in for you. I know how much you want. But, let's go back to our subject. I think that after all, we'll be very glad.

HE

But darling, I also think so.

SHE

So what are your considerations?

HE

I told you already: I don't have any. Maybe, just sometimes, I am thinking...

SHE

(brings in the coffee) After all, if we both want it, there is nothing to talk about. But we have to get it. It won't get done by itself.

HE

I am leaving it to your decision.

SHE

No, I don't agree. I can't decide for you. You have to decide for yourself, that's obvious. I am leaving it to your decision.

HE

No, I don't agree. I also can't decide for you. You have to decide for yourself. Therefore, I leave it to your decision.

SHE

We can decide together. But, you have to have the same opinion that I have.

HE

And what is your opinion?

SHE

You know, I've told you.

HE

But maybe not totally. I don't want to make you anxious, but my opinion on the subject differs slightly from yours. Not a big difference, but still... though, it isn't such a big difference that we couldn't agree.

SHE

We did agree. Those are only details. We could – how do you say it in dirty politics – we could negotiate them.

HE

But you don't think we will need a negotiator to help us?

SHE

No! My darling, we will negotiate it ourselves.

HE

In bed. Then, the negotiation will be in your favor. In bed, you always convince me.

SHE

In bed, you always convince me. I submit to your every suggestion.

HE

I don't want you to submit to my every suggestion, well, maybe to some.

SHE

Which ones? If I may ask.

HE

You know better than I.

SHE

But I want to hear it from you!

HE

No, we don't have to talk about it in bed. We can talk about it here. (*he drinks*) What the hell is this? Ach, I am sorry, I forgot you made it. No, it's good. Maybe just a little bit too sweet....

SHE

I over-sweeten it out of love. You're so sweet!

HE

You think so? I didn't lick myself but I trust you.

SHE

I also trust *you*, completely!

HE

Let's get back to our subject. Don't you think that we could wait a little longer with this decision?

SHE

No, let's not wait! We won't get anywhere with waiting.

HE

You know what old Kim Ling-Choi, a great Korean philosopher, said? Do you know that Korean is an older culture than Japanese?

SHE

I know, much older! So, what did your Kim Ling-Choi say?

HE

Wait – he used to say – then, you will change your mind. (*silence*) He had eight wives.

SHE

He didn't wait too long. You know, a Korean philosopher who lived during the times which we know nothing about should not have any influence over us. Did you influence him? No. Why should we listen to his suggestions? We don't even know who he was. His stupid sex drive – the Korean edition! It does not testify well about his reason.

HE

One should separate sex and reason.

SHE

Don't talk nonsense. 'I love you,' that means: I lost my reason.

HE

No, 'I love you' means: I lost my mind. All of it except one part.

SHE

Let's leave the silly Amish and let's get back to our subject. The dog breeder was telling me that he has two Italian Greyhounds. One of them is very attached to him, so he won't give it away. But there is another one, gray. Do you know it is the only breed of dogs that can stay in the apartment all year long without going out? Of course, we will be walking ours. They are not only extremely intelligent but get attached very strongly to people and – you know what? They like being nice.

HE

Yes, I know. I read about it in the park. They like being ideally nice. Just imagine, they like to show off their niceness! Not like the other big dogs, I don't know what they are called. One of them even jumped on the owner when she was standing on the bridge and pushed her into the stream. Unfortunately for her, the stream was very shallow and the bottom full of stones, a kind of marble. Died instantly. She wanted to see how the stream flows. She developed liking for nature!

SHE

I also have a liking for nature, but in the form of a small, sweet doggie. You see, how happy he'll be with us. We will teach him speak!

HE

But never any bad words. No: asshole, fuck, and son of a bitch.

SHE

No, not at all. He'll be a gentleman. (*they leave*)

(*music*)

VOICE M

Well, see. There is no coffee in the coffee house! She said we have enough for all the Ukrainian writers, even the illiterate ones. And we don't even have enough for the Albanian ones! Aha! There is a little bit in this can. Now, I have a dilemma: can I take this coffee for myself or should I leave it for the potential customer? For me. Because I can tell to the client that there **isn't** any coffee and he can't tell me that there **isn't** any coffee because I am holding it in my hand – though not that much of it – and hence I know that there **is** coffee. So, I'll make myself a cup of coffee with cream. I am coming, I am coming! (*he enters the room*). No, nobody's here. One can have delusions. I wonder if animals also have delusions and what kind? I am sure that a monkey closed in a cage hallucinates about trees and bushes. (*pompously*) He then stands up on the toilet and sees only the towels and underpants that decorate the bathroom landscape. Thus, the monkey deducts that it had delusions. (*stands up on the chair*) Yes, there aren't any bushes or trees. There are towels and underpants instead. Sad, even very sad.

SHE

(*entering*) Something happened?

VOICE M

(on the chair) No, not at all. *(sobers up)* Tea with the double lemon – right away, Maam. Such a monkey - the pig - when you close it in the bathroom, can have those, delusions. What do you call it scientifically: hallucinations or something like that?

SHE

Hallucinations.

VOICE M

You think so?

SHE

I don't think so. I know.

VOICE M

You probably wish I got down from the chair and went to make you a tea? *(does not leave the chair)* Strong or thin like the director's last words? *(out of nowhere)* Kozakiewicz – he had a gesture! *(shows it)* You know that he comes here sometimes. He showed us how to jump down from the chair. We tried it, but a friend broke his hip. That's why I am alone here now. That is, there is a lady friend, but she's not here now. Everything's on my head. A'propos the head. You look nice in this hat. The hat makes everyone look younger. You know, I bought myself a cowboy hat in Ohio. Nobody's ashamed there like they are here. What am I saying? I WAS somebody, especially in front of the mirror.

SHE

Did you at least put the water to boil for the tea?

VOICE M

No, since today we have an espresso machine. That's why I can talk to you without rushing. Yesterday, I had to stand over the pot like a hair dresser over a dirty head. I got lost in thought and didn't even notice that the water started boiling fifteen minutes ago. (*changing his voice*) I presume that your lordship would prefer that I step down from the chair that nonetheless resembles a pedestal. Here I am above the fearful requests of my clients, above the human pettiness, above the literary arguments - do you know by any chance what these morons argue about? - above the tyranny of the governments, whatever they are. At home, I would often stand up on the chair - or on the table, yes! Grandma would say: come down my dear grandson. I know that you want to be large, but do rise above the smallness of the petty careerists and Napoleons and be a normal grandson, my small, sweet grandson...

SHE

My throat dried out...

VOICE M

Out of awe? And I haven't even said anything impressive. (*suddenly*) Since when?

SHE

What - since when?

VOICE M

Since when has your throat been dried up?

SHE

(standing up on the chair) Why don't you listen to me!

VOICE M

Wait a moment, why did you get up on the chair? Coffee house regulars don't do that. On the table, yes, it has happened before to some drunk guests, even to the ones from the best circles, but on the chair?

SHE

I want to be equal to you. Indeed, standing on the chair I have a different perspective! Why don't you make me this tea. My throat is

VOICE M

I know what you want to say: dried up. *(comes down the chair and goes to the kitchen)* How hot is it in here! The water will become hard boiled!

SHE

(on the chair) Granddaughter, come down from this chair, my darling. I know that you want to be a big actress, but this way you won't accomplish anything! Not this way! You have to learn

the theatre from the beginning, learn its history, biographies of other actors, go see various plays, even the stupid ones. If you want to learn, learn from someone else's mistakes. When you're a big actress, don't hang around those idiot officers and salesmen. Take care of the good name of the National Theatre. If the director – come down, my darling, from this chair - if the director starts yelling at you, and he can because it's in their repertoire, don't get offended like any idiot. Just think that he isn't right, even if he were a total jerk which happens more and more often in our theatres. Be good to everybody – come down, damn it, from this chair. You make me nervous, your old, poor grandma – be good, then people will respect you because you are also very pretty.

HE

(entering) Grandma was right. You're very pretty. And why, my child, are you standing on this chair? If someone saw you, what would they think?

SHE

And what did you, my kitten, think?

HE

You know I love you, so I think that even your eccentricities are beautiful, but for the others...

SHE

(getting down from the chair) I don't care about the others. I only care about you. I love you. My throat dried up.

HE

Let's go. I'll tell you what idea I have. We'll drink something at the coffee house across the street. I come here only because this place brings back the memories of our love. (*they leave*)

SCENE NINETEEN

HERE

HE and SHE (*enter, sit down by the table and put away their things, looking nicely at each other*)

HE

(*looking at his watch*) Yes, we are too early. There, (*points to the kitchen*) for certain, nobody's in yet. We can talk freely.

SHE

The best talks are at home.....

HE

But I like this coffee house. The one across the street is too noisy. I got used to this one, you too probably. This place brings a lot of memories.....

SHE

I was coming here for you....

HE

We are here for the last time. We are leaving tomorrow and when we'll be back, the place will be closed for more than a week.

SHE

Yes, the waitress told me. She was even sad. I told her that she'd find such a job anywhere. She said, sure, and that she's happy she won't be here anymore. That jerk of hers - he never was a good waiter - left her, simply left. Can you imagine? Simply - left.

HE

Bertrand Russell left one of his wives - do you know how? On a bike! He got up on a bike, supposedly to get cigarettes or something like that, and she has never seen him again. Philosopher, even a great one, but wasn't able to say goodbye like a gentleman. I am a man, but still I don't understand that.

SHE

And an English man! See, the English do not have a patent for being gentlemen. Nations impute the qualities which they don't have at all.

HE

No! Our waiter wasn't English, but he served with such slowness he could have been born in Kensington, and not in the capital that he reference so eagerly. I was born in capital, he used to say with pride, as if it were Vatican itself. Once I looked at his subpoena that came fresh from the court, and you know what I learned? He was born in Poughkeepsie. The Lower one to be exact.

SHE

So what, he was born. Is it that important? He didn't smell like manure and served well, as if *con amore*. Of course, he wasn't a lawyer. He knew the law from the other side. You know, he didn't have much luck... There is so much lawlessness and crime all around us and he was always getting subpoenaed. You could say that he – suffered for the others, a Messiah of a waiter bunch. He suffered to save the entire waitering clan. You know our literature. You should be familiar with that.

HE

Yes. He was the last romantic among the waiters. Did you notice that he wasn't at all interested in tips? She was different. You waited for the change longer than for the coffee. But she looked at you as if she was expecting that you would take her in your arms and carry somewhere far away, under the pink baldachin of the royal bed.

SHE

Well, everyone is entitled to have their dreams.

HE

You're too kind, my dear, too kind!

SHE

You know what? We'll leave quietly as if we were never here...

HE

As if we just dreamed it....

SHE

Maybe we do dream it all?

HE

Yes, it's possible. I wouldn't *exclude* such possibility. But why do we need in our dream this waiting couple with their problems?

SHE

You know, it's just – well – entertainment. (*She takes her things. He takes his.*) One can dream of various things.

HE

Ok, I let them exist in our dream. On the margins.

SHE

Oh, how beautiful it is to dream life.

HE

Life's a dream. Whose is it?

SHE

Ours. The one you're asking about, it's Calderon's. His name was Don Pedro Calderon de la Barca Barreda Gonzalez de Henau Ruiz de Blasco u Riano.

HE

... de Blaco y Riano, yes. Let's go. Let's throw THEM out of our life.

SHE

THEY were never here. Do you understand darling?

HE

They weren't here. We were always alone, only me and you. I am sorry, you and me. Let's go.

SHE

Wait, I will leave her some money for our would-be breakfast. You know, I feel sorry for her. Wait, there is something under the ashtray. (*reads*) Dear, happy couple! I can't live without him. I am going home. I will poison myself. I left you a breakfast. I like you very much. I wish you all happiness. (*She cries*)

HE

Don't cry. Please, don't cry.

SHE

(*cries*) Swear you will never leave me.

HE

I swear. Don't cry. Please, don't cry.

SHE

(*SHE looks at him, puts her arms around him. They leave. Music*)

Magda Romanska is an Assistant Professor and Head of Theatre Studies at Emerson College's Department of Performing Arts. She holds a Ph.D. from Cornell University, Department of Theatre and a B.A. from Stanford. From 2001 to 2002, she was an exchange scholar at the Yale School of Drama's Department of Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism. Her articles have appeared in or are forthcoming to *TDR: The Drama Review*, *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, *Slovo*, *Gender Forum*, and *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Her two recent book chapters have been published in anthologies *Ghosts, Stories, Histories* (2007), and *The Cultural Politics of Heiner Muller* (2008). Dr. Romanska is a research associate at Harvard University's Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, and a member of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of America. At Emerson, she teaches courses in Theatre History, Dramatic Theory and Dramaturgy.

The Right to Die

By

José Luis Ramos Escobar

Translated by

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José Luis Ramos Escobar's *The Right to Die* explores the effects of 9/11 on the country at the microscopic level. The work uses the deliberations of a heart transplant committee at a Washington hospital as a metaphor for how institutions function in a nation ruled by law or, more precisely, are subverted when questionable actions are justified under the shibboleth of "national security." In addition, the piece probes the complex personality of José Padilla, the Puerto Rican convert to Islam accused of being an Al-Qaeda operative, explores attitudes toward male sexual stereotypes, and offers a hope-filled, multicultural recipe for looking beyond labels of religion and ethnicity.

José Luis Ramos Escobar is a prolific and multifaceted author of more than twenty plays as well as novels and short stories. Most of his dramatic works have been staged in drama festivals in his native Puerto Rico as well as in venues in the United States and Spain. Critics point out that much of his early prose and theater explored the Puerto Rican experience, both on the island and in New York City. In many of these works, modern urban life, filled with violence and conflict, strips characters of their beliefs, freedom and happiness. Ramos Escobar has also written several plays for younger audiences which have been successfully staged at the Luis Torres Nadal Festival in Ponce, Puerto Rico. Chekov and Cervantes have been inspirations for creations as well. *The Right to Die* represents his first work to deal with a broader American and international world.

The Right to Die

(2002)

José Luis Ramos Escobar

Characters

Anna Shumway, 38, coordinator of the heart transplant program

Richie Cooper, 30, nurse

Saul Lepowicz, 52, cardiovascular surgeon

Daniel Wiley, 40, cardiologist

Sara Evans, 35, social worker

Alexis Reitz, 55, director of the transplant program

Doris Moore, 45, representative from admissions

Harold Rodgers, 39, representative from financial planning

Douglas O'Neill, 47, Colonel, U.S. Army

José Padilla, 27, patient

The action takes place in a cardiovascular hospital in metropolitan Washington, D.C., almost a year after September 11, 2001.

Scene I

A man wearing a hospital gown is walking slowly pushing a heart pumping device. He tires easily when he talks so he pauses, every few steps and between sentences.

Padilla: My mother told me when I was a child: Your heart is too big. I liked that. I had so many emotions and feelings that I felt like a walking city. I was filled with everything and there wasn't anything I didn't want to be involved in. My heart took on all injustices and I always bet on the loser. The more causes I encountered that needed my help, the happier I felt. In a struggle, I never give up... Breathing has been my problem. But I never sought recognition. I put my heart and soul into it and I was ready for combat. But one day, when I was very young, I began to have trouble breathing. My mother was right: too big a heart. What to do? ...Wait...Hope... Will I have another chance? Would I want another? ...Hope...Wait.

He exits back.

Scene II

Meeting room where the Heart Transplant Committee evaluates patients. A rectangular table with eight chairs. To the side, a table with a phone. Light in the middle coming from a light hanging over the middle of the table. Anna Shumway enters, arms full of materials. Nurse Richie Cooper follows her with a pitcher of water and glasses.

Anna: I really appreciate your help.

Richie: Don't mention it. You know you can always count on me.

Anna: My secretary always picks a bad time to be sick.

Richie: (Laughs.) I wish we had a choice in the matter.

Anna: She always gets sick when we have meetings. Then, everything is left for me to do.

Richie: You're discussing the new cases, right?

Anna: Yes.

Richie: (He picks up one of the folders.) And it looks like there are a lot of candidates.

Anna: Richie, please, that's confidential information. Put the folder down.

Richie: Sorry.

Anna: It's okay; don't worry about it.

Richie: You know, Shumway, I would love to work in this program.

Anna: But you're on the fifth floor.

Richie: Been there three years.

Anna: And you do good work.

Richie: Yeah, sure, but I need something more....challenging.

Anna: If you were assigned to the operating room...

Richie: No, no, I mean, here, where the decisions are made.

Anna: Nurses aren't needed here.

Richie: You're here.

Anna: Now you want my position?

Richie: No, girl, not at all. Why you're the best.

Anna: Well, there's only this coordinator's position.

Richie: I should have been a social worker, an accountant or a coordinator.

Anna: You're young. You can still study. A Master's in Public Health...

Richie: Because it must be wonderful to have the power to decide who is going to live and who isn't.

Anna: That kind of power doesn't exist. Everything is based on criteria.

Richie: But you all decide.

Anna: If the person qualifies or not.

Richie: You see, you're God.

Anna: What an exaggeration!

Richie: Tell me something, Shumway. How do you decide between two candidates that are the same?

Anna: If they're the same, we admit them both.

Richie: But who gets the heart?

Anna: The first on the list. That is, if he's compatible based on blood type, weight, you know. If not, the next one...

Richie: And the difficult cases?

Anna: We discuss them and come to an agreement.

Richie: And if somebody is gay?

Anna: Are you sick?

Richie: No, girl, it's a hypothetical question.

Anna: We don't take that into consideration in the selection process.

Richie: Hey, little heart of mine, now you know you can konk out because here they would accept even me.

Anna: Where do you come up with these ideas?

Someone knocks at the door.

Richie: Hey, I'd better get out of here, your guests have arrived.

Anna: Guests?

Richie: Shumway, keep me in mind when you're making your choices.

Anna: What?

Richie leaves without responding.

Scene III

Doctors Lepowicz and Wiley enter in the middle of a conversation.

Lepowicz: That movie gives a false impression of reality. No one could have their heart transplanted to their own child.

Wiley: Okay, okay, it's just a movie.

Lepowicz: But it creates unrealistic expectations in people.

Wiley: That may be. You also have to admit that both the hospital and the surgeon come out looking pretty bad.

Lepowicz: And the medical insurance company.

Anna: Good morning.

Wiley: Good morning, Anna.

Lepowicz: Wiley loved *John Q.*

Anna: Of course, if the cardiologists are shown in a good light.

Wiley: As they should be.

Sara Evans, social worker, and Dr. Alexis Reitz, the director of the transplant program, enter.

Sara: If they don't give me another social worker, we're never going to get caught up.

Reitz: I'll propose it to the administration.

Sara: You're wasting your time.

Reitz: Let me try.

Sara: Hello, everyone.

Reitz: Shall we begin?

Anna: Moore and Rodgers aren't here.

Reitz: Call them.

Anna goes to the phone while the others take a seat at the table.

Wiley: Are you going to Israel?

Lepowicz: I'd like to but things are dangerous. Too many assassination attempts.

Wiley: Well, that's the life style.

Lepowicz: Don't you mean death style?

Doris Moore and Harold Rogers come in.

Doris: He came in a minute after 12.

Anna: Now they're here.

Rodgers: I have to find out if Medicare covers him.

Reitz: Let's get started.

Doris: I'm going to present the case anyway.

Anna: Good morning, everyone. I gave each of you a folder with the cases to be discussed and the medical history of each of them.

Doris: I'd like to request a change in the agenda.

Reitz: We haven't even gotten started.

Doris: It's a situation that came up last night and can affect the rest of the cases.

Reitz: Anna?

Anna: Let's listen to it and then we'll decide if we change the agenda or not.

Reitz: Go ahead, Moore.

Doris: Last night at a minute after midnight an ambulance arrived with the patient Joseph Jendry.

Lepowicz: Jendry?

Wiley: I thought he died.

Reitz: Refresh my memory, I can't place him.

Doris: Jendry was here about a year ago.

Wiley: He was suffering congestive heart failure.

Lepowicz: He was a transplant candidate.

Reitz: And why didn't we put him on our list?

Rodgers: His medical insurance didn't cover transplants and Jendry couldn't pay for the operation out of pocket.

Sara: It was a question of money.

Rodgers: We aren't a charity hospital, Evans. This program is running a deficit.

Sara: I only want to point out that the case wasn't discussed because you all ruled it out from the start.

Rodgers: We have to protect the fiscal well-being of the hospital.

Reitz: Okay. And what did he come for last night?

Doris: He now claims that Medicare covers him.

Rodgers: I need to verify that.

Sara: It covers it. Medicare has a two year waiting period for persons who are incapacitated.

Lepowicz: In those two years the majority of those who are waiting die.

Wiley: That's why Medicare chose that waiting period.

Sara: But Jendry didn't die.

Wiley: It's surprising because the last time I examined him he could hardly walk.

Reitz: And when were the two years up?

Sara: Last night, at midnight.

Doris: That's why he's demanding to be evaluated so he can be put on the transplant candidates' list.

Rodgers: Listen, Evans, and how do you know that the waiting period ended last night?

Sara: I advised the patient.

Rodgers: But, how is it possible....?

Sara: Rodgers, Medicare covers all the expenses for the operation. Don't get upset.

Rodgers: Yes, but you shouldn't have...

Reitz: If Medicare covers it, there's no problem.

Doris: Jendry is demanding that the decision be made today because he's already been evaluated.

Reitz: Wiley?

Wiley: That's right.

Lepowicz: In medical terms, he fulfills all the requirements. If I remember correctly, he had a defective left ventricle with less than twenty percent pumping capacity.

Sara: The psychosocial evaluation was very positive. He has a very good family support system.

Rodgers: You sound like his lawyer.

Sara: And you, the prosecutor.

Lepowicz: We should operate on him immediately.

Wiley: Yes. He could die at any moment.

Lepowicz: And we would have to get him connected to the pumping device.

Rodgers: Does Medicare cover that procedure?

Reitz: You should be the one to answer that question, Rodgers.

Sara: Yes, it covers it.

Rodgers: I need to confirm that.

Reitz: Wiley and Lepowicz should reevaluate him today. If there's been no deterioration in his other body functions, Anna will be responsible for getting him on the schedule for an operation for tomorrow.

Rodgers: But I need...

Reitz: And in the meantime, you confirm it, Rodgers.

Rodgers: Those machines cost four hundred thousand dollars apiece.

Reitz: Well, we're going to use them, to justify the cost. Next case.

Rodgers: That Jendry is a sly fox.

Sara: All he did was exercise his rights.

Rodgers: If Medicare doesn't pay, I'm sending you the bill.

Anna: It's as good as on the calendar.

Wiley: Isn't there any coffee?

Anna: My secretary didn't make it to work.

Reitz: Well, call mine and have her bring us some.

Anna: Okie dokie..

Reitz: Lepowicz, would we have been able to put Jendry on the list a year ago?

Lepowicz: Medically it would have been a necessity.

Rodgers: There was no way to cover the costs.

Sara: The cheapest approach is a dead patient.

Rodgers: And if we go bankrupt, who would provide services for the others?

Anna: We can go on; coffee's on the way.

Reitz: Very well. Next?

Anna: Edgar McGriffin. 38.

Reitz: Wiley.

Wiley: This patient has defective valves. His heart can barely pump blood.

Lepowicz: His heart is already so weak that valve replacement is out of the question. It wouldn't change anything.

Wiley: And he doesn't respond to medicines.

Lepowicz: In fact, his heart is often pumping the same blood.

Reitz: Medically he's a good candidate.

Rodgers: And being an engineer he has an excellent medical plan.

Reitz: Psychosocial evaluation.

Sara: Mr. McGriffin is married. He has no history of alcohol or drug use and he doesn't smoke. He appears to be an organized person, which indicates he will follow through on the post-operative treatment. His first family is supportive and he can...

Reitz: His what?

Sara: His first family.

Reitz: He has more than one?

Sara: Yes, he has an extramarital relationship with a work colleague Monday through Thursday. Fridays he travels to his home in North Carolina and is with his wife and children weekends.

Wiley: Great set up.

Lepowicz: That's why his valves are defective.

Doris: Both women have come to visit the patient when he's been hospitalized. And both registered as Mrs. McGriffin.

Reitz: And what does he say about all this?

Sara: He says that he's confused and that his feelings are so conflicted that he doesn't know what to do.

Anna: It's similar to the Miller case.

Reitz: That one caused us problems.

Anna: He showed up at every appointment with a different woman.

Lepowicz: The promiscuous are proliferating.

Wiley: The bigamists.

Reitz: So, what shall we do about McGriffin.

Sara: There can be situations where there's conflict between the wife and lover that cause tension in the patient. In addition, we don't know how they're going to share him after the transplant.

Rodgers: His financial situation is excellent.

Sara: You already said that.

Wiley: If we do the transplant, he'll be strong enough for a third woman.

Sara: What a male chauvinist comment!

Wiley: It's just a joke, Evans.

Anna: The patient's life style can be crucial for his survival.

Reitz: Then are there objections to putting him on the list?

Sara: I've got some concerns.

There is a knock at the door.

Anna: The coffee's here.

Reitz: Coffee break.

Richie enters with a tray.

Anna: Richie, you again!

Richie: They asked me to help and as I've got a big heart...

Wiley: Is there any sugar substitute?

Richie: Here you are, doctor.

Lepowicz: You eat three cookies and afterwards use a sugar substitute.

Wiley: It's to prevent a glucose overdose.

Rodgers: Evans talks like a Sister of Charity.

Doris: They say that's how social work began.

Richie: Evans. Progress?

Sara: You're going too far, Richie.

Richie: Yes or no?

Sara: You really shouldn't be here.

Richie: I only came to bring the coffee.

Anna: (To Reitz.) You shouldn't be drinking coffee. It drives up your blood pressure.

Reitz: Don't worry about it. Shall we continue?

Richie: Can I get you anything else?

Anna: No. Thank you very much, Richie.

Richie: If you need anything, just let me know.

He leaves.

Reitz: And so, what's our decision with regard to McGriffin?

Lepowicz: He goes on the list.

Wiley: Agreed.

Rodgers: Financial planning supports him.

Reitz: Evans?

Sara: Family support is in a bind. If the two wives fight over him, he could wind up with no one to help him.

Doris: The second Mrs. McGriffin is on the war path. One time she got into the patient's room at midnight.

Wiley: Have him solve his skirt mess. That's his problem.

Sara: I disagree.

Wiley: Of course.

Sara: His problem is ours if it interferes with post-operative care and with...

Wiley: You make sure that doesn't happen.

Rodgers: (Referring to Sara) Doctor heart.

Sara: I only want to officially register my concerns in case any conflict arises.

Reitz: Problems could arise.

Anna: We could try to take preventive measures.

Reitz: Like what?

Anna: A meeting of the three parties to establish treatment guidelines and the responsibilities of each of them.

Reitz: It sounds good to me. Evans, arrange the meeting.

Sara: And in the meantime?

Reitz: Let's put an asterisk by this case. Next.

Anna: Louise Austen. 30.

Reitz: What is Mrs. Austen's situation?

Anna: Mister, he's a man.

Reitz: But you said Louise.

Anna: That's his name. Well, no it isn't. He changed his name.

Wiley: And he gave himself a woman's. Friggin' fairy.

Sara: Homosexual.

Wiley: Same bird with a different name.

Anna: Mr. Austen is gay and works nights as a transvestite in a gentlemen's club.

Wiley: Didn't I tell you.

Reitz: Wiley?

Wiley: Myocarditis. Infection.

Lepowicz: Enlarged chambers. Heart muscle extremely weak. Insufficient pumping of the blood.

Rodgers: His parents' insurance policy covers the bulk of the operation. He's still on their policy.

Doris: At 30.

Wiley: Nice arrangement.

Rodgers: His parents are willing to pay the difference.

Reitz: Evans?

Sara: Mr. Austen is a very meticulous and organized person. He is studying law during the day and is pretty far advanced in his studies.

Wiley: But, at night...

Reitz: Wiley, please.

Sara: He can count on his parents support. They have the wherewithal and the...

Doris: The address we have in admissions isn't his parents'.

Sara: No, he has his own apartment but since he was diagnosed with myocarditis, he went back to his parents' home.

Wiley: And he doesn't have a husband?

Sara: ...No, he has a companion who is also a part of the family support system for his health needs.

Wiley: A companion?

Anna: The sexual preference of the patient is not an evaluation criterion.

Wiley: But life style is, especially if there is deviant behavior that may affect his treatment.

Sara: I've already pointed out that his parents...

Wiley: And his companion. Clearly, he could easily infect him with AIDS.

Anna: Mr. Austen has tested HIV negative.

Wiley: So far. But later, who knows?

Lepowicz: With regard to age and physical condition he's an excellent candidate.

Wiley: Saul, the problem isn't age or physical condition. It's that we could waste a heart on someone that doesn't deserve it.

Sara: That's a prejudiced judgment.

Wiley: Gays are promiscuous and can get infected at any time.

Sara: He has a partner.

Wiley: He's a transvestite. What the hell do transvestites do when the show's over?

Reitz: I don't know. You're going to tell us, I imagine.

Wiley: They pick up the first bugger they encounter and they take him to bed.

Sara: Mr. Austen has a stable relationship and gives no indication of being promiscuous.

Wiley: And how do you know that, huh?

Sara: The promiscuous one is McGriffin.

Wiley: That's a different matter.

Sara: Sure, because he's straight.

Reitz: I don't understand your objections. You know that nothing related to sexual preference can be used against a patient.

Wiley: I'm not talking about preference; I'm talking about behavior.

Reitz: The person responsible for the psychosocial profile is Evans.

Wiley: She doesn't know these people.

Reitz: And you do?

Wiley: You bet I do. Why, they were the ones who robbed me of my son.

Long, uncomfortable silence.

Lepowicz: Take it easy, Daniel.

Wiley: You all don't understand. They don't have partners, they have daily lovers, occasional ones, unknown people. Are we going to give a heart to that kind of person? Is there one of those types who is going to stick to a medical regimen and follow-up visits?

Sara: He has a companion who has made a commitment...

Wiley: Another degenerate.

Sara: Look. He's a nurse and is more than qualified to help him.

Wiley: And what do the parents of this pervert say?

Sara: The parents accept him as their son's companion and they don't have any objection to him being the one to take care of him and attend to him.

Anna: I don't believe there is any contraindication for rejecting this patient.

Wiley: Later don't say I didn't warn you.

Reitz: Note Dr. Wiley's objections, Anna. Make the arrangements to put Mr. Austen on the list. Next case.

Anna: Mary Goldman. 42.

Reitz: Wiley?

Wiley: Tell them, Saul.

Lepowicz: Non-ischemic dilated cardiomyopathy.

The phone rings.

Reitz: Anna. Tell them not to interrupt us, please.

Anna goes to the phone.

Lepowicz: Unable to work or do basic things as she doesn't respond to the most intense therapy. Has no infections.

Rodgers: She's a teacher so the county's medical insurance covers the operation.

Anna: Dr. Reitz?

Reitz: But didn't I just tell you...

Anna: It's urgent.

Reitz goes to the telephone.

Reitz: Hello? Yes, this is Reitz speaking... Who? But... To the meeting? But... This is highly unusual... I don't know what to tell you... If you put it in those terms... Very well. (He hangs up. Deep sigh.) Gentlemen, we're having an unexpected visitor. We have to stop the discussion of cases and...

Sara: But why?

Reitz: It's an extremely serious matter that must be attended to immediately.

Lepowicz: It must be something extraordinary to interrupt our meeting.

Reitz: It is.

Anna: Just when...

A knock at the door. Without waiting for a response, Douglas O'Neill enters.

Scene IV

Reitz: Ladies and gentlemen, Col. O'Neill from Military Intelligence in the Pentagon.

O'Neill: (Giving a military salute.) Good morning. At ease.

Reitz: Have a seat, please.

O'Neill: Thanks, but I prefer to remain standing. Can you distribute the folders?

Anna: Of course.

O'Neill: Gentlemen, what I'm going to propose must remain under the strictest confidentiality. No one outside this room is to know what we are going to discuss. Is that clear?

Reitz: Every one of our meetings is confidential. The code of ethics requires it.

O'Neill: Dr. Reitz, I'm talking about national security. Everything is subordinated to the interests of the government of the United States of America. Do I have your pledge?

Murmurs.

Reitz: You have it.

O'Neill: As you will see in the material I distributed to you, we have an urgent transplant case. It deals with Mr. José Padilla, a U.S. citizen.

Wiley: How old is he?

O'Neill: 27. He had a heart attack which caused ventricular dysrhythmia.

Lepowicz: And he hasn't responded to therapy?

O'Neill: No, nor to an AICD implant. His condition is deteriorating by the moment. Yours is the nearest cardiovascular hospital, so we've brought him here for you all to take charge of his case.

Doris: He was brought here? But we have to complete the admission process so that then...

O'Neill: There will be no admission process. There should be no evidence that Mr. Padilla was treated by this institution.

Doris: It's illegal to admit a patient without going through the appropriate process.

O'Neill: This case is above the law.

Lepowicz: No one is above the law.

O'Neill: The government can suspend the application of the legal code when national security is involved.

Reitz: There is one way.

O'Neill: What's that?

Reitz: Admit him using total anonymity. Isn't that right, Doris?

Doris: Yes, well, in that case he doesn't appear in the records, but...

O'Neill: That's the way to deal with it.

Rodgers: But the costs for hospitalization and for...

O'Neill: Financial matters will be taken care of directly by the Finance Office of the Pentagon, without the patient's name being used.

Reitz: Why so much secrecy, Colonel?

O'Neill: I already told you, national security.

Anna: Then it can be assumed that we're dealing with a ghost, someone who doesn't exist...

O'Neill: You must be Shumway, the coordinator.

Anna: That's correct.

O'Neill: Miss Shumway, if this was an ordinary case, I wouldn't be here. This is a very delicate situation which I am not in a position to discuss.

Reitz: We can't take responsibility for a patient we don't have information on.

O'Neill: I'm giving you the necessary information.

Sara: Mr. O'Neill...

O'Neill: Colonel.

Sara: Colonel O'Neill, on the papers you gave us the name of the patient is marked out and there's no personal information about him.

O'Neill: You all don't need that. You have the necessary medical information right there.

Sara: But we have certain criteria for selecting transplant candidates and we can't make a decision based on nothing.

O'Neill: Padilla is a transplant candidate, period.

Reitz: Based on what criteria?

O'Neill: Military.

Wiley: I don't understand why this soldier has to be...

O'Neill: He isn't a soldier.

Reitz: If he's not a soldier, he's a prisoner.

O'Neill: He hasn't been charged with anything.

Anna: He doesn't exist.

O'Neill: Let's just say he's a citizen who was plotting against his own country.

Lepowicz: And what's the purpose of giving him a heart transplant?

O'Neill: ...He may have information of value to us.

Lepowicz: He's a home-grown terrorist.

O'Neill: He may be. For you all, what's been said is all you need to know. He should get a transplant immediately.

Wiley: I imagine you brought us a donated heart for the operation.

O'Neill: I meant he should get the transplant as soon as a compatible heart is available.

Anna: We have a list of previously qualified candidates who have priority...

O'Neill: No one takes priority over Padilla.

Reitz: Colonel, this is a private hospital and you can't come here and give orders as if we were your subordinates.

O'Neill: There's no difference between a private hospital and public one when it's a question of national security.

Reitz: We haven't been informed of the details of this case. As a consequence, we can't make a decision based solely on your assertions.

O'Neill: I can get the appropriate authorities to order you to do this transplant.

Reitz: I doubt that. But, in any case, it would take your time and the patient could die. That's a luxury you don't have. Otherwise, you wouldn't be here.

Tense pause.

O'Neill: ... Tell me what you need to know.

Wiley: When did he suffer the heart attack?

O'Neill: A week ago. We treated him in a military hospital but we realized he wasn't responding to the treatment. Yesterday his situation became critical.

Wiley: Under what circumstances did the heart attack occur?

O'Neill: I'm not in a position to divulge that information.

Wiley: Then how the hell do you expect me to render a responsible medical opinion.

O'Neill: Take the document I brought you and sign it.

Wiley: You're crazy. I can't sign a document without having examined the patient and without knowing the causes of his illness.

O'Neill: You'll have to do it.

Sara: You were torturing him, right?

Reitz: Evans!

Sara: It's the only reason for not wanting to say what caused the heart attack. If there were a medical reason, he would have it written in the document.

O'Neill: The social worker. I've had information about you.

Sara: Really?

O'Neill: Antimilitary, member of Amnesty International, civil rights militant...

Sara: All activities protected by the Constitution.

O'Neill: A rebel looking for causes...

Reitz: An excellent social worker, impeccable in her work, tireless in protecting the patient's rights...

O'Neill: I didn't come here to judge your behavior but on a secret mission of great strategic importance.

Lepowicz: Then it's true that you were torturing him when he had the heart attack.

O'Neill: Let's just say that he was being interrogated.

Lepowicz: That conduct is reprehensible. You don't have any right to torture anyone, much less an American citizen.

O'Neill: If you knew who we're dealing with, you wouldn't defend him so much, Dr. Lepowicz.

Lepowicz: It doesn't matter who he is; he's a human being with rights.

O'Neill: He's a terrorist trained to kill. He's familiar with the Al Qaeda network in U.S. territory and is able to identify the spies that have infiltrated our institutions.

Lepowicz: Formally charge him and turn him over to the justice system.

O'Neill: Everything at the right moment. He still hasn't confessed.

Lepowicz: Ah, but you're going to make him confess.

O'Neill: You would do the same.

Lepowicz: You're mistaken.

O'Neill: You would do it. If you knew that we're dealing with Ibn Mohamed, who coordinated attacks on Jewish busses in Israel and caused dozens of deaths, you would do it. You would torture him until he confessed and then you'd put a bullet through his head.

Lepowicz: In Israel?

Sara: That's why his name is marked out.

Wiley: You should have started with that information.

O'Neill: And that's what he came to do in our country; sow terror, kill innocent people with no risk to himself, promote his agenda of destroying our democracy. We have information that his group was planning to blow up a bus full of explosives at a football stadium when Navy is playing Army.

Doris: My son plays for Navy!

O'Neill: Don't ask me to deal with this wretch with kid gloves.

Sara: You have proof for what you've said?

O'Neill: That information is classified.

Sara: In other words, you don't have proof.

O'Neill: I stand behind what I've said.

Reitz: Colonel, what you're asking us is to violate our procedures and established protocol for selecting (transplant) patients.

O'Neill: What I'm saying is that this patient has information vital to our national security and that we need for him to receive a transplant for us to be able to continue our interrogation.

Wiley: I think national security is above all other criteria.

O'Neill: It's a question of defending our way of life. There is nothing that shouldn't be sacrificed to defend our liberty.

Sara: Did the patient agree to the transplant?

O'Neill: He doesn't have to agree.

Anna: Oh yes he does, sir.

O'Neill: Colonel.

Anna: There must be a written consent, colonel.

O'Neill: Mr. Padilla doesn't control his destiny.

Reitz: What do you mean?

O'Neill: By becoming an enemy combatant, he lost all his rights. We decide what's best for our investigation.

Sara: And if he refuses?

O'Neill: We would pay no attention to him because he no longer is in a position to decide.

Anna: That's unacceptable.

O'Neill: View him as a body, simply a body that needs a new heart, and forget about protocol and the damn criteria.

Reitz: This case violates our rules and breaks all our parameters.

O'Neill: And what happened September 11, what is that, an act according to what rules? Gentlemen, the world order has changed. The terrorists are lying in wait and we must stop them. There's to be no legal consideration or talk about civil rights. They didn't respect the civil rights of the 3,000 who died at the World Trade Center. Laws are for those who obey them; those who break them no longer have any protection. Or do you all want to be responsible for what his heartless group might do against our nation?

Long silence.

Reitz: Are we in a position to make a decision?

Wiley: I approve.

Rodgers: If the Pentagon pays for it.

Doris: In favor.

Sara: I abstain.

Reitz: Anna?

Anna: Whatever the group decides.

Reitz: Lepowicz?

Lepowicz: ...In favor.

O'Neill: Perfect. Dr. Reitz, take charge and please remember, the utmost discretion. We should create a new document with another name so no one will suspect anything.

Reitz: Don't worry. I'll give the appropriate orders.

Doris: I can take care of that.

Reitz: Very well.

O'Neill: Gentlemen, thank you for your sense of patriotism and your support for democracy and liberty. Pass me the copies I gave you.

Sara: Colonel.

O'Neill: Yes?

Sara: What will happen to Mr. Padilla after he confesses?

O'Neill: He will be charged with high treason against this nation.

Sara: And the punishment...

O'Neill: Death.

The lights go out.

Act Two

Scene I

Hospital room.

Gurney up against the wall to the right. In the back, a window. Padilla is looking through it. He is still connected to a heart pump.

Padilla: Beautiful view. I've always liked to look at the countryside from above, or views of the city, even though buildings block my view. There's something divine in seeing things from above, as if you were God. You feel big because of what you see and at the same time, small, before the immensity of what opens up at our feet. Here it's different. All of us look at the interstate running north to south and the monstrous traffic jam doesn't bother us nor the never-

ending lines of cars. We hope for something with a dirty hope and a bitter sense of guilt. And if a fatal accident were to occur: an aggressive and desperate driver who's late for work races his car at breakneck speed, tries to pass into oncoming traffic, collides with a pickup, the car rolls over a couple of times before crashing into the guard rail. The driver is trapped in his car, having suffered horrible head injuries resulting in brain death but his heart is still beating. It would be a nightmare for something like that to happen, but for us it would be wonderful if the driver had a heart that was compatible for us. Atrocious, no? Live each second wanting someone to die so we can live. Would it be worth it? Last night I dreamed that I was the driver that was trapped in the wrecked vehicle and that a surgeon came to take out my heart right on the spot, among the twisted metal and stench of gasoline and burned oil. I was able to see my bloody but beating heart as they put it into a container with ice. Then it was carried away by a helicopter that slowly disappeared from view. I was screaming that that heart was mine and that no one had the right to take it from me. I awoke overwhelmed with guilt. Nonetheless, this morning I looked through the window again and my murderous desires came back to life. What to do? (He lies down on the bed.) Wait/Hope...

Scene II

Nurse Richie Cooper enters.

Richie: Good morning. (He begins to check the pump. How're we feeling this morning?)

Padilla: Ready to fly.

Richie: Baby, I feel that way every day.

Padilla: Don't make me laugh; I jiggle the machine.

Richie: Don't worry; that machine never fails. It does what your heart isn't able to.

Padilla: For a while, right?

Richie: Until you get your transplant. Open your mouth. (He puts a thermometer in Padilla's mouth.)

Padilla: And if a heart doesn't turn up?

Richie: So far, they've turned up. Your blood pressure's a little low, but normal. (He takes the thermometer.) Temperature's 97.

Padilla: Listen, what's your name?

Richie: I'm nurse Cooper, but you can call me Richie.

Padilla: Richie, is there still a guard outside?

Richie: Kid, you've got more protection than the President. Twenty four hours a day.

Padilla: As if I could escape.

Richie: It's not to keep you from escaping, but so no one else can get in.

Padilla: Ah, protecting me.

Richie: That's it. And I've got to leave you. I have to continue my rounds.

Padilla: Richie. (Padilla calling his name stops him.)

Richie: You need to hire me as your private nurse, darling.

Padilla: How long have I been here?

Richie: A week.

Padilla: It's all a blur.

Richie: Anesthesia, the sedatives. You know.

Padilla: One week less.

Richie: How great, huh? I wish they would give me an anesthesia that would erase some people from my mind.

Padilla: But I don't want to erase anybody. Well, maybe I do.

Richie: You see, now I've infected you. Need anything else?

Padilla: No.

Richie: Well, see you later, baby.

He leaves. Padilla returns to his thoughts.

Scene III

Sara Evans, the social worker, enters.

Sara: Hi. I'm Sara Evans, the social worker.

Padilla: What a surprise!

Sara: Why?

Padilla: Two visitors in one day.

Sara: You have a limit on visitors.

Padilla: I have a limited life.

Sara: I've come to complete your case history.

Padilla: Which one of them?

Sara: The fictitious one is done. Your documents are in Administration and they're a model for lying and misleading.

Padilla: What did you expect? I am who I am.

Sara: What interests me is you. José Padilla.

Padilla: I gave up that name years ago.

Sara: But your history starts there.

Padilla: Why do you want to know if you can't write it down?

Sara: I have my reasons.

Padilla: I'm tired of being interrogated.

Sara: Believe me, it's in your best interest.

Padilla: You don't say. As if my life matters to you all.

Sara: It matters to some of us.

Padilla: Forget me. Soon I'll be just another statistic in your records.

Sara: José, I've researched everything about you but I can't find anything about your life.

Padilla: They've erased it all.

Sara: We only know that you're of Puerto Rican heritage and that you were born in the Bronx.

Padilla: Fort Apache.

Sara: What?

Padilla: That's what they called the South Bronx.

Sara: And you were the Indians.

Padilla: Someone had to be hunted down.

Sara: Studied through high school, odd jobs...

Padilla: I had to eat.

Sara: I found no previous criminal acts, not a single arrest.

Padilla: There weren't any.

Sara: Then your conversion to Islam and again nothing.

Padilla: Classified documents. Ask Col. O'Neill for them.

Sara: Under Ibn Mohamed there's no criminal record either.

Padilla: There isn't one.

Sara: But I need to know why they arrested you.

Padilla: Abducted. Ask them.

Sara: I would like to find out from you.

Padilla: Your conscience bothering you? You'd like to be sure that I'm a terrorist so you can sleep soundly? That way you can keep your guilt under lock and key and feel sure that you haven't participated in an illegal conspiracy.

Sara: I've done nothing to harm you.

Padilla: You're here and that makes you an accomplice.

Sara: You're the prisoner.

Padilla: I haven't been accused of anything.

Sara: You must have done something.

Padilla: Sure, I converted to Islam. I'm a fervent believer in the Koran and I oppose the interventionist policies of this government.

Sara: That's not a crime.

Padilla: But, what planet do you live on?

Sara: ... You think you deserve the first heart that comes along.

Padilla: I didn't come here of my own free will.

Sara: But you believe you deserve it.

Padilla: You want to know something? Of course I'd like to live. There are so many things yet to be done. But, I don't know if it's worth it.

Sara: I don't understand you.

Padilla: Eventually they're going to kill me, so I would only be buying a postponement.

Sara: Another person could use that heart they want for you. And they would get more benefit from it.

Padilla: As far as I'm concerned, you can give it to whomever you decide on.

Sara: Then you would die.

Padilla: I have a right to die, don't I?

Sara: The right is to live.

Padilla: Tell them that.

Sara: And to let others live.

Padilla: Where do I have to sign?

Sara: For what?

Padilla: So that it's clear that I totally agree with you.

Sara: I wish I could believe you.

Padilla: It doesn't matter. You don't have any power to do anything.

Sara: No, but it would be comforting to think that if we give you a heart, it's not going to be wasted.

Padilla: They're the ones who'll decide that.

Scene IV

Col. O'Neill enters without knocking.

O'Neill: What are you doing here?

Sara: I was checking on the patient's condition.

O'Neill: You're not a doctor. I gave orders that only absolutely necessary staff were to enter.

Sara: I'm part of the transplant team.

O'Neill: Get out and don't violate my orders again.

Sara: This is not the army, Colonel.

O'Neill: This is my prisoner.

Sara: And what are you afraid of? That I'm going to be more persuasive than your torturers?

O'Neill: Leave here at once.

Sara: I am going to tell Dr. Reitz about this.

She leaves. Padilla has observed this with a slight smile.

Padilla: You really got the social worker angry.

O'Neill: She's just a malcontent who doesn't know how to enjoy the many benefits this society offers her.

Padilla: (Applauding.) Bravo, you know the libretto well.

O'Neill: I'm glad to see you're in a good mood.

Padilla: If you keep giving speeches like that, maybe they'll promote you. And, who knows, perhaps you'll wind up directing the CIA or FBI.

O'Neill: I'm a career soldier and my goal is to defend our democracy.

Padilla: Even if you have to kill.

O'Neill: You all think like that, that the end justifies the means.

Padilla: You all is a lot of people.

O'Neill: Don't play like you're a dummy for me, Padilla, because I know your case history. You're one of the ring leaders of an Al Qaeda cell in the United States.

Padilla: Well, if you have the evidence, charge me. Take me to court and show that I'm a terrorist.

O'Neill: Everything in due time. First, you need to confess.

Padilla: You wish. I'm just a devout Moslem.

O'Neill: Who wants to be a martyr.

Padilla: You guys want to make me a martyr.

O'Neill: We're going to make you confess; you know it.

Padilla: What else do you need to do to make me do it?

O'Neill: You have no idea.

Padilla: I'm going to die on you during the interrogation.

O'Neill: We'll revive you until we get the whole truth.

Padilla: What truth? The truth of the oil companies, the truth of the Zionists or your henchmen's truth? If not, maybe all of them together make up your truth.

O'Neill: It's a shame you're so weak because I'd just love to beat that cynical smirk off your face.

Padilla: More fisticuffs? You never learn.

O'Neill: The one that never learns is you, shithead terrorist. (He grabs him by the gown.)

Padilla: Come on, O'Neill, choke me until I stop breathing. Don't stop. Come on. Kill me.

A knock at the door. O'Neill lets go of Padilla. He tries to recompose himself.

Scene V

O'Neill: Come in.

Rodgers: Colonel, excuse me for the interruption. They told me you were in the hospital and...

O'Neill: What can I do for you?

Rodgers: I've got the document ready you asked me for for the transfer of funds.

O'Neill: Give it to me.

Rodgers (He hands him an envelope.) And I want to tell you how much I appreciate your generosity to the hospital.

O'Neill: That's okay.

Rodgers: It really exceeded our expectations.

O'Neill: That's enough, Rodgers. We'll talk about this in private.

Rodgers: Oh, yes sir. So long, and excuse me again.

He hurries out of the room.

Scene VI

Padilla: How much did you give them, O'Neill?

O'Neill: That's none of your business.

Padilla: I only want to know how much I'm worth.

O'Neill: It's not for you, imbecile. It's for our country.

Padilla: Yeah, sure it is.

O'Neill: And as far as I'm concerned, you're worth nothing.

Padilla: Wrong answer.

O'Neill: You're worth what you know, not you as a person. You couldn't be more loathsome and repugnant.

Padilla: Don't keep on insulting me, I could get very angry and *kaput*.

O'Neill: The fewer the dogs, the less fleas there are.

Padilla: Without me, you don't get your promotion.

O'Neill: You're not going to die. That artificial heart will keep you alive as long we need for it to.

Padilla: Until a real heart turns up.

O'Neill: That's correct.

Padilla: Listen, O'Neill. Why don't you have somebody who's compatible with me killed? That way you'll have your heart without delay.

O'Neill: Your heart.

Padilla: You're the one who needs it. It will be an instrument at your service. As for me, I'd die in peace.

O'Neill: I doubt it. You can't die peacefully if you've got dead people hidden in your closet.

Padilla: You should know about that.

O'Neill: Why don't you just save all your comments and give me a detailed statement about your accomplices? It would go a lot better for you, I assure you. We will leave you here until the transplant and then, if we verify your statement, I can recommend a lighter sentence. Furthermore, we can give you a new identity and you can begin a different life, far away from this senseless war.

Padilla: ... Look, O'Neill, I would like to begin a new life, yes, a life where you don't persecute people because of their beliefs and where you're not born into deprivation and hunger. But, of course, you can't understand that.

O'Neill: How you like to listen to yourself.

Padilla: A life without refugee camps, without massacres like those at Sabra and Chatila, without abuses and without...

O'Neill: Without terrorists that kill thousands of innocent people.

Padilla: We agree on that.

O'Neill: Really?

Padilla: Only I'm thinking about Hiroshima and Nagasaki and you about New York.

O'Neill: The first was a war.

Padilla: And what's this?

O'Neill: Are you going to confess?

Padilla: I've got a proposition for you.

O'Neill: Shoot.

Padilla: If you save yourself your worthless comments and tell me why I was arrested, I promise that I will intercede for you before Allah. In addition, I'll recommend a lighter punishment and you can even begin a new life, fishing in the rivers of Indiana and, who knows, why you can forget this dirty war which contaminated even your thoughts. What do you say?

O'Neill: Go to hell, Padilla.

He turns his back to him and leaves.

Padilla: You sure are touchy.

Scene VII

Meeting room. Wiley and Lepowicz enter abruptly.

Lepowicz: I can't believe you're in favor of that nonsense.

Wiley: Saul, there are situations in which we have to forget ourselves and think about the common good.

Lepowicz: What common good? That of the terrorists who want to finish off Israel?

Wiley: No, man, ours. Yours and mine.

Lepowicz: By giving a transplant to an assassin?

Wiley: So he'll confess.

Lepowicz: But he would get to live and he doesn't deserve to.

Wiley: Of course not, but it's only for him to talk and reveal his accomplices.

Lepowicz: It's repugnant to me just to think that I would be the one to do this operation.

Wiley: If you don't do it, we'll call another surgeon.

Rodgers, Moore and Reitz enter.

Reitz: We need to make a decision immediately.

Doris: I thought it was already settled.

Lepowicz: And it's a joke to me when you say we have to forget ourselves.

Wiley: Why?

Lepowicz: Because you haven't been able to forget your son's problem.

Evans and Shumway enter.

Anna: Now we're all here.

Reitz: Gentlemen, Lifelink has notified us that we have a potential donor. At this very moment, they're picking up the injured party who appears to be brain dead and are transferring him to the University Hospital. Although you know that the team doesn't usually make this decision, I invited you here to deal with an extraordinary situation.

Lepowicz: Who's he compatible with?

Anna: He's a twenty six year old male, O positive, 186 pounds.

Wiley: He's perfect for Padilla.

Doris: Durand is his official name.

Wiley: Whatever.

Lepowicz: He's also compatible with Austen.

Reitz: That is the problem. We have two candidates for a single heart.

Rodgers: But we already decided that the special case took priority.

Reitz: We decided to put him on the list, but we didn't foresee this conflict.

Lepowicz: Under equal circumstances, we have to apply the principle of each party getting their just dues.

Wiley: They're not equal circumstances. One is a transvestite...

Sara: That criterion can't be used to choose the recipient.

Wiley: Of course it can. There is a significant moral difference.

Anna: "Moral necessity" refers to "need" and "benefit."

Wiley: The benefit is for the nation.

Lepowicz: It's for a terrorist.

Rodgers: I want to remind you that the Pentagon donated a million dollars for this case.

Sara: They bought us.

Reitz: Gentlemen, let's keep calm. We need to make a decision without delay, but applying our protocol with logic.

Anna: In Daniels, it states that the recipient selection should be fair and that no...

Wiley: We already know what Daniels says.

Doris: I propose that we vote.

Lepowicz: This isn't a selection.

Wiley: That is exactly what it is. We are going to choose one of the two.

Sara: And the other, just throw him to the Devil.

Reitz: Each inclusion is inherently an exclusion.

Sara: I wonder if we would choose Padilla if he weren't a federal prisoner.

Reitz: That is a hypothetical situation. The government is asking us to do a transplant on a man and we have to notify Lifelink that we have a candidate. What do we decide?

Doris: The citizenry must be protected.

Rodgers: And the hospital is getting a major benefit.

Sara: Of course, we just have to sacrifice Austen.

Wiley: That's life, Evans.

Sara: And if Padilla doesn't know anything and as a consequence doesn't confess anything?

Reitz: Another hypothetical case.

Sara: I don't think so.

Reitz: In any case, that doesn't affect us.

Sara: It does affect us because we will have wasted a heart on someone who doesn't want it.

Anna: The patient is rejecting a transplant?

Sara: Have you already forgotten what O'Neill said?

Wiley: We're getting off topic.

Lepowicz: And the donor?

Anna: I already said he's a man...

Lepowicz: What other information do we have on him?

Anna: He died in an auto accident on Interstate 66.

Reitz: That information about the donor is irrelevant for the decision we're going to make. We've never taken it into consideration.

Anna: What I can tell you, Dr. Lepowicz, is that he is a single male, in good health, no addictions and no contagious diseases. He's been a registered organ donor for two years. If cerebral death can be corroborated, there is also a liver that can be used for another transplant recipient.

Reitz: I want to remind you that I brought us together to deal with a situation which we have never previously confronted.

Lepowicz: As a surgeon, that decision is solely mine.

Reitz: I don't want it to be only one person's, so as to avoid prejudices or preferences that may interfere with the choice. That's why I told Col. O'Neill that the meeting was just between us.

Wiley: There's no alternative; we've got to do the transplant on Padilla.

Doris: Durand. And I agree.

Rodgers: Me too.

Anna: It's inevitable.

Sara: Nothing is inevitable.

Reitz: For or against?

Sara: I don't want to participate in this decision. You all decide.

Retiz: Lepowicz?

Lepowicz: ...I'll do it only because other lives can be saved.

Reitz: Anna, notify Lifelink that we have a recipient. Lepowicz, go to the University hospital to do the tests for compatibility and antibodies. Have them send Padilla to the operating room.

Doris: Durand. Remember. Durand.

Everyone leaves rapidly.

Scene VIII

Padilla's room. Nurse Cooper enters.

Richie: Baby, you apparently have connections in heaven. Or some saint is protecting you.

Padilla: Allah takes cares of his followers.

Richie: It's the same thing. You hit the ground running.

Padilla: My mother wouldn't agree. What are you doing?

Richie: We're leaving.

Padilla: Where are we going?

Richie: To the operating room.

Padilla: The accident.

Richie: Accidents. Your luck led them to choose you.

Padilla: They chose me?

Richie: Yes, there's another patient that deserves that heart, but it's for you. Bingo!

Padilla: You sound bitter.

Richie: Look, honey, don't cause me more pain. I've enough just having to take you to the operating room. If it was left up to me, I'd throw you out the window.

Padilla: It's obvious I don't have many friends around here.

Richie: What do you expect if you're stealing the heart for someone who was here before you?

Padilla: I didn't ask for it.

Richie: But they gave it to you.

Padilla: I can't do anything about that.

Richie: You could die.

Padilla: ...Who's the other patient?

Richie: A young man.

Padilla: Friend of yours.

Richie: You might say that.

Padilla: Richie, I'm sorry.

Richie: And what good is that to me? Sorry isn't going to save Louise.

Padilla: That's true, but I want you to know if it were in my hands, your friend would get the heart.

Richie: But it's not in your hands.

Padilla: No, but... I'm going to pray that another heart becomes available.

Richie: You believe that Allah is going to hear you?

Padilla: Allah is totally goodness.

Richie: If this happens and Louise is saved, I swear I'll become a Moslem.

Padilla: You don't have to do that.

Richie: Fact is I'd look beautiful in that scarf that you all wear. And the beard would look great on me.

Padilla: (Laughs.) You're funny.

Richie: You know, your attitude surprises me.

Padilla: Why?

Richie: I don't know, I've been told you all persecute gays and kill them.

Padilla: Some extremist sects think like that and there are some countries that are very conservative, like Saudi Arabia.

Richie: You see?

Padilla: Here too there are places where they're persecuted and I know that some homosexuals have been killed.

Richie: Hate crimes.

Padilla: That's it. So it doesn't depend on the religion but one's attitude toward life.

Richie: And you don't...?

Padilla: I don't think like that. We're all Allah's children.

Richie: Kid, you're a box full of surprises.

A knock at the door. Anna and Reitz enter.

Anna: Richie, quickly, to the operating room. They're waiting on you.

Richie: Okay, baby, it's over. Heading for the slaughter house.

Reitz: Good luck, Mr. ... Durand.

Padilla: Ha!

Richie leaves pushing the gurney.

Scene IX

Padilla's room. Reitz walks toward the window. Silence.

Anna: Are you worried?

Reitz: I'm hoping we've made the right decision.

Anna: There's no turning back now.

Reitz: No. But I'm left with a deep sense of uneasiness.

Anna: It's natural. It's been a very difficult case.

Reitz: We've violated our own ethics, Anna. We've invented a patient and we give him the first heart that comes along.

Anna: No one will find out about it.

Reitz: We will and that is already terrible. The precedent is extremely dangerous.

Anna: Don't torment yourself, Alexis. We did what we could.

Reitz: No we didn't. We gave the heart to someone who isn't going to benefit from it.

Anna: Others will.

Reitz: That's not the purpose of our program.

Anna: No, it definitely isn't.

Reitz: And they're going to kill him, Anna. We're saving him so they can give him a death sentence.

Anna: Truth is this makes absolutely no sense.

Reitz: In the future, someone will come up with a new reason for us to forget our principles. And what will we do then? What will we use as an excuse to refuse them?

Anna: Don't get ahead of yourself. Maybe this will never happen again.

Reitz: I sure hope not, but I'm afraid this case will haunt us forever.

Anna: You're right.

Reitz: Was it worth it, Anna?

Ann: I don't know. Maybe we'll never know.

Reitz: That's the worst part.

Long silence.

Anna: Well, let's get a little distance from this. How about me inviting you for a drink so you'll stop beating yourself up.

Reitz: Yeah, I can be a masochist, can't I?

Anna: In my apartment. Let's meet when we're finished here.

Reitz: ... It's a deal.

They leave. The room is empty for a few seconds. The lights dim and only the window is visible. Night falls and then it dawns, indicating the passage of time.

Scene X

Padilla's room. A week later. Richie enters pushing a bed in which Padilla is awake. Richie places the bed just so.

Richie: Okay. Now you're in your private parking space.

Padilla: Thanks.

Richie: You're recovering quite nicely.

Padilla: That's what they tell me.

Richie: When they move you from intensive care (ICU) to a private room, it means you're getting close to being released.

Padilla: Their going to release me into captivity.

Richie: Don't be so negative, kid. With that new heart, you're ready for life.

Padilla: What life?

Richie: Whatever comes along. It's always better to be alive.

Padilla: I'm not so sure of that.

Richie: Oh, I've heard that before. A déjà vu.

Padilla: That's my future, a déjà vu.

Richie: Who knows? Maybe a miracle will occur.

Padilla: I don't believe in miracles any more.

Richie: Baby, if Allah hears you he'll excommunicate you.

Padilla: Ay, Richie, you're getting your religions mixed up.

Richie: Why they're all the same. If you do what they tell you, they reward you and if you don't follow the rules, they punish you.

Padilla: It's not that simple.

Richie: I don't know, but I'm one of those who's getting punished.

Padilla: The condemned of the earth.

Richie: That's it. You're reading my mind, eh?

Padilla: ...And your friend?

Richie: The same. Waiting. Hoping.

Padilla: For another accident.

Richie: Maybe for another miracle.

Lepowicz enters.

Lepowicz: Excuse me. I didn't know you had a visitor.

Richie: I was just leaving, Dr. Lepowicz.

Richie leaves.

Scene XI

Lepowicz walks toward the window.

Lepowicz: I'm your surgeon.

Padilla: What's your name?

Lepowicz: Saul Lepowicz.

Padilla: A Jew, right?

Lepowicz: That's right.

Padilla: That must have been hard for you to do.

Lepowicz: You can't imagine how hard.

Padilla: A Jew saving the life of a Moslem.

Lepowicz: And even worse, a terrorist.

Padilla: If you say so. Tell me, did your hand tremble?

Lepowicz: It shook, but I was doing my duty.

Padilla: Of course, you swore to save lives.

Lepowicz: That's right, even the enemy's.

Padilla: I'm not your enemy.

Lepowicz: You're a terrorist who detonated bombs in Israel and killed several of my brothers.

Padilla: So you believed O'Neill's stories?

Lepowicz: Your name has been linked to numerous assassinations and attempted assassinations.

Padilla: I've never been charged with anything.

Lepowicz: That doesn't make you innocent.

Padilla: Nor guilty either.

Lepowicz: Then, how do you want me to be happy for saving the life of someone who is still persecuting and massacring my brothers.

Padilla: I don't want anything. And let me tell you your brothers often persecute and massacre my brothers.

Lepowicz: In self defense.

Padilla: That's what mine say, too.

Lepowicz: You all are seeking the destruction of the people of Israel.

Padilla: We're only looking for a place for the Palestinians to live in peace.

Lepowicz: You can't live in peace with weapons in your hands.

Padilla: Agreed. We see eye to eye.

Lepowicz: Look, I didn't come here to look for points we have in common.

Padilla: Well then, tell me what you came for.

Lepowicz: ... You have a huge responsibility.

Padilla: Because of the heart you transplanted?

Lepowicz: Because of that heart.

Padilla: Tell O'Neill that, so he won't waste it.

Lepowicz: I'm telling you because you're the one who's alive thanks to it.

Padilla: Not for long.

Lepowicz: That's your responsibility.

Padilla: Don't you understand, I'm a prisoner. I'm in their hands.

Lepowicz: What I want you to understand is that your life has changed.

Padilla: I don't see the change. Outside there are guards. O'Neill will come and take me away to interrogate me. In the end, they will kill me. There's no change.

Lepowicz: There is because you've received a special heart.

Padilla: I imagine that they're all special.

Lepowicz: I became upset when I found out that a donor for you had appeared. Something was bothering me, like I had a splinter sticking me in the brain. I carried out the operation like an automaton, but my discomfort didn't go away. The next day I began to find out more about who the donor was. Something was guiding me, a vague certainty that mysterious forces were leading me to a crossroads, a strange premonition that the order of the universe had changed. When I read the article about the accident on Interstate 66, I held my breath. It wasn't possible, and nonetheless, it was true.

Padilla: Oooh, this is a long story.

Lepowicz: The person who donated his heart so you could go on living was a Jew.

Padilla: (The sardonic smile disappears from his face.) Why are you telling me this?

Lepowicz: He was a Jew; do you understand? One of those that you persecute and assassinate saved your life.

Padilla: I've never killed anyone.

Lepowicz: You now have inside you a Jewish heart. The ironies of fate!

Padilla: (Deep sigh.) You're not making this up, are you?

Lepowicz: My mind isn't capable of imagining this paradox.

Padilla: What things life has in store for us!

Lepowicz: But the bitter taste didn't go away when I found out who the donor was. On the contrary, it got worse.

Padilla: And that's why you've come to me.

Lepowicz: Yes, finally I understood. You now have an enormous responsibility to bear. You're no longer, you can't be, a Muslim fanatic who hates Jews and battles to exterminate them. You are now also Jewish, thanks to that heart that's pumping blood through your veins.

Padilla: So I'm a Jew, too.

Lepowicz: And as such, you can't keep attacking Jews, because you would be attacking yourself.

Padilla: Two in one and one in two.

Lepowicz: The double of one is always half of another.

Padilla: A gift of fate.

Lepowicz: An offering for life.

Padilla: You know what the problem is, Lepowicz? Neither you nor I control the threads of this drama. With my Jewish heart, I continue being a Muslim prisoner. And they're going to torture me and drive me crazy unless I confess what has never happened..

Lepowicz: That's possible. But you're not the same person now.

Padilla: Col. O'Neill is going to find your theory interesting.

Lepowicz: He doesn't matter to me, only you do, because you're the one who can make a difference.

Padilla: How?

Lepowicz: By following your heart.

Padilla: You think I'm going to change my way of thinking?

Lepowicz: The heart talks, believe me. Listen to it.

Lepowicz leaves. Padilla is perplexed, stunned.

Scene XII

Padilla alone. He stands up with difficulty and walks to the window.

Padilla: Is this a message from you, Allah? What do you expect of me? Or is it a trap, to see if I go astray? What to do? Who am I in the final analysis: a Hispanic from the South Bronx who forgot his Caribbean roots, an enemy combatant according to the authorities, a Moslem by choice or a Jew by accident? How am I to understand this, Lord? What can I do with so many identities? Who am I to be loyal to? Why me? What should I do now that the wait is over?

The door opens. O'Neill enters with two soldiers.

O'Neill: Vacation's over, Padilla. Take him away!

The lights begin to dim as the soldiers approach Padilla. Only the window remains illuminated, converting the characters into shadows. An uncertain music accompanies the fading light, mixing prayers, pleas, Caribbean rhythms and an imposing military march. The march imposes itself over the other rhythms as the

Curtain Falls.

Bert Patrick is a Professor of Spanish at Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, KS. He has published articles and delivered papers on the Spanish American novel and Hispanic theater, art and film. He previously translated Mexican novelist Sergio Galindo's novel *Polvos de arroz* as *Rice Powder*. In 2003, he was a Fulbright Fellow in Kazan, Russia and has been the recipient of three grants from the Kansas Board of Regents and the Kansas Humanities Council.

Translation for Production Roundtable

In August 2008 Allison Horsley and Adam Versényi organized a roundtable entitled "Translation for Production: Difficult Dialogues and the Art of Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration" for the annual conference of the Association of Theatre in Higher Education in Denver, Colorado. The roundtable departed from the notion that the art of staging a translation reflects the art of the theatre itself: collaboration. While a translator remains in dialogue with the source text throughout the process of translation, as other collaborators come aboard, the dialogue surrounding the translation itself changes to reflect the needs of production and accommodate new perspectives. What challenges face a director, actors, designers, choreographer, playwright, dramaturg, and translator when moving a piece of translated theatre or performance text through the production process? How do collaborators from different disciplines view their role in a translation process, and how do they develop a shared language to achieve their common goals?

By opening a dialogue between theatre practitioners from different fields we hoped to discover how those different perspectives affect participation in the process of translation, gain new insights into how collaborators may improve communication with one another in the process of production, and expand what translation for performance means from others' perspectives. In a world increasingly reliant on shared language, it seems particularly timely to raise a conversation about how we come together as artists to share stories.

Participants in the roundtable included directors, dramaturgs, and playwrights whose working languages included English, Spanish, Russian, and German; and whose approaches to translation focused on the "text" of translation, cultural adaptation, bilingual communication, and

the challenges faced by those who translate centuries-old texts for modern audiences. The dialogue amongst the participants was wide-ranging, lively, and fruitful for all concerned. With the next couple of issues *The Mercurian* will publish participants' notes for the roundtable. We begin with Jason Yancey and Kathleen Jeffs different approaches to staging Spanish Golden Age plays, and Robert Gander's experience of re-imagining Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi* for a contemporary audience.

“Translation for Production: Difficult Dialogues and the Art of Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration,” by Oliver Mayer at the ATHE 2008 Conference, Denver, CO, August 2008.

Let me begin with an anecdote more revealing of my own personal limitations than anything, yet hopefully illuminating the essential problem with translation today.

When my breakout play *BLADE TO THE HEAT* had its first international production in Mexico City at the Teatro Lírico, a Mexican translator was hired (unbeknownst to me) to turn the play into act-able Spanish. We never worked together. The first time I saw his version on the page I knew we were in trouble. I learned Spanish in high school and thanks to several Latina girlfriends, so I was no expert; yet I knew that the play simply didn't flow. The original text is laced with street Spanish, curses and *dichos*, many of which are highly regional and don't necessarily make a lot of sense to a Chilango audience, so the translator had a real conundrum: how to translate Spanish in an English language text back into Spanish? As stated, the problem mostly made this translator throw up his hands. However, one moment stands out. A particular section of the play is a veritable cornucopia of Spanish taunts and curses. The translator's solution was hilarious to me, because his ultimate Mexico City curse was a decidedly English “Fuck you!!” It brought the house down every time.

Even with the success of this one moment, the truth was that the translation didn't get the *fillin* of the play.

The larger truth is that our own limitations in English, Spanish or any language (not to mention archaic versions of our own mother tongue) keep us from quite getting the transformed (as well as translated) text. You can feel the difference on the page, and you just can't get away from it onstage.

We find this problem in Shakespeare productions when directors feel the need for an update – a kind of translation in itself – in time period, costume, or in myriad other ways. The urge to make the experience of a text immediate, present, now and new is always right; but the actual updating of text can lead to altered, disconnected, effects.

Translation is not always determined from language to language; within our own American English historical canon we must make choices based on our own contemporary historical moment. Our intentions as translators become paramount, and they ought to be the original intentions of the text, of the original writer, transformed and translated as best as possible to our present sense of ourselves.

This is not easy! Translation becomes adaptation when the intentions shift. The discomfort extends from our own selves shifting in our seats to our forbears rolling in their graves.

Let me argue for a gestural translation that, regardless of update, focuses on translating 1) the spirit, 2) the action, 3) the accent, and most importantly, 4) the immediacy.

John Steinbeck used the phrase “ferocious with life,” in a different but related context, and this is the way to approach a contemporary translation so that it is not simply textually true, but has the gesture and dimensionality of the original experience. Translations must be ferocious with life.

It may seem obvious to say that one translates more than simply words, but it must be said. The language becomes informed by the discovery of what is really happening. Herein lives the possibility of discovery as the translator begins to unearth the dramatic actions beneath and beyond the words themselves. Sexuality, passion, and the inevitable lies that characters tell one another (and the audience) live in the gesture more than the words themselves.

Translation is a kind of time share; ownership is simply not the same. It is a hybrid style of living – in this case, living inside an already existing text -- making it politically, culturally and linguistically comfortable. It is about being inclusive – albeit for a short period of time – to the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings that comes when the gesture matches the other aspects of translation.

Being ferocious with life means that we are true to context – the original one and our own now – and that we find every possible way to reflect and refract light through the text as one would a prism. Where the light bounces is not up to us, even though we hopefully have intentions for every single moment of the translation. We intend strongly, but then we must let go and let the dramatic action play out.

Spirit, action, accent and immediacy make us feel and give actors a chance to play. When this comes together, the text can be in almost any language and we as an audience will understand the play on our very deepest levels.

Oliver Mayer is Professor of Dramatic Writing at the University Of Southern California School Of Theatre. He is the author of *Blade to the Heat*, which premiered at the Public Theater in New York City. *Dark Matters*, his newest play, will receive its world premiere at San Diego Repertory in the 2008/2009 season. He is a recent winner of a USC Zumberge Award for the creation of a new original six-play cycle.

Translation for Performance: Another Chekhov Play?

Recently, I have come to understand the significant difference between the ability to speak Russian and the ability to speak Russian *as a theatre practitioner*. Over the last five years, I have been engaged in a project, commissioned by Oregon Shakespeare Festival, to complete new literal translations of Chekhov's four major plays for adaptation by the theatre's former artistic director, Libby Appel. Initially I attempted to convince the theatre not to hire me for the project because I didn't feel adequately fluent to take on one of the world's greatest writers in his own language. I hold a BA in Russian, but translating Chekhov was something else. I told them that I could recommend some native speakers for the job, and they countered that they wanted a theatre person. It occurred to me that what I lacked in Russian authenticity I made up for in theatre practicality, and as a working dramaturg who once interned in the OSF literary office, they knew that. I accepted, and to date we have completed *The Cherry Orchard*, *Seagull*, and *Uncle Vanya*, and I've recently started work on *Three Sisters*.

Our first collaboration began in the summer of 2004, with *The Cherry Orchard*. Having never translated Chekhov before, I was unsure of which Russian text to use as a base because I was unsure of how much, or little, Soviet rule affected publications of Chekhov. I began with four published Russian versions of the play, one of which boasted pre-Revolutionary lettering, and I compared them. Seeing no significant differences aside from the reinstatement of material censored at the time of the play's premiere, I settled on the most thorough Soviet version I could find, and simply started at the beginning, with a massive dictionary and a couple of grammar primers by my side. From there, I improvised.

Rather than viewing my literal translation as a "clean" copy of the play for Libby's use as a jumping-off point, I saw it as an opportunity to share the dramaturgical equivalent of extensive vacation photo commentary. I included as much information as I possibly could so that Libby could see what I saw. For many words, I provided a choice between synonyms in English, separated by slashes, and Libby chose from those or came up with her own. If I was at a loss for the English word or phrase, I took all the space on the page I needed to explain the phenomenon

I was viewing. If a word was colloquial or obsolete, if usage was formal or informal and it was significant, I noted it.

Approximately nine months later, I delivered 75 pages of the following to Libby Appel and Oregon Shakespeare Festival:

GAYEV. The train was two hours late. What is that? What way of doing things is that? [Gist: Is that a way to run things?]

CHARLOTTA. (*To PISCHIK*) My dog even eats nuts.

PISCHIK. (*astonished*) What do you know! [Pischik says this phrase ALL THE TIME – each time I’ll just note it with “what do you know” but depending on style, it could be something like: “Fancy that!” “Get a load of that!” “I say!” “Just think!” “You don’t say!” or “Imagine that!”]

Everyone exits, except ANYA and DUNYASHA.

DUNYASHA. We grew tired of waiting for you [coll.]... (*She removes ANYA’s overcoat and hat.*)

ANYA. I did not sleep on the way [journey] for four nights... now I am very cold. [I am frozen]

After I sent Libby my translation and notes, she spent time at the Oregon coast reconciling her previous knowledge of Chekhov Country with my added commentary. She returned with a draft of her adaptation:

GAYEV. The train was two hours late. Is that a way to run things?

CHARLOTTA. *(to PISCHIK)* My dog even eats nuts.

PISCHIK. *(astonished)* What a world!

Everyone exits, except ANYA and DUNYASHA.

DUNYASHA. We've been waiting for you forever... *(She removes ANYA's overcoat and hat.)*

ANYA. I didn't sleep on the journey for four nights... now I'm freezing.

I pored over her version, comparing it to my translation, then the original, and noted places in which I felt she deviated too much from what I viewed as being the gist of the Russian. As a dramaturg, I noted words or phrases that seemed to strike an odd note in context. After rounds of discussion in person and over email, and further research on specific words, contexts, and various outdated Russian billiard games, we went into rehearsal in January of 2007. The cast contributed to the occasional changing of Libby's language choices in the play, as did Libby's own direction of her adaptation. This new version was received well by audiences and theatre practitioners alike, and we began discussing which play to do next.

I began work on *The Seagull*, the title of which Libby has now adjusted to *Seagull* with my hearty support, in the fall of 2007, and felt slightly more comfortable in what seemed at that point to be more familiar territory. I began to notice the similarities in speech patterns between characters in each of the plays, sometimes corresponding to age, sometimes corresponding to world view, and always reflecting what felt, to me, to be the central conflicts at work in the play. *The Cherry Orchard* reveals a changing civilization in the sharp contrast between the styles of speech employed by Gayev as compared to that of Lopakhin. *The Seagull* struck me as surprisingly clean and modern in its dialogue, more European in word choice, and felt to me like

an effort to articulate something unspeakable using theatre as an imperfect microphone . *Uncle Vanya* felt alive and human, as lush and ephemeral as the forests Astrov tries to preserve.

In looking at these plays in Russian over the last five years and trying my best to make sense of what I see there, I have discovered the following: a) Chekhov is very funny, often in a wicked, awfully human way. Just when someone is about to get what he or she wants, someone else comes into the room and blows that dream out of the water; b) it is either very easy to anticipate the next line because the dialogue flows logically or it is impossible to anticipate the next line because someone is continuing a conversation you didn't know he or she was having; c) these characters might lie to themselves but they do not, convincingly, lie to one another very often. While none of the above are observations limited to a reader of Russian, they are elements of Chekhov's writing that seemed more pronounced to me in the translation process. In each of the plays, I fell in love with a different character for whom I had previously never cared. I loved Gayev in *The Cherry Orchard* for his useless lyricism and good heart just as I loved Marina in *Uncle Vanya* for her industriousness in the face of lethargy. I loved Masha in *Seagull* for her straightforward speech, as I loved Treplyov for writing such dense language for Nina to speak in the play-within-a-play.

While I believe that Chekhov is a writer whose works will stand the test of time, he is also a writer whose reputation has suffered in the hands of all of us who have tried to shoehorn his plays into the style of language we expect from them. I do not mean to suggest that other translators have done a disservice to Chekhov in their efforts to communicate his ideas to American audiences, but rather there need to be more translations, more often. Regardless of their language of origin or destination, Chekhov's plays need to be translated and re-translated as often as possible to reflect and predict the language of the current theatre and its audiences.

Allison Horsley is an assistant professor at University of Denver, where she teaches dramatic literature and playwriting. In addition to her work with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Allison serves as dramaturg for all companies of JERSEY BOYS, and has worked as a dramaturg at Yale Repertory Theatre, Center Stage, Dallas Theater Center, La Jolla Playhouse, Denver Center Theatre Company, and the Eugene O'Neill National Music Theater Conference.