

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 8, Number 1 (Spring 2020)

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

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

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the pandemic-delayed Spring 2020 issue of *The Mercurian: A Theatrical Translation Review!* I hope you and those close to you are staying safe and sane. As all theatrical translators already knew, and the pandemic proves once again, despite our different languages and cultures we are all globally connected. I look forward to a time when our theatres can re-open and artists can reach out to audiences in all the myriad modes of creation. Perhaps even by producing some of the plays in translation published in *The Mercurian!*

The issue begins with Brishti Guha's translation of an excerpt from Mahendrarvarman's seventh century Sanskrit play *Intoxicated!* from India. *Intoxicated!* is a satiric one-act that depicts the drunken exploits of a mendicant from an ascetic order associated with Siva and his girlfriend as they search for his lost begging bowl made from a skull. From East to West, the seventh century to the present, there have always been religious figures pursuing decidedly non-spiritual lives. As Guha's introduction to the translation makes clear, certain highly literary aspects of the original Sanskrit text meant to be sung by the actors have been incorporated into the English dialogue to make them more accessible to a contemporary audience.

Intoxicated! is followed by David Lisenby's translation of Cuban playwright Gerardo Fullea León's children's play *Rwandi*. This charming play uses playful language and characterization to tell the tale of a runaway slave boy as he journeys to freedom and maturity. Lisenby's translation of *Rwandi* takes the opposite tack to Guha's translation of *Intoxicated!* as he retains the simple rhyme schemes of the original Spanish songs in the text and captures the Afro-Cuban spiritual tradition that pervades *Rwandi's* journey.

As this issue begins in the East with a seventh century Sanskrit play, we round out its plays in translation with one from the fifth century West with Brian Vinero's translation of the Ancient Greek Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Where *Intoxicated!* and *Rwandi* show us aspects of Hindu and Afro-Cuban spiritual practices, Ancient Greek tragedy was itself a religious ritual meant to transform its audience as that audience acquired knowledge. Like *Intoxicated!* and *Rwandi's* use of song, *Iphigenia at Aulis* also contains Euripides' choral odes that were meant to be sung. Vinero's approach to Euripides' play is to render it all, both spoken text and choral odes, in rhymed verse in iambic pentameter. He has also chosen to craft his own versions of the play's missing opening scene and of its extant closing scene that is inconsistent with Euripides' style. Readers can compare his approach with *Iphigenia at Aulis* to Emma Pauly's translation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*, published in *The Mercurian* Vol. 7, No. 4 Fall 2019, where she chose to render the spoken text in that play in prose but the choral odes in verse, and also had to contend with a missing chunk of the original Ancient Greek.

The issue continues with Rebekah Maggor's review of two books on Arabic theatre, *Sentence to Hope: A Sa'dallah Wannous Reader*, translated and introduced by Robert Myers and Nada Saab, and their edited volume *Modern and Contemporary Political Theatre from the Levant: A Critical Anthology*. Long time readers of *The Mercurian* will recall previous publications of Arabic theatre including a review of Maggor's own

volume *Tabrir Tales: Plays from the Egyptian Revolution* edited with Mohammed Akbakry published in *The Mercurian* Vol. 6, No. 3 Spring 2017, Roger Allen's translation of Sa'dallah Wannous' *Soiree for the Fifth of June* in *The Mercurian* Vol. 5, No. 2 Fall 2014, and Hannah Amit-Kochar's article, "Performing Arabic Plays on the Israeli Stage," published in *The Mercurian* Vol. 1, No. 1 Spring 2007.

The issue concludes with Advisory Board member Neil Blackadder's review of *Seven Plays of Koffi Kwahulé: In and Out of Africa*, translated by Chantal Bilodeau and Judith G. Miller. Blackadder's own translations Rebekka Kricheldorf's *The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killers* and of Thomas Artz's *Chirping Hill* can be found in *The Mercurian* Vol. 1, No. 3 Winter 2008 and Vol. 5, No. 1 Spring 2014 respectively. Readers interested in further works by Kwahulé can find Jill MacDougall's translation of his play *Bintu* published in *The Mercurian* Vol. 1, No. 2 Summer 2007.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can be found at: <https://the-mercurian.com/>.

As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 8, No. 2 Fall 2020 will be October 1, 2020.

—Adam Versényi

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“Intoxicated!” An Excerpt from *Mattavilasa*

By Mahendravarman

Translated by Brishti Guha

While still in high school, I came across a book on the history of Sanskrit literature (a topic my mother was then researching), and was enthralled by the vibrancy of the plays and stories mentioned there. Ever since, I made it a point to read as much Sanskrit literature as I could while keeping up with my studies (and later, my career) in economics.

I first read Mahendravarman’s *Mattavilasa* (an excerpt of which is translated here) many years ago and was immediately captivated by its humorous and irreverent tone. When I used to narrate the plot of the play to my friends, they found it incredible that a seventh-century Sanskrit play would feature people (and, what’s more, people belonging to religious orders) getting drunk and getting into all kinds of scrapes afterwards. One of the reasons I chose this play to translate (apart from the fact that I personally like the original very much) is that it drives home the feeling that people have not really changed at all over time. In many ways, the play has a contemporary, cosmopolitan feel to it. Besides, modern readers (both eastern and western) often view characters from ancient literature with excessive reverence. We think of wise sages and indomitable warriors. This play, in contrast, does not treat even its main characters with any reverence, but shows them along with all their failings (and does so in quite a gentle spirit). This was another reason why the play attracted me, and why I chose to translate it. I had also noticed that the playwright uniformly poked fun at the habits of “fake holy men” (and women) regardless of which particular cult or order they belonged to. So, it didn’t seem to me that the playwright was prejudiced against a particular religion.

While the original Sanskrit play has a lively exchange of dialogue (which I have done my best to capture in the translation), the speakers sometimes speak in verse (especially of a descriptive nature), and long rolling compounds are used. Rolling compound words and sporadic verses were standard in Sanskrit plays of the time, and convey a graceful and poetic quality to readers well-versed in Sanskrit. However, literally translating compound words into English would have made for a very stilted and awkward sounding translation. I have focused on conveying the meaning and spirit of these words, without sacrificing readability. I have also rendered the verses in plain prose. This makes the characters’ speeches sound more natural and will probably make it easier for performers, as well. I have chosen to use rather informal language in my translation, which I felt is in tune with the subject matter of the play. Another issue I encountered during my translation was that the play sometimes casually references religious symbols or stories well-known to an Indian audience, but which western readers might find rather puzzling. I had to choose how much explanation, if any, to insert. I have chosen to retain these portions (slightly abbreviating them when necessary) with a few brief footnotes for context.

Mahendravarman was a king from the Pallava dynasty, who ruled in seventh-century South India from 600 to 630 AD. He was known for writing farcical plays, building rock-cut temples, and chasing away invading neighbors. *Mattavilasa* is his most popular play.

Brishti Guha has a PhD from Princeton and is an associate professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. She is an economist in love with literature. Besides publishing economics papers in international academic journals, and sometimes writing for the popular press, she has published (or is due to publish) translations, retellings, and essays in *Samovar*, *Sci-Phi Journal*, *Eye to the Telescope*, the *Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review*, *Empty Mirror*, *Ezra*, and *Jaggery*.

Intoxicated!

Cast of Characters

Satyasoma: A skull-bearing Saivite mendicant

Devasoma: His girlfriend

Act 1

(Satyasoma and Devasoma enter)

Satyasoma (*drunk*): Darling, it's true that asceticism makes one charming. You've done the ultimate penance. And you're looking more beautiful every second. Your face is breaking out in a sweat, and your arched eyebrows are quivering; your gait is restless, you're laughing without a reason, and your speech is slurred. You roll your reddish eyes passionately one minute, and look blank the next. Your hair falls carelessly on the edge of your shoulders, and the garlands in them are coming apart.

Devasoma: Are you saying I'm drunk?

Satyasoma: What did you say?

Devasoma: Nothing.

Satyasoma: Am *I* drunk, then?

Devasoma: Hey, why is the floor spinning? I'm falling down. Catch me!

Satyasoma: Here you go, Somadeva. (*tries to catch her, and falls down*) But darling, are you angry with me? You're moving away.

Devasoma: I guess Somadeva gets angry easily. She's keeping her distance though you're bowing and scraping in front of her.

Satyasoma: Aren't you Somadeva? (*Thinking*) Oh no. You're Devasoma.

Devasoma: You like this Somadeva so much that you're calling me by her name!

Satyasoma: Darling, that was a slip of the tongue. Blame the wine.

Devasoma: You're lucky you've got something to blame.

Satyasoma: Drinking is ruining my life. Ok, I've decided. I'm going to abstain from today.

¹ This play was set in seventh-century Kanchipuram (a city in south India). At the time, many different religious cults coexisted in southern India. Siva was one of the major Hindu deities, and there were various cults associated with him. The two characters that appear in my translation belong to an extreme religious order associated with Siva. The ascetics belonging to this order were supposed to lead lives of simplicity and meditation, depending on charity for alms. Buddhism existed at the same time, and Buddhist monks and nuns were also supposed to lead similarly austere lives in monasteries and nunneries. However, there were always some people in every religious order who took advantage of the public's willingness to support them, and instead lived eminently non-spiritual lives, in the pursuit of wine, women and wealth! The play is a light-hearted satire making fun of such characters.

Devasoma (*tearfully*): Oh no! Please don't break your vows² on my account!

Satyasoma (*embracing her joyfully*): Glory to my lord Siva! He's shown me this: wine, women, and weird clothing bring eternal bliss!

Devasoma: I've heard the Buddhists speak of a different route to salvation.

Satyasoma: They're a muddled lot. They've confused cause, action, and effect completely, and by doing so, they've shot themselves in the foot. A Buddhist would tell you that a happy end may require painful means: ergo, happiness equals pain.

Devasoma: Let's not talk about them.

Satyasoma: Good idea. Why talk about those who torment people by forcing them to practice chastity, shave off their hair, eat at fixed hours, and wear dirty clothes? Just talking about them feels so wrong: I need a drink or two to purify my mouth after all that.

Devasoma: Then let's go to another tavern.

Satyasoma: Sure, darling.

(The two roam about looking for liquor shops)

Satyasoma: Our Kanci's³ splendid. Listen to the clouds on top of those towers thunder like drums. It's spring all around the year with those flower shops and beautiful girls, with their tinkling girdles. You know how our sages talk of ceaseless joy, boundless and unrestrained: well, I think they could find it right here, drink it up with their senses.

Devasoma: Kanci's like the goddess of wine, full of sweet music.

Satyasoma: Look, darling. This tavern's just like a yajna ground.⁴ The pillar there is the sacrificial post: the drinks are the ritual soma. Those drunks are the priests. Their glasses are the sacrificial vessels, those roasted skewers are special offerings, their drunken talks the Yajur mantras,⁵ their singing the Sama hymns,⁶ their leather bags the sacrificial ladles. And the tavern owner is the fellow in charge of the sacrifice.

Devasoma: And the alms that the two of us can get here are like the sacrificial portion set aside for Rudra.⁷

Satyasoma: I'm enjoying watching these drunkards dance. They're trying to dance in tune to drumbeats, but every time they reach out to adjust a garment or necklace out of place, they lose the rhythm. They're making up for that by moving their hands and eyebrows in time to the music, though!

² His vows to drink alcohol regularly.

³ Kanchipuram, the town where the play is set.

⁴ The ground where religious ceremonies were conducted and offerings made to the gods.

⁵ Chants from one of the Vedas, used in religious rituals.

⁶ Chants from a scripture, intended to be sung aloud.

⁷ Another name for Siva.

Devasoma: Spoken like a true connoisseur.

Satyasoma: Hail the all-powerful goddess of wine! A cup of wine can remove the sting of rejections, soothe lovers' quarrels, and energize the young—not to mention helping with lovemaking! I don't believe people who say that Siva burnt up Cupid into ashes with the flame of his third eye. I think that wine was born from the extreme heat of that glance, and that's why it excites all our minds so!

Devasoma: That makes sense. Siva's a god who helps the world. He wouldn't do anything to destroy it.

(The two start drumming on their cheeks)

Satyasoma: Alms please, dear lady!

(From behind the curtain) Here are some alms for you.

Satyasoma: Let me take that. Darling, where's my skulls?

Devasoma: I don't see it either.

Satyasoma *(thinking)*: We must have left it in the tavern we went to before. Let's go back and look for it.

Devasoma: What do we do? It's a sin to reject alms offered with respect.

Satyasoma: We can deal with this crisis. We don't have our skull, so we'll just take it in this cow's horn.

Devasoma: Ok. *(Does so)*

(The two roam around looking for the skull)

Satyasoma: I don't see it here either. *(Sadly)* Hey folks, have you seen our begging bowl? You haven't? What's to become of me? A skull-bearing ascetic without a skull! I'm ruined. That skull's been with me forever, keeping me company while I ate, drank, and slept. I miss it like a friend. *(Falls down and beats his head)* Oh well, it's just a token after all. I'm still a member of the skull-bearing order. *(Gets up)*

Devasoma: Who could have taken the skull?

Satyasoma: Darling, it had roast meat in it, so I'm guessing either a dog or a Buddhist monk.

Devasoma: Well, let's look for it all over the city.

Satyasoma: Ok, darling.

(The two walk about)

(A Buddhist monk enters with a bowl in his hand)

⁸ Mendicants of this order used a skull as a begging bowl.

Rwandi

By Gerardo Fullea León

Translated from the Spanish by David Lisenby

Presenting the Odyssean saga of an enslaved boy's flight from the plantation to freedom in nineteenth-century Cuba, Gerardo Fullea's *Rwandi* (1977), *Ruandi* in Spanish, is the only work of children's theatre among his two dozen plays. It is also his most widely performed play, having been staged in Latin America, Europe, and the U.S.—in Spanish, German, and French, though never in English, to date.

Rwandi amuses young audiences with playful language, often through intercalated poetry meant to be sung, at the same time that the play raises awareness of historical oppression with present-day implications. Translating *Rwandi* to English presented challenges in rendering rhyme, meter, and abundant figurative devices, which are not merely ornamental flourishes but rather engender a vibrancy that radically humanizes victims of slavery's brutality. An additional issue in the translation process was the need to preserve the play's Cuban cultural specificity. For example, in English for U.S. audiences, the word "plantation" evokes scenes of cotton in the American South, where there should instead be sugar cane on a Caribbean landscape. Nonetheless, "plantation" appropriately calls to mind the racist system of human exploitation that for centuries bolstered the national economies of both the U.S. and Cuba, and so functions well in translation. In other instances I have retained some Spanish in the English text, such as the word *palenque* to signify a community of runaway slaves deep in the hinterlands. Since its meaning is clear in the context of the play, and since English lacks a parallel term, and since replacing it with "community of runaway slaves deep in the hinterlands" undeniably breaks the rhythm and tone of the text, I decided the Spanish should remain. Similarly, English audiences will hear a smattering of Spanish in character names and references to Cuban flora and fauna, such as the ceiba tree and the jicotea turtle, both of which are imbued with mystical powers by Afro-Cuban spiritual tradition. In this way I have sought to present "the foreign as foreign," as translation theorist Antoine Berman endorses, in a way that is in balance with the imperative that *Rwandi* be pleasurable and readily comprehensible to audiences of all ages in (mostly) monolingual performance in English.

Productions of *Rwandi* have adapted the published playscript's twelve episodic scenes in selective ways, sometimes abridging dialogue within scenes and sometimes omitting whole episodes altogether, allowing flexibility for constraints such as cast size, show length, language, and musical resources. The 2015 German tradaptation *Ruandi und Levi*, for example, elides the title protagonist's encounter with a lecturing owl named Lechuza Profusa, a section packed with comedically mangled proverbs, diminutive expressions, and eye-roll-inducing puns that resist close translation. And a 2007 production by New York's IATI group skips the near-death dream sequence that brings nearly all characters together at once, and thus necessitates more actors than the show's cast contained. In consultation with the playwright and also with the director and actors of the Jewell Theatre Company, whose April 2019 developmental reading of this translation was instrumental for honing the characters' voices in English, I decided to retain all elements of the published Spanish version of the play, reissued most recently in 2015 by Editorial Gente Nueva. Along with *Rwandi*'s history of playwright-sanctioned

adaptation in production, the playscript's sparse stage directions invite, if not require, each production to interpret the work anew.

Gerardo Fullea León (1942, Santiago de Cuba), winner of Cuba's 2014 National Theatre Award, is the author of twenty-four plays and was General Director of the Rita Montaner Theatre Company in Havana from 1988 until his 2014 retirement. He belongs to a generation of writers and artists who came of age following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, receiving his theatrical training in the Primer Seminario de Dramaturgia taught by Argentine playwright Osvaldo Dragún from 1961 to 1963, which aimed to cultivate a generation of revolutionary playwrights in Cuba. In addition to *Rwandi*, Fullea's *Azogue* (1979), *Plácido* (1982), and *Chago de Guisa* (1989) also reclaim the humanity of black and *mulato* protagonists in slaveholding Cuba who journey, literally and metaphorically, from the plantation to the palenque. These plays redress racial injustice while navigating restrictions on freedom of expression in Castro's Cuba, where overtly highlighting present-day racial inequalities would be anathema to the Revolution's claim to have eradicated racism in the 1960s, and therefore politically implausible. In this context, historically-set theatre prompts audiences to draw parallels between the dramatized past and their own lived realities in the present. The attention to marginalized subjectivities extends from Fullea's colonial-era plays to include works with contemporary settings such as *Remendios* (1993), *Betún* (1995), and *Remolino en las aguas* (1999), which tackle issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation in twentieth-century settings. Fullea's most recent piece, a monologue in the voice of nineteenth-century writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda titled *La pasión desobediente* (2014), foretells the leveling of inequalities rooted in gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and nationality, and in so doing synthesizes the ethos of his socially-engaged theatre developed over more than a half century. In the whole of Fullea's work, the celebration of his characters' humanity is always also a celebration of their Cubanness. He resides in Cerro, Havana.

David Lisenby (Ph.D. 2012, University of Kansas) is Associate Professor of Spanish at William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri. His academic articles and literary translations appear in *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, *Chasqui*, *Afro-Hispanic Review*, *Words Without Borders*, *Two Lines*, *Latin American Literature Today*, *Cuba Counterpoints*, *Island in the Light / Isla en la luz*, *Exchanges*, and elsewhere. An article forthcoming in *A Contracorriente* explores how Gerardo Fullea's historical theatre—including *Rwandi*, *Plácido*, and *La pasión desobediente*—enacts a struggle for justice through prophetic and poetic language, where the inequities of Cuba's slaveholding, colonial era fuel an ongoing struggle to realize egalitarian ideals on the island.

Rwandi

For Jesús Abascal, in living memory.

Friends, I wish not to write a single line without at least an ounce of love. But it isn't easy, I assure you. Love—like that small seed we give to the earth in just the right season to one day grow into a stalk of corn, a lemon tree, or a rose—requires our effort, our care, and our hope, to till the soil and nourish the earth. And later the seed will need protection from wind and cold, from storms and weeds, from hungry wanderers and daring insects. Among these dangers is where we are headed. So grant me pardon, friends, if I cannot simply speak of love, for now, as I'd like. When the small tree you play around today grows full size and gives peaceful shade and sweet fruit, when the strong young trunk becomes thick and tough and legendary, remember me then. And please, when that time comes, share with me; tell me about the colors and flavors, the smells and the splendor of that full grown love that will one day flourish among humankind.

A play in twelve scenes

Characters (in order of appearance)

Poet	narrator figure, of the audience's present time
Father	bumbling plantation owner, around 40 years old
Belina	kind daughter of the plantation owner, near Rwandi's age
Grandma Minga	wise older slave, born in Africa
Rwandi	determined 11-year-old slave protagonist
Tina	Belina's doll
Duke DeSleuth	troubadour guard dog tasked with tracking Rwandi
Ceiba Tree	appears to Rwandi as a many-armed monster
Lechuza Profusa	absurd, loquacious, professorial owl
Pepo	vulture, thief, and aspiring fighter pilot
Pupo	Pepo's counterpart
Ms. Jicotea	resolute turtle (a Cuban slider)
Ms. Piedra	adventurous rock
White Scorpion	a dispassionate threat

Girl of the River water spirit with flowing, treacherous hair
Sun hard-working celestial orb

Time and place: Mid-nineteenth-century Cuba, Matanzas province, on a sugar plantation and in the forest beyond.

Scene I

POET:

The tree is not the mountain,
Like a drop is not the river;
Give me your hand in friendship,
And we will be mountain and river.

A petal is not a rose,
Like a bird is not a nest;
Give me your hand in friendship,
And we will be rose and nest.

A pebble is not the beach,
Like the cloud is not the sky;
Give me your hand in friendship,
And we will be beach and sky.

Poet addresses the audience directly.

Good evening to you all! Today I want to tell you the tale of a boy. He was not a prince or a philosopher. But he could have been someone who passes by and then builds a tower that makes us raise our eyes in amazement. Or perhaps a caring teacher. Or maybe one who strings together those strong and delicate sounds, silences, and words we call a song. Oh, but the boy in our story did not live in these days that shine on you and me! His was another time: gray, full of hurtful sounds, of countless injustices; and also full of yearning, thirsting for light among many darknesses and many men. This boy was a slave. No, I am not going to tell you what a slave was. You'll learn that much better in books that explain the painful mark of history. Today I wish only for us to walk alongside this boy – for us to know his dreams, his doubts, and his worries in the senselessness of his time. But no more words for now. Let us go nearly two centuries back, into the big house of a sugar plantation in the Cuban province of Matanzas. One evening at the end of summer when the sky is tinged red, and a warm, sorrowful breeze covers all. That is the time when...

Father enters with a whip in his hand, followed by Belina and Grandma Minga.

FATHER: No, no, and no. It is decided already!

BELINA: But why, Daddy?

FATHER: Because he is irresponsible and unbearable.

BELINA: What's so bad about dreaming?

MINGA: That's the question! Yes sir!

FATHER: Quiet. Enough! A slave boy who tends the oxen cannot dream. No, ma'am.

BELINA: And where does it say that?

FATHER: Well, how should I know! That's just the way it is.

BELINA: Daddy, but don't the oxen dream too?

FATHER: But an ox is an ox, like a fish out of water is a filet.

BELINA: And Rwandi is Rwandi!

MINGA: That's right. That's it to a T.

FATHER: (*to MINGA*) You be quiet! (*to BELINA*) Don't call him that. That ox-boy's name is Martín. MAR-TÍN! Who's ever heard of a king named Oscar or a dressmaker named Penelope? Would it ever occur to you to give a cook the beautiful name of Isabella? Never! Every job has its name, and for every name there is a job. And a slave boy who leads the oxen by the nose, because that is the task on the plantation he poorly performs, that slave should be called the ox-boy Martín. And that's it! No more commotion or notions of anything else!

BELINA: But isn't Rwandi a nicer name? Isn't it? He's from Rwanda, a place way over there, they say, in the middle of Africa almost, where his parents came from. Daddy, have you ever been there? On the maps...

FATHER: (*interrupting*) No, I've never even thought about it. I've never even thought about thinking about it. And don't try to go teaching me about geology.

BELINA: It's geography, Daddy, geography.

FATHER: (*to MINGA*) And what are you laughing at? (*to BELINA*) Geography, geology, none of it matters one bit if that Martín, if that Twandi, as you call him, takes a nap and the oxen go wherever they feel like. Do you know how much it would cost me if one of those carts turned over? No? Well, at least as much as a hundred dresses like that one you've got on. And that's what matters!

BELINA: I have too many anyway.

FATHER: Don't be silly! A pretty girl needs lots of dresses, lots of ribbons, lots of flowers.

BELINA: Daddy, isn't a rose a pretty flower?

FATHER: Well, I guess. So what?

BELINA: A rose always wears the same clothes, and still... Look how pretty she is!

MINGA: That's right. Yes sir, I agree.

FATHER: *(to Minga)* Mind your own business. *(to Belina)* There's no sense in arguing. You don't know anything about anything. And no doubt that Lwandi deserves some of the credit.

BELINA: He's my friend.

FATHER: You mean to say your toy or your servant. Who's ever seen a nice little girl who's friends with a slave boy?

BELINA: Well, look. We teach each other lots of things. I taught him the six times table and the four times table...

MINGA: And just like that.

FATHER: And what about five?

BELINA: He doesn't know that one.

FATHER: But, but... But it's unheard-of, outrageous to learn times six after times four! Things should be learned in order. Otherwise, it's like wearing your raincoat in the house. Ridiculous! That Kwandi, or whatever he's called, won't ever learn anything serious. Nothing! Not Latin or any other dead languages.

MINGA: Listen to that gibberish.

BELINA: Well, look. He knows the language Grandma Minga speaks really well. And it's beautiful! If you heard it, I know you'd think so. And guess what. He also knows the names of all the trees in the forest and what they're good for. Listen: cedar leaves are for headaches; avocado flowers are for making Tuesdays happy; plum blossoms are for washing your hair; canistel branches are for holding up paper; and carnation stems...

FATHER: For giving you both a good spanking! And enough of the superstitions and silliness.

Belina walks away, grumbling.

MINGA: Belina! Belina!

BELINA: *(buttering him up)* You know what, Daddy? When I listen to you, it sounds like a thousand lovely goldfinches singing at once.

FATHER: Well, now.

BELINA: And when you talk, like right now, it's like a bright star in the night sky.

FATHER: Well, well, well.

BELINA: So, Dad... Daddy, will you let Rwandi stay here?

FATHER: No! Noo! It's not possible. I already promised him as a gift to your Aunt Leonor.

BELINA: He's a person, not a present. People can't just be given away.

FATHER: Who taught you those arguments? Who?

BELINA: Daddy...

FATHER: (*interrupting*) You see? I can't have one moment of peace. This has got to be Swandi's fault. We've got to pull this thing out by the roots. I've been too soft letting him play with you when he's done working. And look how it's turned out! That's it. He'll leave for Havana. And you, to a boarding school. (*to Minga*) Move aside, old witch!

BELINA: Daddy, Daddy, you know what? When you sing, the goldfinches hide.

FATHER: What?

BELINA: And when you talk like now, the bright star goes out.

FATHER: Ahh! Rebellion in my house! Rebellion! The blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh. My little girl treats me like a villain! And she takes sides with that Fwandi, Twandi, Nwandi, Mwandi... And... Martín will leave for Havana!

Scene II

POET: Word spreads quickly of what the plantation master has ordered, like a sharp wind that enters through a window and knocks over vases, scatters photographs, and chills the blood in your veins. Rwndi is going, that same afternoon, to see the woman everyone calls Grandma Minga, the most respected and wise among the slaves on the plantation. He finds her in the back of the garden where the butterflies and picuala flowers are, as calm and tender as fertile earth.

Grandma Minga prepares her cigar while Rwndi watches her, sitting on the ground.

MINGA: (*singing*)

You who come from the land
Where I first opened my eyes,
Tell me, does that tree still give shade,
The fruit tree I learned to climb?

You who come from the war
Where my brother died,
Tell me, does that tree still give shade,
The fruit tree I learned to climb?

You who come from the mountains
Where I grew up near the sky,

Tell me, does that tree still give shade,
The fruit tree I learned to climb?

(*addressing Rwandi*) Through the roots of the tree we can know its trunk; and through its branches, the sky. And your sky, my child, is very cloudy. The master has made his decision, and begging and crying won't do any good.

RWANDI: Grandma Minga, I don't want to go.

MINGA: A moment comes when we all must say goodbye to what we love. My Rwandi, I too, one day not long from now, will leave this path you see and will start a journey toward an ocean where no one arrives awake.

RWANDI: And are you going to take me with you?

MINGA: Not then, my Rwandi, not then.

RWANDI: Grandma Minga, take me with you. Take me, please. I'll behave. I promise. I won't shout anymore at naptime or lick the dessert plate or trap lizards in the backyard. But take me, Grandma Minga! Take me with you!

MINGA: My Rwandi, I can't. I won't be able to.

RWANDI: Bah!

MINGA: Rwandi, come now...

RWANDI: (*interrupting*) I won't act like this anymore either, Grandma, you'll see. And especially not in front of grown-ups. But take me, please.

MINGA: My Rwandi, that trip is almost always taken alone, even when hundreds go with us.

RWANDI: Grandma Minga, I don't understand. I don't understand.

MINGA: You don't have to know everything today. You will learn in time. You'll learn.

RWANDI: Grandma Minga, I want to know everything now, everything.

MINGA: You are very impatient, my Rwandi, very impatient. But I've already told you everything you should know for the time being.

RWANDI: Grandma, don't confuse me on purpose. You haven't said anything to help me understand.

MINGA: Humph! For now it is enough for you to know just enough. Listen, the water in the river looks blue and dark. When you swim in it, it's clear and sweet. But when you drink it, it's smooth and cool and calms your thirst. Right now, you are only looking at the water.

RWANDI: So, Grandma Minga, what should I do?

MINGA: Start the journey. Swim in the water of life. Drink it a sip at a time, without hurry but without hesitation. Until you're able to see the difference between water from a well and water from a river—between water from a pond and the brilliant, babbling stream that flows from a fresh spring.

RWANDI: Grandma. Grandma Minga. Why don't you take me to the *palenque*, then? Huh? In the meantime, huh? Deep in the forest and up in the hills! You say all the people who live at the *palenque* used to be slaves like us before they made it there.

MINGA: Humph! First you would need to learn a lot of things.

RWANDI: Tell me what, Grandma Minga. Tell me what!

MINGA: I've told you a thousand times, Rwandi, a thousand times. Don't you think I would have taken you away from this place if I could have? If I could have... Goodness! If I could!

RWANDI: Maybe I can get to the *palenque*!

MINGA: You? By yourself?

RWANDI: Yes, me. Don't laugh! I'm almost twelve years old, and if you tell me how, who knows if... well...

MINGA: You wouldn't be able to yet, my Rwandi. You wouldn't be able. Think about how sad it's made you to see the scars on my back from the overseer's whip, years ago, when I tried to run away? No, gentle hugs are not what I've received from my masters, for wanting to be free like the birds and the wind.

RWANDI: (*upset*) Grandma Minga!

MINGA: No, no need for that. Humph! Do you know what? A drop of water doesn't make a river. And one man alone doesn't build a bridge or a town, Rwandi. Look, the birds in the air might seem small and fragile, but they're very strong. And do you know why? Because they always go together, and that makes them powerful. When you are older, you and the other house slaves in Havana will gather together, and you'll understand then what I'm about to tell you. When...

POET: And so the good Grandma Minga reveals her secrets once more, one by one, to restless Rwandi. What dreams, what yearning is awakened in Rwandi by the wise words, these beautiful legends of the ancestors' struggle? We do not yet know. But let us see what happens a little later, while the masters eat dinner with clattering plates and forks, and in the slave quarters the day is closing with weariness and a crust of bread. At that hour, in some corner of the big house...

Scene III

Belina, with her doll Tina, gives a sack to Rwandi.

BELINA: Here you go.

RWANDI: Is everything here?

BELINA: Everything.

RWANDI: The rope?

BELINA: The rope too.

RWANDI: Good... but... are you crying?

BELINA: No, it's Tina.

RWANDI: Did she come to say goodbye?

BELINA: Yes. Guess what! She lost a tooth yesterday.

RWANDI: Really? You should take her to a doctor fast, in a carriage.

BELINA: In Havana they were going to teach you to be a carriage driver.

RWANDI: I wouldn't like that job.

BELINA: Take me with you, Rwandi!

RWANDI: I can't. They'd be after us in no time. You're too young. The *palenque* is far away. I already explained.

BELINA: You already explained. Everything is explained in books too, and sometimes I don't understand anything.

RWANDI: Because you probably don't know how to read them.

BELINA: I do know. Who do you think taught you to read, huh? But what I mean is books can only tell you some things. Like, they tell you autumn is the season that comes after summer when the leaves turn yellow and the days get shorter. But they don't tell you that in the afternoons you get tired and don't know what to do and get a lump in your throat. And suddenly you don't know what to say and your hands can't hold onto your toys and your ribbons, and your eyes get cloudy from sadness like when you have to say goodbye to your grandparents.

RWANDI: I should go, Belina.

BELINA: Stay a few more days. Maybe if I talk with Daddy again I can convince him, and he'll leave you here on the plantation.

RWANDI: So I can keep minding the oxen my whole life and get hunchback before I turn 20? And when I'm big and something goes wrong with an ox, get put in the stocks for punishment?

BELINA: No, Rwandi. No.

RWANDI: Or turn all quiet and dumb like the ones who serve in the big house? "Yes, master, I'll clean your boots till they shine like glass. No, master, I don't need rest, ever."

BELINA: Rwandi...

RWANDI: And if I say anything to complain, get whipped by the overseer?

BELINA: No! Go quick, Rwandi. Wait, take this.

RWANDI: What is it?

BELINA: The green ribbon you used to like in my hair. Keep it. It'll help you.

RWANDI: Thanks. Bye, Belina.

BELINA: Rwandi!

RWANDI: Yes?

BELINA: Aren't you going to say goodbye to Tina?

RWANDI: Oh, Tina! (*sings or speaks*)

Something in you tells me
This dream can really be:
Like a wise word
Grandma whispers in my ear.

BELINA: (*sings or speaks*)

Something in you tells me
Good luck can really be:
Like a long nap
In the house we shared.

TOGETHER:

And that's why when I look
Into your eyes I see:
Something in you tells me
Without you I can't be here.

RWANDI: (*giving the doll a kiss on the forehead*) Goodbye, Tina. Take care. You're... you're the nicest, smartest doll I've ever met in my life. I'll come back. I'll come back to... to find you and explore the forest together and hold your hand while we run through the trees. Goodbye! (*leaves running*)

BELINA: Bye, Rwandi. Bye, bye, bye...

POET: Run, Rwandi, run and don't look back because if you did you wouldn't be able to go on after seeing the warm tears in Belina's misty eyes. Nor would she understand that damp shaking in your hands. Run, Rwandi!

But before leaving the property of the plantation, near the fence that surrounds the yard, Rwandi meets...

Scene IV

The dog Duke DeSleuth growls when Rwandi enters with his sack.

DUKE: Grrr. Woof! Who goes there? Who is it? What do you want?

RWANDI: Stop barking, Duke! It's me, Rwandi. Put on your glasses. Don't you recognize me?

DUKE: *(Putting on glasses.)* Ah, now I can smell you. Who wouldn't know that great fence-jumper Racin' Rwandi?

RWANDI: I've beaten you to the road and back plenty of times, Duke.

DUKE: By playing tricks... But... why haven't you ever guessed where I hide the bones, ruh?

RWANDI: That's easy. It's just that I don't want to give away your secret.

DUKE: You don't say. Then where do I hide them, ruh?

RWANDI: Well, under the meat.

DUKE: What wisdom!

RWANDI: Have I upset the great hound Duke DeSleuth?

DUKE: I'm a mutt, sir, and proud to be.

RWANDI: Whatever you say, Mister Mutt.

DUKE: And, changing the subject... What, may I ask, are you looking for around here, outside the slaves' barracks this time of night?

RWANDI: Nothing. Taking a walk.

DUKE: Taking a walk? At this hour? Come on, be honest and admit you came to delight yourself with my singing. Admit it!

RWANDI: No, no. I mean... Yes, yes!

DUKE: Ah, I bet you haven't heard the new one I've written. It's a marvel!

RWANDI: You don't say.

DUKE: Do you doubt it?

RWANDI: No, of course not. Of course not! It's just that...

DUKE: *(interrupting)* Well, listen then. For its international premier, Duke's "Opus No. 43"! *(singing)*

The cat who hunts the mice,
In other words, the mouser,
Is all moused-up at home
'Cause he can't find his trouser.

Ms. Assumption, the frog,
Shows off with presumption
Her lime-green-shaded tail
Which lacks apparent function.

The parrot known as Sebastian,
In order to be a policeman,
Studies in the sheep pen.
The parrot known as Sebastian.

What do you think? Say something. C'mon. You're speechless.

RWANDI: I... I really don't know anything about music. I'd rather...

DUKE: (*interrupting*) Well, you're really on the wrong track. Very wrong. We dogs have a finely developed musical sense. That is, for *our* music, which bothers most adult humans, of course... They're hardened! Canine music is rich in nuance and subtlety. Of all the animals, we are the master singers. Who would dare deny that a bark is ten times more melodious than a canary's song? Only a canary would, of course. Haven't you heard my "Ode to the Moon"? That has been one of the preferred themes of the dog community for centuries upon centuries. You must not have heard mine. I can sing it for you right now in two hundred sixty-two variations that go from lamenting, passing through vicious, all the way to euphoric.

RWANDI: Not now, Duke. Some other day you can sing them all for me. I don't have time today. I still have a long way to go.

DUKE: A long way? What are you taking besides your feet?

RWANDI: I have to go, Duke, really.

DUKE: What? You're crazy. That's impossible. Does the master know you're leaving?

RWANDI: No, only you and I know it.

DUKE: Now, wait just a minute.

RWANDI: Please don't bark, Duke. Listen. You have to help me.

DUKE: Have to help you what? Turn into a runaway?

RWANDI: Give me a chance, Duke. Aren't you still my friend?

DUKE: I am, but... whippings are whippings!

RWANDI: Maybe not. I've got your alibi right here. Look. (*pulling out a bottle*) Smell it.

DUKE: Aaachoo! Put away that pepper, Rwandi! Put it away!

RWANDI: See, I sprinkle just a little bit over here and over there...

DUKE: And I catch a nasty ailment of the nose.

RWANDI: But now you can say that since there's no moon tonight, you didn't see me. And because of the pepper I sprinkled around, you didn't smell me... Understand?

DUKE: Ok, ok, ok. Anything for friendship. It won't be the first time I've helped a runaway.

RWANDI: I'll always be grateful, Duke DeSleuth.

DUKE: That's what friends are for. Now, remember. Tomorrow when they discover you're missing, they'll make me track you. And even if I can trick them for a little while...

RWANDI: I'll be long gone, Duke, I promise. By that time I'll have already crossed the river.

DUKE: I'll hold them off until evening, ok? If you haven't crossed by then, I won't have any choice but to...

RWANDI: (*interrupting*) I understand. Deal. Put 'er there!

DUKE: The poor stars tonight won't have this tenor to sing and howl to them! Achoo!

POET: And Rwandi takes off, as if he had wheels for feet. The open air fills his lungs and opens his shirt, and his arms feel lighter than ever. He travels quickly, covering a good deal of ground without even losing his breath. He enters the forest he had always dreamed of crossing, when he used to gaze at it from afar while prodding the oxen. There he goes scampering over fallen tree trunks, pushing aside branches and avoiding thorny bushes. There he goes, free and light like the wind.

Scene V

RWANDI: (*stopping*) Whoa! I must be pretty far now. You can't hear the songs from the slaves' quarters. Only some far-off barking and the sound of the wind in the trees. It's so quiet! I'll rest just a little. I'm not one bit sleepy. I shouldn't sleep at night. That's when I can get farther ahead. But if I had some light to see it would be better. It's so dark here. And it's cold all of a sudden! I'll make a little campfire. That's it. No one'll see it from the plantation. Then the cold will go away and I can see... What part of the forest could this be? (*building the fire*) I hope Grandma Minga doesn't get upset when she goes to check on me before bed. No, she'll probably think I'm wandering around the big house or the yard catching fireflies. Those would do me some good in this darkness! I wonder what the *palenque* is like. Will they take me in? Ahh, that heat is so nice!

A mysterious noise is heard. The fire flickers. When Rwandi sees the Ceiba tree, it looks to him like an enormous hundred-armed beast.

RWANDI: Who's over there? Who is that?

CEIBA: That's what I want to know. Who dares light a fire so close to the mighty Ceiba tree?

RWANDI: I didn't know you were there.

CEIBA: Well now you know. What? Did I scare you?

RWANDI: (*trembling*) No. What makes you think I was scared?

CEIBA: Then why are you shaking?

RWANDI: I'm not shaking.

CEIBA: You're not shaking? (*laughing*) Of course not. Ho!

RWANDI: Careful. Don't laugh like that. You'll put out the fire and...

CEIBA: (*interrupting*) ...and then you'll be in the dark again.

RWANDI: You won't do that.

CEIBA: Who says so? Look. Do you see my arms?

RWANDI: Yes.

CEIBA: They're so long, without moving I could smash that fire, and with one of them I could grab you from a hundred yards away if you try to run.

RWANDI: I'm not planning to.

CEIBA: (*laughing menacingly*) Ho! Just one of my fingers can knock down a horse, snatch a kite from the sky, block your way.

RWANDI: Why would you do that?

CEIBA: To keep you from getting where you're going.

RWANDI: I need to go. You have no right to stop me.

CEIBA: Ho! I'm your main enemy, you know. You're no match for me!

RWANDI: I haven't done anything to hurt you.

CEIBA: No? And that fire that could devour me in the blink of an eye? You deserve a good whipping you won't soon forget. And they should punish you with three days in a room alone without seeing anybody. Only bread and water! (*laughing*) Ho! You're already lost. You'll be running back to the slave quarters again, crying like what you are... a naughty, ridiculous boy who thinks he's a hero! A silly, scared kid who stops and turns around as soon as things get hard because he doesn't know what he really wants.

RWANDI: I do know what I want. I do! And I'm not scared. I'm not!

CEIBA: Ho, ho! You're not? Now you'll see! (*Ceiba blows and puts out the fire.*)

RWANDI: What did you do? Why'd you put out the fire?

CEIBA: So you'll go ahead and admit you're afraid.

RWANDI: (*crying*) No, no. Grandma Minga, help me conquer my fear. Help me, Grandma Minga.

Grandma Minga appears.

MINGA: Fear can be the first enemy you find when you start down a path. He can make you believe a rabbit has turned into a beast before your eyes, that the night is never going to end. And even that a simple tree, a Ceiba, looks like the most terrible monster in the forest. If you overcome your initial fear, you'll win a great battle.

RWANDI: How, Grandma Minga? How?

MINGA: Humph! My Rwandi, fear walks only within us. He is not like the cold or the heat. The night gets cold, and we bundle up. The sun presses down, and all of us sweat. But I say, "I am afraid," and no one else feels it. Well, unless they too are stripped down.

RWANDI: Stripped down?

MINGA: Yes, stripped of strength.

RWANDI: And what do you do to be sure you're protected, full of strength, Grandma Minga?

MINGA: Humph! Well, you look for the presence of something that strengthens us, of course.

RWANDI: What?

MINGA: If you are with a friend, it's easy. If not, it's enough to remember someone you love, someone who laughs with you or hopes for what you have to achieve.

RWANDI: Belina!

MINGA: Hmm. Then fear will disappear like magic. It's as simple as a lullaby. We all can do it.

RWANDI: All of us? Me too?

(sings while trying to light the fire again)

The Moon does not want to sleep
On top of the far barren hill.
She wants to sleep on your pillow
Safe from the cold air's chill.

She doesn't want to spend the night
Awake high up in the air.
She wants to be on your blue bed
And play with her light on your hair.

She doesn't want to leave quietly
When morning arrives in the forest.
She wants to stay in your heart
And dream there where it is warmest.

The monstrous Ceiba turns into what it is, a simple ceiba tree. Grandma Minga disappears.

RWANDI: How silly I am! It's just a ceiba tree!

LECHUZA: *(appears wearing a biretta, holding a cane, and speaking with an overly affected professorial tone)*
Bravo, bravo, little boy! You won! And all thanks to my good advice.

RWANDI: Your good advice? With whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?

LECHUZA: Well, with the professor of prosopopoeia, onomatopoeia, and other subjects from Pompeii-a, Ms. Lechuza Profusa!

RWANDI: Ah, nice to meet you. Rwandi, at your service.

LECHUZA: I've heard it all. And you've demonstrated, once again, an important point: that a little teaching, comma, taught by me, comma, forms the foundation for success, period.

RWANDI: That sounds like the moral of a story.

LECHUZA: Well, of course. What little event, without a little moral, would have a little meaning?

RWANDI: Some morals are very boring.

LECHUZA: Little boys like you are what's boring.

RWANDI: More like little stories about little pigeons in little puddles.

LECHUZA: What silliness of yours.

RWANDI: That's what I think about the way you talk.

LECHUZA: Bah! Do you know how my little grandmother used to sleep?

RWANDI: I can imagine. They read her the little adventures of the wise little owl.

LECHUZA: No, little sir.

RWANDI: Maybe the stories of the boastful little lion?

LECHUZA: No and no, sir, no.

RWANDI: Don't get confused, Ms. Profuse, or you'll lose your muse.

LECHUZA: I'm not confused, and much less bemused. And who do you think you are? I have a diploma for something, dis-honorary degree. And I write in perfect rhyme and meter. And even if my words add up to zero, I manage to say them with just the right airs. Surely *(loses her composure)* you don't know my latest brainteaser.

RWANDI: I don't have time to listen to you. Excuse me.

LECHUZA: What a shame! Well, since everything has its moral, here it is...

RWANDI: Not again. Morals are for old women who drink whiskey and boil beans.

LECHUZA: That's enough. I'll sweeten the soup with pepper sauce.

RWANDI: Whatever you want. It's you that'll get food poisoning, not me. Bye, Professor Lechuza Profusa. Pardon me, Obtuse-ah! I mean, Confuse-ah!

LECHUZA: You are atrocious! Listen to me, kid. Don't waste your time on escapades. Stay here conversing with me. You know something? You should go to my school. There I'd teach you proclamation with pretention, and thus you'd forget any previously promulgated pontifications.

RWANDI: You can keep your school! I have a long way left to walk. One day I'll go to a real school.

LECHUZA: What impertinence! I am sorry to have met you. You are impossible, like all boys who believe themselves to be brave. You know what? Petulance must be like a well-tailored little suit, which one pretends to have been born wearing.

RWANDI: There you go with your first moral.

LECHUZA: And here comes the second, quote, "the virtue of staying quiet is known only by those who have no tongue." And I have quite a sharp one.

RWANDI: Let's be done. The first was better.

LECHUZA: And here is the third: do good if you don't want to be done harm by those who care little for you. And I do not care about you.

RWANDI: That's the worst of all. Good-bye.

LECHUZA: You are undeniably mouthy. And your conversation bores me.

RWANDI: We agree on something. See you around, or not.

LECHUZA: Never again. I'm going in search of a mouse. (*proclaiming her garbled proverbs with utter conviction*) As they say, you can lead a horse to water, but the greener grass is always on the right side. Thus the early bird does indeed get worms. Since nothing is more blinding than the soles of your shoes. That's why the fox knows more than a rich man in paradise. Nevertheless, don't put off until tomorrow getting grease for the squeaky wheel. (*Rwandi tries to take off.*) Because in the end, the streetlamp lights the glass house. (*Rwandi escapes.*) Wait, wait, wait, young man, I'm not finished yet. Wait... Bah! Have you ever seen such a thing? He left me with the words still in my mouth. Well, like I was saying, the hunt for the hunter...

POET: Not one more, please. Let's follow our friend. He is continuing on his path, sure that not every lesson is a good one. But, anyway, pardon me. I landed on a moral! Where can he have gone? But... look where he is! He's fallen asleep for the night in a forest clearing, right by a dead *27alenuque27*

tree full of vultures! Why are they observing Rwandi so closely? Why are they flapping around him and his traveling sack? Let's go wake him up. He's rested a good while already. It's getting too late, or very early. In a moment the Sun will show its face and... Rwandi, wake up! Wake up, Rwandi!

Scene VI

Two vultures, the brothers Pepo and Pupo, interrogate Rwandi, frequently talking over one another. They come armed and accompanied by other vultures.

PEPO: It's about time you woke up...

PUPO: ...and paid attention to us.

RWANDI: Have I been asleep for a long time?

PEPO: Be polite and tell us good morning...

PUPO: ...since it's not night or afternoon.

RWANDI: I don't have much time; good morning.

PUPO: Well we don't either...

PEPO: ...and let's get to the point.

RWANDI: But quick. I have to keep going.

PUPO: This is my brother Pepo...

PEPO: ...and my brother Pupo.

RWANDI: What is it you want?

PEPO: That's not the tone you want to take.

PUPO: Here you have to respect us.

RWANDI: Ah, so you two are tough guys?

PEPO: Very tough. Right, Pupo?

PUPO: Absolutely tough, Pepo.

RWANDI: Yeah, well with faces like those, what other choice do you have? I don't have time for this tough guy stuff.

PEPO: Hey, hey, kid, one second.

PUPO: (*blocking his way*) Just where exactly do you think you're going?

RWANDI: That's no business of yours. Grandma Minga says not to waste time on people who act like you two. And I agree!

PUPO: In all my days as a turkey vulture, never have I heard such an offense. And you, Pepo?

PEPO: Never before, Pupo.

RWANDI: Well you have now, and goodbye.

PUPO: Stop right there...

PEPO: ...if you know what's good for you, you'll keep real quiet.

RWANDI: Hey! Who do you think you are?

PUPO: Open that sack right now...

PEPO: ...quick, before my feathers get ruffled.

RWANDI: I'm not going to.

PEPO: Oh, no? Sound the alarm, Pupo.

PUPO: As you order, Pepo.

VULTURES: *(as a military chant)*

Who's that up there in the sky?

Vultures, vultures, see 'em fly.

Man the weapons, man the guns.

Vultures gonna make 'em run.

All the vultures fly in circles, as in a military maneuver, and land in a tree.

RWANDI: Looks like this is getting ugly.

PEPO: And it'll get uglier if you don't go along...

PUPO: ...all of us are ready to attack.

RWANDI: But what do you want? My food? I don't have much.

PEPO: Hand over everything you've got in that sack.

PUPO: All or nothing. The sack or your life.

RWANDI: If that's all it is, I'll gladly oblige. *(opens the sack, looks in it, and takes out a stick)*

PUPO: And what is that? That's...

PEPO: ...not what we want.

RWANDI: But it's what I plan to give you. Now come closer for a taste! *(waving the stick threateningly)*

PEPO: Ah, troublemaker, now you'll see. Fly, Pupo!

PUPO: Ah, rabble-rouser, now you'll see. (*to the other vultures*) Fly, Beto. Fly, Chucho!

VULTURES: (*chanting*)

Up on your left foot, down on your right.
Early every morning, late every night.
Vultures, vultures, where have you been?
Up in the air and down again.

In a choreographed battle, the vultures attack Rwandi like fighter planes, trying to scare him. He defends himself with the stick. They go back to the tree.

PEPO: (*as a radio dispatch*) Lieutenant Pepo reporting to General Pupo on the events of unequal combat, carried out early this morning. The state of the troops: three vultures with slight contusions to the wings. One with lost feathers, two with trauma to the claws. Another with a foot twisted permanently to the right; and a final one with a wringed neck; wrung, I meant to say.

RWANDI: Do you give up?

PEPO: Never! There's a reason we're the toughest vultures in the forest. Right, Pupo?

PUPO: Yep, Pepo. We control the confines of this forest line, including the incline of the pines and the nine signs of Sergeant Porcupine's canines.

RWANDI: I think we're done here.

PUPO: He's tough to pluck, Pepo.

PEPO: I see that, Pupo.

RWANDI: So I'll be on my way. See you later, or not.

PUPO: Operation Intimidation, Pepo.

PEPO: In action.

Rwandi tries to take a few steps. The vultures fly over to him.

RWANDI: And what's going on now?

PEPO: Either you hand over the meat you're carrying in that sack, or we'll make sure the whole forest knows every step you take.

PUPO: When they see us flapping around in a circle in the sky, they'll know where you are. And you'll never make it to wherever you're going.

RWANDI: How about if you just leave me alone?

PEPO: Do what we say. We're hungry.

RWANDI: Me too.

PUPO: That's not our concern.

RWANDI: Look, the meat I've got in here is for eating a little on the way and for giving the rest to the *31 alenque* when I get there. In case they need it...

PEPO: Well, we're not humanitarians, and much less vegetarians.

PUPO: We're carnivores, and pity is not our strong suit.

RWANDI: So I see. Ok, what choice is there? I'll give it to you, but... Take this! (*He hits them with the sack, but they wrestle it away. Rwandi manages to keep the rope, a little food, and some water.*)

VULTURES: (*chanting*)

Down in the mess hall, time to eat.

Got to find something to put in my beak.

The bread was moldy and the meat was fat.

You know darn well I couldn't eat that.

The vultures fight amongst themselves for a bite. Rwandi leaves, disheartened.

POET: Our boy is left with only some crackers and a little water and prepares to continue – because the body can withstand more than the mind imagines, when it feeds on dreams like Rwandi's. So, he keeps going and going. Meanwhile, back at the plantation we find they are already searching for Rwandi.

Scene VII

Father, Grandma Minga, Belina with Tina, and Duke enter.

FATHER: That's what I get for being nice. Do you have any idea how much money I lose each time a blessed slave escapes? Hundreds. Thousands! Practically a wagon full! Argh, they're going to ruin me! It's your fault this happened, you two! This useless old woman and that Fwandi deserve a hundred lashes each.

BELINA: And me too, since I got the meat from the kitchen, the rope to cross the river, the savings from my piggy bank, your old shirt... ah! And some crackers, and, well, yes, my green ribbon.

FATHER: That sounds like quite enough.

BELINA: No, I should have gone with him.

FATHER: Are you hearing this, Minga? Are you hearing this?

MINGA: Humph! I am the one to blame. I answered his questions, told him of my own attempts, prepared him for what's ahead... I never imagined what plans he was hatching. If I'd have known... Ah, if I'd have known! The journey might have taken my last breath, but I'd have gone with him.

FATHER: You're both lunatics, insane. The impudence to talk that way to your master! And the lack of respect for your father! One insolent child and one old woman who can hardly stand on her own two legs. Of course you two would help him.

DUKE: Arf, keep on wasting time. Achoo! That's how Rwandi'll escape.

FATHER: Looks like Duke has his trail.

DUKE: Arf, arf. If I did, I wouldn't tell you. Achoo!

BELINA: So, Daddy, if we find him you'll forgive him and let him stay on the plantation?

FATHER: No! My word is law.

BELINA: I know, Daddy. But laws can be changed. Just for one month, Daddy, just a month. He won't try to escape again. I'll make sure, you'll see. Please.

FATHER: He'll be here just long enough for his stay in the punishment room. And that's it!

BELINA: Daddy, he's just a kid! Don't be mean.

FATHER: Does a kid do this kind of thing?

BELINA: I won't eat ever again, Daddy.

FATHER: You'll get skinny.

BELINA: Or drink water. And I'll throw out my medicine and tear my dresses. I'll never go to school again!

FATHER: Belina!

BELINA: And I won't kiss you when I go to bed.

FATHER: Belina, Belina, Belina. I have to teach that boy a lesson, Belina! What kind of example would it be to the overseer if I go soft? No, don't look at me like that. It's enough already I'm looking for that fool behind the overseer's back. And me being the master! Who's ever seen such a thing? Huh?! And I'm doing it for you. My overseer would have the dogs rip him to shreds, but... (*Belina starts to cry.*) Don't do that. Look... Ok, ok, ok! Aunt Leonor is right that I spoil you too much. Ok, he'll stay here... one more month. But only one month. Ah, and he won't leave the servants' room in the back!

BELINA: But, Daddy! Poor Rwandi!

FATHER: I'm not giving another inch. He'll get bread and water! No more playing around! And, well, we'll see how he behaves. We'll see. And then maybe... We need more young servants in the house and... I'm not promising anything. Nothing at all.

DUKE: Arf, arf, now I'll find him. Achoo!

BELINA: Thank you, thank you! Did you hear, Grandma Minga? Aren't you happy?

MINGA: Yes, I heard. But... should I be happy that Rwandi will be a slave again?

(sings or speaks)

Far from you, my life
Loses all its warmth.
Every evening falls
Without the break of dawn.

Close to you, my life
Loses all its color.
Every evening falls
Without the break of dawn.

Scene VIII

POET: Midday arrives, and the Sun is sending out his strongest rays over the earth, withering roses and moistening foreheads with sweat. Weak and tired, Rwandi still runs and runs. The sun and heat push down on him, more and more, until, tired and foggy-headed, he sits down, feeling sad, to take a rest. Not a breeze is felt, and the last sip of water has run out.

Along with Rwandi and Ms. Jicotea, Ms. Piedra is on stage, though she is not noticed until she moves upon speaking later.

RWANDI: Ah, I'm never going to make it. Never! Poor Rwandi thought he was so strong, and he's just like all the other kids. So weak that sometimes his legs feel like two oxen stuck in the mud. Oh, poor Rwandi and his dreams! Poor me.

MS. JICOTEA: *(standing up next to Rwandi)* But what is this? Have you ever seen such a thing? Such a strong, growing boy feeling sorry for himself like that?

RWANDI: Ah, sorry, Ms. Jicotea, I thought you were a rock.

MS. JICOTEA: What a silly mistake. Me, a rock! You almost drowned me with that blubbing.

RWANDI: I'm very sad, Ms. Jicotea.

MS. JICOTEA: Children must not stay too sad for too long, you know. They must jump, play, study, and sometimes play tricks. That, yes. But sad? That is a dreadful word for a child, dreadful. Grown-

ups can be very sad, yes. Some are sad for what they have. Most are sad for what they don't have. Others, sad just because. But sadness should not be for a child!

RWANDI: I'm tired and don't see how I can make it.

MS. JICOTEA: And all this because of that little worry?

RWANDI: Does it seem so little?

MS. JICOTEA: Miniscule! Minute! It's been sixty-four moons since they told me it was time for the great competition, the unconcluded race!

RWANDI: What is that?

MS. JICOTEA: A race we turtles celebrate every hundred years.

RWANDI: Why every hundred years?

MS. JICOTEA: Because sometimes there are turtles that are running the last race still, or the one before that, or the one before the one before that.

RWANDI: That's crazy!

MS. JICOTEA: Crazy is stopping or falling behind in the race you have set for yourself.

RWANDI: And are there prizes?

MS. JICOTEA: Almost always. But what prize is greater than the chance to participate?

RWANDI: And do some make it to the end?

MS. JICOTEA: Some. By persisting and helping one another. Sometimes when three of us find ourselves together, we decide to call the race and declare ourselves the victors.

RWANDI: And the others?

MS. JICOTEA: They end up accepting it. What choice do they have! And they declare themselves victors too! Or they continue on, lost, because they don't know how to set a goal and reach it.

RWANDI: How many races have you run?

MS. JICOTEA: What a question! In one, of course. You only have the opportunity in life to participate in one race. That's why you have to do it with the most spirit and determination. Understand?

RWANDI: And does nothing stop you?

MS. JICOTEA: They block my way, they slow me down, but they don't stop me. Onward, ever onward. If I let them stop me, I would become sad, like you. And I've already told you that can't be. Of course, it's good to take a rest once in a while.

RWANDI: Really?

MS. JICOTEA: Really. Like the one I took, or you, a moment ago. Take a rest! But now let's get our spirits up and...

RWANDI: (*interrupting*) In no time at all...

TOGETHER: Onward!

(*singing or speaking*)

They met by chance one Sunday,
Ms. Egret and the crocodile.
“Where to in such a hurry,
My neighbor crocodile?”

He's left his safe protection
Under the saffron tree
And, running in such a rush,
Looks less like a croc than a steed.

“I'm in a hurry, Ms. Egret.
I don't have a second to waste.”
“Hold on,” she said, “and tell me:
How can I be of aid?”

The day is growing longer
With dance of shadow and light.
Then with flashes in clouds,
The rain announces the night.

And in case you doubted,
What proves it's true is this pain
In my foot. You see, it alerts me
To earthquakes or hurricanes.

MS. PIEDRA: (*moving*) One moment, one moment. I want to go to the river too.

RWANDI: But... you, Ms. Piedra?

MS. PIEDRA: Of course, what did you think? I'm not going to stay stopped here forever.

RWANDI: But I can't just toss you in my pocket. You're a rock, and you'd weigh me down!

MS. PIEDRA: But you can easily give me a little kick there with your foot. Then I'll go rolling until I make it to the river. It's not far off.

RWANDI: It's not far?

MS. JICOTEA: She's hallucinating!

MS. PIEDRA: You don't feel it?

RWANDI: No.

MS. JICOTEA: Me neither, Ms. Piedra. Are you alright?

MS. PIEDRA: Ah, it seems that you two don't know how to roll toward adventure. What are those faces for? I'm in my good senses. I do feel the river. Or do you believe in that saying, Lucky the rock who neither feels nor suffers? What ignorance with a capital I. I sense the waters of the stream when they come jumping through the trees. I hear them fill the birds' nests with music, releasing the flowers' perfume. If you only knew how I sprout little clusters of mossy green, and my edges dampen with happiness, and I get the urge to fly like a bird, to have pollen so the bees will taste me. Or for someone to throw me from the hilltops to see... all the colors that unravel under the sky, at last! Yes, really. No one knows the way better than the rocks. But, ... well! Look, over here, the moss is fresher, and that's a sign of water close by.

MS. JICOTEA: It's true. I hadn't noticed.

RWANDI: Then let's hurry before it gets dark.

MS. JICOTEA: Go ahead with Ms. Piedra, child, go ahead. We all have our own pace. But hurry! We'll meet again at the finish.

POET: With renewed spirits, our Rwandi goes kicking Ms. Piedra with his foot, and she rolls and rolls happily toward the river. Not far behind, Ms. Jicotea follows them. After walking a while, now almost to the river, in a dense part of the forest, an enormous ugly White Scorpion blocks Rwandi's path. But, let's see what happens to Rwandi. Come on, Rwandi!

Scene IX

SCORPION: (*sharpening his stinger and singing or speaking*)

There can never be anything wrong
With being who I am.
The heartless ones are the others
Who try to put me down.

I have every right in the world
To be just who I am.
The heartless ones are the others
Who try to put me down.

I will show my true colors
By being who I am.
The heartless ones are the others;
They'll never put me down.

Congratulations, kid! Congratulations! I've traveled from the cornfield, where I grew up, in search of some unlucky victim. I've crossed paths with iguanas, centipedes, and bumblebees. And they all flee from my path as if from an impending storm. Imagine if you hadn't happened to pass by. I might have poisoned my own tail with my stinger. Or I might have had nothing to eat but air. But now you've come along. So this is my chance!

RWANDI: Mr. Scorpion, have mercy. Don't hurt me.

SCORPION: I can't take pity. It isn't in my nature. That's just who I am.

RWANDI: I haven't done you any harm.

SCORPION: And do sickness and malice need such excuses to attack? What ignorance, kid!

RWANDI: Let me get to the river. Tomorrow I'll come back here again and...

SCORPION: (*interrupting*) No. I'll lose my stinger and my breath as soon as I strike you, since I'm not so young anymore, but... what can I do? It's who I am!

RWANDI: Nothing can stop you?

SCORPION: Don't get your hopes up. The only thing that could stop me is willpower, but I don't have any. That's for human beings. You humans are different. Thanks to willpower, some of you have gotten out of the worst situations with just a few scars. But me, ... I already told you. It's who I am!

RWANDI: I won't let one little sting stop me. Let's go. You want to see my willpower? I'll show you.

SCORPION: That's how I like my victims, determined. You have no other way out. You won't suffer much. You'll see. It's a short, deep pain. Then you sink into a fog, and... (*Rwandi stomps on the scorpion, though it stings him all the same.*)

POET: The scorpion falls defeated, but our Rwandi suddenly feels the earth spin and open under his feet. An immense, murky warmth rises through his body all the way to his forehead. His hands begin sweating, while his tongue gets drier and drier. And he can neither scream nor move. The name of a friend lingers on his lips. Remembering this name sustains him, prevents him from falling deeper. And then, finally, after a while, no one could say quite when, he feels more relaxed, as if back from a long walk, but changed somehow... a young man entering a new, strange place! A beautiful place where they announce his arrival with trumpets and drums.

Scene X

Rwandi appears transformed into a young man.

LECHUZA: Here comes the great Rwandi!

CEIBA: He makes his triumphant entrance to the royal *palenque*.

BELINA: Rwandi, I've waited so, so long for you. Look how much Tina has grown.

TINA: How are you doing, Rwandi? How are you doing, Rwandi? How are you doing, Rwandi?

RWANDI: She's big now, almost as tall as you.

BELINA: Did you bring her any presents?

RWANDI: Yes, this flower from the forest that smells sweet all night long.

TINA: Ah, how pretty. Ah, how pretty.

RWANDI: And for you, Belina, this smooth scarf the forest spun from your green ribbon I wore on my neck.

BELINA: Thank you. How beautiful!

Grandma Minga enters.

RWANDI: Grandma! Grandma Minga!

MINGA: My Rwandi, my good Rwandi. I knew you would make it!

RWANDI: Grandma, how is your back? Is it better?

MINGA: Completely better, my Rwandi. No whips can hurt me anymore.

RWANDI: Grandma Minga..., is the master here too?

BELINA: Here there are no masters, Rwandi.

RWANDI: There aren't?

MINGA: Here we are all masters and kings! That is to say, free! Kings of ourselves and of those we love and who love us. That is the only worthy kingdom among human beings, the kingdom of love.

BELINA: And today we'll celebrate your arrival by crowning you king of yourself. For accomplishing the great deed of achieving your goals.

RWANDI: I did only what I needed to do.

CEIBA: I have seen you overcome fear.

PUPO: And hunger too. Right, Pepo?

PEPO: Very true, Pupo.

SCORPION: And you even conquered sickness.

LECHUZA: And I didn't stop you with my chattering.

RWANDI: Are all of them kings too?

MINGA: Not yet, but some day they will be, when they mend their ways and fulfill the pure and true designs that nature has for all beings to live in harmony.

Pupo and Pepo interrupt one another.

PUPO: We...

PEPO: ...we learned.

PUPO: Pardon me. You first, Mr. Pepo.

PEPO: Excuse me. By no means; first you.

PUPO AND PEPO: The rules of courtesy and etiquette.

PUPO: You first.

PEPO: No! You.

MINGA: Boys, boys!

PUPO: Pardon me, Mr. Pepo.

PEPO: Excuse me, Mr. Pupo.

LECHUZA: I am attending, every morning and very early, an actual school where I learn properly from books: Ready, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, G, G ... G? What letter's next?

MINGA: Young lady!

LECHUZA: I'll start over. Ready, A, B, C, D, E, F, G ... and Y!

CEIBA: Well I give the best, warm shade to travelers. And by night I shelter in my branches a hundred mockingbirds, six pigeons, one dancing warbler, and two pairs of canaries that never let me rest. But no matter! At any time, if I want, I can... (*gestures threateningly*)

MINGA: (*interrupting*) Madam!

CEIBA: If I want, I can rock them gently to sleep all day.

SCORPION: I've now bitten my own tail twenty-one thousand, four hundred seventy-nine times, in order not to sting anyone else. But how delightful it would be to give one little sting, even if it were just to a delivery boy.

MINGA: Mister Scorpion!

SCORPION: It's who I am!

MINGA: Well, then change! We must try to correct our mistakes and flaws when they harm others. Humph! (*turning to all present*) Do you all promise to do so?

ALL: We promise, Grandma Minga. We promise.

CEIBA: And now, before the dinner and the awards... the great dance!

LECHUZA: Alright, birds of a feather flock together. Take a partner's hand, and let's dance.

MINGA: Now receive our prize, Rwandi, young branch of an old family tree.

RWANDI: So, everything has its reward?

BELINA: Everything!

All the characters sing and dance.

ALL: Yes, the greatest prize is the chance to truly live!

POET: A great party is one where everyone dances, as in a then-distant future, as in a sure and shining present. But between the haze and the happiness, a sweet, quiet voice is heard little by little. And Rwandi wakes up to see himself again as he is in our story: a slave boy, alone and lost in the forest. Yet he finds new strength in that sweet voice, coming not from his dream but from the waking world. He gets up and runs, at first not very fast, and then... quick as ever! There he goes in search of the melodious voice. And now, at last, he finds himself on the bank of a tranquil, babbling river.

Scene XI

The Sun is on stage with Rwandi and the Girl of the River.

GIRL OF THE RIVER: *(singing or speaking)*

My hair is made of silver
And my hands of crystal glass.
My dress is clearest blue
Sewn with coral from oceans past.

See yourself in my tender eyes,
And you will not be lost.
Don't disturb my rushing waters,
For in my arms you'll cross.

RWANDI: Is that you singing with such a sweet voice?

GIRL: Yes, it's me, Rwandi, the Girl of the River.

RWANDI: You know me? You knew I was coming here?

GIRL: A bright star confirmed it at midday: "He is overcoming all obstacles and will be here soon," it told me. And even the breeze has been whispering it through the chattering leaves. We all hoped for you to succeed.

RWANDI: Will you let me cross, Girl of the River?

GIRL: Of course. But be cautious of my hair. It is long and twisting, and you could become tangled and fall down to the bottom where the fish travel among the deep, dark rocks.

RWANDI: I will be careful.

GIRL: Hurry, then. Cross before the sun goes down.

RWANDI: If you let me, I'll cross right away.

GIRL: One moment. What is it you value most among your possessions?

RWANDI: I've lost everything along the way.

GIRL: And have you gained nothing in return?

RWANDI: Life.

GIRL: You can lose it in a second.

RWANDI: But you can also make it count.

GIRL: You are worthy to cross. But you must give me something in return. It is custom. What is it you are wearing around your neck?

RWANDI: It's... a ribbon. A memento.

GIRL: Do you want something more valuable than a memento? Give that to me.

RWANDI: I would feel bare without it.

GIRL: Find another one, by living.

RWANDI: Ok, have it. That's too bad! (*prepares to throw the ribbon into the river*)

GIRL: Do not throw it. Leave it on that rock. Although, if I were you, I would not do so.

RWANDI: I don't understand.

GIRL: Everything is understood in its own time.

RWANDI: You're talking like Grandma Minga.

GIRL: She must be very wise to talk like the waters.

RWANDI: And like the animals and the clouds. She knows so much more than she explains.

GIRL: She is wise, then. (*Rwandi makes it look like he is leaving the ribbon, but he hides it in his pocket.*) And now, Rwandi... (*The Sun begins to hide itself.*)

RWANDI: What's happening?

GIRL: Ah, the Sun is setting. It's late, Rwandi!

RWANDI: Mr. Sun, Mr. Sun, don't hide away yet.

SUN: I'm very tired, Rwandi. Very tired. Since dawn I've had my nose to the grindstone lighting the world. Who do you think has brightened the humble homes and the palaces? Because of me, stalks of grain have sprung up. I have livened the house of the sick, and I've helped time pass for the prisoner and for the guard. And who dried the puddles and the clothes on the clotheslines? Who? Well, it is true I've dallied in the stained-glass windows of churches, but they make my light dance and play! However, I've been kind to the women who stroll with parasols. And I've known to hide myself for a while, behind a cloud, to give rest to those who work in the fields. If I've been tough on you, pardon me, but as you see, I've been toiling away, and now... (*yawns*) I have to go!

RWANDI: Just a little longer, Mr. Sun! Stay a little longer!

SUN: Impossible, Rwandi. Come back tomorrow. I promise to come out, even if it's raining.

RWANDI: Just a few minutes, Mr. Sun, until I get to the middle of the river.

SUN: I can't. I can't, Rwandi. (*fading away*) I'll come back tomorrow. I'll come back. I'll come back... (*disappears*)

RWANDI: What do I do now?

GIRL: Wait, Rwandi. Wait for the Moon to come out.

RWANDI: I need to get to the *palenque* tonight.

GIRL: Is what you are seeking so important?

RWANDI: It is.

GIRL: And if you don't manage to reach it?

RWANDI: If I don't reach it? Well, others that come after will know that someone made it this far. And will want to go further!

GIRL: Now it is I who do not understand.

Duke's barking can be heard, coming closer as the scene progresses.

GIRL: Those who search for you are approaching.

RWANDI: I hear the bark of my good friend Duke DeSleuth.

GIRL: What is he saying?

RWANDI: How strange! He says, "Wait for me. Don't cross." Is he crazy?

GIRL: No, listen carefully. There is joy in his call.

RWANDI: But I hear fear too. Fear that they find me. I should cross now! (*He ties his rope to a rock.*)

GIRL: Wait just until the Moon comes. It's nearly out.

RWANDI: No, I can't wait any longer. They're getting closer and closer. I can't!

GIRL: Don't do it, Rwandi. It's very late already. Look, the ocean's tide is starting to cover the plants that grow on my banks. It's twisting its arms with mine and dirtying my hair with its salt. It's now rising up the rocks, covering the moss like a great dark sheet. Don't you hear it?

RWANDI: I can't wait, Girl of the River. They're very close. I have to go.

GIRL: Oh, Rwandi, if only you had patience! I can't help you anymore.

RWANDI: I can do it. I can do it. My arms and legs have climbed the highest trees. My chest has stayed strong through joy and pain... I know my body can carry me across! (*Holding tight to the rope, Rwandi jumps into the river and crosses slowly while he sings or speaks.*)

The falling sky will soon
Be swallowed by the night.
And I have no one who
Can take me to the other side.

Another day of work
In the fields has left me tired.
And I have no one who
Can walk along my side.

The table now is served
For a single guest to dine.
And I have no one who
Can be here by my side.

GIRL: Careful, Rwandi. Careful, careful with my hair. Be careful!

POET: Rwandi's lost his footing. He's under the water. But look!

MS. PIEDRA: (*appears*) Stand firm on me, Rwandi. That's it, yes. Here I am to help you. And look there; there's another rock. Move your foot to her; she's my friend. Don't fear.

RWANDI: Grandma Minga, I'm crossing! I'm crossing!

POET: Yes, he goes further and further out. He is getting close to the other side now. But what's happening? The rope is failing! Will our Rwandi not make it across? He needs help. The rope has come loose from the rock. And Rwandi... Rwandi is sinking into the water; his head bobs up for a moment, spinning and spinning, and suddenly... It's incredible! Look!

MS. JICOTEA: (*carrying Rwandi, who is riding on her, straddling her shell*) Worry not, Rwandi, worry not. Hold tight to my shell. You won't tip me over. I row with my feet. There we go! We're almost there. We're almost there!

The moon rises.

GIRL: Oh, Moon, beautiful Moon! Shed your light always on young Rwandi!

RWANDI: (*from the other side*) I've crossed! I've crossed! I've crossed! Grandma Minga, Belina, Forest, River, look at me. I've crossed! I've crossed! I've crossed!

POET: And upon bidding farewell to all his friends, with leaps and laughter, our Rwandi goes into the deep forest, out of sight. Good luck, young man, good luck. May your path be friendly and generous. It's not long before the others arrive at the river. All is peaceful now. An immense, cream-white moon shimmers over the waters, which softly whisper their joy.

Scene XII

DUKE: He didn't understand my bark. How could he think I'd trick him?

BELINA: Grandma Minga, has he made it?

FATHER: To where, Belina? Where?

MINGA: Yes, he has to have made it.

A drumbeat begins to be heard.

BELINA: What is that?

MINGA: You hear it? The drums of the *palenque*.

BELINA: What are they saying, Grandma Minga? What are they saying?

MINGA: They are announcing that Rwandi has arrived.

BELINA: Then... he made it there!

MINGA: Yes, my beautiful Rwandi has made it.

BELINA: And will he come back, Grandma Minga? Will he come back?

FATHER: Let's go, Belina. Let's go home.

MINGA: Will he return? Of course he'll return! You know something? He'll return from the *palenque* with all the others who once were slaves. And they will join hundreds more, like all of us. Yes, indeed! And they will fight together for there to never be slaves or sad children in this land ever again.

POET: And one day, when those far away drums dance here among us, and their music strikes us not as mysterious and distant, but clear and bright like your eyes, he will return. It will be the great celebration! Then, a child like you will see him. They will discover him in a young boy's actions, in an old man's voice, in a teenager's firm gaze. And all will know that his trip was not in vain. And then they'll say, "Rwandi has returned, and among us... he lives free!"

Curtain.

THE END

Iphigenia at Aulis

By Euripides

Translated and Adapted into English Verse by Brian Vinero

Greek tragedy is not for the faint of heart. It is a tremendous challenge for actors and audiences and, yes, for the translator. These plays are not a slice-of-life or a character study. They tend to unfold on the worst day of the protagonist's life. The characters face insurmountable odds, callous cruelty and horrors in a tangled web of misery that only one of the Greek Gods can untangle. We collectively hold our breath for the *deus ex machina* when a force beyond the power of mere mortals will set things right.

A classic Greek drama was not meant to be subtle. It was akin to a religious ritual performed in a grand, outdoor cathedral where the sky itself was the dome. And the actors wore masks that did not allow for the subtlety that a small-scale contemporary play or a movie camera allows. The imagery and emotions in the dialogue were required to go beyond words and become poetry that could penetrate the ears of well over a thousand observers who would only experience the play once during an annual festival. The plays utilized rhyme which helped the spectators hear, but also helped the actors memorize mammoth speeches some of which are three times the length of a typical Shakespearean soliloquy. A highly-trained chorus used music and movement to take the audience along on a journey unaided by modern stagecraft's use of lighting and scenery.

While there have been many adaptations of the works of Euripides in English, I believe that placing them in rhymed verse in iambic pentameter is the most effective way to create an approximation of the original Greek verse in our language. This form is familiar to classically trained English-speaking actors who have studied the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. By heightening the language it creates a structure which allows the actor to create the larger-than-life truth that is required in classical acting. The measured rhythm of iambic pentameter is a heartbeat which can help keep the actors on track while performing a very challenging play, particularly during lengthy scenes and speeches.

I have crafted this translation with the intent of having it used for performance. While I have strongly endeavored to remain true to Euripides' dramatic intent, philosophy and imagery, I have not been slavishly faithful in the dialogue. In particular when he uses a colloquial phrase or makes a reference to a person or event in Greek history or mythology that would be clear to an Athenian audience of his time it could be all but incomprehensible to a contemporary audience. I have traded the pursuit of a literal word-for-word adaptation for a work respectful of the poetry and dramatic intensity of this Greek tragedy. To this end the choral passages are presented as lyrical interludes to the dialogue which is structured within the poetic language of rhymed verse.

To date I have completed seven full translations of the plays of Euripides; from the high tragedy of his masterpiece *Medea* to the tricky blend of comedy and tragedy in the romantic, yet problematic *Alcestis*. *Iphigenia at Aulis* presented specific challenges that I felt needed to be addressed before attempting a translation. It is agreed by most scholars that Euripides died before completing it and the play's opening scene is missing. The closing scene in the script that has survived antiquity is

inconsistent with Euripides' style and most likely not his work, and is frankly just incredibly weak. Between this problematic beginning and ending is an absolutely brilliant play, among the best of Euripides in my opinion; and it was my hope to craft an improved beginning and ending more worthy of it. So I took my cue from other, similar works of this master playwright to create new opening and ending scenes which I believe are not only more dramatically viable, but also more consistent with his style.

The extant play opens with a scene between Agamemnon and his servant, beginning with a lengthy monologue and continuing into a dialogue. This is inconsistent with most Euripides plays which open with a single actor on stage, frequently playing a supernatural being. I took a cue from Euripides' *Hecuba* which opens with the ghost of her son Polydore. As a specter, he has the ability to see beyond the limits of a typical mortal to contextualize the situation for the audience. Using this model, I chose to use the character of Calchas, a seer who is mentioned many times in the body of the play and is vital to the plot, to draw the audience in at the opening. My goal was to use his speech to immerse the audience into the larger dramatic and mythological context of events surrounding the impending destruction of the House of Atreus.

The existing final scene was even more problematic, with an incredibly anticlimactic ending for a play with high tension and stakes. Frequently Euripides will utilize a messenger in the middle of a play to describe something that has occurred offstage. This was not found in the existing script. Instead a messenger arrives in the final few pages to describe what is actually the climax and it makes for very weak drama. Aside from scholarly opinions that this is inconsistent with Euripides' style, there is also a surviving fragment of the original final scene which was a dialogue between Clytemnestra and the goddess Artemis. This information guided me as I crafted a new final scene. I first used the chorus to suggest the sacrifice of Iphigenia just offstage and then bring in Artemis at the climax as a *deus ex machina*, which is common in the works of Euripides. In her dialogue with the grieving Clytemnestra, Artemis is clear in intention but purposefully opaque with information, only hinting at the tragedy that will befall the House of Atreus in the coming years.

While I endeavored to make this translation as timeless as Euripides' masterful play; I cannot ignore the fact that just as the original was shaded by the era in which he lived, I also am influenced by current events. What was true in the Bronze Age still rings via the seer Calchas' warning:

“The line can blur
When kings take on great airs as if they were
A god themselves. Then watch the Gods react
With rage and anger when men dare to act
As if they're worthy of Olympus.”

The true mark of a classic is that it reminds us that the struggles of mortals are not new, and will never end. Please enjoy a thousand strokes of pure truth from the pen of Euripides.

Euripides was a leading, though controversial, playwright during the Golden Age of Greek Theatre. He was known for his stunning poetry, innovation, and complex psychological and philosophical ideas presented in his dramas. Though little is known of his life, his surviving works paint a portrait of a man dissatisfied with politics, war and dismissive attitudes toward women in Athenian society. While there are records of over ninety plays attributed to him, only nineteen have survived from antiquity. Even this fragment of work is a far greater number of extant plays than the other great tragic playwrights Sophocles and Aeschylus combined, both of whom wrote in a conservative style far more typical of the era. Euripides' bold characters with great psychological depth stood him ahead of his time. His tendency to challenge his audience's perceptions of the great historical and mythical characters that populated his play may have cost him many awards in the annual Dionysia. Yet time has proven him to be the greatest of the ancient Greek playwrights. His major works, which continue to inspire playwrights and engage audiences, include *Medea*, *The Bacchae*, *The Trojan Women* and *Electra*.

Playwright **Brian Vinero** is an alumnus of the Minnesota Conservatory of Performing Arts, the National Shakespeare Conservatory, the 78th Street Theatre Lab, the BMI/Lehman Engel Workshop and a founding member of the New Musical Theatre Exchange. His plays have been produced and/or developed at the Praxis Theatre Ensemble, the 78th Street Theatre Lab, the Willoughby Theatre, the West Side Dance Project, the BMI/Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop and the Midtown International Theatre Festival in New York City, Theatre of Note in Los Angeles, the Jewish Ensemble Theatre in Detroit and at the Playwrights Center, the New Musical Theatre Exchange, the Classical Actors Ensemble, Theatre Pro Rata and the Minnesota Fringe in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. His translations of the plays of Euripides include *Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Alcestis* and the four-play cycle *Children of Agamemnon* consisting of the plays *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Electra*, *Orestes* and *Iphigenia at Tauris*. Other theatrical works include multiple translations of the works of Moliere, a modernization of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, and musicals adapted from Rostand's *Chantecler* and Booth Tarkington's *The Magnificent Ambersons*. Brian has worked directly with two Newberry Award-winning authors adapting their work to the stage, has been published by the international literary journal *Asymptote*, and has served on the faculties of William Patterson University and Regional Center for the Arts High School. His rhymed verse adaptations of the plays of Euripides are available for sale on Amazon.com and at the Drama Book Shop in New York City. Member of the Dramatists Guild, BMI and the Playwrights' Center.

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Iphigenia at Aulis

Cast of Characters:

Calchas, an augur
Agamemnon, King of Argos
Attendant, an old man
Menelaus, brother to Agamemnon
Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon
Iphigenia, daughter to Clytemnestra and Agamemnon
Achilles, a warrior
Artemis, Goddess of the Hunt
Messenger

Chorus of Women of Chalcis
Attendants to Clytemnestra

The action takes place on the sea coast of Aulis outside the quarters of Agamemnon.

(CALCHAS enters from the shadows.)

CALCHAS

You may call me an augur or a seer
And call me to decipher when you fear
The mystery of what will lie ahead
I'm Agamemnon's extra eye. I've led
Him through the darkest veil of mystery
As I reveal to him each prophecy
For Great Apollo gave me second sight
And I can see beyond the darkest night
And past the next day's dawn to see what will
Become of helpless mortals. But they still
May try to stay the steady hand of Fate
Then find the march of time will never wait
As prophecies will always come to be
They call out "Calchas, tell us what you see.
Yes Calchas, watch the birds. How do they fly?
In what formations do they touch the sky?"
Yes birds are most reliable. I find
Their quick-changing formations move the mind
Beyond what mortals comprehend to where
All questions can be answered if you dare

To seek the truth. But when you find it will
You then accept it? You may not until
You can accept the Gods rule everything
No matter what calamity they bring
Upon us we must heed their will and pray
They'll let us prosper for another day
And on this day I saw a flock of birds
Make sharp formations almost clear as words
They tell me sometimes something will occur
In royal houses causing them to blur
The line that separates all gods from men
And Agamemnon was so foolish when
He boasted he had hunting skills so strong
That he could better Artemis. He's wrong.
No man can match a god in anything
And if you dare to boast of such a thing
The God's great anger is but guaranteed
But if you're royalty you might not heed
A warning. As I said: The line can blur
When kings take on great airs as if they were
A god themselves. Then watch the Gods react
With rage and anger when men dare to act
As if they're worthy of Olympus. And
Then Agamemnon took his bow in hand
And dared set foot in woods that Artemis
Had consecrated telling men that this
Was where she kept her sacred herd of deer
But Agamemnon went in without fear
And fired off a shot that killed a doe
The favorite of the goddess. She was so
Enraged at Agamemnon that she swore
The next time that he found himself at war
That he'd pay dearly for his crime. Now we
Are here and looking out upon the sea
The air is still too still to be believed
It tells us Artemis is still bereaved
And knows a thousand ships must sail upon
The sea to Troy. But still the wind is gone
Held back in vengeance by a holy hand
That guarantees an army stays on land
But there is a solution. I have seen

It written in the sky up there between
The flapping wings of ravens. But it is
An act no man commits while keeping his
Mere mortal soul intact. The skies have shown
Me darkness that the night has never known
I told him of a sacrifice. But he
Must not be told his final destiny
He cannot know the bloodshed I have seen
For though he may be royalty between
The world of peasants and Olympus he
Is not yet meant to know all that I see
That's set in motion here today. I'm so
Distraught to face him knowing what I know
I am a seer I can't help what I see
The gift that Great Apollo gave to me
Brings clarity at times sometimes despair
Because the mighty Gods aren't always fair

(CALCHAS disappears into the shadows as AGAMEMNON enters with his aged ATTENDANT)

AGAMEMNON

King Thestius once had a daughter. She
Was Leda. And she then in turn had three
Young daughters of her own: First Phoebe then
Came Clytemnestra who I wed. And when
Great Zeus touched Leda she was blessed and cursed
To carry Helen in her womb. The first-
Born sons of Greece's greatest families came
To woo and wed the beauty with a name
That made men mad with passion when they heard
It spoken. They'd engage without a word
And draw their blades with thoughts of bloodshed should
They spy another suitor. Then they would
Attack with hatred in their eyes. And when
Tyndareus her father saw these men
He was perplexed. His daughter had a hand
But it was his to give. So then he planned
To bind her suitors in an oath: They would
All swear before a sacrifice that should
The man who wins fair Helen ever see
A day he finds his wife abducted we

Will all become like brothers raising arms
Against the man who put her into harm's
Way. And we'll sack his city to the ground
While burning everything until we've found
The man who'd dare to steal fair Helen's hand
Be he from Greece or from a foreign land
There will be no distinction. He will learn
We bonded men will make his city burn
And so they sealed their fate and swore their vow
Tyndareus did smile knowing now
His ruse had worked. No longer would there be
Fresh suitor's blood upon his floor. Then he
Brought forth fair Helen saying that her hand
Was hers to give to Aphrodite. Stand
Before her blowing winds of love to show
Her where true love would land. And we don't know
What led her eye to Menelaus. I
Don't understand what bound their eyes or why
Their union ever came to be. But then
From far-off Troy the most corrupt of men
Prince Paris came to Sparta clad in gold
With robes that shined and glittered with each fold
Such finery could not disguise the stink
Of such a foul barbarian who'd think
That he could judge the Goddesses and there
Would be no consequence. And he who'd dare
To meddle with the Gods might be so bold
To steal a wife and leave a man's bed cold
And that is what he did: He took the hand
Of Helen and they flew back to his land
And Helen didn't scream or make a fight
Oh how those two went riding through the night
How Menelaus screamed and rode through all
Of Greece enraged and bellowing a call
To arms for all the men that swore their bond
To one another. He who would abscond
With Helen must be taught a lesson. So
They polished up their spears and grabbed a bow
And made great haste and headed to the sea
And saw these straits that cut so narrowly
They almost dare each ship to try and pass

And lead right to a sea as smooth as glass
And there's another sea: A sea of tents
With many men within. Great regiments
Just waiting for their leader to give word
That now is time to sail. I see a herd
Of horses waiting to be yoked onto
Their shining chariots. And tell me who
These men should choose to lead them? Sadly me
Well, Menelaus is my family
I guess that Fate has spun this and I'm here
It seems they seek to honor me. Now we're
All gathered and we're ready. Yet we wait
It seems the wind will not cooperate
I called upon my augur Calchas. He
Proclaimed to have the darkest prophecy
That we are cursed and will remain until
We give the Gods a sacrifice and kill
My own Iphigenia. Artemis
Who rules this land demands it. Sadly this
Blood sacrifice is what she now demands
Or else we'll never sail to Trojan lands
But once her blood is spilled our ships will fly
And then turn Troy to dust and ashes. I
Refused of course and told my messenger
That such a sacrifice would not occur
I said, "Dismiss the men. I will not lead
Them. I will never see my daughter bleed
To raise a wind." Then Menelaus said
That I should reconsider; filled my head
With every argument and every word
And he would not relent until he heard
Me acquiesce and say that I agreed
And said I would commit the foulest deed
I wrote a scroll to Clytemnestra. She
Will send our daughter here. She will agree
Because I made a ruse and told a lie
I said I struck a marriage pact and I
Have promised her to Great Achilles, he
A soldier of such high nobility
The greatest of our warriors. I went
Beyond superlatives so she'd consent

I wrote to her he wouldn't dare to leave
Without a wife to wait for him and grieve
If he should not return. And she must be
Descended from our royal house or he
Would not concede. I wove this web of lies
And Clytemnestra never will be wise
As to the truthful purpose. She'll believe
Iphigenia will be wed. Though we've
Another plan. And only five now know
The truth of where she's truly meant to go
Just you and Calchas, Menelaus and
Odysseus and Castor know what's planned
But plans can change and so can hearts so I
Have changed my mind. I cannot let her die
So I've composed another scroll to say
"Don't bring her here." Now leave without delay
Through dark of night deliver this, old man
Before they learn of my discarded plan
Make haste to Argos! You have served with great
Command for years. I hope it's not too late

(ATTENDANT exits in haste and AGAMEMNON goes into his tent as a CHORUS OF CHALSISS WOMEN enter)

CHORUS

I SAILED DOWN THE RIVER
TRAVELED DOWN THE RIVER
TO AULIS AULIS AULIS AULIS
TO THE END OF THE RIVER
THE BOTTOM OF THE RIVER

WHERE THE RIVER IS DONE
AND THE SEA HAS BEGUN
WHERE THE RIVER CEASES TO BE
AND THE RIVER BECOMES THE SEA

I LEFT MY HOME BEHIND
I LEFT MY CITY BEHIND
I CAME TO THE SEA
TO AULIS AULIS AULIS AULIS
I CAME TO WITNESS A GLORIOUS SIGHT

I SAILED DOWN THE RIVER
TRAVELED DOWN THE RIVER
TO AULIS AULIS AULIS AULIS
TO THE END OF THE RIVER
THE BOTTOM OF THE RIVER

I CAME TO BEHOLD THIS WONDROUS SIGHT
OF AN ARMY ASSEMBLED IN AULIS (AULIS AULIS AULIS AULIS)
AN ARMY OF MIGHTY MEN
THE MEN OF GREECE
I SEE A THOUSAND MEN
AND KNOW THERE ARE THOUSANDS MORE
THOUSANDS OF MEN AND A THOUSAND SHIPS
WAITING AT THE SHORE
WAITING AT THE SHORE
WAITING TO SAIL
READY TONIGHT
AND THEY ALL WILL PICK UP AN OAR
WHEN THE WIND WILL FINALLY ROAR

OUR HUSBANDS SAY THESE MEN ARE LED
BY THE NOBLE AGAMEMNON
OUR HUSBANDS SAY THAT THEY ARE LED
AND ALL THE MEN SAY THAT THEY ARE LED
BY THE NOBLE AGAMEMNON
AND HIS BROTHER MENELAUS
POOR MENELAUS
HAD A WIFE RIPPED FROM HIS BED (HELEN HELEN HELEN HELEN)
OH MENELAUS
HAD A WIFE RIPPED FROM HIS HOME (HELEN HELEN HELEN HELEN)
OH APHRODITE
GREAT APHRODITE
GAVE THE TROJAN PRINCE A GIFT
GAVE THE TROJAN PARIS THE SNARE OF LOVE
AS REWARD FOR REWARDING HER
AS REWARD FOR ANNOINTING HER
THE GREATEST BEAUTY OF ALL THE GODDESSES

BUT I ARRIVED HERE (IN AULIS AULIS AULIS AULIS)
AS I RAN THROUGH THE WOODS
THE SACRED GROVE OF ARTEMIS (ARTEMIS ARTEMIS)
THE AIR WAS THICK
LIKE THE SMOKE FROM A STOVE
THE AIR WAS THICK WITH THE SMOKE OF SACRIFICE
AND I BLUSHED AS I RAN
AND I WAS FLUSHED AS I RAN
AS IF I WERE A MAIDEN FIRST LAYING EYES ON A MAN

I BEGAN TO BREATHE THE AIR SO THICK
THE AIR SO THICK WITH THE SMOKE OF SACRIFICE
AS I LOOKED BELOW
AT ALL THE MEN BELOW
THE ARMY WAITING THERE
THE MEN ALL WAITING THERE

I SEE THE MEN OF GREECE
THE MIGHTY MEN OF GREECE
THE SONS OF MEN WHOSE NAMES ALL RING
THROUGH THE WALLS OF EVERY CITY
THE WALLS OF EVERY VILLAGE
THEIR NAMES ALL RING
THROUGH THE WOODS AND THE CAVES
AND THE SAND BESIDE THE SEA

THEY ARE THE SONS OF THE SONS OF GREECE
THE SONS OF THE SONS OF THE SONS OF GREECE
EACH ROYAL HOUSE
EACH ROYAL LINE
EACH NAME GROWS GREATER
EACH HOUSE GROWS GREATER
FROM THE SONS OF THE SONS OF THE SONS OF GREECE
AND I SEE THEM THERE
AS THEY PREPARE
ALL THE SONS OF THE SONS OF THE SONS OF GREECE
AS THEY PREPARE
TO GO OUT THERE
FAR BEYOND THE LIGHT OF THE SUN
FAR BEYOND WHERE HORIZONS END
FAR BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF GREECE

AND THERE AMONG ALL THE SONS
AS MY EYE SEES HUNDREDS
AND THEN SEES THOUSANDS
OF THE SONS OF THE SONS OF THE SONS OF GREECE
THERE IS ONE (HE'S A SON, HE'S A SON)
THERE IS ONE (OF GREECE, OF GREECE, OF GREECE)
WHO STANDS SO TALL
THE MIGHTIEST OF ALL
A SON OF A SON OF A SON OF GREECE

THE GREAT ACHILLES
MIGHTY ACHILLES
IS HE MORTAL MAN OR GOD
NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN HIM BLEED
NO MORTAL CARRIES HIMSELF
ON LEGS AS STURDY
AS THE MIGHTIEST TREES
NO MORTAL WALKS WITH A GAIT
AS IF HE STRIDES THROUGH THE GREAT HALLS OF OLYMPUS
BUT HE'S A MAN
NOT A GOD
JUST A MAN
NOT A GOD
HE'S A SON OF A SON OF A SON OF GREECE

AND THERE AMONG THE MEN
I SEE ANOTHER MAN
HE'S A SON OF A SON OF A SON OF GREECE
THE MAN IS MERELY MORTAL
THE MAN IS CLEARLY MORTAL
FOR NO GOD WOULD LET ANOTHER MAN STEAL
A TREASURE FROM HIS BED (HELEN HELEN HELEN HELEN)
A TREASURE FROM HIS HOME (HELEN HELEN HELEN HELEN)
IT IS MENELAUS
POOR MENELAUS
WALKING SO QUICKLY
THOUGH THE WIND STANDS STILL
WALKING WITH PURPOSE
THOUGH THE WIND STAYS CALM
WITH HIS EYES SO FULL OF FEAR
WITH HIS EYES SO DEADLY STILL
AS STILL AS THE SEA THAT'S HERE
IN AULIS AULIS AULIS AULIS

HERE'S MENELAUS (IN AULIS AULIS AULIS AULIS)
ANGRY MENELAUS (THE SON OF A SON OF A SON OF GREECE)

VENGEFUL MENELAUS
WITH HIS EYES SO DEADLY STILL
WITH A LOOK LIKE HE COULD KILL
FOR A SON OF A SON OF A SON OF GREECE

(ATTENDANT re-enters with MENELAUS. They are struggling over the scroll.)

ATTENDANT

How dare you Menelaus! You have gone
Too far

MENELAUS

Stay back from me you worthless pawn
You're far too loyal to your master

ATTENDANT

Your
Reproach brings me great honor

MENELAUS

Say no more
Or be assured you will regret it. You
Are not a party to this matter

ATTENDANT

Do
You think you can just commandeer what I
Am carrying for Agamemnon? Why
Do you think you can read all that's within?
Was it addressed to you?

MENELAUS

Do not begin
To try and contemplate the things I do
The words within all have the power to
Bring great calamity to all of us

ATTENDANT

Well then I think that's something to discuss
With other people. But the scroll is mine
So give it here

MENELAUS

I won't

ATTENDANT

Well that is fine
By me because I'm never letting go

MENELAUS

Then be assured that soon your head will know
The full weight of my scepter as I hit
You and your scalp drips blood

ATTENDANT

Consider it
My pleasure. It's an honor if I die
In service to my master

MENELAUS

Oh you try
My patience. How you babble for a slave

(AGAMEMNON re-enters from his tent)

ATTENDANT

Oh Master how I pray you're here to save
Me. I've been violated! And this man
Will not behave with dignity

AGAMEMNON

Who can
Inform me why there's great disruption here
Outside my quarters?

MENELAUS

Well it should appear
My words have greater weight than his

(ATTENDANT releases his grip on the scroll and exits to AGAMEMNON'S tent)

AGAMEMNON

Tell me
Why did you struggle with him violently?
What did he do?

MENELAUS

Oh do you want to know?
I'd say the tale is in my eyes. Now go
And take a look if you should dare

AGAMEMNON

I dare?
My brother, I know surely you're aware
I'm of the House of Atreus. No fear
Is in my eyes or anywhere

MENELAUS

But here
Within this scroll there is a message. There
Are many words and they are poison

AGAMEMNON

Share
The scroll with me and I will see. I trust
You'll hand it off to me?

MENELAUS

No first I must
Go share it with my brave compatriots

AGAMEMNON

The seal is broken. That means you know what's
Within although it wasn't for your eyes

MENELAUS

I've seen the wicked plan that you disguise
By shrouding it in secrecy

AGAMEMNON

But how
Did you obtain it? Will The Gods allow
A shameless act done by a shameless man?

MENELAUS

I simply waited to deploy your plan
While waiting for your daughter to arrive

From Argos

AGAMEMNON

Do you really think that I've
A need to be observed and supervised?
And by the likes of you?

MENELAUS

I realized
That action was required and within
A spark of fire set me off. I'm in
No bounds to you my brother. I am not
Your slave

AGAMEMNON

Oh foulest villain you forgot
Am I not master of my house?

MENELAUS

Not when
Your mind is muddled. Making plans and then
You turn around and do the opposite
And then you change your mind again

AGAMEMNON

Is it
A pleasure for you speaking such foul things?
They say a tongue that babbles only brings
The darkest hatred evil and despair

MENELAUS

A mind that vacillates is most unfair
To he who must possess it. And his friends
Will never know what's next. So this depends
On how you will respond: I want to know
Will you now turn from truth? Or are you so
Enraged I can't get through to you? I will
Not trouble you too long or speak until
I overstate my case. Remember when
You said you'd be enthused to lead the men
Of Greece against the Trojans? Even so

At first you hesitated. Though I know
Your heart was beating like a battle drum
You tried to act so humble and succumb
To politicians' ruses. Grasping hands
And so accessible to all demands
From any man who crossed your path. And so
You gave an audience to all. Although
I know that some preferred that they were spared
That "honor." Still it seems you were prepared
To purchase popularity and be
Commander to us all. Then suddenly
Your manner took a turn and there you were
No longer quite so cordial. You prefer
To hide yourself behind a door now. So
The men you called your friends can't find you. Know
That men who have true worth would never try
To change themselves when fortune flies so high
And then forget who true friends truly are
When he can benefit them all. I'm far
From finished. I have just begun but that
Was just the sad first disappointment at
This port of Aulis. Here where all these men
Are waiting for a wind and don't know when
It might arrive. This curse the Gods have sent
Now keeps you in a state of discontent
And now the men demand that you dismiss
These thousand ships and put an end to this
Impossible endeavor. Oh you look
Distressed from all the leadership you took
How you command a fleet that cannot move
However will you sail to Troy and prove
That we were most correct in choosing you
And you once questioned me, "What should I do?
The Gods have set a trap and I'm ensnared."
Well I would say that you should be prepared
To lose your rank and honor and your name
Will now be sullied. Those that seek out fame
Might only find their own demise. And when
Your augur Calchas said to free the men
From waiting there must be a tribute to
Great Artemis, a sacrifice. Then you

Would have your wind and have your war. Then how
You seemed so eager, said you would allow
It and there was no argument. You sent
At once a message to your wife content
To let her think that she would greet a groom
Not knowing that you sealed your daughter's doom
But now you simply changed your mind. I saw
The words within the scroll. So you withdraw
Your duty to your country and your men
And you won't sacrifice your daughter when
The very air around us heard you say
You would. Well that is fine. As every day
One hears men claim that they will follow through
Resolving they will see their duty to
The end. But then they fail. You might just blame
The foolish citizens who praised their name
And put them into power. But I don't
I blame the men themselves. As when they won't
Protect their homeland they deserve their fate
But I myself just pray it's not too late
For our beloved Grecian brothers. They
Had hoped to show barbarians the way
Our spears feel in their bellies. But it's fine
Instead we'll let them laugh at us. The swine
Of Troy will know that they were spared because
Of you and your fine daughter. Yes that was
Their saving grace. I truly hope that I
Will never make a man a leader by
Believing he has honor. Bravery
Is worthless. If you truly want defense
Then pray you choose a man with common sense

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It's truly not a thing to celebrate
When brothers battle spewing words of hate

AGAMEMNON

Allow me leave to criticize you too
But I'll be brief and I won't look at you
With eyes so full of judgment as I know
It is my brother I'm addressing. So

A good man knows to show respect. Tell me
Why do you speak your words so forcefully?
Your face and eyes blood red with anger. Why?
Were you so wronged? What are you missing? I
Am sorry that you couldn't choose a bride
Possessed of virtue. Though I know you tried
To. Do not look at me to find a new
One who will keep fidelity to you
When you could not control the one you had
I have done nothing wrong here. It is sad
She slipped right through your fingers. But should I
Now suffer for your feelings? So is my
Success your inspiration? I say no.
It's just your bed is cold and you are so
Dejected longing for your wife that you
Have cast aside all reason and you threw
Your honor to the wind. But who can say
If we can judge your actions by the way
You now conduct yourself. You have no shame
So who can judge you? Tell me if I came
To change my mind when I at first was wrong
Does that mean I am feeble? Yet you long
To capture your lost wife who fled from you?
And what a wicked wife at that. I do
Not claim to know the Gods true will but I
Might think they did a favor for you. Why
Did all those suitors try for Helen's hand?
Yes that is something I can't understand
And bounded by an oath? They should have known
But hope defeats all reason and it's shown
Itself to be as strong as gods and that
Is all that binds these men. They came here at
Behest of hope not loyalty to you
Your strength does not inspire. Take them to
The brink of war. Their foolish hearts all yearn
For victory. But some will not return
Don't think the Gods don't know their oaths aren't true
As they see everything. They know that you
All were just merely bonded with foul lust
That's why I will not kill my daughter just
So you can go retrieve your worthless wife

Your need for vengeance isn't worth her life
The blood that spills the tears I shed cannot
Cleanse me of such injustice. You have sought
An answer. Now you have one. Was I clear?
Concise? Well then I'd truly say that we're
Now done. And if you still can't comprehend
My staunch position then I recommend
You step out of my way. I take my leave

LEADER OF THE CHOURS

It seems your daughter now has a reprieve
These words are different. What was said before
Is lost upon the wind

MENELAUS

So there's no more
Assistance and no options? And no friends?

AGAMEMNON

You won't if you give them untimely ends

MENELAUS

I swear we could not share a father

AGAMEMNON

I
Will share your wisdom not your madness

MENELAUS

Try
To sympathize. All friends and families do
It

AGAMEMNON

Ask me for my sympathy when you
Are helping me. Not harming me

MENELAUS

So now
The needs of Greece are not your problem?

AGAMEMNON

How

Could I relieve this curse the Gods have sent?

MENELAUS

Then sit upon your throne and be content
To know that you betrayed your brother. I
Will seek a new solution using my
True friends.

(A MESSENGER enters in haste)

MESSENGER

Great Agamemnon, Lord and King

Of all the Greeks, I have arrived to bring
Iphigenia to you. With your bride
Her mother Clytemnestra at her side
And Clytemnestra carries your young son
Orestes. With the traveling you've done
I hope the sight of family warms your eyes
As they have traveled far you realize
They need a moment for refreshment. How
The road exhausted them. Their mares are now
Set loose to graze as all the ladies go
To set their feet within a fountain. So
I have arrived to herald they are here
So you can be prepared. When they came near
The army quickly stood. From tent to tent
Their murmurings portend a great event
Then all the men just rushed about to see
Your daughter. She's been blessed so thoroughly
By Fortune that these merely mortal men
All dared to steal a glimpse of her. And then
They dared to ask, "Is this her wedding day?
Or did Great Agamemnon merely say
He yearned to see her so they whisked her here?"
But others whispered that it would appear
She was to be prepared for Artemis
The ruler of this land. And all of this
Was leading to a wedding. "Who will be
Her groom?" They wondered. So we soon will see

The marriage ritual performed you will
Both crown your heads and fill the baskets full
And my lord Menelaus you'll prepare
The bridal music. Set the flutes right there
And let the music flow from tent to tent
And let the dancing start. As this is meant
To be a day of joyful blessings for
Your daughter

AGAMEMNON

I appreciate it more
Then you can ever know. No go within
And wait to see what Fate will bring

(MESSENGER exits into AGAMEMNON'S quarters)

Again

I'm at a loss for words or hope. How to
Begin to speak or find the words? I do
Not know how I've condemned myself or how
Cruel Fortune has reversed itself and now
I've been outwitted by myself. I see
The poorest man and envy him for he
Can be advantaged by his lowly state
And be allowed to weep and cry. But great
Men born to greatest houses have no choice
We have no compromises as our voice
Calls out commands to those we rule. Yet we
Are ruled as well by expectations. See
My shame. I'm full of tears that will not fall
Or I will fall as well. But should you call
Me callous if my eye is dry? How can
I face my wife? Tell me what kind of man
Could dare to greet her? I did not invite
Her here but now upon this darkest night
Her presence will destroy me. I can see
Why she would think she should accompany
Our daughter on this day when she believes
A wedding will take place. And who deceives
Her? It's her base and wicked husband. Why
I ask you must my untouched daughter die?

She'll be a bride but Hades is her groom
I pity her as I now seal her doom
How she will plead to me, "Oh Father no!
Don't sacrifice me! Is this what you show
The world? That you would wed me to a blade?"
If only my young son Orestes stayed
Behind. But he is here and even though
He only is an infant he will know
That darkest acts commence here and he'll cry
He has no words to speak but we'll know why
He screams in protestations. Oh that fiend
The foul Prince Paris! You have intervened
In my affairs and for the worse so you
Could have your precious Helen

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But I do
Have pity for you if you will permit
It. I am of another land but it
Shows grace to have some sympathy for he
Who suffers. Even when he's royalty

MENELAUS

Please put your right hand here my brother

AGAMEMNON

I
Will give it to the victor knowing my
Defeat is my despair

MENELAUS

I fully swear
In name of our grandfather Pelops there
Is no way I'm deceiving you. And by
The name of Atreus I will not lie
I'm speaking simply from my heart. I see
My brother forcing back his tears. I'll be
Soon holding back my own tears seeing your
Pain. I'm withdrawing all I said before
I will not burden you with death and fear
I see it now from your perspective. We're

Not sacrificing anyone for me
Or my base interests when yours should be
Predominant. And how could I rejoice
When I had forced you to the foulest choice?
What right have I to say your children die
While mine still feel the sunlight? Tell me why
I wish this for myself? What do I need?
Another marriage? It is guaranteed
That I could find another worthy wife
So why should I destroy my brother's life?
And all for Helen? Trading treasure for
Disloyal rubbish? Was I foolish or
Just mad with vengeance when I dared to plan
Your daughter's sacrifice? What kind of man
Could order such an act? I feel for her
More than you can imagine. If I were
To let her bleed so I stay married? No.
My marriage isn't worth a murder so
I say she won't be Helen's victim too
She had nothing to do with it. Now you
Can go disband the army. Set them free
Just like those tears you needed. You'll make me
Start crying too if you should start. I will
Not heed an oracle that calls to kill
A child that's not mine. The choice is yours
Alone. And what's this change that now implores
Me to abandon acts of hatred? I
Remembered that you are my brother. Why
Would I do otherwise? I pity he
Whose hatred blinds him to his family

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Your ancestors should be most proud to see
Your words displaying generosity

AGAMEMNON

You are to be commended brother for
Your change of heart and selfless act. It's more
Than anything expected. We are bound
As brothers and by blood. And I have found
That those so close within a house can find

Themselves embattled. And that is the kind
Of bitterness that I abhor. And I
Am sad to say your selflessness is my
Undoing. As although we all have failed
To launch these ships it seems this ship has sailed
There is no turning back now and we must
Now sacrifice my daughter

MENELAUS

Tell me just
Who might dare to compel you?

AGAMEMNON

Look out there
I see an army that's assembled

MENELAUS

Dare
You send her home to Argos?

AGAMEMNON

Yes I could
Perhaps and be unnoticed. But there would
Still be another issue

MENELAUS

What could be
Preventing you? As surely you don't see
This group of soldiers as a threat?

AGAMEMNON

My seer.
My augur Calchas still is stationed here
And he may tell the men his prophecy

MENELAUS

Not if I hold his tongue with death. Then he
Will keep it to himself

AGAMEMNON

 All augurs are
A curse on men. They look upon a star
And read the future only seeking to
Fulfill their own ambition

MENELAUS

 And they do
No good at all. And yet they're always near

AGAMEMNON

And you have not considered what I fear
The most

MENELAUS

 How can I know your thoughts if you
Don't tell me?

AGAMEMNON

 There's another person who
Knows everything

MENELAUS

 You mean Odysseus?
What do you fear? He's not a threat to us

AGAMEMNON

The wind here does not move but know that he
Can change just like the wind and viciously
Whip men into a mob in moments

MENELAUS

 He
Has such a need for notoriety
And he's enslaved by it

AGAMEMNON

 He will stand there
Can you envision it? And that is where
He'll raise a rage within the mob of men
Repeating all the words of Calchas. Then

He'll say I offered Artemis a prize
And then did not deliver it. Their eyes
Will fill with rage and he will tell them to
Give Her the blood She craves from me and you
And kill Iphigenia anyway
But if I should escape to Argos they
Will follow close behind with sword and spear
And raze the city to the ground. I fear
My challenges are insurmountable
I drown in misery and feel the pull
Of all Olympus tearing me to dust
Oh Menelaus, I know I can trust
You with this: Don't let Clytemnestra know
What Fate has spun today. As I now go
To take my daughter on a journey where
The road will lead to Hades. Maybe there
Will be far fewer tears this way

(AGAMEMNON addresses the CHORUS)

And you
You women there of Chalcis. You will do
Yourselves a favor keeping this among
Yourselves. I recommend you hold your tongue

(AGAMEMNON and MENELAUS exit)

CHORUS

OH APHRODITE
GREAT APHRODITE
MAY YOU BLESS US WITH A BREATH OF LOVE
JUST A BRIEF AND FLEETING KISS OF LOVE
NOT A BREATHLESS TIGHT EMBRACE OF LOVE
FROM WHICH NO ONE GETS RELEASED
EMBRACED BY TWO ARMS AND ENCASED IN MADNESS
HELD SO TIGHT THAT EACH BREATH BELONGS
TO THE ONE WHO HOLDS YOUR HEART
HELD SO TIGHT LIKE A READY BOW
LIKE THE BOW OF EROS
READY TO RELEASE
TWO SHARP ARROWS

TWO SHARP ARROWS
ONE THAT WILL STRIKE YOU
LIKE A WARM SUMMER'S DAY
ONE THAT WILL BLESS
THAT WILL BLESS
THAT WILL BLESS
THAT WILL BLESS YOU WITH HAPPINESS
HAPPINESS
BUT THE OTHER WILL STRIKE YOU A DIFFERENT WAY
LIKE A COLD WINTER NIGHT WITH NO MOON IN THE SKY
A LONG LONELY NIGHT THAT NO FIRE CAN WARM
EVEN IF YOUR LOVE IS THERE
IT WILL ONLY BRING DESPAIR

OH APHRODITE
GREAT APHRODITE
WE BEG OF YOU
PRAY TO YOU
BE A WARM SUMMER DAY
NOT A COLD WINTER'S NIGHT

(LIKE A BRIEF AND FLEETING KISS)
(EMBRACED IN TWO ARMS AND
ENCASED IN MADNESS)

FROM A NIGHTMARE
FROM WHICH WE CAN'T AWAKE
FROM WHICH WE CAN'T AWAKE

WE ARE ONLY MORTAL
WE DON'T LIVE AS GODS
AND YET WE CAN HOPE TO ATTAIN
A TOUCH OF GRACE
A HINT OF THE DIVINE

TRUE VIRTUE CAN ALWAYS BE SEEN
ALL MEN CAN LEARN
TO BE GOOD
TO BE TRUE
BUT IT'S BETTER TO BE BORN
BEING GOOD
BEING TRUE
AND TO KNOW THAT BRINGS TRUE WISDOM

(ALL MEN CAN LEARN TO BE
GOOD)

AND IT IS BEYOND ALL GLORY

(BETTER TO BE BORN BEING GOOD)

AS A WOMAN HOLDS HER LOVE
QUIETLY IN HER HEART
AS A MAN CONTROLS HIS NEEDS
SO THE NEEDS OF HIS CITY AND HIS COUNTRYMEN
GO BEFORE ALL THE NEEDS OF A LOWLY MAN
ALL MEN CAN LEARN
TO BE GOOD
TO BE TRUE
BUT IT'S BETTER TO BE BORN
BEING GOOD
BEING TRUE

AND PARIS DIDN'T LEARN
TO BE GOOD
TO BE TRUE
AND WE KNOW HE WASN'T BORN
BEING GOOD
BEING TRUE
AND HE TOOK A WOMAN'S HEART
A HEART THAT WASN'T GOOD
A HEARTS THAT WASN'T TRUE
AND THEY TOOK OFF THROUGH THE NIGHT
ON A COLD WINTER NIGHT WITH NO MOON IN THE SKY
A LONG LONELY NIGHT THAT NO FIRE CAN WARM
EVEN IF YOUR LOVE IS THERE
IT WILL ONLY BRING DESPAIR

NOW THESE MEN WILL SAIL
THROUGH THE NIGHT
THROUGH THE NIGHT
FOR THE NEEDS OF HIS CITY AND HIS COUNTRYMEN
THE NEEDS OF HIS CITY AND HIS COUNTRYMEN
TO BREAK HER FROM THIS CURSE
FROM APHRODITE'S CURSE

WHAT DO I SEE APPROACHING
WHO DO I SEE APPROACHING
IT IS IPHIGENIA
THE DAUGHTER OF THE KING
AND CLYTEMNESTRA
THE WIFE OF THE KING

BEHOLD THEIR GREATNESS
BESTOWED BY THE GODS
BEHOLD GREAT FORTUNE
BEYOND OURSELVES
BEYOND OUR LIVES
BEYOND OUR REACH

(CLYTEMNESTRA enters with ORESTES in her arms with IPHIGENIA following. They are accompanied by ATTENDANTS)

LET US GREET THE QUEEN
CLYTEMNESTRA
SEE THAT HER PATH IS FREE
FROM DANGER
SEE THAT HER PATH IS FREE
FROM TROUBLE
LET US GREET
IPHIGENIA
SEE THAT HER PATH IS FREE
FROM DANGER
SEE THAT HER PATH IS FREE
FROM TROUBLE

WE THE WOMEN OF CHALCIS
GREET THE WORTHY WIFE OF AGAMEMNON
THE DAUGHTER OF AGAMEMNON
WE ARE ONLY MORTAL
WE DON'T LIVE AS GODS
AND YET WE CAN HOPE TO ATTAIN
A TOUCH OF GRACE
A HINT OF THE DIVINE
WE THE WOMEN OF CHALCIS
GREET YOU WORTHY QUEEN
WORTHY QUEEN
WORTHY QUEEN

CLYTEMNESTRA

I take your welcome as an omen that
Will bring great fortune. All this kindness at
The site of my young daughter's wedding will
Bring happiness to her. If you could fill

Your arms with all these gifts I bring. They are
Her dowry. Please take them inside. Now our
Young Prince Orestes, Agamemnon's son,
Should see this sight as well

(she speaks to ORESTES)

Now little one,
I know you're very tired from our ride
But wake to see your sister as a bride
Now you must bless her with your presence. You
Are noble like her groom Achilles. Do
You know you'll now be kinsmen?

(CLYTEMNESTRA hands him off to an ATTENDANT, then addresses IPHIGENIA:)

Stand by me
Iphigenia my sweet daughter. Be
Beside me so these strangers see my pride
And joy. And now your father comes outside
So welcome him my child

(AGAMEMNON has re-entered from his quarters)

Oh my king
And lord, Great Agamemnon. And I bring
Our precious daughter as commanded

IPHIGENIA

Be
Not angry with me Mother if I see
My father and I run to him from you

(she rushes to AGAMEMNON)

Oh father it has been too long. I do
Forget myself and run when I first see
Your face and hope you'll hold me. Do not be
Upset with me

CLYTEMNESTRA

Do not apologize
Do what you will. I surely recognize
Of all my children you most surely are
The most devoted to your father

IPHIGENIA

Far
Too long has passed since I have seen you. I
Am most contented

AGAMEMNON

As am I. And my
Sweet sentiments are same as yours

IPHIGENIA

Hail to
Great Agamemnon! I am thankful you
Have brought me here

AGAMEMNON

I don't know what to say
I'm not sure I am worthy of the way
You praise me

IPHIGENIA

Father you should be at ease
And not look so uncomfortable. No please
Look happy that you see me

AGAMEMNON

Everything
Brings pressures. And a general and king
Has more than most

IPHIGENIA

But maybe for today
You'll set your worries free. Then you may say
You're only here for me

AGAMEMNON

Yes I am here
And only here for you

IPHIGENIA

Then you should clear
Your brow of tension and release your eyes
From pain and sadness

AGAMEMNON

How it gratifies
Me when I see you. More than anyone

IPHIGENIA

But I still see your sadness isn't done
There's tears within your eyes

AGAMEMNON

Well yes there are
Because I know I'll have to travel far
From you

IPHIGENIA

How far is Troy?

AGAMEMNON

Across the sea
Where I wish there had never come to be
The foul Prince Paris

IPHIGENIA

And I cannot take
The voyage with you?

AGAMEMNON

Daughter when you make
Such sense it pains me all the more

IPHIGENIA

Then I
Will say some foolish things in hopes that my

Dull words will comfort you

AGAMEMNON (*aside*)

This is too much

The words that must be said to her are such
A burden

(turns back to IPHIGENIA)

Thank you for the offer my

Dear girl

IPHIGENIA

Stay here with us my father

AGAMEMNON

I

Can only hope for that. But sadly Fate
Has other plans for me

IPHIGENIA

I truly hate

The need for war. Let Menelaus go
And fight his inconveniences

AGAMEMNON

I know

That if I don't accept Fate's fickle touch
I'll pass it onto others

IPHIGENIA

It's been such

A long time that you all have waited here
In Aulis. And for what?

AGAMEMNON

It would appear

That I've been hindered in my quest

IPHIGENIA

Take me
Along on your long voyage. I will be
A member of your crew

AGAMEMNON

Your future has
A voyage you must take. Remember as
You travel that you have a father

IPHIGENIA

Do
I make the trip with mother? Or are you
Inferring that I go alone?

AGAMEMNON

You'll be
Alone. Without your mother or with me

IPHIGENIA

Then where am I to go? Where do you send
Me?

AGAMEMNON

No, enough of this. Let's not pretend
A maiden needs to know these things

IPHIGENIA

But you
Will hurry home from Troy when this is through?
As you return triumphant

AGAMEMNON

But before
I take these ships to seek a foreign shore
I must commit a sacrifice

IPHIGENIA

What do
The Gods demand for sacrificing?

AGAMEMNON

 You
Will be a witness to it. And you'll be
Beside the altar

IPHIGENIA

 You're expecting me
To lead a dance around the altar?

AGAMEMNON

 Oh
I only wish like you I did not know
The truth. Now go within before the men
Should dare to see you. I am troubled when
I see the face that kisses me is strained
And when your hand is holding mine I'm pained
To know our travels take us very far
Away from one another. Oh you are
A beauty through and through with golden hair
How Troy now burdens us beyond compare
And all for Helen. Cursed Helen! I
Must not continue. Or within my eye
I'll drop another tear from holding you
So go within at once.

(IPHIGENIA exits. AGAMEMNON turns to CLYTEMNESTRA)

 I truly do
Seek out your pardon Leda's Daughter. I
Revealed my bare emotions knowing my
Dear daughter now will be Achilles' bride
A father's love still cannot be denied
I see another path for her and know
It's natural that one day children go
Away to their new homes. Yet I despair

CLYTEMNESTRA

Do you think I'm insensitive? Prepare
To see a similar response when I
Lead her into her wedding. I will cry
Along with all the wedding hymns. I will

Not judge you for your feelings. And until
Some time has passed I'm certain we won't be
Ourselves. But now I ask that you tell me
The details of this man she'll marry. He
Is of what house and lineage? I know
His name and nothing else

AGAMEMNON

Some years ago
There was a girl Aegina daughter to
Asopus

CLYTEMNESTRA

You must merely tell me who
She married. Was he mortal or was he
A god?

AGAMEMNON

It was great Zeus. And then soon she
Gave birth to Aeacus of Cenone

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then
Which son inherited his kingdom when
He passed to Hades?

AGAMEMNON

Peleus. Then he
Was wedded to Great Thetis.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Willingly?
With all the Gods approval?

AGAMEMNON

Zeus agreed
And as his word is law there was no need
For anyone's approval or dissent

CLYTEMNESTRA

Where did they make the marriage covenant?
Among the ocean's waves?

AGAMEMNON

On sacred land
Where Chiron dwells

CLYTEMNESTRA

Am I to understand
She wed among the centaurs?

AGAMEMNON

It is said
The Gods were there among them

CLYTEMNESTRA

And who led
The education of Achilles?

AGAMEMNON

He
Was mostly raised by Chiron so he'd be
Protected from all mortal vices

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then
I'd say that's very wise. There's virtue when
You choose to let immortals raise a son

AGAMEMNON

Well that's his lineage. And he just won
Our daughter's hand

CLYTEMNESTRA

Well I cannot complain
But tell me where his home is?

AGAMEMNON

On a plain
Beside the river Apidanus

CLYTEMNESTRA

So
He'll take our untouched daughter there?

AGAMEMNON

She'll go
With him if he commands it. He is now
Her lord

CLYTEMNESTRA

I pray Olympus will allow
Them every happiness. And what will be
Their wedding day?

AGAMEMNON

It's on the day we see
The moon is round and full to bless the day

CLYTEMNESTRA

But what about the sacrifice?

(AGAMEMNON is momentarily stunned by this)

The way
To truly bless the marriage is to make
An offering to our Great Goddess

AGAMEMNON

Take
Some comfort in the fact that I'm about
To do that very thing. So have no doubt
It will be done

CLYTEMNESTRA

And then there has to be
A wedding feast thereafter. Hopefully
You'll be there

AGAMEMNON

I will be there after I
Complete my duties to the Gods

CLYTEMNESTRA

I'll try
To make a feast for all the women. Though
I don't know where to set it

AGAMEMNON

It can go
Right here beside our ships

CLYTEMNESTRA

I will make do
With this location. But I think that you
Are well aware it's insufficient

AGAMEMNON

Do
What I command my lady. Or have you
Forgotten that you must obey me?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I
Obey you as I always have

AGAMEMNON

Then try
To see that with the wedding plans I will
Control the situation

CLYTEMNESTRA

I'll stand still
And will not say a thing. For who am I?
I'm just the mother of the bride. Please try
To execute a woman's duties. Go
Exert yourself

AGAMEMNON

You'll leave your daughter so
She can be married here among the men

CLYTEMNESTRA

And where am I to do my duties when
This happens?

AGAMEMNON

 You'll return to Argos where
You can attend the women

CLYTEMNESTRA

 If I'm there
Then who will raise the torch and who will be
Attending to our daughter's needs?

AGAMEMNON

 I'll see
That when the ritual begins I will
Be there and hold a torch for her

CLYTEMNESTRA

 But still
That's not the way that proper things are done
Tradition is important

AGAMEMNON

 Everyone
Within this camp are men. You should not be
Among these brutish soldiers

CLYTEMNESTRA

 Don't you see
A mother's place is here. You'll give away
Our daughter without me?

AGAMEMNON

 Well so you say
But I say you belong at home. That's where
There's women waiting unattended

CLYTEMNESTRA

 There
Is no way they will be corrupted. They

Are all within thick walls

AGAMEMNON

You will obey

CLYTEMNESTRA

No! I will call to Hera! She will hear
My plea. You may rule all from far and near
And all the land you see. But once within
The walls of home a wife can then begin
To have her say as well. And so I say
That I'm defining what's the proper way
To hold a wedding and who should be there
So stop an angry mother if you dare

(CLYTEMNESTRA exits with the ATTENDANTS in tow, one of them carries ORESTES)

AGAMEMNON

I am beyond all hope my plans destroyed
I hoped to send her off so she'd avoid
The ritual that comes. I had to lie
Deceiving those I love the most. Now I
Will have no option but to do the deed
Consulting Calchas asking what I need
To do to please the goddess, seeking her
Forgiveness. Though I truly would prefer
That I did not hold all of Greece inside
Myself when I protect our country's pride
While I destroy my heart. A man can wed
A wife or country. Either way he'll head
To Hades in the end. When all is done
No man will ever rescue everyone

(AGAMEMNON exits)

CHORUS

THERE ACROSS THE SEA
LIES THE CITY OF TROY
OUR MEN WILL CROSS THE SEA
TO THE CITY OF TROY
WHERE APOLLO'S LIGHT

SHINES SILVER ON THE WAVES
BY THE CITY OF TROY
THE CITY OF TROY

AND CASSANDRA STANDS
IN THE CITY OF TROY
A PROPHETESS
IN THE CITY OF TROY
AS SHE TOSSES HER HAIR
IT FLOWS AND FLOWS
LIKE THE WAVES ON THE SEA
IT FLOWS AND FLOWS
AND THE WIND WHISPERS TO HER
THEN SHE KNOWS
THEN SHE KNOWS
WHAT WILL COME TO BE
IN THE CITY OF TROY
BESIDE THE SEA
BESIDE THE SEA

AND CASSANDRA WEARS
A GARLAND OF LAUREL
THAT IS COVERED WITH FLOWERS
AND THE TROJANS WAIT
ON THE TOPS OF THEIR TOWERS
PATIENTLY
BESIDE THE SEA
IN THE CITY OF TROY
IN THE CITY OF TROY

SOON THEY WILL SEE
A THOUSAND SHIPS
AND THOUSANDS OF MEN
WHO CAME ACROSS THE SEA
TO RETRIEVE ONE WOMAN
HELEN HELEN HELEN HELEN
BY SHIELD AND SPEAR
THEY'LL RETURN HER HERE
TO GREECE GREECE GREECE GREECE

AS THE WAVES OF THE SEA

FLOW AND FLOW
A RIVER WILL ALSO FLOW
A RIVER THAT IS BORN ANEW
A RIVER THAT HAS NO NAME
A RIVER OF BLOOD
THAT WILL FLOW AND FLOW
WITH THE BLOOD OF TROJAN MEN
AND ARES WILL SING
AS THE SOLDIERS SHOUT
AS THE TROJAN WALLS
ARE PAINTED RED WITH BLOOD
AS THEIR MEN GET STABBED
AND THEIR CITY IS SACKED
FROM THE GROUND TO THE SKY
AND SO MANY MEN WILL DIE
LEAVING PRIAM'S WIFE TO CRY
QUEEN HECUBA WILL CRY
AND LEFT THERE
ALL ALONE
IS HELEN
HELEN HELEN HELEN
A DAUGHTER OF GREAT ZEUS
WILL CRY AND CRY AND CRY
FOR PARIS THE MAN WHO TOOK HER AWAY
FOR PARIS THE MAN WHO LEFT HER ALONE
AND THEN A THOUSAND SHIPS
WILL TURN TO TAKE HER HOME
ON A THOUSAND SHIPS
TO GREECE GREECE GREECE GREECE

MAY I NEVER KNOW A TIME
MAY I NEVER KNOW THE PAIN
WHEN MY HOMELAND IS ATTACKED
WHEN MY CITY IS BURNED AND SACKED
MAY MY CHILDREN NEVER KNOW A TIME
MAY MY CHILDREN NEVER KNOW THE PAIN
WHEN THEIR CITY IS BURNED TO ASHES
WHEN THEIR CITY IS ONLY EMBERS
WHEN THE CONQUERING SOLDIERS SAUNTER IN
WHEN THE CONQUERING SOLDIERS GRAB THE HAIR
OF THE WOMEN LEFT BEHIND

AND MAKE THEM A CONCUBINE
MAY THAT FATE NOT BE MINE

WHEN THE TROJAN MEN ALL DIE
AND THE TROJAN WOMEN CRY
AS THEIR CITY BURNS TO ASHES
AS THEIR CITY IS ONLY EMBERS
IT ALL WILL BE
IT WILL ONLY BE
THE FAULT OF HELEN
HELEN HELEN HELEN
THE DAUGHTER OF ZEUS
HELEN HELEN HELEN HELEN

WE CAN HEAR GREAT TALES
OF MORTALS AND GODS
A HUNDRED WAYS
A THOUSAND WAYS
WE CAN HEAR OF DEATH AND WAR AND STRIFE
A HUNDRED TIMES
A THOUSAND TIMES
BUT WHAT WILL WE LEARN
WHAT WILL WE EVER LEARN

AND THE WAVES OF THE SEA
WILL FLOW AND FLOW
AND THE WAVES OF THE SEA
WILL FLOW AND FLOW
AND THE WAVES OF THE SEA
WILL FLOW AND FLOW

(ACHILLES enters)

ACHILLES

Please tell me where among these tents I'll find
The leader of the Greeks? Who might be kind
Enough to tell him that Achilles is
Awaiting him? Or maybe one of his
Manservants might be bothered? I am just
The son of Peleus that's all. I must
Inform him our delay here truly is

An inconvenience. Tell him some of his
Men are unmarried so they've left their land
And homes unguarded. But then understand
The married men are mad as well for they
Have left behind their wives and children. Day
By day we loiter here and all for what?
We have some passion for adventure. But
All Greece is clamoring as well. And I
Believe the Gods all have a hand in. My
Opinions should be heard as so should all
Who might have one as well. I heard the call
To arms and I responded leaving my
Most sacred home and land behind. Now I
Just wait here for a wind and all the men
I brought with me just constantly ask when
We might depart. "Oh Great Achilles how
Are we still stationed here? Let's travel now
To Troy and start our war!" We need to see
Some action or a resolution. Be
Pragmatic or productive. Or you may
Discover that these men have gone away
If you won't lead them. Come out! Let's discuss
What will commence you Sons of Atreus

(CLYTEMNESTRA enters)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Son of the Goddess, salutations. I
Just heard your words within the tent. That's why
I came out here to greet you

ACHILLES

Modesty
Cannot prepare me for the sight I see
This vision that's before me. Beautiful
Beyond compare

CLYTEMNESTRA

I see you're dutiful
To modesty. I'm pleased. As we've not met
It's not surprise that you don't know me

ACHILLES

Yet

I'm wondering who might this woman be
Among these Greeks that I can barely see
As they are standing with their shields in hand

CLYTEMNESTRA

I'm Leda's daughter Clytemnestra. And
I am the wife of Agamemnon

ACHILLES

Well

That clears all questions. Though I should not dwell
Here. I cannot be seen engaging you
In conversation. You're a woman

CLYTEMNESTRA

Do

Remain. You should not leave just take my hand
To bless the marriage

ACHILLES

I don't understand

I cannot take your hand in mine. What would
Your husband Agamemnon say? I should
Not take what's his as mine

CLYTEMNESTRA

But you can take

It rightfully as yours as you will make
A marriage with my daughter

ACHILLES

Did you say

A marriage? What is this? There is no way
That could be true. Have you gone mad? Did you
Invent this in your mind just now?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I do

Declare all men are similar. So shy

When faced with a commitment. Then they try
To run when they're reminded

ACHILLES

Hear each word
I say great lady: I have never heard
Of anything regarding marriage and
I have not wooed her. Do you understand?
None of the Sons of Atreus have said
A word of this to me

CLYTEMNESTRA

Was I misled?
I do not understand. The words you say
Are mysteries to me in the same way
My words do not make sense to you

ACHILLES

I'll try
To guess and say we're both correct. But my
Belief is that we're both deceived

CLYTEMNESTRA

I'm so
Humiliated. Like a fool I go
Off on a marriage tangent unaware
The marriage I believe in isn't there
I'm so ashamed

ACHILLES

Someone has played a game
With both of us. But you should not feel shame
I say we both forget it

CLYTEMNESTRA

I must go
I cannot face you knowing that you know
That I was made a fool of

ACHILLES

And I will
Bid you farewell as well. But yet I still
Seek out your husband

(ATTENDANT calls out from within Agamemnon's quarters)

ATTENDANT

Greetings stranger you
Descendant of Aeacus. You must do
Us honor by remaining here. You are
Descended from a goddess. Don't go far
And you my mistress Leda's daughter. Hail!

ACHILLES

Who is this creature you've engaged to wail
Through open doors? His voice betrays his fear

ATTENDANT

I think I'm better off if I stay here
I merely am a slave and nothing more
I can't ascend past yelling through a door
So why should I take risks or hope to be
A better man? I don't need dignity

ACHILLES

Then who do you belong to? You're not mine
I don't share you with Agamemnon. Whine
To him through doors but stay away from me

ATTENDANT

That lady standing there before you? She
Received me from her father

ACHILLES

Why am I
Still waiting here? Why is it that you try
Delaying me?

ATTENDANT

Are you alone with her?
Outside the door?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes and we would prefer
That you address us face to face. So you
Will now extract yourself

(ATTENDANT slowly enters from Agamemnon's quarters)

ATTENDANT

May Fortune do
Its best and so may I. So we can see
The one I wish to save be saved

ACHILLES

Well we
May see that speech do well another day
The words have weight but nothing that you say
Has meaning

(ATTENDANT kneels before CLYTEMNESTRA and takes her hand)

CLYTEMNESTRA

You may take my hand but still
You mustn't fear in telling me. I will
Protect you

ATTENDANT

Mistress you must know by now
The kind of character I have. And how
I am devoted to you thoroughly
And also to your children

CLYTEMNESTRA

I agree
For many years you've served me well

ATTENDANT

I was
Included in your dowry. And because
Of that King Agamemnon owns me

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yes
You came along with me

ATTENDANT

Still you might guess
That I am loyal to you and I'm bound
In duty to you. But I have not found
Myself as loyal to your husband

CLYTEMNESTRA

Tell
Me now what words you're holding

ATTENDANT

Very well
You soon will hear your daughter has been slain
And by your husband's hand

CLYTEMNESTRA

Are you insane?
What is this madness? You are getting old
And so confused. The lie that you just told
Cannot be true

ATTENDANT

He'll slice the virgin skin
Upon her throat upon his blade

CLYTEMNESTRA

I'm in
A world gone mad. I will not hear this. Has
My husband lost his mind?

ATTENDANT

He's lucid as
Can be. Except for this. He's lost his mind
Forgetting he's a father and he's blind
To reason

CLYTEMNESTRA

But I do not understand
Who has convinced him? Tell me what fiend planned
This foul atrocity?

ATTENDANT

There came to be
An oracle that Calchas claimed would see
Our fleet trapped here until the deed was done

CLYTEMNESTRA

To send the army off? Can anyone
Know how this kills me knowing he will kill
Our daughter so they catch a wind?

ATTENDANT

Until
They reach the halls of Troy they will not rest
As they help Menelaus on his quest
Retrieving Helen

CLYTEMNESTRA

So for her I'll see
My daughter slaughtered as a guarantee
A prophecy will come to pass?

ATTENDANT

That is
The full extent of what I know: That his
Intention is to sacrifice her to
Great Artemis

CLYTEMNESTRA

But why did he go through
This masquerade of marriage? Bringing me

From Argos

ATTENDANT

He was certain you would be
More likely to arrive if you believed
Your daughter would be wed

CLYTEMNESTRA

But he deceived
Us both. And I've delivered her to be
Destroyed as I will be as well

ATTENDANT

Yes he
Is so conniving plotting to devise
A deadly trap for both of you

CLYTEMNESTRA

My eyes
Cannot hold back the tears. I'll break apart
From this assault of pain

ATTENDANT

Relieve your heart
Of bitter grief. It's natural to mourn
If you should lose a child and she's torn
From you

CLYTEMNESTRA

But how old man did you first know
Of this dark plot?

ATTENDANT

He ordered me to go
To you with a retraction to the scroll
He sent at first

CLYTEMNESTRA

So what then was his goal?
To stay at home or bring our daughter here
For her destruction?

ATTENDANT

No he made it clear
That you were to remain at home. He was
Within his senses at that point

CLYTEMNESTRA

How does
It happen that you were delivering
A letter but you never came to bring
It to me?

ATTENDANT

Menelaus took it right
From my two hands. That man is full of spite
And he has caused this misery

CLYTEMNESTRA

Do you
Hear this oh Son of Peleus?

ACHILLES

I do
I hear this misery and feel the fool
To think your husband used me as a tool

CLYTEMNESTRA

But can't you see they'll slay my daughter? And
They used you as the bait as if they planned
To marry her to you

ACHILLES

Your husband is
To blame for this and I'm disgusted. His
Foul acts are not unnoticed

CLYTEMNESTRA

I will not
Be limited by shame. I know I ought
To show respect before you as you are
Descended from The Gods and I am far
Beneath you as a mortal. But I will

Now set aside all shame and beg until
I can secure my daughter's life.

(she throws herself on her knees before him)

Oh please

I'm here before you begging on my knees
Descendant of Olympus, aid me now
She never truly was your bride but how
Can you ignore her now? She's there within
Prepared to be your bride and covered in
Fine wreaths and garlands. And expecting you
Instead she'll find that I've prepared her to
Be sacrificed instead of wed. You know
That you will seem responsible. Although
You never truly were her groom they'll say
You still were party to this in a way
Because she only came here thinking you
Would marry her. Who cares if it were true?

(she reaches for his beard)

I'll supplicate before you. My right hand
Now holds your beard. I beg you understand
My pleas and in your mother's name I call
Upon you in your name. That's how this all
Began. Your name was used and so I fell
Into this trap. So can you really tell
Me you will not assist now? You are bound
By honor aren't you? This unholy ground
I kneel upon is all I have. I'm not
Near any friends or family. You have got
To help me in my time of need. You know
What Agamemnon did to us. It's so
Beyond contempt and truly cruel. And I
Am here alone a woman. Should I try
Convincing all these soldiers on my own?
These wild men and sailors who have shown
They lust for blood by coming here? But they
May listen to a man like you. Just say
You will protect us. Please! Stretch out your arm

And then we'll know that we won't come to harm

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Just hear a mother's cries, it's like a spell
Their love is most unbounded. You can't tell
What limits they will pass when seeking to
Protect their young. There's nothing they won't do

ACHILLES

As I was born with tendency to be
High minded I can moderate and see
Both fortune and misfortune. Mortal men
Have highest highs and lowest lows and then
They'll prosper letting wisdom lead the way
Or they may turn their back on it. I say
That either way is valid. I was raised
In Chiron's holy halls and now I'm praised
For my straightforward manner. Still I will
Obey the Sons of Atreus until
Their orders go against my judgment. So
I use my spear on my own terms although
I always seek to honor Ares. Be
It here in Aulis or in Troy I'm free
To follow my own righteous path. But you
Dear lady, how I see you suffer through
This nightmare that your husband made to be
I truly feel for you and I will see
That this will all be rectified. I may
Be young but I will surely find a way
To save this girl they called my bride. My name
Was used in vain but I won't live in shame
From knowing that a sacrifice commenced
One where a father held the blade against
Her throat. For I am not your husband's toy
He will not use my name and then destroy
Your daughter. Nor am I a weapon. Your
Own husband is the villain here. All for
The promise of a marriage we are all
Anointed with a bloody mark and fall
Before our fellow man impure and bound
To guilt. And should she bleed upon the ground

A virgin and an innocent? How can
We let her die? Tell me what kind of man
Is worse? Could it be me were I not born
The son of Peleus? But we adorn
The likes of Menelaus with respect?
Though am I just as base if I accept
Your husband's machinations? So I swear
In name of all the Gods whose blood I bear
King Agamemnon will not do this deed
He won't so much as touch her robes. He'll heed
My warnings if he's wise or he will know
The glory of my ancestors. I'll show
That charlatan foul Calchas prophecies
And ones he won't see coming. A disease
On men these augurs need to go away
As they perform their rituals they say
The things they claim will come to be and then
Their dark predictions are forgotten when
The future comes to pass and they are wrong
But as for marriage? Well there is a long
Long line of maidens clamoring for me
But I don't help you just so I can be
Presented as an honest suitor. No
Your husband has insulted me. It's so
Outrageous that he stole my name and used
It as enticement. I would have refused
If I were asked. And you so eagerly
Believed it all. Though it can never be
My name is only mine but I would lend
It to the Greeks should victory depend
On it. And if it raised a wind to Troy
There is no action I would not employ
If it would help my Grecian brothers. But
It seems our leaders truly don't know what
They seek from me. Am I their friend or foe?
But soon I'll draw my sword and they will know
I might just draw some blood before we leave
For Troy. And should they think they can achieve
Abduction of your daughter while I stand
Protecting her then soon and by my hand
They'll find that it's their blood that soon will spill

Yet vigilance is needed. Be so still
And leave this task to me. Although I'm so
Just like a god to your eyes you must know
In truth I'm still a mortal. But I'll try
To prove I'm worthy of the Gods on High
Olympus

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Son of Peleus you are
Most worthy of your lineage and far
Beyond all mortal men. Your words ring true
Your sacred mother should be proud of you

CLYTEMNESTRA

If only I could find the words that would
Give you the praise you so deserve. Though should
I praise you much too far or far too less
I hope to stay within your favor. Yes
It is quite possible the praised get strained
If those who praise them leave their tongues unchained
And prattle on with gratitude. Still I
Am so ashamed to burden you with my
Ordeal. My troubles don't belong to you
But when a man of means says he will do
An honorable act to help someone
Whose honor does not match his own he's done
A truly worthy deed indeed. And here
I am so unconnected to you. Fear
Is gripping me completely. Still I plea
For pity from you. I so foolishly
Believed we would be bound as kinsmen. Though
If she had died from this then you must know
It could be like the darkest omen to
Destroy all future marriage plans for you
But how your words were powerful from first
To last. And now my daughter isn't cursed
To die as it seems you are willing to
Protect her. But what should she do for you?
Should she fall down and supplicate and take
Your knees within her hands? I should not make
Her do it as she is untouched. But still

I will demand it should that be your will
I will deliver her to you and she
Will stand before you as nobility
Yet modestly present herself to you
But if that isn't necessary to
Secure your help then I would hope that we
Could keep her there within. And then she'll be
Inside beyond all eyes remaining true
To modesty and chastity if you
Permit it. You must tell me what you are
Expecting. Then we'll only go that far

ACHILLES

You need not bring your daughter out to me
My lady. Let's not let the rabble see
Such actions. When you gather all these men
And have an army but no action then
Their idle hands give way to idle lips
And we'll have gossip here among the ships
With foulest thoughts and words beyond compare
But should she kneel? That's neither here nor there
For I am now committed to engage
The forces that oppose you so enrage
Me. I will see this through or I will die
While trying. Yes I have not told a lie
Nor do I make a mockery of you
And all your troubles. I will see this through
Or let me die if I dare fail you

CLYTEMNESTRA

May
You be exalted for the selfless way
You rescue the distressed

ACHILLES

But first you need
To hear what we must do so we'll succeed

CLYTEMNESTRA

What do you say? I'm listening to each
Word that you say

ACHILLES

I think we first should reach
Out to your husband hoping to persuade
Him to a wiser way

CLYTEMNESTRA

That man is made
Of dust and sand a total coward. He
Is too afraid of all the soldiers

ACHILLES

Be
Persuasive and you'll turn his mind

CLYTEMNESTRA

A cold
Chance that I'll turn him. But I will uphold
The call of your directions

ACHILLES

You must plea
With him to stop the slaughter. But if he
Opposes you and won't be swayed then you
Must come to me. I'll do what I must do
But only if we have no other way
And this assures your safety. And it may
Behoove us to approach with words instead
Of force. Then Agamemnon won't be led
To anger with me and the army will
Not blame me for our situation. Still
The sword and work with words, I say, then you
Will have your greatest chance. You might get through
These challenges and save your family
Without an intervention made by me

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your words are wise and make such sense. But now
I have to act upon these words. But how
Should I then seek you out if I should fail
Convincing him? Then how can I avail
My wretched self of your protection?

ACHILLES

I

Will watch you. If occasion calls for my
Intrusion I will be there. Until then
Be certain you aren't seen among the men
You are born of a royal house and you
Cannot be seen distraught and running through
This horde of men. You are the daughter of
Tyndareus you should not push and shove
Your way to foul your reputation. Your
Great father is a noble man

CLYTEMNESTRA

And for

Your words my way is clear. I will obey
Your sound instructions, every word you say
In name of all the Gods I hope that you
Are well rewarded for the things you do
But if they don't then should we righteously
Devoutly follow them? We soon shall see

(CLYTEMNESTRA and ACHILLES exit)

CHORUS

WHEN THE GODS ALL GATHERED
FOR THE GREAT WEDDING FEAST
OF PELEUS AND THETIS
PELEUS AND THETIS
HOW THE MUSIC FLOWED THROUGH THE FLUTE
AND THE STRINGS OF THE LYRE
AS BREATH PASSED THROUGH THE REEDS
AND THE GUESTS ALL DANCED
TO THE SONG OF THE FLUTE AND THE LYRE AND THE REEDS
AND THE GUESTS ALL DANCED WEARING SANDALS OF GOLD

AND CHIRON WAS THERE
AMONG THE GUESTS
AND CHIRON WAS THERE
AMONG THE CENTAURS
AS THE WINE OF BACCHUS
AS THE GUESTS ALL DANCED

AMONG THE GARLANDS AND WREATHS
AND THE GUESTS ALL DANCED
WEARING SANDALS OF GOLD

THEN THE MUSIC STOPPED FOR CHIRON
THE DANCING STOPPED FOR CHIRON
AS CHIRON HAS SECOND SIGHT
HE COULD SEE THE DAYS
THAT FOLLOW THE NIGHT
EVERYONE STOPPED FOR CHIRON
EVERYTHING STOPPED FOR CHIRON

HE CALLED TO THETIS ON HER WEDDING DAY
AND TOLD HER A SON WOULD BE BORN
ACHILLES ACHILLES ACHILLES ACHILLES
A SON LIKE SHE
DESCENDED FROM THE GODS
ACHILLES ACHILLES ACHILLES ACHILLES
AND HE WOULD BE
A LIGHT AMONG MEN
AND HE WOULD BE
A WARRIOR AND THEN
HE WOULD TRAVEL ONE DAY TO TROY
HE WOULD TRAVEL AWAY TO TROY

AND TROY WOULD FALL
AND BY HIS HAND
AND TROY WOULD FALL
BUT HE WOULD SURELY STAND
ALL COVERED WITH ARMOR
FORGED BY THE GODS
ALL COVERED IN ARMOR OF GOLD
GIVEN BY HIS MOTHER
ARMOR OF GOLD FORGED BY THE GODS
A GIFT FROM HIS MOTHER
ARMOR OF GOLD

WE ARE ALL GATHERED
FOR A GREAT WEDDING FEAST
FOR THE CHILD OF AGAMEMNON
FOR THE CHILD OF AGAMEMNON

LET THE MUSIC FLOW THROUGH THE FLUTE
AND THE STRINGS OF THE LYRE
LET BREATH PASS THROUGH THE REEDS
LET THE GUESTS ALL DANCE
TO THE SONG OF THE FLUTE AND THE LYRE AND THE REEDS
LET THE GUESTS ALL DANCE WEARING SANDALS OF GOLD

BUT IPHIGENIA
YOU ARE BEDECKED AND PREPARED
IPHIGENIA
BEDECKED AS A BRIDE
BUT ARE YOU PREPARED
FOR WHAT YOU ARE PREPARED FOR
HAVE YOU PREPARED
FOR WHAT YOU ARE PREPARED FOR
PREPARED AS A BRIDE
TO BE SLAUGHTERED LIKE A BEAST
THE FLUTE AND THE LYRE AND THE REEDS WILL PLAY
BUT IT WON'T BE A WEDDING SONG THEY PLAY
YOUR MOTHER PREPARED YOU YOU AREN'T PREPARED
PRIMPED YOU ADORNED YOU FOR WHAT YOU ARE ARE
PREPARED FOR
TO BE CUT ACROSS THE THROAT HAVE YOU PREPARED
TO BE SLAUGHTERED LIKE A GOAT

BUT WHO WILL BE
A LIGHT AMONG MEN
WILL WE SEE
A LIGHT AMONG MEN

VIRTUE IS LIKE A WARRIOR
IN ARMOR OF GOLD
ARMOR OF GOLD
VIRTUE GETS LED TO BATTLE
IN ARMOR OF GOLD FORGED BY THE GODS
AND THE BATTLE MAY BE BEGUN
BUT THE BATTLE WILL NEVER BE WON
AS MORTALS SEE THE GOLD
NOT THE WARRIOR WITHIN
BUT THEY ONLY SEE THE GOLD
NOT THE VIRTUE THAT'S WITHIN

LAWLESSNESS OVERPOWERS LAW
CALLOUSNESS OVERPOWERS LOVE
AND ALL MORTALS LOSE THEMSELVES
TO JEALOUSY AND APATHY
AND BECOME LIKE THE GODS ABOVE

(CLYTEMNESTRA re-enters)

CLYTEMNESTRA

I'm once again outdoors and seeking out
My husband. Though it seems he'll go about
His business while avoiding us. If he
Could only hear his daughter wail as she
Is now aware what fate awaits her. And
She knows the horrors that her father planned
Her cries are low then high as she now pleas
In agony. I spoke of him now he's
Approaching. Let him be held in contempt
This evil father who would dare attempt
This crime against his child

(AGAMEMNON re-enters)

AGAMEMNON

I see you
Are waiting, Leda's daughter. And I do
Believe that Fate has set you here so I
Can speak with you alone as some of my
Words are unsuitable for brides to be
One final night of innocence should see
Her off

CLYTEMNESTRA

What is so urgent that you must
Discuss it here and now?

AGAMEMNON

As we discussed
It's time to send her forth with me. They made
Great preparations for her. They have laid

Out lustral waters and the barley cakes
Are ready for the fire. Someone rakes
The coals in preparation for the fat
Young heifers we are sacrificing at
The sacred shrine of Artemis all for
The marriage to be consecrated. Or
Without the spilling of dark blood we will
Not honor her

CLYTEMNESTRA

You speak sweet words until
Your actions speak so foul. I cannot say
A word of praise for them

(calls to AGAMEMNON'S quarters)

And now you may
Come out my daughter. As you are aware
Of all your father planned for you. Let's share
This moment with your baby brother. Bring
Orestes out with you. Just make swaddling
From your fine robes to hold him

(IPHIGENIA re-enters carrying ORESTES)

She stands still
And ready to obey you. But I will
Now speak for both of us

AGAMEMNON

My daughter why
Do you weep bitterly? Look up at my
Face once again. Upon the ground you stare
And mask your face behind your robes

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now where
Should I begin to tell you all of my
Predicaments and sorrows? Should I try
To start at the beginning? Or I could
Begin where this is ending. Nothing would

Make sense of senselessness

AGAMEMNON

What do you say?

You both are in hysterics. And the way
You are confronting me disturbs me. You
Are both alarmed and it alarms me

CLYTEMNESTRA

Do

You promise to be candid should I dare
To ask of you some pointed questions?

AGAMEMNON

There

Is no necessity to ask that. You
Can ask me anything and freely

CLYTEMNESTRA

Do

You plan to to sacrifice our daughter?

AGAMEMNON

What?

The words you speak are so disgusting. But
I'm sad to say they just reflect on you

CLYTEMNESTRA

Just try and calm yourself and simply do
What you have promised. Answer me

AGAMEMNON

If I

Am given decent questions then I'll try
To give a decent answer

CLYTEMNESTRA

But I do

Not have another question. And so you
Need not provide another answer

AGAMEMNON

Oh

How Fate and destiny now plagues me

CLYTEMNESTRA

So

It is with me and with our daughter. We
Are tied and bound to sad misfortune. Three
Unfortunates most certain

AGAMEMNON

How have I

Wronged you?

CLYTEMNESTRA

You dare to ask me that? Please try

To think before you speak. Your mind is in
Your sword and shield. Yet nothing works within
Your flailing mouth

AGAMEMNON

So I have been betrayed

And you know of my plans

CLYTEMNESTRA

I know you made

The darkest foulest pact. I know it all
The silence that I'm hearing now? I'll call
It your complete confession. Moan and weep
Away but spare me your sad words. Just keep
It to yourself and please do not expend
An effort just for me

AGAMEMNON

I won't offend

You with excuses falsehoods or a plea
In hopes that I won't act so shamelessly
And add to my misfortunes

CLYTEMNESTRA

Listen to

The words I say and words I mean so you
Will not be mystified by riddles or
Have any doubt of my position. For
My first point: Please remember you coerced
Me into marriage when you killed the first
Man I had married. And then how you killed
My first born son as well. How you fulfilled
Your bloody destiny as you just threw
My baby to the ground right after you
Had torn him suckling from my breast. But who
Arrived? Two sons of Zeus, my brothers to
Avenge me riding high on horseback. They
The Dioscuri came to make you pay
While raging war against you. Oh but then
My aged father gave you refuge when
You supplicated at his feet. Then he
Rewarded you for all your crimes with me
Well I was reconciled to my fate
And as you know I did not hesitate
To do my wifely duties. You have no
Legitimate complaint as I've been so
Devoted to you though with modesty
I honored both your name and house and see
That when returning home you felt at ease
And when you left you felt refreshed. And these
Are markers of a perfect wife. They are
Quite rare but you don't have to travel far
To find a worthless wife they're everywhere
And I have given you a son. And there
Are daughters in your house as well but you
Will now dispose of one of them and through
Cruel actions you're depriving me of her
And how might you respond if someone were
To wonder why you killed your daughter? Would
You have an answer? Possibly I could
Respond for you and say, "It had to be
To help his brother Menelaus. He
Must go recover Helen." That seems right
To bargain with your child so he might

Retrieve a foul immoral woman. Pay
With what is dear to us just so he may
Retrieve what we all know is foul. You'll go
To Troy and leave us all behind. Although
What will you truly leave? A home that has
An emptiness that can't be sated as
I look upon her empty bed and chair
And sit alone and weep in deep despair
While wailing through the empty halls "Oh my
Dear child you were sadly murdered by
Your father's hand. And now he has destroyed
You and himself with one deep cut employed
In service to a worthy cause. And he
Just held the blade himself so you must see
He holds the guilt alone as well." And I
Suppose I'll wait at home just biding my
Time patiently so dutiful to you
And wonder if your little war is through
Then one day when you've seen your duty done
Imagine what delights wait for the one
Who swore that he would see his duty through
And kill his loving daughter. If you do
These crimes against me by the Gods I swear
I will commit some crimes against you. Fair
Is fair. But go and sacrifice her. Then
Go pray for all the Gods to bless you when
You have your daughter's blood upon you. May
Your words be fine and pious as you pray
While stabbing her to death. Pray you'll return
To find a house that's not disgraced. You spurn
Your family and all decency so why
Should you expect it's waiting for you? I
Am wondering should I be praying too
While waiting for a safe return for you?
We cannot fool the Gods. Would they believe
I'm praying for the killer as I grieve
My daughter's death? And if you should survive
And then return to Argos you'll arrive
To find your children fleeing your embrace
How will you look your children in the face
When you know they know that you stole the breath

Of one of them to free the wind? Yes death
Exchanged for wind is quite a bargain. Now
Have you considered all of this? Just how
Important is the honor carrying
A scepter while you lead an army? Bring
This argument to all your soldiers. Say
“We need a wind to sail to Troy. The way
To do this is to make a lottery
And enter all our daughter’s names. Then we
Will choose one for a sacrifice.” That’s fair
Instead you’ll set your flesh and blood up there
Upon a board for all to see. And why
Do you not make your brother pay? Just try
Demanding Menelaus has to set
His daughter there for sacrifice. Yes let
His offspring go be punished for the sake
Of her foul mother’s crime. I should not make
A sacrifice myself when I am true
To you while she goes gallivanting. Do
You think it’s fair if Helen should return
To Sparta she should live in peace? And earn
The right to see her daughter grow? If I
Am wrong I beg of you please tell me why
But if my words are righteous do not slay
Our daughter. You must find a wiser way

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Are you persuaded, Agamemnon? Please
Now join with her and save your child. These
Decisions can be justified. Who might
Dare question a decision that is right?

IPHIGENIA

Had I the tongue of Orpheus I would
Use words to charm and move you. Like I could
Move boulders with my words as well. I’d say
Enchanting things to move men to my way
Of thinking. But it seems I need to try
My tears as an enchantment. And so I
Kneel down before you as I supplicate
I have no branch but I can consecrate

The ritual by my own body bore
By my own mother. And I'll beg you for
My life. Do not destroy me I am still
So young. Please let me see the light until
My time has truly come. Do not send me
To Hades where forever I will be
Surrounded by the darkest night of all
I was first born to you the first to call
You "father" as I sat upon your knee
And you called me your daughter lovingly
And with affection. And the way you'd say
"My precious daughter there will come a day
You'll leave my house then how you'll prosper in
Your husband's house. While living there within
His walls in such a way that's worthy of
The House of Atreus." And then with love
I'd talk to you while pulling on your beard
Just as I'm doing now. "Oh my revered
Dear father, how I hope to see you there
In my new home when you are old. It's where
I hope I can repay all that you did
To raise me with such loving care." We did
Say all of that, remember? Or have you
Forgotten it as now you lead me to
My death? As I drip tears upon each knee
In name of all your forefathers and she
Who bore me standing over there. Look how
She's suffering so greatly. This is now
More painful than the day that she gave birth
To me. I beg you tell me I'm not worth
As much as Helen and her broken vow
As she has wandered off with Paris now
Did he arrive for my destruction? So
Please look directly at me father. Know
That if you kiss me it will be the last
You set upon my tear-stained cheek. Now fast
Before I'm gone leave me a memory
Of you in case you truly do not see
Your way to sparing me

(she presents ORESTES)

Orestes you

Are just a helpless baby but you do
Have tears that you can use protesting my
Destruction. You can say I should not die
By binding all your tears and cries to mine
As even babies know there is a line
Where good is gone and evil reigns. You see
My father he now doesn't move and he
Is speechless not a sound from him. How his
Cold silence is like supplication. Is
He saying you should show some mercy to
His sister who is pleading unto you?
His sister who has many years to live?
And by your beard I beg of you to give
Us both your full attention as we make
Our case. We both have purest hearts to break
As we both plea you'll reconsider. Here
You see a baby and a maiden. We're
Both hoping to prevail and hope that you
Will understand. You know I'm begging to
Live in the light of day the greatest thing
The Gods have made for mortals. How we cling
To it and fear the dark. Please tell me who
Would choose death over life? A madman? To
Live life with great dishonor is preferred
To dying with dishonor

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I have heard

The name of Helen and I wonder why
This wretched woman leads a girl to die
The House of Atreus has children who
Are suffering and all because of you

AGAMEMNON

A man may love his children but can still
Have understanding love can stretch until
It breaks when sad reality steps in
If you can't see distinction you begin
Descending into madness. It's a curse
For me to do this but it's even worse

If I do not, I know that you can see
A line of ships that stretch out endlessly
And all the soldiers clad in bronze who wait
To make their mark in Troy but hesitate
Because there is no wind. Hear how they yearn
To raze the city's towers makes them burn
Just like the fire smoldering within
Them all. The only way we can begin
Our quest is heeding Calchas. Prophecies
Must be obeyed. And I have heard the pleas
Of all these soldiers. How they lust for war
It seizes them like madness yearning for
Revenge and honor screaming we should sail
And soon. They want their weapons to impale
Barbarians of Troy and teach them how
We punish countries that would dare allow
Their prince to pilfer Grecian wives. I know
These men will kill us all in Argos. So
Outrageous is their bloodlust they'll react
With homicidal rage due to the fact
It was a Goddess who commanded me
Do not blame Menelaus, Daughter. He
Did not enslave my soul nor did he force
My hand. I'm simply following the course
Of leadership to all my countrymen
And sacrifices must be given when
Your country calls. Necessity is not
A welcome guest at times. And it has brought
Me to this place. Remember we all are
In servitude to Greece and that is far
Beyond the price of just one life. And you
Alone can lead our fight for honor through
This deed. So all the scum of Troy can see
That we will not abide this robbery

(AGAMEMNON exits)

CLYTEMNESTRA
YOU WOMEN ARE STRANGERS
UNKNOWN TO ME
AND YOU SEE

MISERY
MY MISERY
MY DAUGHTER YOU
HAVE SEEN HIM LEAVE
LEAVING YOU ALONE
LEAVING US ALONE
LEAVING US TO GRIEVE
IN MISERY

IPHIGENIA

MISERY

CLYTEMNESTRA AND IPHIGENIA

IN MISERY

IPHIGENIA

MOTHER WE ARE LOCKED
IN MISERY TOGETHER
OUR FATES ENTWINED
OUR MISERY COMBINED
AND MY LIFE WILL SOON BE DONE
AS I SAY GOODBYE TO THE SUN
THE SUN WON'T SHINE ON ME
BUT IT WILL SHINE ENDLESSLY
IN FAR OFF TROY
WHERE ONCE THERE WAS A BOY
A SON BORN TO PRIAM
A ROYAL SON OF PRIAM
A SON THEY FEARED WOULD DESTROY TROY
SO THEY TORE HIM FROM HIS MOTHER'S ARMS
SO THEY SENT HIM TO AN EARLY DOOM
BUT HERDSMEN SAVED HIM
HERDSMEN RAISED HIM
AND SAVED HIM FROM HIS DOOM
FOR HIM TO BECOME MY DOOM

AND THEN HE GREW
LIKE THE FLOWERS AND TREES
THAT HE GREW AMONG
HYACINTH AND ROSES
BEAUTIFUL AND FULL

BEAUTIFUL ENOUGH
TO CATCH THE EYE OF A GODDESS
TO CATCH THE EYES OF THREE GODDESSES
HERA
APHRODITE
AND ATHENA
AND THEY ASKED HIM TO OBSERVE
AND THEY ASKED OF HIM TO JUDGE
WHICH ONE OF THE GODDESSES
WAS THE GREATEST BEAUTY
WHICH ONE OF THEM
CAPTURED HIS EYE
THEY ASKED THE PRINCE
PARIS THE PRINCE
PARIS THE PRINCE THAT WAS LEFT TO DIE
LEFT TO DIE

AND NOW I AM LEFT TO DIE
I AM LEFT TO PAY
THE PRICE FOR PARIS
FOUL PRINCE PARIS
I AM TO PAY
FOR THE GAMES OF THE GODDESSES
HERA
APHRODITE
AND ATHENA

BUT IT IS ARTEMIS
WHO DEMANDS I PAY
ARTEMIS
WHO DEMANDS MY BLOOD
TO RELEASE THE WIND
THAT WILL FILL THE SAILS
THAT WILL CARRY OFF THE GREEKS
AND BRING GLORY TO THE GREEKS

OH MOTHER
MY MOTHER
MY FATHER HAS LEFT ME ALONE
IN MISERY
FOUL MISERY

I AM ABANDONED
I AM DESERTED
IN MISERY
FOUL MISERY

I CURSE THE DAY
I FIRST SET EYES
ON HELEN

CHORUS

HELEN HELEN HELEN

IPHIGENIA

AND NOW MY FATHER
MY OWN FATHER
IS THE WORST PERSON TO
IS THE WORST PERSON WHO
COULD DO THIS DEED TO ME
THIS DARKEST DEED TO ME
HE WILL MAKE ME BLEED
TO FULFILL HIS NEED

OH AULIS AULIS AULIS AULIS
IF YOU HAD NOT RECEIVED
IF YOU HAD NEVER RECEIVED
THESE SHIPS OF WAR
BEDECKED IN BRONZE
THESE SHIPS OF WAR
THAT POINT TO TROY
IF ZEUS WOULD ONLY SEND A WIND
IF ZEUS WOULD JUST RELEASE THE WIND
BUT WE NEVER KNOW
HOW THE WINDS WILL BLOW
ONE DAY YOU SAIL
ONE DAY YOU FAIL
A MORTAL CAN NEVER KNOW
A MORTAL CAN NEVER KNOW

MISERY
OH MISERY
HELEN YOU BRING NOTHING BUT MISERY

YOU BRING ME NOTHING BUT MISERY

CHORUS

HELEN HELEN HELEN HELEN

IPHIGENIA

YOU BRING ALL OF GREECE
MISERY
MISERY

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I pity you as you've been forced to face
A fate so foul. It is a true disgrace

IPHIGENIA

Oh Mother my dear mother, now I see
A group of men approaching

CLYTEMNESTRA

 It is he
The son of Thetis that you were brought here
To wed

IPHIGENIA

 Open the doors. I'll disappear
Within so he can't see me.

(calls towards AGAMEMNON'S quarters)

 You inside
Swing out the door for me

CLYTEMNESTRA

 Why do you hide

IPHIGENIA

I am ashamed to face Achilles

CLYTEMNESTRA

 Why?

IPHIGENIA

The Fates have cruelly toyed with us. Now I
Am so ashamed

CLYTEMNESTRA

There is no time to feel
Unnecessary modesty. Or we'll
Soon find our circumstances come to bear
We can't control a world that isn't fair
So keep your feet right here so you won't be
Devoid of breath but full of dignity

(ACHILLES re-enters followed by ATTENDANTS carrying his armor and weapons)

ACHILLES

Oh Leda's daughter, you are suffering

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your words are sadly true

ACHILLES

And yet I bring
Your word of darkest cries among the men
That shouts from ear to ear

CLYTEMNESTRA

Well tell me then
What is it?

ACHILLES

It concerns your daughter

CLYTEMNESTRA

You
Now come to me with words like omens

ACHILLES

To
Them all it is inevitable. She
Is set for sacrifice

CLYTEMNESTRA

Can there not be
A man among them who would argue?

ACHILLES

I
Did try myself and was endangered

CLYTEMNESTRA

Why?
What danger could befall you?

ACHILLES

They prepared
To stone me

CLYTEMNESTRA

Stone you? Just because you dared
To speak up for my daughter?

ACHILLES

That was all

CLYTEMNESTRA

What kind of man would even have the gall
To lay a finger on your armor? Who
Would dare?

ACHILLES

Just all the men of Greece

CLYTEMNESTRA

And you
Were not protected by your soldiers?

ACHILLES

They
Were first to turn against me

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then I say
We are undone, my daughter

ACHILLES

They said I
Was just enslaved to marriage that is why
I foolishly defended her

CLYTEMNESTRA

And when
You answered them?

ACHILLES

I told the mob of men
That she was my intended and they should
Not murder her

CLYTEMNESTRA

I would agree

ACHILLES

And would
They dare destroy the maiden meant for me?
One promised by her father?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Knowing she
Was brought to you from Argos

ACHILLES

But I was
Then overcome by calls for blood

CLYTEMNESTRA

Because
A mob is more foul mischief than one man
Can gather for himself

ACHILLES

But I began
This quest to help you and I'll still assist
You if I can

CLYTEMNESTRA

But how can you resist
An army? You are just one man

ACHILLES

Do you
See these attendants bearing arms?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I do
I truly bless you for your actions

ACHILLES

I
Am blessed already

CLYTEMNESTRA

So you say that my
Dear child won't be slaughtered?

ACHILLES

She will not
Without consent from me

CLYTEMNESTRA

But they have got
Intentions to destroy her ruthlessly

ACHILLES

With well more than a thousand men. You'll see
Odysseus is leading them

CLYTEMNESTRA

The son
Of Sisyphus?

ACHILLES

Yes he's the very one

CLYTEMNESTRA

Does he come of his own accord? Or is
He following an order?

ACHILLES

It is his
Decision.

CLYTEMNESTRA

He must have an evil mind
To want to stain his hands with blood

ACHILLES

He'll find
Me waiting to restrain him

CLYTEMNESTRA

Will he try
To seize her dragging her away?

ACHILLES

Yes by
The hair I have no doubt

CLYTEMNESTRA

What can I do
If it should come to that?

ACHILLES

Just hold her to
Yourself and don't let go

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then you can know
She will be safe if I can help her

ACHILLES

So

Prepare yourself as it will come to be

IPHIGENIA

My mother you must listen now to me
You have great anger at your husband though
Your feelings have no purpose. There is no
Escaping our predicament. We must
Commend this kindly stranger. But he's just
Delaying the inevitable tide
Let's not destroy him in the name of pride
Or honor. There's an army heading here
And you can't let him intervene. I fear
This will destroy his reputation. Then
I still will be a sacrifice and when
I'm gone he still will suffer needlessly
While we gain nothing. Are you hearing me?
My thoughts and words are worthy. I have seen
The end and I resolve to die. I mean
To do it with my head held high without
A whimper or a struggle. Do not doubt
My last decision, Mother. See my way
Of thinking. Know that I mean what I say
Now all of Greece is watching me and my
Small sacrifice will let our army fly
On mighty winds across the sea to Troy
Now it's within my power to deploy
A thousand ships to sack the city, burn
It to the ground. The Trojans won't return
Again to Greece abducting women. They
Are but barbarians. There is no way
They'll come here to commit that crime once more
They will think twice of Helen how the score
Was settled with complete destruction. And
How foul Prince Paris was the firebrand
That set it all in motion. As for me
By death I am redeemed and I will be
Remembered for my final gift to Greece
For just the cost of my small struggle peace
Will come and I will be remembered. So

I have no right to cling to life. I know
You didn't bear me just so I could be
A blessing to myself. I say that we
Should all be blessings to our countrymen
All for the good of Greece. And, Mother when
I see a host of soldiers bravely stand
There with their shields and ready at command
And thousands more all at the oar to go
Head bravely into battle. As they show
Their loyalty to Greece then how can I
Prevent their right to valor? So I die
It's just one life in face of thousands. There
Cannot be justice if I would but dare
To utter one sad word in protest. And
Let me be clear that I cannot demand
One man go battle all these soldiers where
They might be killed or they may kill him. There
Is no way we can justify it. May
One man of valor see the light of day
Before ten thousand others who would let
Him sacrifice himself, survive. A debt
To Artemis has been decided. I
Am just a mortal should I dare to try
Opposing her? A Goddess? There's no way
And so I give myself to Greece. And may
My body be the spark that makes Troy burn
This is my legacy. I will not learn
The trials of a marriage. I won't know
The pain and joy of motherhood. I go
Off to the darkness. This will give me fame
And glory they will holler out my name
As soon we'll see the sack of Troy has shown
Barbarians they will be overthrown
They'll be enslaved while we will prosper free
As Greece fulfills its holy destiny

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Your words and deeds will bring great glory. Though
The Fates and Gods can be so fickle. So
We'll never know the secrets of their ways

ACHILLES

Oh Agamemnon's daughter, I would praise
The Gods if I were blessed to have you be
My wife. But you cannot belong to me
As you belong to Greece and Greece to you
You are the daughter of our homeland through
And through. You are intelligent to know
You cannot fight Olympus so you show
Great sensibility while weighing all
Your options. But I still wish I could call
You my intended. What I see in you
Is great nobility a heart so true
A heart I want to have. If only I
Could rescue you. I swear to you in my
Most holy mother's name I'd bring you to
My home and halls. But still I cannot do
It. I cannot face all the Greeks to spare
Your fate. I know of nothing more unfair
Or fearsome as the darkness known as death

IPHIGENIA

I'll say with what may be my final breath
And without hesitation: Helen has
Caused war and bloodshed with her beauty as
It drives most men to madness. Oh but you
Must not be slain on my behalf. And who
Might lose their life while you're defending me?
If I am able you must let me be
The savior of Greece

ACHILLES

What can I say?
You have a noble spirit. There's no way
My words can challenge your resolve. So why
Would I dare to deny you? But still I
Am here if you should dare to change your mind
I will be there beside you and you'll find
My sword and shield in service to you. I
Will hide them both beside the altar. By
My words you know you can be saved if you
Discover as the blade comes into view

You're not as brave as you believed. Just know
I will be there and quite well armed. I go
Now to the altar and I wait for you
Just signal me if you cannot go through
With it

(ACHILLES and ATTENDANTS exit)

IPHIGENIA

Now mother tell me why are you
So silent? And with tears within your eyes

CLYTEMNESTRA

I say I have no reason to disguise
The misery within

IPHIGENIA

You must not make
Me back away just like a coward. Take
My words and my decisions as they are

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then speak my child. I won't stop you. Far
Be it for me to cause you injury

IPHIGENIA

I will not have you mourning. You won't be
Enrobed in black or chopping off your hair

CLYTEMNESTRA

Why would you say that to me daughter? There
Are mourning rituals and I'll have lost
You

IPHIGENIA

No not lost but found. I'll pay the cost
For you to reap the praise and glory

CLYTEMNESTRA

How
Can that be right? You say you won't allow

My mourning you?

IPHIGENIA

 You can't. I will not be
Interred within a tomb

CLYTEMNESTRA

 Now suddenly
A tomb is not required for the dead?

IPHIGENIA

I will have a memorial instead
Of just a tomb. As Artemis will see
Me die upon her altar. That will be
My final resting place

CLYTEMNESTRA

 There's nothing I
Can say that's wiser. So I will not try
To argue further

IPHIGENIA

 But I still will live
In glory as the gift that I will give
To Greece will be remembered

CLYTEMNESTRA

 What should I
Say to your sisters?

IPHIGENIA

 That they should not cry
For me or mourn. I will not have them there
Enrobed in black

CLYTEMNESTRA

 And tell me what to share
With all the girls in Argos?

IPHIGENIA

Tell them I
Bid them farewell. And I expect they'll try
Their best as young Orestes grows to be
A man of honor

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hold him. You must see
Him one last time

IPHIGENIA

My dearest brother you
Did try your best with all that you could do
For one so young

CLYTEMNESTRA

And what is left for me
To do for you in Argos?

IPHIGENIA

You must be
Forgiving of my father. He is still
Your husband

CLYTEMNESTRA

He has trials to fulfill
That will be truly terrible

IPHIGENIA

But he
Has not seen me forsaken willingly
He just submitted for his countrymen

CLYTEMNESTRA

But he still proved himself unworthy when
Conspiring like a criminal. He's now
Unworthy of his ancestors

IPHIGENIA

But how
Should I now be delivered? Who will take

Me to the altar? Or I fear they'll make
Me go by dragging me there by my hair

CLYTEMNESTRA

It must be me

IPHIGENIA

No mother don't you dare
That's not the answer

CLYTEMNESTRA

Let me do it. I
At least can hold your robes

IPHIGENIA

You must comply
With all I said my mother. You must know
That this is for the best. You cannot go
Let one of Father's servants take me to
The Goddess' most holy grove and do
My duty and be sacrificed

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then that
Is all my child? You are leaving?

IPHIGENIA

At
Once. And I will not be returning

CLYTEMNESTRA

And
You leave your mother?

IPHIGENIA

Try to understand
Not everything that happens is correct

CLYTEMNESTRA

Just stop! You cannot go

IPHIGENIA

You disrespect
Me with your tears. And I forbid them

(CLYTEMNESTRA collapses on the ground. ATTENDANT to AGAMEMNON enters as IPHIGENIA addresses CHORUS:)

So
To all you women raise your voices. Show
Devotion now to Artemis. Yes sing!
Oh daughter of Great Zeus we now will bring
You what has been demanded. Let the men
Now hear our song. Collect some baskets then
Go light the fire pit and grind the meal
To make the sacred cakes. Oh Father kneel
Before the altar as I soon will be
Arriving to assure a victory

(she sings)

THERE IS NO SOUND OF THE WIND
AND THE ARMY SEEMS SO STILL
BUT WHAT DO I HEAR
DRAWING ME NEAR
AS I HEAD UP TO THE HILL

I HEAR A DRUM
THE BEAT OF A DRUM
TELLING ME
CALLING ME
TO COME

CHORUS

THE BEAT OF A DRUM
THE BEAT OF A DRUM

IPHIGENIA

CALLING OUT TO ME
THE BRINGER OF VICTORY
KNOWING I WILL BE
THE DESTROYER OF TROY

THE BANE OF TROY
THE PAIN OF TROY ACROSS THE SEA
WILL BELONG TO ME

CHORUS

TELLING YOU TO COME
CALLING YOU TO COME
BY THE BEAT OF THE DRUM
THE BEAT OF THE DRUM

IPHIGENIA

EMBELLISH ME WITH CROWNS
HONOR ME WITH WREATHS
DANCE AROUND
LEAP UPON THE GROUND
TO THE BEAT OF THE DRUM
BY THE BEAT OF THE DRUM

CHORUS

CALLING YOU TO COME
CALLING YOU TO COME

IPHIGENIA

DANCE A BLESSING
SING A BLESSING
TO ARTEMIS
GREAT ARTEMIS

IPHIGENIA

I BRING MYSELF TO YOUR ALTAR
UP TO YOUR SACRED ALTAR

I BRING MYSELF TO YOUR ALTAR
UP TO YOUR SACRED ALTAR

I HEAR THE DRUM
THE BEAT OF THE DRUM

CHORUS

THERE IS NO SOUND
OF THE WIND
AND THE ARMY
SEEMS SO STILL

BUT WHAT DOES SHE HEAR
DRAWING HER NEAR
AS SHE HEADS
UP TO THE HILL

SHE HEARS THE DRUM
THE BEAT OF THE DRUM

TELLING ME
CALLING ME
TO COME

TELLING HER
CALLING HER
TO COME

IPHIGENIA

OH ARTEMIS
GREAT ARTEMIS
I WILL NOT SHOW YOU FEAR
I WILL NOT SHED A TEAR
I WILL NOT SPOIL YOUR SACRED SHRINE
WITH ONE TEAR OF MINE
WITH ONE TEAR OF MINE
THEY ARE UNWORTHY OF YOU
UNWORTHY OF THE DIVINE

(IPHIGENIA begins to exit with ATTENDANT TO AGAMEMNON during the following:)

HEAR THE DRUM
IT'S GROWING LOUD
AND LOUDER STILL
IS IT COMING CLOSER
OR DOES IT KNOW I AM CLOSER
YOU MUST SING MY SISTERS
AND LOUDER LIKE THE DRUM
YOU MUST LET THEM KNOW
AND LET YOUR VOICES RISE TO SHOW
THAT I SOON WILL COME
BY THE BEAT OF THE DRUM
THE BEAT OF THE DRUM

(She has exited. CHORUS sings as the drumming intensifies:)

CHORUS

THE WIND HAS BEEN SO STILL
SO SILENT LIKE IT'S DEAD
AND NOW THE WORLD IS STILL
AND SHE WILL SOON BE DEAD

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

OH
IPHIGENIA

CHORUS

SHE HEARS THE DRUM
THE BEAT OF THE DRUM

OH
IPHIGENIA

TELLING HER
CALLING HER
TO COME

DANCE A BLESSING
SING A BLESSING
TO ARTEMIS
GREAT ARTEMIS

OH
IPHIGENIA

OH
IPHIGENIA

CHORUS

HEAR THE BEAT OF THE DRUM
THE BEAT OF THE DRUM

(Drumming intensifies as the CHORUS goes silent. The drumming crescendos and then stops. CHORUS chants the following with no music:)

LIKE THE BEATING OF A HEART
A DRUM GOES ON AND ON
UNTIL THE BEATING OF A HEART
IS GONE
IS GONE
IS GONE
IS GONE

(The goddess ARTEMIS enters from aloft)

ARTEMIS

Behold the power of Olympus. I
Am Artemis the Huntress. Feel the sky
Now start to breathe again the wind is free
A sacrifice fulfilled her destiny
And all is right. Or all is right for now
Did Agamemnon think I would allow
One daughter in exchange for killing my
Most sacred deer? To think he could defy
A Goddess' most sacred law and then
Exchange one body for a body? When
A royal mortal dares to cross the line
That separates them all from the divine
They soon find that their curse is just begun

With consequences that are never done
But rise now Clytemnestra. Let me see
That face that carries heavy destiny
And let me see that boy you carry. His
New destiny begins as well. He is
A son who will inherit so much sin
As now you'll both entangle him within
A web of evil lies and vengeance so
Destructive that the Fates could never know
The tragedy approaching. But I do
A Goddess can see everything that you
Cannot know now. And so you'll carry on
This world is strange to you a daughter gone
A marriage that is shattered. Oh how you
Awakened just this morning going through
Your daily preparations blissfully
Not knowing what was coming. But you'll be
Reborn tomorrow when you wake. At first
You won't remember but your bliss will burst
Apart before your eyes can open. Then
Remembering your heart will break again
As it will every morning now as you
Awaken to a broken world so new
To you and yet so tiresome. But there
Is purpose in your future. So prepare
To be of use to me as I will see
Your husband's full destruction. Destiny
Cannot be stopped but it can be foreseen
It might pick out a peasant or a queen
So let your husband go to war as you
Now take some time to plan and think things through
The Fates are watching you more than you know

CLYTEMNESTRA

But how can I go on when I am so
Destroyed? My daughter laying there upon
Your altar dead

ARTEMIS

Or maybe she is gone

CLYTEMNESTRA

Can there be a distinction?

ARTEMIS

Yes there may
And maybe when they raised the blade to slay
Her I replaced her with the sacred doe
Your husband killed. But we may never know
You show a man a maiden or a deer
But they won't see a difference as they cheer
Themselves while proudly going off to war
Among the calls for blood they might ignore
The body that is there before them. You
Could never see beyond your wailing, too
Emotional to see what's truly there
While still believing Fate is sometimes fair
But know that she is truly gone. And you
Will not lay eyes on her again. But through
Some healing over time the loss will wane
And you'll discover purpose through your pain

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now I have nothing

ARTEMIS

Silence mortal! You
Still live the life of royalty. And two
More daughters still await you. And you'll find
Your youngest girl Electra has the kind
Of name that rings for eons through the sky
She'll be remembered. Do not ask me why
And there within your arms a son will rise
And like his sister one day through the skies
His name will ring forever famously
Or infamously we can never be
Too certain how the story will be told
Or who will tell it. But for now just hold
Him in your arms and all you women come
And sing to him and dance and beat a drum
His father soon will sail across the sea
And it will fall to women now that he

Is raised to manhood. Sing now as I take
My leave. Remember every move you make
Is noted by the Gods so do not dare
Forget: The Gods are always everywhere

(ARTEMIS exits. CHORUS surrounds CLYTEMNESTRA and ORESTES)

CHORUS

HE'S A BOY AND NOT A MAN
AND HE'LL BE A MAN NOT A GOD
HE'S THE SON OF A SON OF A SON OF GREECE
HE'S THE SON OF A SON OF A SON OF GREECE
HE'S THE SON OF A SON OF A SON OF GREECE

The End

Sentence to Hope: A Sa'dallah Wannous Reader

Translated from the Arabic with an Introduction by Robert Myers and Nada Saab, Yale University Press, 2019

Modern and Contemporary Political Theatre from the Levant: A Critical Anthology

Edited by Robert Myers and Nada Saab, Brill, 2019

Reviewed by Rebekah Maggor

The Arab world has had a rich and diverse performance culture for centuries. But play-based theatre, anchored around scripted dialogue and performed in a space with demarcated areas for actors and audience, made its entrance as a European import around the middle of the nineteenth century. In Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus, and Beirut, elite audiences attended performances of visiting troops from Europe and locally produced Arabic translations of mostly French and Italian dramas. Towards the close of the century, however, a growing cohort of radical Arab intellectuals appropriated this novel theatre genre, transforming it from an exclusive “Western art” into homegrown entertainment. As historian Ilhan Khuri-Makdisi has shown, the major Arab cities in the Ottoman provinces of Egypt and the Levant were seized by a frenzy of theatrical production that both reflected and helped formulate anti-colonial and anti-elitist ideas. Arabic theatre stood at the core of a wider network of civic institutions such as leftist newspapers, schools for workers, free reading rooms, and industrial and agricultural expositions. Theatre groups staged politicized Arabic adaptations of European and Greek classics, as well as original plays based on a rich heritage of tribal tales of early Islam or stories of *The Thousand and One Nights*. Decades before Brecht’s consciousness-raising *Lehrstücke* and epic historical dramas obliterated fourth walls across European stages, Arab theatre artists fomented revolution with bold experimental plays that blurred lines between audience and spectator, decried economic exploitation, and called for the elimination of poverty.

The ideal of theatre as social project, with the potential to mobilize the masses against a sectarianized and unequal society, remains very much alive in the Arab world decades later. This socio-political thrust is evident in two excellent collections of contemporary Arabic drama in translation published this past year: *Sentence to Hope: A Sa'dallah Wannous Reader* (Yale University Press) and *Modern and Contemporary Political Theatre from the Levant: A Critical Anthology* (Brill), both edited by Robert Myers and Nada Saab. The collections bring together seminal plays written between 1967 and 2015 and make a major contribution to the small but growing body of contemporary Arabic drama available in English translation. Each annotated collection begins with a detailed introduction to the literary and political context of the plays and personal biographies of every writer. The *Wannous Reader* also includes a selection of the playwright’s speeches, essays, and interviews, showcasing his erudite perspectives on the intersection of theatre and politics. The books are an enormous boon not only for scholars of international theatre and Middle East studies, but for a much broader audience of artists and activists interested in political theatre, protest literature, and radical social change.

Wannous and the other Arab-Levant playwrights, these collections demonstrate, are more than worthy heirs to the political imagination and aesthetic ambitions of the pioneering Arab dramatists of the turn of last century. These writers animate weighty philosophical ideas through poetic language, dazzling

storytelling, and vivid characterization. As Wannous explains, “Theatre is the profound presentation of the human condition through the rules that govern history, and through class struggle and the process of social development” (426). For these Arab playwrights, class struggle and social development are broad umbrellas that necessarily include the status of women, sexual liberation, freedom of speech, the role of religion in government, the coercive apparatus of the state, and sectarianism as a means of autocratic rule. Aesthetically, their plays amalgamate European and Arab influences, or more accurately, as Wannous explains, they treat theatre as a “Western art that must be cultivated without any complexes in our local environment” (425). They critically and self-consciously integrate and deconstruct elements of Arabo-Islamic history and folk performance traditions with Aristotelian dramatic structures and modern European staging techniques.

In *Sentence to Hope: A Sa’dallah Wannous Reader* the editors co-translated four representative plays by one of the Arab world’s most dynamic dramatists of the twentieth century. In *An Evening’s Entertainment for the Fifth of June* (1969), one of Wannous’s earliest dramas, a disillusioned playwright in an unnamed Arab country sets off fierce public debate when he interrupts the performance of his festive nationalist drama in the aftermath of a devastating military defeat. A hyper meta-theatrical experimental play, it opens with hilarious playfulness and turns abruptly dark and brutal when security forces surround the theatre and arrest all who dared participate in the public conversation. *The Adventure of the Head of Mamlouk Jabir* (1971) similarly revolves around a catastrophic military defeat for which ordinary people pay the ultimate price. Drawing inspiration from the thirteenth century sacking of Baghdad by Hulagu Khan, Wannous imagines the adventures of the vizier’s Arlecchino-esque *mamlouk* (slave). A provocative play within a play, a neighborhood *bakawati* (storyteller) relates Jabir’s tale to a disheartened audience of down-and-out coffeehouse patrons. They interrupt with increasingly boisterous protests as the *bakawati*’s tale swerves precipitously from Jabir’s high-spirited scheming to his ruthless execution, fast followed by the looting and destruction of the city.

The two later plays in the Wannous collection, both written around 1994, hone in on gender disparities and the predicament of women within unequal societies. The intimate *Wretched Dreams*, set in a provincial Arab village in the early 1960s, follows two impoverished peasant women sharing a cramped house with their abusive husbands. The older of the two is a seamstress who works day and night to eke out a living while her good-for-nothing husband fritters away her money on drink and prostitutes. After a cultured and mysterious young lodger offers the wives an enticing glimpse of independence, self-respect, and sexual freedom, the women devise a bold plan to free themselves from their oppressive marriages. Like a heightened and hallucinatory Edward Albee play, *Wretched Dreams* begins with the deceptively naturalistic setup of a droll bickering married couple and ends with a nightmarish sequence of revenge gone wrong. *Rituals of Signs and Transformations* is a meditation on connections between economic independence, gender inequality, and sexual liberation, based on a titillating historical incident in Damascus in the late nineteenth century. When a high-ranking religious official is caught in flagrante delicto with his prostitute mistress, the official’s wife forces him to divorce her. With the advice and training of this same street-savvy prostitute, the fresh divorcee transforms herself from a respected and sexually repressed noblewoman into the erotic celebrity courtesan Almasa (“the diamond”). An Almasa craze takes Damascus by storm and threatens to wreak havoc with the social

and political order of the city. Fearing a popular uprising against the aristocrats, the Grand Mufti (the top religious judge) issues a decree legalizing violence against prostitutes, leading to further bloodshed.

Wannous thus reworks important elements of Arab heritage—popular literary characters, ancient tales, and key moments in pre-modern and contemporary history—to coax class struggle onto center stage. There are no “good” or “evil” rulers in his plays, only self-serving elites who behead servants, murder assertive women, sack entire cities, and disappear protesters all in the name of maintaining the status quo. In his inverted renderings, however, these ancient tales of high politics and betrayal are no longer the escapades of sultans or caliphs but rather, the stories of slaves and servants, who become the chief protagonists. His plays within plays feature mixed audiences of workers, refugees, peasants, and urbanites who hotly debate the events on stage. He shines a light on both the frustrations and glass ceilings of aristocratic and bourgeois women as well as the overbearing poverty and duress of working women. His peasants and servants are not comic sidekicks to the elite, but rather intelligent and sympathetic protagonists who take action to escape their unjust circumstances.

A dismal and disillusioned grassroots political outlook coupled with black humor similarly characterizes the plays in Myers and Saab’s second collection of dramatic translations, *Modern and Contemporary Political Theater from the Levant*. In his bluntly titled *The Dictator* (1967), Lebanese poet, playwright and journalist Isam Mahfuz mocks the faux populist rhetoric and empty revolutionary promises of “liberation” and “freedom.” This absurdist two-hander is reminiscent of Beckett’s stifflingly repetitive *Endgame*. The General and his suspiciously servant-like assistant Sa’dun, organize a revolution from inside a small cramped room, replete with a few pieces of broken furniture, the shard of a mirror, and a phone with a severed cord. Through a series of power-play word games, the General gradually convinces the modest Sa’dun to turn himself into a king. The General then stabs Sa’dun and declares, while admiring himself in the mirror shard, “I killed the King. I saved the world.”

Poet, screenwriter, and dramatist Muhammad al-Maghut likewise threads the ironic trope of oppressing the people to save the people through his hilariously bleak time-traveling satire *The Jester* (1973), translated by Gordon Witty. Al-Maghut, an influential contemporary of Wannous in Syria, staunchly identified as working-class. He was most famous for his pioneering prose poetry and his popular collaborations with Syrian comedian Durayd Lahham. The Jester of the title is a player in a ragtag traveling theatre troupe in a present-day Arab city. While performing at a coffee house, improvising a ludicrous impersonation of the eighth century Umayyad conqueror ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu’awia, known as Saqr Quraysh, the Jester suddenly finds himself whisked back in time to the real court of the heroic Arab prince. Saqr Quraysh is shocked and dismayed when the Jester reveals that Spaniards and Zionists have conquered Andalusia and Palestine, and ruthless Arab dictators have pummeled the rest of his impoverished “grandchildren” into terrified submission with their merciless security forces. Saqr Kuraysh, in antiquated literary Arabic, orders his groom to “saddle me a steed as fast as the wind” and fearlessly travels into the future to liberate Palestine and restore dignity to all his oppressed Arab descendants (168). Soon after reaching the present-day Arab world, a lowly security guard detains the passport-less Saqr Quraysh at a border checkpoint and anticlimactically squelches his valiant plans to restore the Arab peoples to glory. When the local officials discover Saqr Quraysh’s

identity, they hand the medieval “war criminal” over to a Spanish diplomat in exchange for several tons of onions.

Written thirty years later, the Iraqi playwright and director Jawad al-Asadi literally strips bare the political drama in his strikingly naturalistic tête-à-tête *Baghdadi Bath*. Months after a military invasion, two working-class brothers wash themselves in an abandoned public bath in the middle of their ransacked neighborhood. In the first act, Majid, who has been earning handsome sums running supplies for the occupying military, pronounces the foreign soldiers his country’s saviors, for whom he would “sacrifice my eyesight” (314). In the second act, after a shipping gig goes gruesomely wrong, Majid admits that he has betrayed his own brother for the favors of a pitiless imperial military campaign. As in Wannous’s prophetic *Mamlouk Jabir*, the invading army sacks the city and replaces one oppressive regime with another, leaving the people of Baghdad to pick up the pieces.

Like Wannous’s work, the plays in the Levant collection exhibit a deep cynicism towards “regime changes” and “revolutions” that swap one tyrant for another, each propped up by foreign capital and proxy-military interventions. In some ways, however, a few of the plays represent a distinct strain. Whereas Wannous (and al-Maghut) deployed a geographical and linguistic distancing of epic tales and poetic language to disguise a call to arms, Mahfuz and al-Asadi embrace absurdist political nihilism, which often takes the form of minimalist and claustrophobic two-person vernacular dramas. Plays such as *Mamlouk Jabir* and *The Jester* set up animated public dialogues between the performers and their questioning audiences in historically specific settings. *Baghdadi Bath* and *The Dictator*, by contrast, take place in detritus strewn spaces. They confine human conversation to an alienated exchange in the perpetual vacuum of an anonymous present. Wannous constructed crushing narratives that nonetheless proceed with a determined sense of change over time and cast ordinary people as part of an emerging collective consciousness. For Al-Asadi and Mahfuz’s isolated individual characters, history grinds to a halt. They are unable to struggle for change.

Whether nihilistic or collectivist, absurdist and minimalist or lavish and epic, the plays in these two collections belong to a pantheon of modern international drama. Even as these plays draw on a magnificent and longstanding legacy of Arabic literary forms and folk performance traditions, they emphatically do not fetishize Arab authenticity. As Wannous insisted, “Arab theatre has, since its inception, been authentic...what guarantees particularity and identity in Arab theatre are not cosmetic or prepackaged forms but its content and engagement with the real world from which this theatre emerges”(400). For Wannous and the other writers, engaging with the “real world” meant situating Arab countries as postcolonial states in an uneven global system that “accentuates unjust divisions of wealth and widens the gap between extremely rich countries and destitute peoples” (389). In thinking about the translation and staging of his plays internationally, Wannous was deeply concerned that they might be interpreted as exotic objects. A production of *Mamlouk Jabir* in Moscow in 1990 greatly pleased Wannous because the Russian audience felt the tale was about them. “They appreciated the play not as an alien novelty that speaks about the land of *The Thousand and One Nights*, but as a serious play that reflects their own concerns, a play that relates to them in the same way these conditions relate to us” (396). Myers and Saab appropriately chose translations that do not “otherize” or “Orientalize.” Lucid and lively, the translations engage with the political core of these works. They provide an

excellent foundation for new English-language adaptations, which would be painfully relevant for our current moment of global tumult and grotesque inequality.

REBEKAH MAGGOR is a translator, director, and scholar. She is Assistant Professor in the Department of Performing & Media Arts at Cornell University. Her research centers on political theatre and drama in translation, with an emphasis on recent Arabic drama from Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. She co-edited *Tabrir Tales: Plays from the Egyptian Revolution* (Seagull Books) and her forthcoming collection, *New Plays from Palestine: Theatre Between Home and Exile*: co-edited with Marvin Carlson and Mas'ud Hamdan, will be published by Martin E. Segal Theatre Center Publications. As a director, Maggor has staged her translations at venues across the U.S. including the Huntington Theatre Company, Golden Thread Theatre, PEN World Voices Festival, the Segal Theatre Centre, Harvard University, Cornell University and others. She has received grants from the NEA (Literature Fellowship in Translation), Fulbright Scholar Program, Doris Duke Foundation, Mellon Foundation's TCG Global Connections, the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University, among others. www.RebekahMaggor.com

Seven Plays of Koffi Kwahulé: In and Out of Africa

Translated by Chantal Bilodeau and Judith G. Miller, Edited with Introductions by Judith G. Miller, University of Michigan Press, 2017

Reviewed by Neil Blackadder

University of Michigan Press' African Perspectives series has provided the opportunity for a kind of publication that all readers of *The Mercurian* wish would happen far more frequently: a collection of translations of plays by an important contemporary playwright. Moreover, this handsome volume features brief yet substantive essays by both the editor and the translator, as well as introductions to each of the seven plays, with production photographs. Koffi Kwahulé, born in Côte d'Ivoire in 1956 and now based in Paris, is well deserving of such a collection.

The seven plays span a period of two decades, from 1992, when Kwahulé won a major French playwriting prize with *Cette vieille magie noire* (translated as *That Old Black Magic*), to *La Mélancolie des barbares* (*Melancholy of Barbarians*) published in 2009 and first staged in 2013. There's great variety of style and theme among the seven plays. *Jaz* is essentially a monologue spoken by a rape victim called Jaz, though she's to be accompanied by a jazz instrument, and "a chorus of Jaz figures might prove very effective" (67). *Big Shoot* and *Blue-S-Cat* are both two-character plays, the first taking place in a glass cage, the second in an elevator. *Brewery* is aptly described as a "farcical four-hander" (219), while *That Old Black Magic*, "The most 'realistic' of Kwahulé's plays" (21) calls for seven named characters plus a jazz quartet. The cast of *Misterioso-911* is "At least six women. Ideally, eight or ten. Possibly more" (145). Finally, the translation of *Melancholy of Barbarians* features fifteen characters, though in the original script (as in some of the others), Kwahulé didn't assign lines at all.

The texts are informed by a wide range of cultural and historical material, and most readers will benefit from Judith Miller's elucidation in her introductions. Clearly, jazz constitutes one of Kwahulé's most frequent points of reference. *That Old Black Magic* alludes to a song from 1942; one of the women in *Misterioso-911* plays Thelonius Monk's 1958 composition "Misterioso"—and, in a characteristic departure from what might seem obvious, does so on the cello. But *That Old Black Magic* also draws on, and quotes from, Goethe's *Faust*. And *Big Shoot*, as Miller puts it, "explores the fundamental question of the Old Testament: Am I my brother's keeper?" (101). *Misterioso-911* is set "Sometime after September 11, 2011" (145) and was written shortly after the terrorist attacks, while *Jaz* was inspired in part by the systematic use of rape as a weapon during the war in Bosnia, and Kwahulé's examination of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed in *Big Shoot* grew out of his work with survivors of the Rwandan genocide. *Brewery* (the one script translated by Miller rather than by Chantal Bilodeau) is the only play explicitly set in the continent of Kwahulé's birth: "We are in an unnamed African country at the end of a Civil War" (223), though it also contains many Western cultural and literary references, and substantial passages in German (of which English translations are provided). *Melancholy of Barbarians* reflects most directly the fact that Kwahulé has lived in France for most of his adult life, its hard-hitting theatricalization of life in a working-class suburb having been written "at the behest of a cultural and social committee in Rodez" (269).

Miller provides a helpful introduction to the translations in her essay “Soundscapes, Mindscapes, and Escape,” where she contextualizes Kwahulé’s work in relation to that of other African, and particularly Francophone African playwrights, going back to the 1960s. Like other critics, Miller places Kwahulé in a group of “hybrid” playwrights who, beginning in the early 1990s, “insisted on their right to critique the commodification of an ‘authentic Africa’” (3). She fittingly characterizes Kwahulé’s plays as “multilayered and polyvalent meditations” which “fold specific political commentaries into a larger concern about what it means to be a human being in postcolonial times” (4). With little more than five pages to write about seven plays, Miller offers interpretations that are valid in themselves and also convey how much there is to grapple with in Kwahulé’s work, e.g., “His is an uncomfortable real, situated somewhere between classical realism and surrealism, more a psychic state than a material one, often even cartoonish” (7). The notes to Miller’s introduction include some valuable information and ideas that might have more effectively been incorporated into the essay itself.

While most of the editorial material was written by Miller, it’s appropriate and pleasing that Bilodeau is given the chance in “A Word about the Translation” to explain how she dealt with some of the main challenges posed by Kwahulé’s scripts. It’s interesting to read about her decision, in *That Old Black Magic*, to “in a sense, ‘reconstruct’ the sounds and rhythms of 1950s American film noir English” (17), and how she approached all the very local slang in *Melancholy of Barbarians*. The most striking decision Bilodeau made in preparing her translations for publication was “to assign dialogue to specific characters in four of the five plays where, in the original, that assignment is left open to interpretation” (15). While her point that “I felt it was necessary to make that choice in order to facilitate the reading of these unfamiliar and dense texts” (16) makes some sense, it does render the experience of reading—or of preparing to stage—these translations significantly different than it would be for someone reading the original French scripts. And the translator rather contradicts herself by opting not to assign the lines in *Misterioso-911* on the grounds that “I felt assigning the lines would have pushed the translation into the realm of an adaptation” (16)—couldn’t the same thing be said, then, about the texts in which she did assign the lines? Still, in most cases, the volume does make clear in the introductory material for each play whether or not Bilodeau has assigned lines where Kwahulé did not.

The translations themselves generally read well, conveying the often hard-edged but also at times quite lyrical quality of Kwahulé’s French. I did find some passages less smoothly rendered than they might have been, such as “on foot from the opposite end of the world all the way to here” (108) for “à pied du bout du monde jusqu’ici” in *Big Shoot*. *Misterioso-911* features one character objecting to another using the informal ‘tu,’ and while a combination of referring to “her first name” and using the character name Linda may well be the best option available, the repeated long phrase “calling her by her first name” weighs down the dialogue. Characters in *Misterioso-911* also address each other as ‘Madame,’ and Bilodeau’s solution for that is to use Ms.—but that leads to unlikely-sounding lines like “Ms., it’s true!” (167) for “Non, mais c’est vrai, madame!” Not crucial, but I was surprised that, for a US publication, references in *Jazz* to “au quatrième” and “au sixième” were translated as “On the fourth floor” and “on the sixth floor” (80) rather than adjusted to American usage. More importantly, there’s some odd inconsistency regarding which details in the texts were included in the English versions. For

instance, Kwahulé writes in parentheses that the jazz quartet mentioned in the character list for *That Old Black Magic* is “(indispensable),” but that’s omitted from the translation (23). And only some of the dedications and epigraphs in the original texts have made their way into the English versions—often at the top of Miller’s introductions, which is misleading.

The oddest editorial decision is to include after the introductions to each play a list of “Notes for reading and performance” that are numbered as if (as with the endnotes to Miller’s introduction to the volume) they relate to superscript numbers in the preceding text—but they don’t. It’s not clear why at least some of the valuable information in those notes, particularly regarding what led Kwahulé to write each play, couldn’t have been incorporated into that play’s introduction. It’s also surprising that nobody caught the failure to correctly print, in Miller’s translation of *Brewery*, the German character ß, which instead shows up as f. Personally, I always like translations to make clear what the titles of the original works were; in this volume, one has to delve into the notes to Miller’s introduction to find that information. The collection would also have been enhanced by more details about productions of the plays in the original. All we find out about where and when these examples of Kwahulé’s work have been staged is what’s included in the captions to the photographs that accompany each introduction.

As Bilodeau underlines in her acknowledgments, most of the translations in *Seven Plays of Koffi Kwahulé* “have gone through an extensive development process” (vii) involving such organizations as The Lark, New York Theatre Workshop, and the Berkshire Theatre Festival. Such collaboration is integral to the best theatrical translation, yet it’s unfortunate that the collection wasn’t published following several full productions. It’s apparent from the information provided (and some more recent internet research) that these translations have not been staged in the US except for one university production. That is regrettable, though perhaps not surprising, given the demands presented by Kwahulé’s work. One hopes that some enterprising theatre companies will rise to the challenge of producing these scripts; in the meantime, it’s great to have these translations available in book form.

NEIL BLACKADDER recently retired from a twenty-five-year career teaching theater at Knox College and Duke University. He translates drama and prose from German and French, specializing in contemporary theatre. His translations of plays by Lukas Bärfuss, Ewald Palmethofer, and Rebekka Kricheldorf have been produced in London, New York, Chicago, and elsewhere, while many others by Ferdinand Schmalz, Maxi Obexer, Evelyne de la Chenelière, Thomas Arzt, and Mishka Lavigne have been presented in staged readings. He serves on *The Mercurian*’s advisory board, is active in ALTA, co-founded the Theatre in Translation network, and is a member of Chicago’s Third Coast Translators Collective.