

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 7, Number 4 (Fall 2019)

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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 Fall 2019 issue of *The Mercurian: A Theatrical Translation Review!*

We begin with Emma Pauly's theatrically rich, surprisingly contemporary translation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*. Pauly's translation captures the give and take between stage and audience that would have marked Euripides' theatrical practice as Dionysus frequently addresses the audience directly. As Dionysus is both the blood that courses through the veins of all beasts, including human beings, and the sap that flows through trees and plants, the god is genderless and breaks all bounds or any attempts to define the divinity's essence. In her introduction, Pauly calls for a non-binary, gender non-conforming, or queer actor to enact Dionysus, another mark of this translation of an ancient Greek play for the twenty-first century.

The issue continues with Elena Igartuburu's translation of contemporary Catalan playwright Marta Aran's play *Lamp Lady*. *Lamp Lady* delves into the world of contemporary art as its characters attempt to establish themselves as artists and curators while juggling their ambitions with their desires for relationships and children. Perhaps more salient than her plot, however, is Aran's language that, with its repetitions, circularity, and frequent hesitations illustrates her characters' constant lack of understanding of, or engagement with, one another.

Lamp Lady is followed by Michael Evans' translation of Danish playwright Astrid Saalbach's play *End of the World*. Evans, whose provocation *Credo: 18 Thoughts on Translating for the Theatre* appeared in *The Mercurian*, Vol. 4, No. 1; plunges us into Saalbach's fantastical world, a fascistic society where absolute perfection is the only goal. Politicians who lose their elected offices and soccer teams who do not win are quickly eliminated. Saalbach's play can be interpreted in a variety of ways as her protagonist Xenia, a flight attendant, gains everything she's always wanted, only to lose it again.

The issue concludes with three book reviews, all on translations of or about translating Spanish Golden Age theatre. First comes Jean Graham-Jones' review of Kathleen Jeffs' *Staging the Spanish Golden Age: Translation and Performance*. Graham-Jones, whose translation of Ricardo Monti's *Apocalypse Tomorrow* appeared in *The Mercurian*, Vol. 2, No. 1, details Jeffs' approach as a "participant-observer" to describing the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2004-2005 "Spanish Season," and discusses what she calls Jeffs' "productive model for translation as artistic collaboration and textual interpretation."

Graham-Jones' review of Jeffs' monograph is followed Kathleen Jeff's own review of Harley Erdman's translation of Luis Vélez de Guevara's play *The Mountain Girl from La Vera*, published with facing pages in the Spanish original by Aris & Phillips Hispanic Classics series. Here too we find a translation of a Spanish Golden Age text with an eye towards contemporary performance. Not only does Erdman's translation bring Vélez' "*moza varonil*" or "He-Girl" to life for us but Jeffs' also

discusses his approach to translating the polymetry and rhyme in Vélez' text. Rather than force English end rhymes, Erdman strives for speakability and rhetorical flourish.

Completing a reviewing circle, Jeffs' review of Erdman's translation is followed by Gregory J. Racz' review of Kathleen Jeffs' translation of Guillén de Castro's play, *The Force of Habit*. Published in the same bilingual series from Aris & Phillips as Erdman's translation, this is, as Racz notes, the first published English translation of the play. Continuing this issue's completely serendipitous focus on gender, Guillén de Castro's *The Force of Habit* revolves "around young adult siblings having their "correct" gender identities "restored" to correspond with each one's biological sex." Racz unpacks how classical and Renaissance views regarding the ways that habit shapes behavior, when combined with the Spanish Golden Age's strict codes of honor, create a radically different context for us than the gender-switching dramas of the period elsewhere. For a production approach to staging Jeffs' translation see Sara Freeman's article, "Researching and Directing Guillén de Castro's *The Force of Habit*" in *The Mercurian*, Vol. 6, No. 1.

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. 1 (Spring 2020) will be February 1, 2020.

—Adam Versényi

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The Bacchae
By Euripides
Translated by Emma Pauly

I began work on *Bacchae* about two months after completing my Bachelors at the University of Chicago in the summer of 2016, though a slow and creeping fascination with the play had been fermenting (pun very much intended) for about two years prior. It received a reading in Los Angeles with Griot Theatre of the West Valley in the spring of 2017 and was briefly workshopped during my time in the UK at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. After a few redrafts, it received another reading in conjunction with Pious Productions in the spring of 2019. This iteration of the translation represents the changes made after that most recent reading.

Bacchae has been a story of sexual revolution, religious fundamentalism, political unrest, female empowerment (or disempowerment). It has been an atheist manifesto, railing against a cruel and spiteful god just as often as it has been a harkening to faith and orthodoxy. I have no answers here, and I do not seek to find them.

For me, it is a family grieving at cross-purposes. For me, *Bacchae* is a play of two mothers. One is Agave, maddened and blood-spattered, exulting and mourning, intimately and horrifyingly connected to the body of her son. But the other is Semele, whose tomb is remarked upon too many times within the Greek text for her ghost to ever be forgotten. The spirit of Semele looms large over the text as her son, father, nephew and sisters collide with one another over *how* they are to remember her.

Most of the scholarship and discourse around *Bacchae* seems to spiral down into the most dramatic ‘set piece’ of the play: the rending of Pentheus. As such, there is a gravitational pull into Pentheus’ body and psyche, and it is not unreasonable that there would be. Pentheus is male, presents himself as cisgendered, and grapples with sexuality and repressed impulse in a way with which many witnessing his pain can find common ground. His death is fearsome and pitiable and his descent into Dionysiac madness perhaps even more so. He is, after all, a tragic protagonist.

But he is not the only one.

Bacchae is so often characterized as an unstoppable wave swamping a helpless figure, a removed and inexorable god systematically destroying an enemy that cannot hope to stand in opposition to. Dionysus is held at arm’s length: a smiling, inscrutable seducer in one line, an incomprehensible force of nature in another. He is Other and therefore cannot be understood. He is Other and therefore an audience cannot empathize with him. He is Other and therefore he is not ‘us’.

But *he* is our other protagonist, and I have attempted to produce a translation that treats him as such.

This *Bacchae* is an exploration of what it means to exist in a queer body, what it means to be perceived in a queer body, and what it means to rage, suffer, and grieve in a queer body. What does it mean to stand in front of one’s family, proclaim your identity, your *self* and remain unseen? The god Dionysus does this in multiple permutations over the course of the play, revealing and concealing himself in the body that is both disguise and epiphany. My one hard-and-fast rule for the casting of this play was

made to honor that: Dionysus *must* be played by a non-binary, genderqueer, or otherwise gender non-conforming actor.

Rather than creating a distance from the Other, I have striven in this translation to stand within it.

Bacchae is also notorious for the text that it does *not* possess; an uncomfortably large section is missing from the final moments of the play. Dionysus' entrance-lines are lost to time, as is Agave's final lament over the body of Pentheus. Rather than skip over it, I have chosen to fill that space (albeit with an acknowledgement from Dionysus himself that a loss is present). In the page or so of 'original' text, Dionysus castigates Kadmos and Agave for, from his perspective, tacitly participating in Semele's demise. Over and over again in this text, holes open up and grief pours in.

Turning to the logistics of this translation, the main stylistic choice overall was the decision to render non-choral speech in prose rather than verse. In the *parodos*, odes, and *exodos* that are woven throughout the play, the chorus speaks in free verse. This is done for ease of comprehension above all else, as I have made that job somewhat more difficult in other areas. References to mythologically obscure places, entities and practices have not been excised. In a few cases, I have attempted to couch them in their context, much in the same way I have added context in-narrative to shed light on the linguistic trickery that occurs in a few select places in the text (two of the most notable being the *homeros/meros* confusion Teiresias explores in his speech to Pentheus and the continual punning on Pentheus' very name, which riffs on the Attic Greek word *penthos*, meaning 'suffering' or 'grief').

This attempt at context has (somewhat unintentionally) dovetailed with another of my stylistic choices in this translation: fourth wall awareness. *Bacchae* is a play of violence and horror, yes, but what makes it truly remarkable amongst tragedies is its humor and metatheatricality. In this translation that attempts to re-center the emotional heart of the play, Dionysus serves as both narrator and protagonist, flitting between times and realities, commentating and participating in equal measure as he navigates a body that is both his and not his, a city that is and is not his home, and a family he does and does not love.

Little can be said with certainty about the life of **Euripides**; he was likely born in approximately 480 BCE on the island of Salamis and likely died around 406 BC in exile in Macedonia. During his life, he wrote anywhere between 92 and 95 plays, 19 of which have survived in complete enough form to be performed (18, if the contested authorship of *Rhesus* is to be believed). He was awarded first prize at the City Dionysia a total of five times in his career, one of which was for *Bacchae* (awarded posthumously to him in 405 BC).

Emma Pauly (she/her/hers or they/them/theirs) is a dramaturg, translator and performer with a focus in Greco-Roman text, particularly tragedy. They hold a B.A. from the University of Chicago in Theater and Performance Studies with a minor in Classics and an M.A. from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School's International Acting Programme. Their translations have been featured in productions at Chicago's Prop Thr (where she is a member of the dramaturg pool) and Pop Magic Productions, of selections from the Orphic Hymns and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* respectively. They are

currently serving as the Supporting Dramaturg and translation consultant on Court Theatre's production of the full Theban Cycle (with *The Gospel at Colonus* taking the place of *Oedipus at Colonus*), a three-production endeavor spanning two seasons. Originally hailing from Los Angeles, they are currently based in Chicago.

The Bacchae

Dramatis Personae

Thebans

Pentheus

Agave

Kadmos

Teiresias

Messenger 1

Messenger 2

Chorus

Chorus Leader

Chorus

Other

Dionysus

[Stage directions indicated thusly.]

The Bacchae

[Semele's grave. DIONYSUS is onstage as house opens.]

DIONYSUS: Here I am.

Dionysus, son of Zeus, in the land of Thebes, at your service. Kadmos' daughter Semele gave birth to me here in a scorch of lightning.

Down from divinity, I have taken this mortal form, here where the Dirke and Ismenus meet.

(They're rivers, for those of you who haven't kept up with your classical geography.)

I can see her grave. My lightning-struck mother's grave. This is her room. *Was* her room. Right by the palace. Still smoking from Zeus' fires, a burning that never dies away.

Hera's fault, though. Hera's immortal rage against my mother.

Kadmos made this place sacred (well done to him), a shrine to his baby girl. But the vines all around it, I made those. I veiled the place in young grapes and fresh green and growing things.

I came here from Lydia, where the earth bears gold, passing through Phrygia, then the expanse of sunstruck Persia, walled Bactria and the dread land of the Medes—

None of this is going to make any sense is it? Do any of those exist now?

—then through Arabia (you still have that one, right?) and all across fair Asia, the places that hug the salt-sea's coast, full of Greeks and foreigners mingling beneath the spires.

And now I'm home.

I have come here first before all other *Greek* cities to strike up the dances and set down my rites so that mortal kind can know me for what I am: a god.

Thebes is first in all of Greece to be roused by my call, fawnskin-draped and bearing the thyrsus in their hands, my ivy-wound spear.

And why?

Because my aunts—my mother's side, her *sisters*, they never should have—

They said—no, they *pronounced* that Dionysus was no child of Zeus, that Semele had lain down with some *mortal*, foisting the blame on Zeus for the product of the unmarried bed. (acting on Kadmos' say-so). Zeus killed her, so they say, they *shrill*, for it. For lying about her bedmate.

And so I've driven them mad. Driven them from beneath their roofs. They're up in the mountains now, my wildness in their hearts.

They bear my colors now, at my behest, the trappings of my faith.

All of Kadmos' female citizens, as many as there are in the city, all have left their homes.

Up there they mingle with Kadmos' own daughters, among green boughs and sit upon the stones with no roof to pen them in.

The city has to learn, willing or no, even uninitiated as they are. They will learn my ways.

Semele must be defended.

My mother must be defended.

The mortals must be shown that I am Zeus' trueborn kin, a trueborn god. They will be shown.

But Kadmos. He's abdicated, handed over his power and privilege to Pentheus, one of his daughter's brood, one who rails against the gods. Well, me. *Just* me.

I'm banned from his sacrifices, not given a thought in his prayers.

So we're going to give him a show. Make my divinity crystal clear, for him and for Thebes.

Then onto other lands, away from here and towards new frontiers. I'll set my feet on a new road and make myself manifest in other lands.

But if Thebes should, say, take up arms in anger and harry the Bacchae from the mountain ...I may take the field.

For all this, I've decanted myself into this mortal vessel and taken a human face.

Do you like it?

Anyhoo.

My exiles from Tmolus, from Lydia's walls, my retainers, my ladies-in-waiting, you whom I brought from all the lands to keep me company.

My witnesses.

Strike up the band, the Phrygian drums, mine and Rhea's invention.

Flood the city with the beating of drums, encircle Pentheus' palace, that the city of Kadmos might see you in your glory.

[Drums.]

I'll swing by Kithairon, where the rest are, to share in the dance.

And away we go.

[DIONYSUS exits. The Chorus take the stage. Their garlands and flowers will eventually decorate Semele's grave.]

CHORUS:

From sacred Tmolus we've come.

Hurrying. Hastening.

To do Bromios' precious work.

We follow him in labor unlaborious.

We call *evoe*, we call out the Bacchae's cry.

Who would stand in our way?

Who *could* stand in our way?

Anyone?

Let *them* stay housebound,

let *them* clear the streets,

let *them* keep their mouths shut, shut away, shut off:

I will sing.

I will *scream*. As we have, as is custom, as is the way.

I will sing to Dionysus.

It's a blessing to know these rites

to live god-touched

to throw your soul into the dances, initiated in the rites

to run wild in the mountains
in the throes of Bacchic frenzy
sacrosanct and holy, holy, holy
to honor the rites of Cybele the Great Mother--
and, thyrsus in hand and ivy-crowned, to serve Dionysus.

CHORUS LEADER:

Come, Bacchae,
come Bacchae, we who carried him with us,
Bromios the Raging One,
the god and child-of-a-god,
from Phrygian wilderness
to the paved expanse of Greece,
we brought him, Bromios the Loud-Resounding.

CHORUS:

She brought him, to us,
first, Semele, in the throes of birth-agony,
death-agony from Zeus' thunderstroke,
she cast him out from the womb just before-

Crack.

The lightning stole Semele away.
And so Zeus son of Kronos
made a shelter of his own for his babe.
No hesitation. Slit his thigh open
and sewed the wound shut with gold,
out of Hera's sight.

From there he came forth
at the time the Fates had set for him,
the horned god, a crown of snakes on his brow.
We do the same in his honor,
wind our hair with wild-caught serpents.

Thebes! City-mother of Semele, wear the ivy.
Thrive, thrive with fruit and yew-garlands,
dance in Bacchus' glory crowned in oak and fir.
Drape yourself in fawnskin over your sheep's wool.

Come and *be* with us.
Have some *fun*, it's holy!

The earth will dance with us,
with Bromios-Dionysus who leads this company.

To the mountain.

To the mountain.

Where the women wait,
the ones Dionysus drove in madness
away from the shuttle and the loom.

Hail to the hidden cave of the Divine Dancers,
Cretan cavern, caretaker of the infant Zeus,
in whose depths the thrice-helmed Korybantes
discovered this taut-stretched circle of hide for us.

In their fervent celebration,
they paired it with the sweet breathing-sound
of Phrygian flutes and placed it in the hands
of Mother Rhea, ringing out loud
with the Bacchae's cries of exultation.

Close at hand were the Satyrs,
dancing like wild, bringing the rites of the Mother Goddess to fruition.
They joined it all together with the dances of the chorus, the feasts we hold
every three years.

And in it all, Dionysus is exalted.

It's sweet with him, up on the mountain,
sprawling on the ground after the dance has tired him out, the fawnskins beneath us slick with ram's
blood,
our sacrifices. It's raw. It's *good*.

There is a rush through Phrygia,
through Lydia, and Bromios leads the tide, *yes*.

The earth runs with milk,
with wine,
with honey,
flows,
gushes,
streams.

He raises a firebrand, a burning pine branch,
like Syrian incense,
the tip of his staff alight.

Racing, dancing,
he kindles the stragglers,
with his cries he spurs us on,
his tumbling hair fans out behind him in the wind—

Our voices one with his, he *roars*.
We roar.

Go, Bacchae.
Go, Bacchae, go with golden grace,
the richness of Tmolus.

Sing for Dionysus,
sing with the drums,
loud-resounding.

Cry glory, glory to the god of joy, of exultation.

Call to him.
Give him your screams in sweet music and flute-song.
On.
To the mountain.
Onward to the mountain.

So he says.
And like a young horse
with its mother at the grazing,
we kick up our heels.
It's all in good fun.

[TEIRESIAS *enters*. *The blind prophet. Elderly, a little wild, and powerful.*]

TEIRESIAS: Hello? Who's there?

Kadmos? Speak up if you're in there!

Child of Agenor?

He who left the city of Sidon and built this towered town of Thebes?

Will one of you nice young ladies go inside and say that Teiresias is here looking for him?

He'll know why I'm here.

[*One of the CHORUS exits.*]

We've got an idea, he and I. Even as old as I am (and he's even older).

We'll take up the wands, wear the fawnskin, crown our heads in shoots of ivy.

[KADMOS enters from inside the palace with the CHORUS MEMBER trailing behind. Nicely dressed, bearing two ivy wreaths. Old but stately. Kicked ass in his youth.]

KADMOS: Darling! My dear friend.

[They embrace.]

I heard your voice from inside, I knew it was you. Wise words from a wise man.

I've got the god's livery right here.

[He takes TEIRESIAS' hand and gently hands him an ivy crown.]

For my daughter's child has made it clear to mortals that he is a god, this Dionysus my grandson. That being the case, he deserves as great praise as we can give him.

Shall we dance, old friend?

Shall we plant our feet and toss our far-too-graying hair?

You'll lead, of course, age waltzing with age, my Teiresias. You've always been the wiser of us.

This never gets old. Day and night, beating time on the earth with the thyrsus.

I could forget that I've grown old.

TEIRESIAS: We're of the same mind, then. Even I will try out the dance.

KADMOS: Shall we? To the mountain, in a chariot?

TEIRESIAS: A bit proud for greeting a god, don't you think?

KADMOS: Then I'll guide you, old following older.

TEIRESIAS: We'll have an easy time of it, what with a god leading us on.

KADMOS: Is there nobody else in the city who'll dance for Bacchus?

TEIRESIAS: We're the only ones wise enough. The rest...less so.

KADMOS: Mustn't delay. Here, take my hand.

[He offers TEIRESIAS an arm.]

TEIRESIAS: Where—ah, there you are. I've got you.

KADMOS: I may be mortal, but I know better than to ignore a god.

TEIRESIAS: But to them *[he indicates the city]*, we don't 'know better' about anything at all. All our traditions, customs of our nation, all the ways of this age, we can't argue our way out of, not by any measure of our hearts or minds.

But now.

Would anyone call me a fool, say I shame myself and my years by joining the dance and wearing the ivy?

No.

Or rather, they shouldn't. He doesn't care. The god does not care, young or old, only that you dance. He wants his due from all alike.

None are excluded from his praise.

[During this, PENTHEUS begins to enter.]

KADMOS: Teiresias.

Teiresias.

I know you can't see by light, but I can describe for you.

Pentheus is coming. Echion's son, my grandson, the one I abdicated for. Coming rather fast, actually, right up to the house.

I wonder what set him off.

Some breaking news to report?

[PENTHEUS enters in a rush.]

PENTHEUS: I was out on business when I heard, away from the city. I've been told that there's a new evil in the city, that the women have forsaken their homes. It's a front, it's a fake, a false Bacchic rite, an excuse for them to cavort in the mountain's shade, dancing to honor this 'new god' Dionysus.

Whoever *that* is. Whoever he *really* is.

I hear they've got casks of wine up there, full to the brim, just sitting there in the midst of their frolicking. *And* that they sneak off into secluded corners, servicing men, excusing it as a sacred thing, a Maenad's ritual.

If it *is* a ritual, it's to Aphrodite, not this Bacchus of theirs.

I've seized some of them already, they're being kept with bound hands in a common holding cell, guarded by my people; as for those still at large, I will drive them down from the mountain.

Ino and Agave are there, Agave who mothered me with Echion, and cousin Actaeon's mother, my aunt Autonoe, I'm made to understand.

With them clapped in irons, I'll put an end to this bad behavior. Swiftly.

They say a stranger has made an entrance, some foreign conjurer from Lydia, with waves of perfumed hair. She—

He?

Whatever. The hedge-witch has Aphrodite in their eyes, they say, eyes dark and deep as wine.

But.

She's holding court with them, day and night, telling tales of these howling rites.

If I catch her here, under this roofs, I will end her. I will stop the thyrsus in her hand from keeping the beat. And that long hair that she so loves to flaunt? I'll cut that short too.

Taking her head off should do it.

This person says that Dionysus is divine, that he was sewn away inside Zeus' thigh, but we know the child was burnt alive in the thunderbolt's blazing trail with its mother, punishment for boasting of her bond with Zeus.

Isn't that offense enough to merit a hanging? A noose for this stranger and her undignified indignity?

But look here. Another 'miracle'! I see the prophet draped in spotted fawnskin, Teiresias—and my grandfather—that's. Just so funny. The both of you, living it up, waving those wands about.

I can't have this, grandfather, I can't watch you shaming yourself in your old age. Shake this ivy off, if you don't mind? Let the thyrsus fall from your hands, oh father of my mother?

[KADMOS does neither of those things.]

You. You talked him into this, Teiresias.

What will this do for you, hmm? If you bring a new god to the people, that's more auguries for you, a bigger share of the roasts people burn for offerings? If your grayed age wasn't protecting you, you'd be thrown down, bound in among the rest of the Bacchae for preaching this false gospel.

When *women* start getting into the wine, I say it's gone too far. It's not healthy.

CHORUS LEADER: Blasphemer!

No reverence for the gods from the heir of earthborn-sowing Kadmos?

Will you dishonor your family, Echion's son?

TEIRESIAS: It's no great task for a wise man to speak well when the time comes, if he picks it carefully.

You hold yourself as if you're one of these ready-tongued individuals. You're not. Your words lack sense behind them.

Even the boldest speaker fails as a citizen when his words lack *sense*.

But as for this new god, this one you sneer at, I cannot describe how far he will spread over Greece, how great his rise. For there are two things, young man, two that are prized above all else by men.

The first is the goddess Demeter, for she is the Earth. Call her whichever you prefer. It is she who brings forth solid food from the earth. Dry goods, if you will.

But her junior, Semele's child, showed us the other side of the coin, found the nectar in a bunch of grapes and gave it to mortals, letting them be free of pain when they partake of the river-of-the-vine. He gives us sleep, to forget the evils of the day for a time, and there is no better prescription for pain.

We pour out a god as an offering to the gods, divinity for divinity, and through him are we given grace in our sacrifices.

And you. You would make light of this, here, now, because Zeus sewed him up inside himself? His thigh, so they say. Pay attention, young man, and I'll show you the truth of it.

When Zeus spirited him away, out of the lightning's embers, he took the child up to Olympus, too-newly born. But Hera would not let it stand, wanted him thrown down from the clouds to earth. And so, as gods do, Zeus concocted his own scheme to counter his wife. He shaped a copy of the child from vapor and air, breaking off a piece of earth-cloaking cloud to give to her as a hostage, bait to divert her wrath from the child Dionysus.

And what is hostage in our tongue? 'Homeros'. And thigh? 'Meros'.

Cumulative error, it's called. Mortals tell the story to each other, and gradually 'homeros' becomes 'meros', and the story grows and changes.

There.

Does that make sense, young man?

[PENTHEUS is silent.]

This god is a prophet, too. There's method in his madness and much of the future to be found in his dances.

For when the god enters a worshipper and takes full hold, the possessed one can prophesy.

Which isn't to say there's nothing of Ares in him either. Now *he's* a god you know well. You know that feeling before a battle? That flutter, that tremor in the ranks, that exhilarating fear before anyone so much as raises a spear. *That* is Dionysus. That too is his madness.

You might even see him up in Delphi's crags, leaping between the twin peaks with a torch in hand, moving and shaking. Greatest show in Greece.

Listen to me, Pentheus. Don't go spreading it around that your kingship is the greatest power there is. Even if you believe it so. that you're in the right. You're not. Your judgment is impaired.

Welcome the god to the city, let the libations flow for him. Come to the rites. Wear the ivy.

[PENTHEUS is silent.]

Dionysus won't lead any of the women to Aphrodite if they don't want to be led. He cannot bring out what is not already there. If they wish to be chaste, they will be chaste and any Bacchic ecstasy isn't going to change that.

Don't you see?

You love the praise too, when the citizens cry out your name in joy after a decree, thronging at the city gates. I wager *he* wants to be honored, just the same.

And so Kadmos and I shall honor him, even with your mockery. Ivy-crowned, we'll dance, even though a pair of greybeards won't add much to the revelry. You cannot make us side against a god.

I would consider who is mad and who is not between the two of us. And what kind of cure is needed.

CHORUS LEADER: Apollo is proud, old man. It is no shame to him to praise his little brother, a great god in his own right, and you worship him the better for it.

KADMOS: Child, Teiresias speaks with knowledge. Stake your claim with us, not set apart from the laws of nature. You're not thinking clearly, you're all over the place.

And even if he's not divine, even if he's as you say, just...say he is. Make it your best lie you've told, let Semele be remembered as the mother of a god and bring glory to our family and our line.

You remember Actaeon, your cousin, and his grisly fate? The one whose own dogs, the ones he raised from pups, tore him to shreds. Artemis turned them on him, for saying he was the better hunter between the two of them.

Please. Do not let that be you.

Don the ivy. Give the god his tribute with us.

PENTHEUS: Don't touch me.

Bacchant it up if you must, but don't infect me with this idiocy.

He'll pay for this, the one who tasked you with his fools errand.

One of you. Go, quickly. Find his favorite spot, that little private place where he watches for bird-omens. Ransack it, pry the stones up out of the earth with levers and throw his wreaths and garlands out into the storm.

I'll hurt him the most with that.

And you.

Track down this stranger, the one *shaped* like a woman, who infected our women with this new disease and plagues our marriage-beds.

Be sure to bring him-or-her-or-whatever here in chains, but alive. I want his punishment to be death by stoning. That'll cure this Bacchic sickness for all of Thebes.

TEIRESIAS: You have no idea what you're saying, do you?

Poor boy.

More mad now than you were before, and before you were hardly sane.

Madder still to come.

We should go, Kadmos, and beg forgiveness on his behalf, harsh as he may be. For the city, too. Just in case the god tries something new.

Come now, and keep me from tripping with that ivy-staff of yours, and I'll do the same for you: it'd be a shame for the both of us seniors to take a dive.

All the same. We must serve Bacchus, son of Zeus.

Pentheus will bring you suffering, Kadmos. You and your family.

I don't need prophecy to see that. He's made it perfectly clear by word alone.

[KADMOS and TEIRESIAS exit one way, PENTHEUS another.]

CHORUS LEADER:

Grace, divine queen.

Grace, who spreads golden wings over the earth—
Have you heard these words of Pentheus?

Do you hear his blasphemy against the Raging One,
Semele's child,
the first spirit called upon for the happiest times,
for feasting and for garland-wearing joy?
He hallows the chorus
and laughs with the flute,
stops worries in their tracks
when gods set to feasting
and the grapevine's shimmer steals over them
in ivy and in laughter
he pours out an offering for the guests,
the gift of sleep.

CHORUS:

Unchecked tongues and heedless ignorance
only end in misfortune.
But a life of quiet.
This leaves a house unmoved, binds it together.

The gods may be far away in the heavens,
but they see us. See what we do.
Cleverness is not wisdom,
and neither is reaching beyond thoughts meant for mortals.
Our lives are short.
Spend all your time reaching
and you miss what's in front of you.
This is the madman's way.
Or at least the ill-counseled.

But that's just my opinion.

I wish I could be in Cyprus, Aphrodite's isle,
Where love lives, heart's-cure love, in mortal hearts,
Paphos where it never rains,
where a hundred foreign streams with a hundred mouths
make the land grow, make the rivers flow.
Take me to the Muse's home, Pieria,
and let me rest on Olympus' slopes.

Thunderer, He Who Leads the Dance,
He Who Cries Out Joy, Elemental Spirit,
take me there.

The Graces are there, Desire is there,
there where the Bacchae may worship without fear.
The *daimon*, our force of nature takes joy
in the good times, Zeus' child,
He smiles on the Goddess Peace, the abundant one,
The Lady Who Cares for the Young.
In equal measure, to the fortunate and the not,
he gives us the relief of wine.
Wine without pain.

But he hates too.
He hates this in particular:
the ones that have no care for life,
no love for the blessed life,
in bright day and sweeter night.
Those who fail to keep their wisdom,
their cunning far from men who overstep their bounds.

Majority rules. What's good for the many should be good for me.

[A SOLDIER enters. He leads DIONYSUS with his hands bound.]

SOLDIER: Lord Pentheus!

We have him!

[PENTHEUS enters from the other side.]

SOLDIER (cont'd): We've snared the prey you sent us for, we've made it worth your while.

It's a docile creature, didn't flinch, didn't flee, but gave himself freely into our hands. Didn't even turn pale, didn't lose the flush in his cheeks.

He just laughed. Let us bind him and lead him off, made it easy for us.

I was embarrassed, I told him it wasn't my idea, friend, that it was you who sent me, your orders.

But as for the others. The Bacchae you captured, plucked out of the forest and threw into the city jail...

They're gone. Free and sporting in the fields, calling out to Bromios their god.

The ropes untied themselves from their feet, the locks fell open with no hand turning the key.

One of many strange things this one has brought to Thebes.

But I defer to your discretion.

PENTHEUS: Untie his hands. He's not lithe enough to wriggle out of this net.

Well.

Not ugly, certainly.

Not to your women, I've heard.

Is that why you've come to Thebes, stranger? For the women?

Long hair...not a brawler, then.

The way it falls over your face, a promise of desire.

Smooth skin, carefully maintained. Never worked in the sun, yeah? Kept yourself indoors, behind bedroom doors, doing Aphrodite's dirty work with your looks.

But tell me about you. Tell me where you're from.

DIONYSUS: Fine by me, that's not hard. I'm sure you've heard of Tmolus, the mountain of flowers?

PENTHEUS: I know it. It encircles Sardis.

DIONYSUS: I'm from there. Lydian by birth.

[To audience.]

Let's go with that, why not?

PENTHEUS: And why have you brought these rites to Greece?

DIONYSUS: Dionysus son of Zeus set me on the road.

PENTHEUS: Do you have your own Zeus in Lydia, spawning new gods?

DIONYSUS: No. He and Semele met and joined *here*. This very place.

PENTHEUS: Did he force you into his service? Come to you in a dream or appear in front of you?

DIONYSUS: He saw me. I saw him. He gave me the rites *personally*.

[If there isn't innuendo on that line, you're doing it wrong.]

PENTHEUS: And what are these *rites* like?

DIONYSUS: Not telling. I'm not allowed to. Not to the uninitiated.

PENTHEUS: Do they benefit those that practice them?

DIONYSUS: Wouldn't you like to know?

Still. Not telling. That's the law.

PENTHEUS: You're *very* good at this! Really, masterful bullshit. Tell me more.

DIONYSUS: The rites don't take kindly to those who scorn the god.

PENTHEUS: So you say you've seen this god in person? What did he look like?

DIONYSUS: Anything he pleased. He's not mine to command.

PENTHEUS: You're dodging the question. Quite well, it's well-crafted silliness.

DIONYSUS: Wisdom always sounds silly to the unwise.

PENTHEUS: Is this the first place you've brought this deity to?

DIONYSUS: Every nation save this one is already initiated.

PENTHEUS: They don't know any better. Far less developed than Greeks, those foreign nations.

DIONYSUS: They're smarter than you in this instance. And besides, different strokes.

PENTHEUS: And are these rites conducted by day or by night?

DIONYSUS: Night, for the most part. It's so much more...spiritual. Good for devotion.

PENTHEUS: The night's a trap for women's virtue.

DIONYSUS: And the day isn't? You don't get out much, do you?

PENTHEUS: You're going to pay for this, for this sharp-tongued defiance.

DIONYSUS: As are you. For your ignorance. For sacrilege against a god.

PENTHEUS: Brave words, Bacchant. You must have had a good coach.

DIONYSUS: Oh, yes. So what will you do to me?

Are you going to *punish* me?

PENTHEUS: Yes. I'm going to cut off that pretty hair of yours.

[He grabs DIONYSUS by the hair.]

DIONYSUS: My hair is divine. It is an adornment for the god.

PENTHEUS: Your thyrsus, then. Hand it over.

DIONYSUS: Come and get it. It's Dionysus' to take.

PENTHEUS: Prison, then. We'll shut you away.

DIONYSUS: The god will come for me, whenever I call him.

PENTHEUS: Of course he will, as long as you summon him surrounded by your fawning followers. They'll do whatever you say and call it divine will.

DIONYSUS: He's here right now. He sees how I am treated.

PENTHEUS: Well, where is he then? *I* can't see him.

DIONYSUS: With me, within me. You are godless. You cannot see.

PENTHEUS: Take him.

He holds me in contempt, and through me, Thebes.

DIONYSUS: I will say this once.

I am not to be bound.

I know something you don't know.

PENTHEUS: I have the power here. And I say, bind him.

DIONYSUS: You don't know why you live like this. You don't know what you're doing. You don't know who you are.

PENTHEUS: I am Pentheus, son of Agave, son of Echion.

DIONYSUS: Pentheus.

That means 'suffering', you know. Like 'pathos'. It suits you.

PENTHEUS: Get out.

Throw him in the stables, into a horse-trough, make sure there's no light for him to see by.

You can dance *there*. And as for your accomplices, the ones you've brought to our city, we're going to sell them to the highest bidder. I'll bind their hands to the loom and keep them in service, instead of beating at drums with that racket they keep up.

DIONYSUS: I will go.

Nothing will befall me that is not already set. Let it be.

But you. Dionysus will not let you go unpunished for this arrogance. And *still* you say he's not real.

Bind me and you put a god in chains.

[The guards tie DIONYSUS' hands and lead him away.]

CHORUS:

Daughter of Achelous,
fair river-queen Dirke,
hear us! Help us!

You held our god once in your rivers.

When Zeus took him newborn from undying flames,
sewed him up inside his thigh
and brought him to term,
calling to him:

“Come, Dithyrambus, he-of-the-prayer-songs,
let me give you a womb,
not your mother's but good enough.
I will kindle you to glory, my Bacchus,
and all Thebes will scream your name.”

Lady Dirke, blessed stream, why do you turn me away?
I bring you garlands, I bring you a crown of flowers,
why do you spurn me?
Why won't you listen to me?
By the clustered grape, Dionysus' joy,
I swear that you will yet take note
of Bromios the Thunderer.

Such rage.
Such *rage* flames up
in the son of the earthborn Echion

the serpent's son,
who sprang up from dragon's teeth
sown in the earth like grain.

Pentheus. Monster.
Fearsome beast, like none of mortal kind.
He is a giant,
a bloodstained creature
in a deathmatch with gods.

Pentheus comes for us.
Soon he will loop the noose around my neck,
I who am bound to Bromios and no other.

He has our leader already,
tied up in his house,
cast into confining darkness.

Do you see this, Dionysus?
Son of Zeus, do you see your chosen
in danger of capture?
Come bearing a staff of gold,
down from Olympus.
Come and conquer the pride of this bloody-minded man.

Where are you, Dionysus?
Have you gone to Nysa,
where wild things are bred,
to lead a new revel?
The Corcyrian mountains?
Dionysus?
The hollows of Mount Olympus,
where the trees grow thick, where once Orpheus
plucked his harp and gave movement
and sorrow to trees, to beasts?
Blessed Pieria, the Lord of the Joy-Cry honors you.

He is coming.
He comes to lead the chorus,
his cue is here.

He will cross the rapids of the Axion,
he will bring the Maenads in a mad rush.

He has left the land of Lydia for us,
a generous, bounteous land, of fast-flowing rivers
that give water to herds of fine horses.

DIONYSUS [*from offstage, amplified, distorted, and in Attic Greek*]:

ἰὼ,
κλύετ' ἐμᾶς κλύετ' αὐδᾶς,
ἰὼ βᾶκχαι, ἰὼ βᾶκχαι.

CHORUS: Who is that?

Is that the voice of the Joy-God?

Is that who answers me?

DIONYSUS: ἰὼ ἰὼ, πάλιν αὐδῶ,
ὁ Σεμέλας, ὁ Διὸς παῖς

CHORUS: Lord-and-lady!

Come, join us, come to your chorus!

Bromios! Oh, Bromios!

DIONYSUS: σεῖε πέδον χθονὸς Ἔννοσι πότνια

[*Trembling. Rumbling.*]

CHORUS: He's bringing down the palace!

Pentheus' house lies in ruins!

DIONYSUS HAS COME UPON THIS HOUSE.

Worship him, praise him—

Look how the stones slide off their pillars.

Dionysus did that,

he screams out his victory

from within the house of his foe.

DIONYSUS: ἄπτε κερᾶνιον αἴθοπα λαμπάδα--

[*Beat. Power gathers.*]

σύμφλεγε σύμφλεγε δώματα Πενθέος!

[*Fire.*]

CHORUS: Look! There!

Fire over Semele's tomb,
can't you see?

LOOK.

Zeus' lightning-fire!

Get down, Maenads,
throw your bodies to the earth.

Our lord our god is come,
he is here,

and the child of Zeus *strikes* against this house.

[Dionysus enters.]

DIONYSUS: Oh, sweethearts. Frightened enough to hit the deck?

I'm going to go ahead and say you've seen Bacchus'...remodel of the house of Pentheus?

Get up, it's okay.

Take heart, no need for all that trembling.

CHORUS LEADER: I'm so glad you're okay.

What would I do without my captain of the dancers?

You left me alone, I was so upset.

DIONYSUS: Did you come to grief when Pentheus took me? When he fenced me in with darkness?

CHORUS LEADER: What else was I supposed to do? Who would lead us if something happened to you?

But how did you escape from that godless man?

DIONYSUS: Did it myself. No trouble.

Mostly myself. Mostly no trouble.

CHORUS LEADER: But your hands were bound, how—

DIONYSUS: Ah.

Yeah, well. I may have made that whole thing a little hard for him. Humiliating, actually.

He thought he had me in his clutches, but no. Not for an instant. He fed that hope in vain.

Near the prison he'd tossed me in, someone put a bull in his path. Pentheus threw the chains everywhere he could reach to tie the beast down, right down to the hooves. He was breathing hard by the end of it, sweat pouring off him, gnashing his teeth, everything.

I was right next to him, watching quietly.

Then Dionysus reached down and shook the house to ruin. Then, just to be sure, he called fire to light up his mother's tomb like a beacon.

Pentheus saw this too, thought his house was on fire, ran all over the place screaming at his slaves to bring water to douse it.

They all fell to, but it didn't exactly go well for them.

Pentheus gave that up for lost—he'd noticed I'd gone—grabbed his sword and charged after me into the house.

Then, the Roaring God—at least, I *think* it was him, but that's just my opinion—created an...image in the courtyard.

A phantom?

A simulacrum?

[To audience.]

Hologram's good for this century, yeah?

Cool. Okay. A hologram, then. As a target. Pentheus lunged, slashing at shimmering ether with killing intent.

But Dionysus wasn't done, bringing him and his house low with another tremor, shaking the pillars to pieces.

All this destruction. I guess he didn't like me being chained up like that. Mean thing to do.

And dear Pentheus is worn out by now from raging, his sword slack at his side.

That's what happens when you pit yourself against a god.

I took my leave of the house and came back to you, Pentheus isn't a concern.

[A scream of frustration from offstage.]

I stand corrected.

I'm guessing those are his footsteps inside the house. Former house.

And he's coming right this way.

Whatever will he say next?

I'll take it in stride, whatever it is, no matter how much he huffs and puffs.

Keep calm and carry on, as the wisest say.

[To audience.]

Will say.

Have said.

[PENTHEUS enters.]

PENTHEUS: This couldn't be worse!

The foreigner's escaped! I had him bound, but still he slipped loose!

[He sees DIONYSUS.]

FUCK.

And here he is! What are you doing here? How did you escape?

DIONYSUS: Easy there, calm down. Try some deep breaths. In through the nose, out through the—

PENTHEUS: How did you slip your chains and make it out here?

DIONYSUS: Did I not say I would be rescued? Were you not listening?

PENTHEUS: What?

Always coming out with some new excuse, you're so *inventive*.

Who rescued you, then?

DIONYSUS: The one who pushes the grapevine through the soil for mortal men, Dionysus.

PENTHEUS: ...

DIONYSUS: I don't get you. It's Dionysus' gift, it's a good thing, why—

PENTHEUS *(to guards):* Close the gates. Lock every way out of the city.

DIONYSUS: Why bother?

A god can leap tall buildings in a single bound.

PENTHEUS: You've got a smart mouth.

Not as smart as you'd like it to be.

DIONYSUS: I'm smart enough where it counts.

Hold on.

You might want to listen to this one first. He's come from the mountain with news.

Don't mind me, I'll be right here. I'm not going anywhere.

[MESSENGER enters.]

MESSENGER: Lord Pentheus, king of Thebes, I have come from Mount Kithairon, from the peak where the snowfall never melts.

PENTHEUS: And what news have you come in such haste to deliver?

MESSENGER: I saw the Bacchae, the priestesses, the ones who made a break out of the city, flying from it on frail feet. I have come to tell you, to warn the city—

My lord. There is some *insane shit* going on up there that I don't understand.

But please. I need to know if I may speak freely or keep myself in check.

I fear some retribution, lord, from a short temper and a noble's patience.

PENTHEUS: Speak.

I won't be shooting any messengers. It wouldn't be fair.

Instead, for every horror you tell me about the Bacchae, the more will I visit upon this one here, the one who our women took their cues from.

MESSENGER: The cattle-herds were just coming over the top of the hill, right when the sun just begins to warm the earth.

I saw three groups of women, of revelers, one led by your aunt Autonoe, the second by your mother Agave, the third by your aunt Ino.

They lay asleep, all of them, their bodies at rest, some leaning their backs against fir-trees, some with their heads pillowed on oak-leaves.

They *seemed* sober, sir. Not as you said they would be, drunk on wine and flute-song, and certainly not—

[He struggles, trying not to say 'fucking like rabbits'.]

Sneaking off to 'seek Aphrodite'.

But then your mother stood up in the middle of them and called out, urging them to shake off sleep. She'd heard the cattle lowing.

So they broke themselves from their rest, springing up straightaway. Orderly-like, organized, all of them, it was starting. Old and young, married and not.

They let their hair fall over their shoulders and the ones that had let their fawnskins fall hiked them back up and tied them in place.

With. Um. Snakes. They tied the dappled hides in place with snakes. Snakes with flicking tongues that licked their cheeks.

Some cradled wolf-cubs or young deer in their arms and fed the wild things from their breasts, the ones who left their newborns behind in the city whose breasts were still heavy with milk.

All of them re-crowned themselves in ivy, in oak, in blossoming yew.

One of them took her staff and struck it against a stone, and a jet of water sprang out, fresh and clear. Another plunged hers into the earth and the god loosed for her a torrent of wine. Those who wanted to dug their fingers into the dirt up to the knuckles and found rivulets of milk. Honey ran free from their staves, sweet as it dripped.

If you had been there, if you had seen it, you would pray to this god you condemn.

The cowherds and shepherds met up, talking over each other, trying to piece together the wonders, the terrors they had seen done.

One of them, a traveler, an out-of-towner, a bit more practiced in speaking, addressed us all.

“Come on, men! Men of these holy mountains, don’t you want to hunt them down? We could bring back Agave to Pentheus; she’s his mother, we’d be doing him a service getting her out of that Bacchic insanity (and earn something in return)!”

That was good enough for us, and so we burrowed down into the leaves and waited to ambush them.

And they came right on time, we saw them whirling into their dances, crying with every voice for Iacchos, Bromios, the son of Zeus.

The whole *mountain* worshipped with them, even the beasts, and nothing could keep still.

Agave bolted by me and I blew our cover, hoping to grab her quickly I had left behind the thicket where we had hidden ourselves.

She saw me and screamed: “My hounds, sprinters, *men* are hunting us! Fall in, fall in, thyrsos to hand!”

We ran. And *just* avoided a shredding by the Bacchae.

And since they couldn’t have us...

They got the grazing cows instead. Attacked them with nothing but their hands.

You’d have seen them tearing a fat calf in two, *screaming* in their grasp. Look another way and there they were, rending pieces off a heifer.

You would have seen ribs and cloven hooves thrown all over the place, blood-drenched ribbons hanging from the trees, still dripping. Proud bulls, tossing their horns in defiant rage, were driven to the ground, torn down by more women’s hands than I could count. Their hides were ripped from the meat in the blink of an eye, even your kingly eyes.

And then they took off, all at once, like birds, with a flightpath down over the plains that line the Asopus river, where the best of Theban grain is sown. They hit Hysiae and Erythrae, the two towns at the base of Mount Kithairon, turned the villages inside out like raiding soldiers.

They took children from their homes. Whatever they took with them on their shoulders, none of it fell to the ground or needed any ropes to tie it down, not bronze, not iron.

They wore fire in their hair, but they were not burned.

Some of the townspeople took up arms in retaliation, marching out against the Bacchae.

It was terrible, my lord. Terrible to watch.

The points of the men's spears could not draw blood.

But the women did, hurling their staves like javelins, they did their damage and took flight.

Women. Women did this to our men, and not without a god at their backs.

They went back to their base after that, the spot where the god had sent forth the fountains for them. They washed the blood off there.

I saw the snakes licking the last drops off their faces with forked tongues.

Welcome this god into the city, whoever he is. Please, my lord.

He has shown his power.

And it's not all bad. I've heard he gave the grapevine to us mortals, as an end to pain.

And without wine, we've got no chance with Aphrodite. Or anything else good, for that matter.

CHORUS LEADER: Maybe I shouldn't say so to a king, but I will.

Dionysus bows to no other god.

PENTHEUS: This is an outrage, the *gall* of these Bacchae, and it spreads like wildfire already. You are a black mark on all of Greece.

But I will not waver.

[To guards.]

Summon the rest of the guard to the Electran gate. I want all the shieldbearers, the cavalry with their swiftest horses, and everyone who can hold a shield on one arm and pluck a bowstring with the other.

We will march upon the Bacchae.

This is too much to bear, to suffer this much injury by women's hands. We cannot let this stand.

DIONYSUS: ...well, that isn't what *I* said to do. I know you heard me, Pentheus.

You've tried to hurt me, but even so I'll tell you this. this is not right. You are making war on a god.

Listen for a second. Wait.

Bromios won't just *let* you take his followers off the mountain.

PENTHEUS: Don't tell me what to do. Be glad you managed to escape your chains. Or are you missing them?

DIONYSUS: If I were in your place, I would rather sacrifice to a god than stamp my foot at him.

PENTHEUS: But I'm making a great sacrifice. In the glens of Kithairon I will make it, from a slaughter of women.

It's what they deserve.

DIONYSUS: You will flee. All of you.

You think they're laughing at you now? Imagine when you have to take your bronze shields and turn tail, running from the staves of the Bacchae.

PENTHEUS: He just doesn't stop talking, does he? Such an impossible person.

DIONYSUS: Pentheus.

My friend.

You have a chance to make this right.

PENTHEUS: By doing what? Being ruled by my subjects?

DIONYSUS: What if I brought the women to you? Unarmed? I can.

PENTHEUS: Nice try. I know a trick when I see one.

DIONYSUS: Is it a trick if I'm trying to *save you*?

PENTHEUS: This is all part of your plan, I'm sure, a pact to make this worship last forever.

DIONYSUS: I made that pact. But that's between my god and me.

PENTHEUS [*to guards*]: Get my armor.

And you.

Be quiet.

[*PENTHEUS begins to walk away.*]

DIONYSUS: Okay.

[*Beat.*]

DIONYSUS: Do you want to see them? All together, sitting up on the mountain?

PENTHEUS: *So much.* I'd pay good money to see that.

DIONYSUS: Oh? Why the sudden passion? What could have come over you?

PENTHEUS: Well, it would be upsetting to see them drunk, certainly—

DIONYSUS: But you'd enjoy it. Even if it's so unpalatable.

PENTHEUS: Yes, of course. I could sit under the pines, I'll be quiet.

DIONYSUS: But they would hunt you down, no matter what stealth you use.

PENTHEUS: You're right, I'll go in the open. That's a good idea.

DIONYSUS: Shall we, then? Will you come on this adventure with me?

PENTHEUS: Right away, let's go! No delay, I can't stand waiting.

DIONYSUS: Hold on.

You're not dressed for it.

A nice dress, preferably linen, and then you'll be ready.

PENTHEUS: What? Go from man to woman? Why?

DIONYSUS: They'll kill you if you look like a man.

PENTHEUS: You're right. Again.

You've been right this whole time.

DIONYSUS: Dionysus taught me well.

PENTHEUS: How should I do what you ask? What's the best way?

DIONYSUS: Come back inside, we'll get you changed.

PENTHEUS: Into what?

Women's clothes?

I can't. It would shame me.

DIONYSUS: So you don't want to see the Maenads that badly.

[Beat.]

PENTHEUS: What do you want me to wear?

DIONYSUS: Let's deal with your hair first. It needs to be longer, I can take care of that.

PENTHEUS: And next? Any other costume pieces?

DIONYSUS: A dress that falls past your ankles. And a headband.

PENTHEUS: Do you want to add anything else?

DIONYSUS: A thyrsus in hand and a dappled fawnskin. That'll do nicely.

PENTHEUS: I can't, I can't, not women's clothes, it's not—

DIONYSUS: You'll spill blood if you fight them head-on.

PENTHEUS: Right. It's better for me to go first to do recon.

DIONYSUS: Exactly! It's a better plan than fighting fire with fire.

PENTHEUS: But how can I get through the city without being spotted?

DIONYSUS: Back alleys and side streets. I'll lead.

PENTHEUS: Anything's better than being the Bacchae's fool. We'll go inside and I'll think about it.

DIONYSUS: Great, fine by me.

Whatever you decide, I'm ready and waiting.

PENTHEUS: I'm going. Inside, I mean.

Either I will go armed to the Bacchae or...I'll do as you say.

[PENTHEUS exits.

The CHORUS gathers closer.]

DIONYSUS: He's in the net, ladies.

He will come to the Bacchae, and he will give them his life as tribute.

Dionysus, it's in your hands.

You're not far off, this I know.

Make him pay.

Strip him of sanity, plant madness in his heart, something manic.

He wouldn't do this with his wits about him. Women's clothing for such a man...not *him*. But now, driven to distraction? Now, he'll wear it.

I want him brought low. I want Thebes to see him in a woman's guise, led through the streets in the form he once scorned. He's said some hurtful things.

Back inside for me, then, and a few last touches on what Pentheus will wear for his 'Road Trip to Hades' look, delivered there butchered by his mother's hands.

He will *know* Dionysus. He will know the son of Zeus to be true-god-born, to be the greatest horror to mortal kind.

And the greatest helper.

[*DIONYSUS exits.*]

CHORUS:

Am I to dance?

To lift my feet the whole night through
with the frenzy of a god inside me?

Shall I bare my throat to the dewy air
like a fawn at play in the meadow,
where joy is green and wide?

When she has outrun a panicked chase,
leaped clear over the braided nets and their wielders?
When the hunter spurs his dogs on
and she presses faster, faster,
she runs,
she leaps,
her fear puts lightning in her bounds?

She rushes over the plains,
down the riverbank and finds her joy again,
away from men, finds it in the wild places
and in the shade among young trees.

What is wisdom? Here, now?
What is the highest blessing of gods to mortals?
It is to stretch out your hand
over the head of the one you hate,
the one that hates you,
and know your strength is greater.
Doesn't that always feel *good*?

The strength of a god is not roused without need,
But when it is roused, it comes down.
Implacably.
It sets mortals to rights,
the ones who kneel at the altar of pride,
those who, in senselessness and without judgment,
do not acknowledge the gods.

In their cunning, the gods hide themselves
behind time, behind the pace of our years.
And they hunt down the unholy.

Natural law forbids us from exceeding our time, our scope.
The price of knowing this is not too high.
There's even strength in it.
Knowing the divine is power.
It has been so for the longest of time,
it will be so for a long time more.
It's only natural.

What is wisdom? Here, now?
What is the highest blessing of gods to mortals?
It is to stretch out your hand
over the head of the one you hate,
the one that hates you,
and know your strength is greater.
Doesn't that always feel *good*?

Happy is the one who escapes a sea-storm
and comes home to the harbor.
And happy is the one who stands against their hardships.
Happy are they who endure.
One man may exceed another, in his own way.
In wealth.
In power.
Countless hopes for yet-more-countless people.
Sometimes hope wins out, gives us riches—
And sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes we fail.

But the one who can live in spite of this,
who is happy day to day.
That one is blessed.

[*DIONYSUS re-enters.*]

DIONYSUS: Come on now,
So eager to see what he's not meant to see,
So eager to chase what must not be chased?
Pentheus, I'm talking to you, come on out!
Out of the house, that's right, out where I can see you.

I want to see you dressed to the nines in women's wear.

Not *just* a woman's. A *maenad's*, full of fire and fury, a spy amidst your mother and her retinue.

[PENTHEUS enters, wearing women's clothing.]

DIONYSUS: My goodness.

A daughter of Kadmos, how lovely.

PENTHEUS: I—

I can see two suns. I think?

Two sets of seven gates around the city, two Thebes.

And you.

You're the bull. You look like a bull. Right in front of me, leading me on. I can see horns on your head.

Were you wild before? A beast, not a person? You're a bull now, I'm certain.

DIONYSUS: It's the god's presence. He walks with us.

He wasn't feeling very gracious before, but now he's declared a ceasefire.

You're seeing what you should see.

PENTHEUS: How do I look? Is this like how Ino stands? Or Agave my mother?

DIONYSUS: Spitting image.

Uncanny.

But here, this lock of hair has come loose. It's not where I put it under the headband.

PENTHEUS: Might've done that inside. I was practicing Maenad-ing, tossing my hair and all that.

DIONYSUS: ...of course you were.

Come here, I'll fix it, that's what I'm here for.

Hold still. Head straight.

[DIONYSUS fixes his hair.]

PENTHEUS: Alright, set it in order. I'm all yours.

DIONYSUS: And your belt is too loose.

And these pleats, they're all uneven around your ankles.

PENTHEUS: Seems alright on the right side.

As far as I can tell, it's not too bad. It's a nice cut on me, ankle-length.

DIONYSUS: You'll think me a true friend once you see that you were wrong about how the Bacchae dress. It's sensible, really.

PENTHEUS: What's more like them? Holding the staff in the left hand or the right? I want to get it spot-on.

DIONYSUS: In the right. And lifted with the right foot.

I'm so pleased that you've changed your mind.

PENTHEUS: I could lift Mount Kithairon on my shoulders, Bacchae and all, couldn't I?

DIONYSUS: Sure, why not? If you want to.

You had such a negative outlook before, such an unsound mind. Now you're thinking as you should.

PENTHEUS: Maybe we'll bring a crowbar? Or should I tear the mountain from its roots barehanded?

No, I'll need a better angle. Better to brace with the shoulders, arms maybe?

DIONYSUS: Just as long as you don't wreck the nymph's shrines or Pan's favorite pipe-playing spot.

PENTHEUS: Ah, yes! Well said! No taking women by force. I'll hide myself in the pines.

DIONYSUS: You'll hide in the perfect hidey-hole for a spy sneaking up on the Maenads.

PENTHEUS: I can see them now, almost. Little birds in the brambles, tangled up in each other, in *bed* with each other.

DIONYSUS: Well then, it's up to you to stop them! Guard against their wiles.

You might even catch them, unless they catch you first.

PENTHEUS: Let's go. Lead me through the middle of Thebes.

I'm the only man with the courage for this. Me.

DIONYSUS: You. Only you.

You take this on for your city. All alone.

For the trial that awaits you is your destiny and yours only.

Come along now.

I am your escort and deliverer.

Another will bring you home.

PENTHEUS: My mother, right.

DIONYSUS: You'll be a celebrity.

PENTHEUS: That's why I'm going.

DIONYSUS: You'll be raised up.

PENTHEUS: I like the sound of that!

DIONYSUS: In your mother's arms.

PENTHEUS: You'll make a delicate thing of me yet.

DIONYSUS: Something like that.

PENTHEUS: I'll get my just reward.

DIONYSUS: You're terrible! Just terrible.

And what meets you will be just as terrible.

Get ready. You will find glory, a fame that touches the sky.

[PENTHEUS exits.]

Embrace your son, Agave.

And your kin too, all you daughters of Kadmos.

I am taking this boy to his greatest exhibition, and I'm going to win it. Me and Bromios together.

Stay tuned for further developments.

[DIONYSUS exits.]

CHORUS: GO.

Go.

To the mountain, go.

Go, quick hounds of madness,

Run to Kadmos' daughters and their band.

Incense them

against the one who comes in women's wear
like a mad thing the spy comes to the Maenads.

His mother will be first.

First to see him hiding in the crags
or behind a rocky spar, scoping them out.

She'll call out to the Maenads—

Who's here to eavesdrop on Kadmos' mountain-bound daughters?

Who is it who comes to the mountain?

Who is it who comes to the mountain, Bacchae?

What could have borne him?

No woman's blood has borne him.

A lion's whelp.

Or a Gorgon, one of the race of monsters.

Let Justice show herself.

Let Justice bear her sword.

Let her open the throat of this man.

Let her cut down the son of Echion,

the man who sprang from the earth.

Atheon. Anomon. Adikon.

Ungodly. Unlawful. Unjust.

He comes with violence in his head
and injustice in his heart,
with this he goes against your worship, Bacchus.

With this he desecrates your mother.

With his wits incensed
and his will in uproar, he's on his way.

He comes to conquer the unconquerable.

Death will teach him temperance.

In matters divine, there is no excuse.

A mortal life can be without pain.

I don't begrudge wisdom.

I do have fun trying to find it.

But there are other things.

Great things, things I can know.

I'd like to set sail towards a good life.

To live *well*, day and night.

I will cast away injustice

and I will honor my gods.

Let Justice show herself.

Let Justice bear her sword.

Let her open the throat of this man.

Let her cut down the son of Echion, the man who sprang from the earth.

Atheon. Anomon. Adikon.

Ungodly. Unlawful. Unjust.

Dionysus, show yourself.

As a bull.

As a serpent with many heads.

As a lion with fire for a mane.

Go, Bacchus.

Throw the fatal noose to catch the Bacchae's would-be hunter.

Let him fall to the Maenads

Let him fall to the throng.

And do it with a smile.

[The SECOND MESSENGER enters.]

SECOND MESSENGER: This house was great, once. Blessed, out of all in Greece, the house of Kadmos of Sidon, who sowed a crop of dragon's teeth in the earth and reaped a harvest of earthborn men.

I'm sorry for you.

I'm only a servant, but I am sorry.

CHORUS: What is it?

Do you have something to tell us?

SECOND MESSENGER: Pentheus is dead. Echion's son is dead.

CHORUS LEADER: Oh, *Dionysus*.

Lord-and-Lady, you have shown your glory.

SECOND MESSENGER: ...*what?*

What are you saying?

You can't be happy about the fall of this house, the evil that has come upon it.

CHORUS LEADER: In case you haven't noticed,
we're not *from here*.

I sing in a key that was born far away from here,
and you cannot threaten me with chains.

MESSENGER: Do you think there are no men left in Thebes that will do it?

CHORUS: Dionysus!

Dionysus has me for his own.

Not Thebes.

MESSENGER: I understand that.

But we are undone. To take joy in that is wrong. It is impious, ladies.

CHORUS: Go on. Tell me how the blasphemer died.

SECOND MESSENGER: We left Thebes' houses behind, crossed the river Asopus and began the climb of rocky Kithairon, Pentheus and I—I was following my master—and the stranger in the lead. When we got to the site, we settled into a grass-covered valley, keeping our tongues and footsteps silent, so we could watch without being watched ourselves.

It was a cleft in the rock surrounded by cliffs, well watered, canopied over with pine-branches where the Maenads had established themselves. They were keeping their hands busy with workaday things.

Some were remaking their ragged staves, twining long ivy about them, some chased each other like horses at play, still others sang, calling back and forth to each other, some song about Bacchus.

But Pentheus wasn't happy. He couldn't see the group of women from where he was. He said:

Stranger, I can't see them from here. No sign of the "Maenads".

We need higher ground. If I climbed one of the tall pines I might be able to get a better view of their shameless raving.

And then I saw the stranger work a miracle.

He took the highest branch of a pine-tree in his hand—I don't know how—he pulled it down, and down, and down, until it touched the dark soil.

It traced an arc like the curve of a drawn bow or part of a circle scratched out by a compass. Thus did he, with his hands, nothing else, bend the pine-bough to earth.

Human beings can't *do* that.

He settled Pentheus onto a branch and let the tree straighten itself out again, guiding it gently with his hands, making sure its cargo didn't go flying off, until finally the pine stood straight again, with my lord and master crouched on its back.

Right where the Maenads could see him. Better than he even saw them.

He was a sitting duck up that high, and the stranger was nowhere to be found, but there was a voice, out of nothing, out of the air---it must have been Dionysus—he cried out:

He's here, ladies. I've brought him.

The one who laughed at you, at me, at my worship.

Avenge us.

He spoke, and a pillar of sacred flame breached heaven and earth at his words.

Then silence. The leaves of the trees hushed themselves and the beasts made no sound.

You wouldn't have heard a thing.

The women bolted to their feet and tried to investigate—

And he gave his orders again.

And *this time*, the daughters of Kadmos knew Dionysus' command.

Doves could not have been quicker than them as they surged forward, sprinting with quick footfalls, Agave his mother, then her sisters, then all the Bacchae behind them. They leaped over broken cliffs and streams swollen with snowmelt with the god breathing frenzy into them.

When they caught sight of the king perched in the fir-tree, they threw stones for their missiles (first pebbles, then boulders), from a high rock opposite the tree that they'd scaled. They threw pine-branches like javelins, and still others used their staves as spears and launched a volley of those at Pentheus too—like a damned dartboard.

But they didn't hit. He was sitting at too great a height for even their energy to reach.

But they'd got him cornered with no escape route.

As a last resort, they pulled up oak-branches, lightning-fast, using them like iron crowbars to gouge out the tree's roots.

When even this didn't work, Agave called:

Come on, circle the trunk, every Maenad to a branch!

We'll bring down this crouching beast, make sure he won't go spreading the secrets of the god's rites.

A thousand hands seized the fir-tree.

And uprooted it.

From that great height, Pentheus fell, screaming long and loud.

It had clicked. He knew he was done.

His mother was the high priestess. It was her right to go first. To begin the killing, and so she threw herself at him.

He tore the headband from his head so that she would recognize him—oh, poor Agave—to stop her from killing him.

He touched her face and said:

It's me, mother.

It's me. Your son, it's Pentheus.

You had me in Echion's house.

Mercy, mother, *please*. I know I messed up, please, please don't kill me, don't kill your son—

She was foaming at the mouth and her eyes roved everywhere, she wasn't thinking clearly—or at all—

Bacchus had hold of her. She didn't listen.

Grabbing his left forearm in her hands, she braced her foot against his bruised ribs and tore the arm from his shoulder.

It wasn't her own strength that did it, the god had given her hands some of his own.

Ino went to work on the other side, tearing the flesh from the bones, and Autonoë and the rest of the Bacchae fell on him.

There was so much noise, all of them together, him groaning with all the breath he could get and them raising their victory-cry.

One carried off an arm, another a foot, still shod.

His ribs were stripped bare and with bloody hands they threw what was left of Pentheus around like they were playing catch.

His body lies all over the place, some in the cracks in the rock, some in the canopy deep in the forest.

It won't be easy to find.

His wretched head, his mother happened to get that in her hands, she's speared it on the tip of her staff, like a hunter who brings a lion home down the middle of Kithairon, leaving her sisters behind in the Maenad's dances.

She's coming home, rejoicing in the cursed quarry she caught, bringing it inside the walls. She gives Bacchus partial credit, her partner in the hunt, her brother-in-arms, the most illustrious victor.

Her only prize is tears.

I have to go. Get out of the crossfire before Agave sets foot back in the house.

Temperance.

Temperance and honoring the gods. It's the best we can do.

The smartest thing mortals can choose to do.

[SECOND MESSENGER exits.]

CHORUS LEADER: Dance in the name of Dionysus.

Raise up your voices for the fall of Pentheus,
son of dragon's teeth, son of the earthborn.

Dressed in woman's garb and a fennel-staff,
he went straight down to Hades.

The bull led him by the hand to disaster, to death.

Kadmos' Bacchae, you have achieved the glory of glories.

But for you, it is wailing.

For *you*, it is tears.

What a great thing, what a fine thing,
for one's hands to drip red with blood,
Blood of a son that *you* struck down.

But look!

Agave comes home.

Pentheus' mother comes home with her eyes rolling.

Welcome her to the revels.

Welcome her with the god's own joy.

[AGAVE enters, bearing the head of PENTHEUS.]

AGAVE: Bacchae!

CHORUS LEADER: What's got you excited?

AGAVE: I've come from the mountain, I've brought home a new cutting, a fresh sprig to adorn the halls, a blessed quarry!

CHORUS LEADER: I can see that.

And I welcome you as a sister-dancer.

AGAVE: I snagged him, me on my own! No ropes for this wild young lion. See for yourself!

CHORUS: From what wilderness?

AGAVE: Kiathairon!

CHORUS: Kithairon?

AGAVE: Killed him!

CHORUS: Who struck him down?

AGAVE: ME! I was first, the honor is mine!

They sing of me in the revels, they call me “Agave the Blessed”!

CHORUS: Anyone else?

AGAVE: Kadmos’...

CHORUS: Kadmos’ what?

AGAVE: His daughters, my sisters!

They only got to the beast after me.

After me.

We got lucky in this hunt!

CHORUS: So lucky.

AGAVE: Come on! Share in this feast with me.

CHORUS: What? Share it?

You poor woman.

AGAVE: It’s a young one, too.

See how the hair’s so soft on the sides here, and longer on top.

CHORUS: He certainly looks like a beast with hair like that.

A wild beast.

AGAVE: Bacchus is a huntsman indeed, he was so smart in setting the Maenads on this wild thing.

CHORUS LEADER: Oh, he is.

Our lord-and-lady is a hunter.

AGAVE: Won’t you congratulate me?

CHORUS: Congratulations.

AGAVE: Soon Kadmos’ kin—

CHORUS: And Pentheus your son—

AGAVE: He'll be so proud of his mother, for catching this prize, the lion's share.

CHORUS: Remarkable.

AGAVE: Remarkably done!

CHORUS: Are you pleased?

AGAVE: Ecstatic!

It was amazing.

I did something *amazing* in this chase.

CHORUS LEADER: So show them, oh great and terrible woman, show them your hunting-prize, brought home in victory.

AGAVE: People of Thebes, this fair-towered city, all of you!

Come and see what I've caught, the prey that the daughters of Kadmos have snared in the hunting, not with thrown-spears like those in Thessaly, not with nets, but with our own fingers, our own arms.

What use is there in boasting of our skill in spear-making? It's all in vain.

We did this, we caught this beast bare-handed and scattered his joints to the wind.

Where's my old father? Tell him to come.

And where's my son Pentheus?

He should have this. Tell him to bring a ladder with him, too, I want him to mount this on the lintel, this lion that I caught for him, brought here for him.

[KADMOS enters, bearing the rest of Pentheus, attended.]

KADMOS: Come on, bear that wretched burden. Oh, Pentheus.

Come on, right here, right before the house.

This wasn't easy to find. I searched all over Kithairon, finding the body. The scraps.

I've brought it back.

Some was thrown into the trees, some in the rocks.

Hard to retrieve.

I've been informed of my daughter's activities, but only when I was already out of the city, on my way back from trying to get to the Bacchae with old TEIRESIAS.

I turned right back around to the mountain.

And now I escort my grandson home, slain by the Maenads.

I saw Autonoe there, Actaeon's mother by Aristaeus, and Ino, my girls, still stung to madness among the oaks and pines.

I was told Agave was on her way here, Bacchus' spirit in her steps—

And it seems they were right.

I see her. It is a curse to see her.

AGAVE: Daddy, we've brought you bragging rights, the right to say you have the finest daughters in the mortal world!

All of us—well, mostly me, we left the loom behind and went on to bigger and better things, to the bare-handed hunt!

I have the victory-spoils right here, see? I brought them here for you to hang up in the house: here, you should hold them, Daddy.

Be proud of our catch, tell your friends! Have a feast!

We are blessed, blessed, for what we've done.

KADMOS: Oh, *penthos*, grief beyond measure, I can't look, not at what you've done with murderous hands.

You've thrown down a fine sacrifice to the gods, and you would call all of Thebes to a feast for it.

To your misery, greatest of all, and then to my own.

A god has destroyed us. Justly but...but this is too much.

The lord Bromios has destroyed us.

He's our *family*.

AGAVE: You're getting crotchety in your old age, and sad-eyed.

My son'll be a good hunter, he takes after his mother when he takes a kill with the rest of the Theban youths someday.

All he does now is rail against the gods.

You should really scold him for that, Daddy.

Can someone call him out here so he can see my stroke of luck?

KADMOS: (*Mourning-cry*)

You'll know pain when you realize what you've done.

If you stay like this forever—you won't be alright, but at least you won't know how not-alright you are.

AGAVE: What do you mean, not alright? What's wrong?

KADMOS: First, I need you to look up. Look at the sky.

AGAVE: Okay, okay. Why am I looking at it?

KADMOS: Does it look the same or has it changed?

AGAVE: Brighter than before. Sharper.

KADMOS: How do you feel? Still...overwrought?

AGAVE: I don't understand.

I think I'm coming down from whatever I was before, something's changing.

KADMOS: Can you hear me? Can you answer me clearly?

AGAVE: Yes.

...I forgot what we were saying.

Daddy?

KADMOS: Whose house did you go to when you were married?

AGAVE: You gave me to one of the earthborn, that's what they called them. Echion.

KADMOS: And who is the son you bore there to that husband?

AGAVE: Pentheus. He's mine and his father's.

KADMOS: Whose head are you holding in your hands?

AGAVE: A lion's. They said so. In the hunt, they said so.

KADMOS: Look again now. Look clearly. It's not hard to see.

[She looks.]

AGAVE: What is this? What am I holding?

KADMOS: Look.

You'll understand.

AGAVE: I see sorrow. The greatest sorrow.

KADMOS: Does it still look like a lion?

AGAVE: No.

No.

No it's Pentheus. It's Pentheus' head.

No, please no.

KADMOS: Mourned even before you knew him.

AGAVE: How did he die? How did he get in my hands?

KADMOS: An unhappy truth. And too long in coming.

AGAVE: Tell me.

My heart's beating so fast, I can't—

KADMOS: You killed him. You and your sisters.

AGAVE: ...where?

Here?

Where did this happen?

KADMOS: The same place where Actaeon's dogs dismembered him.

AGAVE: Kithairon? Why did Pentheus go there?

KADMOS: He went to mock the god and your rites.

AGAVE: Why did we go there?

KADMOS: You were possessed. You and the rest of the city had Bacchus within them.

AGAVE: Dionysus.

He's destroyed us.

I understand.

KADMOS: He was dishonored by you.

He was not acknowledged as a god.

AGAVE: Where is my son, father?

Where is what's left of my most-loved child?

KADMOS: I've brought it back here. Only just managed to find it out.

AGAVE: Has he been set in order?

KADMOS: No. I tried. I couldn't.

AGAVE: But what did Pentheus have to do with my mistake?

KADMOS: He took after you and did not honor the god, and so the god bound us all together in this same ruin, destroyed this house and us with it.

And me. Without sons and now without your son, my grandson, child of your womb, woman of sorrow—

This is an ugly death he's died.

[He addresses the pieces of Pentheus.]

You were a light in the house. You held us together, child, son of my daughter, and were something to be feared in the city.

When they saw your face, nobody would insult ancient old me. You would have laid down the law on all of them.

But now I am dishonored, exiled from my own house, Kadmos the great, who sowed and reaped the Theban race, the most glorious of harvests.

Dearest to me of all men—you're dead, I know you're dead, but I call you dearest still.

Child.

You won't ever touch me with those hands again, embrace me, call me grandfather, touch my face, saying: "Who's wronged you, old man? Who has slandered you? Has someone stirred you up or made your heart heavy? Say who, so I can punish them, I'll punish anyone who hurts you, grandfather."

But now I am miserable. And you are broken. Your mother needs pity and her sisters are ruined.

If there are any left who would look down on the gods, let them see this.

This death.

And let them know the gods.

CHORUS LEADER: I'm sorry, Kadmos.

This man deserved what he got, child of your child, but it is a torment for you.

AGAVE: Daddy.

Daddy, this is—

Everything's changed, everything's gone—

[AGAVE mourns.]

In the quiet, DIONYSUS enters, a God revealed.]

DIONYSUS: I warned him.

I told him exactly what I was, exactly what I wanted, exactly what he had to do to avoid this.

But he didn't believe me.

[To audience.]

There were other words here, once. Good ones.

But they're lost. To time, to carelessness, to the degradation of parchment, fire and sand.

Doesn't matter. They're lost.

Kadmos and his wife Harmonia turned to serpents, leading an army and sacking Thebes (still as serpents? I've never been sure), pillaging Apollo's oracle, saved at the end by Ares, a peaceful death at long last, and so on.

But.

You.

[Back to KADMOS and AGAVE.]

Grandfather. Auntie.

I bring Semele's regards. The Semele you called a whore, called a liar.

I can't help but think that maybe if she had been believed, if when she had come to you with news a child you had trusted her, she might not have trusted Hera when she planted that seed of doubt. What if your sisters are right, what if this *is* a common man and your child a common bastard?

She might not have made Zeus promise her anything she asked for.

She might not have asked him to reveal himself.

And she might not have been burned out of existence by what she saw.

I might have had a mother.

But you didn't believe her.

And even after she went up in smoke, you and your sisters and your son shut her out, shut me out.

I say this to you as Dionysus, son of no mortal father.

I am Zeus' son.

I am Semele's son.

If you would have been wiser, if you had been willing to *listen*, we—

You would be happy now and you would have the son of Zeus as your ally. Your family.

KADMOS: Dionysus.

We're begging you.

We know we have acted unjustly.

DIONYSUS: A little late to that.

You should have known me from the start. You didn't.

KADMOS: I *know* that now.

But you have gone too far.

DIONYSUS: And *you* committed blasphemy.

I am a god. You denied me.

KADMOS: Yes.

You are a god.

And so you shouldn't stoop to mortal anger.

DIONYSUS: Doesn't matter.

Zeus-my-father set this all in motion long ago.

AGAVE: It's been decided.

Exile for us both.

DIONYSUS: Quite.

And why delay? What will be, will be.

KADMOS: Child.

All this is too terrible, all that's come upon us. You, your sisters, and us, all cursed.

I will go into foreign lands, an aged exile and have no rest from trouble or pain.

No peaceful passing to the Acheron which flows down into the earth.

AGAVE: Daddy.

I'll have to go without you.

KADMOS: What's all this, my poor child?

You look like a little swan, wings outspread over its worn-out parent.

AGAVE: Where should I go?

I don't have another home to go to.

KADMOS: I don't know, my girl.

Your father can't be of much use to you here.

AGAVE: Goodbye.

Goodbye to the palace, goodbye to my city, my country, my home.

I leave you in pain for more pain in banishment.

KADMOS: Go now, my child. Try Aristeus' land.

AGAVE: I grieve for you, Daddy.

KADMOS: And I for you, my child. For you and for your sisters.

AGAVE: It's a terrible thing that Dionysus has done to us and our house.

DIONYSUS: And terrible what was done to him, for his name had no honor in Thebes.

AGAVE: Goodbye, daddy.

KADMOS: Goodbye, unhappy daughter.

It will be hard going for you.

AGAVE: See me out, ladies.

It's the least you can do.

I'll fetch my sisters to accompany me in my journey.

I will go where sullied Kithairon can no longer see me, where I can no longer see Kithairon, where there are no fennel-staves to be found.

Leave it to the rest of the Bacchae.

[KADMOS and AGAVE are led to separate exits. The CHORUS exit with them.

DIONYSUS remains onstage as the play ends.]

Lamp Lady

By Marta Aran

Translated by Elena Igartuburu

In early 2019, Catalan playwright Marta Aran contacted me to translate her play *La noia de la làmpada* into English as *Lamp Lady*. I connected with her work in the first reading and, although it was my first professional foray into Catalan-English translation, I happily committed to the work. One of the most challenging aspects of this particular translations was transposing the everyday language—the expressions and phrases of everyday life but also Alba’s continuous cursing and swearing—and expressions of the play into American English while maintaining or transferring the cultural and contextual specificities that enrich the play. The dialogue between two of the main characters, Gemma and Alba, is somewhat circular, repetitious, and filled with tension that is built through a flow of lines that gets broken by sudden pauses and continuous hesitations. Maurici speaks through to other characters, in a sort of continuous monologue, not really listening or engaging. The lack of understanding or engagement and the constant quest for the right thing to say of the characters calls for an attention to language and form that made the play equally interesting and challenging to translate.

Probably the most enriching aspect in the process of translating *La Noia* was collaborating with graduate students from the Theater Department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Together, we performed the first scene of the play at the celebration of Catalan letters in Sant Jordi, April 23rd, Spring 2019. Being able to hear the text helped solve many issues of articulation, rhythm, and cadence.

Marta Aran (Barcelona, Spain) is a Young Catalan playwright with experience and training in theater directing, acting, and writing. She has released two plays: *La noia de la làmpada* (Barcelona, 2018) and *Els dies mentits* (Barcelona, 2019). She was a finalist in the “Torneo de Dramaturgia de Temporada Alta” in Girona (Spain) and participated as a guest playwright in the “Torneo de dramaturgia de Buenos Aires en Timbre4 (TABA)” in Buenos Aires (Argentina). She has recently been awarded the *Carme Monturiol* fellowship by the city council of Barcelona to write her third play *Narcisos* and was also finalist to “RECVLL” with her second play *Els dies mentit*.

Elena Igartuburu (Ph.D. 2015, Universidad de Oviedo) is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her journey into translation and interpreting began as a conference interpreter at the University of Oviedo in Spain, and she has continued such work at UMass Amherst, Amherst College, and the Institute for Training and Development. She has recently started her foray into theatre translation with her work on the Catalan playwright Marta Aran’s *Lamp Lady* (2019). She was recently selected as resident translator for the new Spanish-Playwright in Residence program at UMass Amherst sponsored by the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the Embassy of Spain to translate the José Manuel Mora’s *Los Nadadores Nocturnos* (2014).

Lamp Lady

Characters

Alba, 30 years old

Gemma, 27 years old

Maurici, 34 years old

Lidia, 30 years old

1. Cerulean Blue

An art gallery in a large city. Three paintings hang on a white wall. Two sisters: Alba and Gemma. It's been a long time since the last time they saw each other. Alba, the older sister, is five months pregnant.

GEMMA: Can I?

She motions to touch Alba's belly.

ALBA: Yes.

GEMMA: It's weird...

ALBA: Yeah. *(Pause)* Want something?

GEMMA: No, thanks.

ALBA: Ok.

GEMMA: It's so big...

ALBA: Too big.

GEMMA: Really!

ALBA: Yeah, apparently, I have a lot of amniotic fluid, but everything is ok. It's different for every woman.

GEMMA: Everything is alright, then?

ALBA: Yes, yes, great. Everything's great... Yeah...

Yesterday I got an ultrasound. I could only see the feet. In the first ultrasound it looked as if the baby was flying...

GEMMA: What do you mean?

ALBA: It looked like an alien.

GEMMA: Have you thought of a name?

ALBA: Alien.

Pause.

GEMMA: And you, how are you?

ALBA: Tired.

GEMMA: It's heavy, isn't it?

ALBA: Yes, I just get so tired. It's hard to do things... Everything's harder.

GEMMA: And does it move?

ALBA: Like the devil. And you, how are you?

GEMMA: Alright.

ALBA: That's great. And how's everything?

GEMMA: Great. And you?

ALBA: Great, great. And you?

GEMMA: Great!

ALBA: I'm happy for you. I'm glad you're doing well. It's great...

They laugh.

GEMMA: Yes! Yeah...

ALBA: Enjoy it while you can... Because after... Well, you see what happens!

GEMMA: But isn't it beautiful?

ALBA: I don't know...

GEMMA: I'd love to be a mother.

ALBA: It's a myth, all that talk about the happiness of pregnancy...

GEMMA: Yes, you told me on the phone.

ALBA: Yeah, true. It's the only thing I talk about. Sorry! I'm getting so annoying. I know.

GEMMA: It's ok.

ALBA: It seems that there's this hormone that fills you up with this energy, you know?

GEMMA: Yeah...

ALBA: And you become really strong...

GEMMA: And the happiness...

ALBA: So you don't believe it either! Where the hell is it, this shitty hormone?

Pause.

ALBA: Want me to bring the papers?

GEMMA: Later, maybe?

ALBA: Yes, later... Sure... Are we? The...

Alba points at her belly.

GEMMA: Oh, of course! Sorry.

ALBA: I'm a cow, you know?

GEMMA: You look pretty.

ALBA: Gemma...

GEMMA: I'm lying.

They stare at each other. Alba smiles shyly.

ALBA: You're the one who's looking gorgeous.

GEMMA: Do you really mean it?

ALBA: Yes. Very pretty. So beautiful. *(Pause)* The jacket is...

GEMMA: Cute?

ALBA: And you changed your hair, right?

GEMMA: Yes. You too.

ALBA: No, I did not dye my hair. It's different.

GEMMA: Oh.

ALBA: I don't like hairdressers, you know? They scare me. That smell... I can't. I suffocate when I'm in there.

GEMMA: I see.

ALBA: Does it look terrible?

GEMMA: No, no...

ALBA: I get dizzy...

GEMMA: I see...

ALBA: You must think I'm exaggerating...

GEMMA: No!

ALBA: Yeah, people think that. It's ok

GEMMA: I don't.

ALBA: I would think that too...

GEMMA: Well I don't!

ALBA: It's horrible, this whole pregnancy thing.

GEMMA: Yeah?

ALBA: Horrible.

Silence.

GEMMA: But I guess that when you're finally a mother, you'll forget all of this...

Crazy, right? All this. Becoming a mother...

ALBA: Oh, yes! Like mom! Crazy.

GEMMA: Like mom...

Pause.

ALBA: But I just don't know what's wrong with me, I don't feel motherly at all, you know? No instinct...

Are you sure you don't want anything? I bought a ton of stuff...

Maybe when he comes all these hormones will kick in, but I don't know... It's so hard!

GEMMA: Well, but nature's wise. It gives you a few months to get used to the idea...

ALBA: Well, for me, a day would be enough to get used to the idea! I don't know why I have to have this thing inside me for such a long time...

Well, enough about... And you, how are you?

GEMMA: Ok. Working a lot.

ALBA: Are you still going back to China?

GEMMA: Japan.

ALBA: Oh, yes, Japan.

GEMMA: Yeah, but this time I'm thinking of settling down here. With everything that went down with mom's house... And the Japanese want a representative for the company here. It's a good opportunity.

ALBA: Damn, great! Isn't it? It sounds important.

GEMMA: I'm happy. And you? Are you happy?

ALBA: Why?

Gemma points at her belly.

ALBA: Very happy! Everybody congratulates me. There's not end to it. A lot of people think that this is something to be thankful for.

GEMMA: And isn't it?

ALBA: Not at all...

GEMMA: At least people will let you sit down on the bus, right?

ALBA: Oh, no. As soon as they see me, people turn their faces. You can see how they cling to their seats as if their lives depended on it. And I hate those fucking grannies, don't you?

GEMMA: Sometimes.

ALBA: Want some coffee? Tea, juice, soda?

GEMMA: No, thanks.

ALBA: Are you on a diet?

GEMMA: No.

ALBA: Not that you're fat. No, no... *(Pause)* One day, you know what happened to me?

On a bus actually. I get on, right? And this old lady tells another granny to give up her seat, because, clearly, I look like a fucking cow. Oh, I know I am, don't worry! It's ok! It's...! And I thought, ok, at least I get some benefits from this huge fucking belly. And you know what she said, the lady? Yes, she said that she wouldn't stand up because I might be pregnant but she could have a heart attack at any moment... Bitch...

So, you see, not even on the bus is it worth being pregnant. Fuck...

GEMMA: But you want to have it, right?

ALBA: What do you mean?

GEMMA: Do you want to have a baby?

ALBA: Yes, yes, of course. It's his dream... It was all so fast... It's like at that moment, when you get pregnant, right? What keeps you from having a kid?

GEMMA: I don't know... You sound like you don't want a baby.

ALBA: It's never a good time to have a baby, don't you think?

GEMMA: It depends.

ALBA: Don't fool yourself.

Pause.

GEMMA: And, besides that, is everything alright?

ALBA: Yes, great. A lot has changed though... We wanted to get married quickly, before mom... but we didn't make it on time.

GEMMA: Yeah. It's on the nineteenth, right?

ALBA: Exactly. The nineteenth. Well, anyways she would've cried... It's for the best. It would've been a waste of money.

GEMMA: Always so practical.

ALBA: It would've been so sad.

GEMMA: Yeah.

Is that the engagement ring?

ALBA: Yes.

GEMMA: Lovely.

ALBA: Gemma, I would've sent you an invitation. I just thought you wouldn't... With you going back to China...

GEMMA: Japan.

ALBA: Yes, yes. Japan. I didn't know if you'd be able to...

GEMMA: Oh, don't worry about that. It would've been really weird! It's been so long since...

ALBA: Yeah, right? Believe me, that's just what I was thinking. I'm glad we agree. I didn't mean to bring up the subject. I talk too much.

GEMMA: It's ok.

ALBA: I don't want to spoil things, you know?

GEMMA: You didn't, really.

ALBA: You seem different. So different.

Pause.

GEMMA: Getting married while you're pregnant is such a beautiful thing.

ALBA: Marrying with a belly? It's kind of trailer trash.

GEMMA: What do you mean?

ALBA: That's what people did in the 50s... When there wasn't decent birth control...

Look at this...

Alba points at her belly.

GEMMA: I still think it's beautiful.

ALBA: I would never waste fifteen thousand dollars on a party just to look like a whale and, on top of it all, have a ton of photos to prove it. No, no.

GEMMA: Ok, let's drop the subject.

ALBA: Yes, there's no point in talking about it. None at all.

They look at each other, looking for something to talk about.

GEMMA: And you got that grant, right?

ALBA: Yes, but... no.

GEMMA: I'm so sorry.

ALBA: It's ok... Really.

GEMMA: Yeah, but I know it was important to you.

ALBA: At the beginning I was in shock, but not anymore. That's the way life is, isn't it? After years pursuing that grant... I get it right when I can't accept it.

GEMMA: Can't you apply for it again?

ALBA: No, it was only for people up to thirty. It was now or never. It seems that once you're thirty, the whole entrepreneur thing is over.

GEMMA: Damn...

ALBA: Sometimes I think about what would happen if I were to travel around with that money...

GEMMA: Where would you go?

ALBA: My thing is coordinating contemporary art fairs, so Switzerland, Hong Kong, Miami, New York. Two years traveling the world...

GEMMA: God!

ALBA: Yeah. But, at the end of the day, I'm creating a new life! What's more important than that, right? *(Pause)* It's fine, I'm doing great, don't think I'm not... Maybe I do have some of those hormones after all...

GEMMA: Really?

ALBA: No. But it's true that... No, it's ok.

GEMMA: Tell me.

ALBA: It's nonsense.

GEMMA: C'mon.

ALBA: No, really, Gemma, it's nothing.

GEMMA: Tell me!

ALBA: We're seen each other again.

GEMMA: Yes.

ALBA: And we hadn't for so long...

GEMMA: No, we hadn't.

ALBA: Exactly. I'm glad we...

GEMMA: Yeah.

ALBA: Want some coffee?

GEMMA: No, thanks.

ALBA: You're so skinny, drink something.

GEMMA: How are you guys doing, with the gallery?

ALBA: Great. Really great. My boss, Carles... He's retiring.

GEMMA: Is he?

ALBA: Yeah, and he's doing really weird things. He asks me questions, he watches me... And, just this year, he's asked me to curate two weeks for the art fair.

GEMMA: That's great, isn't it?

ALBA: Yes! He would never do such a thing if he didn't have something in mind...

GEMMA: And what do you think that is?

ALBA: I think he wants me to succeed him as art director. But he's testing me first. When he told me I would be in charge of the program for the art fair, I was so happy! But then all of this happened, and I kept my mouth shut, you know? Since nobody could see it yet...

GEMMA: Why would you do that?

ALBA: Who would give that kind of responsibility to a pregnant woman? I had to give up my dream, I'd like to, at least, keep this opportunity. It's the last chance I have to be someone.

GEMMA: You're someone.

ALBA: Not yet.

GEMMA: Yes.

ALBA: No.

GEMMA: It's not that bad.

ALBA: I have to be perfect, you know? Oh...

GEMMA: Are you ok?

ALBA: Sorry, I'm going to...

Alba runs offstage.

GEMMA: Go, go.

Sounds of someone vomiting.

GEMMA: Oh God...

ALBA: Oh no, the artichokes... I knew it! I knew it wasn't a good idea...

GEMMA: Thanks for the info.

ALBA: Can you bring some baby wipes? Please.

GEMMA: Where are they?

ALBA: In my bag.

GEMMA: You still don't have the baby and you're already carrying baby wipes?

ALBA: One should always carry baby wipes. Above all if you puke everywhere you go. I'm developing a taste for throwing up anything I eat.

Gemma goes to the bag and a bunch of baby magazines fall from it as she looks for the wipes.

GEMMA: And how's the fair thing going?

ALBA: Basically, I'm behind in everything. But I guess that soon enough I'll stop feeling like shit and I'll be able to catch up.

GEMMA: And how do you manage when customers come, and you need to...?

ALBA: I've developed a code with Maurici. If I say "it seems someone's knocking," he distracts the customer while I escape.

GEMMA: And does it work?

ALBA: Oh, it sure does!

Wow! It's so late! People coming to the opening will be here any minute now and here I am...

GEMMA: Do you need any help?

ALBA: No. I can do it on my own. Thanks.

GEMMA: Do want me to go?

ALBA: No! But I can't be with you all the time... I'm sorry. Don't worry about me. Maurici will be here in a minute and he'll help me out.

GEMMA: Oh, no problem, I'll wait. I'll finally meet the famous Maurici. Mom loved him.

Pause.

ALBA: Sure! He'll be here in no time. He's helping me deal with all this work during the pregnancy. He's unemployed...

GEMMA: And what exactly is it that Maurici does?

ALBA: Everything I can't do. He's gotten into it with such energy... But I'm still the one in charge, you know?

GEMMA: I would expect nothing less.

ALBA: I have to put up these signs with the names of the painters. That's all.

GEMMA: Ok. Go do it.

Alba tries to lift a painting that's on the floor. Gemma helps her.

ALBA: I can do it. Thanks.

GEMMA: It's ok, I'll help.

ALBA: I'll do it. Thanks.

GEMMA: Ok.

MAURICI (*offstage*): Hello? I'm here!

ALBA: Look, Maurici!

MAURICI (*offstage*): I already have the design for the catalogues! I've been talking to the Arts Council's Executive Director and I've set up a meeting with him to talk about the fair.

ALBA: Oh, good.

MAURICI (*offstage*): I told him you wouldn't attend. In your condition and since yesterday you wouldn't stop... You don't disagree, do you?

ALBA: No, no...

MAURICI (*offstage*): Can you imagine that you started puking at the meeting? It would be too much!

ALBA: Can you come here please?

Maurici enters.

MAURICI: Oh, sorry, I didn't know you had company. I meant...

ALBA: Maurici, this is Gemma.

MAURICI: Hi, Gemma. (*He starts off to shake her hand.*) Nice to meet you.

ALBA: My sister...

MAURICI: Ooh! (*He kisses her on both cheeks.*) The one that's in China, right?

GEMMA: Japan.

MAURICI: What?

GEMMA: Nothing. Nice to meet you too. I was looking forward to it. Alba talks a lot about you.

MAURICI: And about you too.

GEMMA: She already told me that you're helping her with the gallery.

MAURICI: Well, we both coordinate events, etc. And Lidia helps us... With the art fair and the program we're completely overwhelmed.

GEMMA: Oh, so you're also making the program?

MAURICI: We're a team, aren't we?

Maurici kisses Alba.

ALBA: Yes.

MAURICI: How're you feeling? Any better?

ALBA: Yes.

MAURICI: How did lunch sit with you today?

ALBA: Maurici...

MAURICI: It's just...

She finds my artistic perspective very useful. We complement each other.

GEMMA: I didn't know you were an artist! Alba, why didn't you tell me? I thought you were a programmer.

MAURICI: Well, that's just a job, a way to make ends meet, but the truth is that I'm an artist. Although programming is also a kind of art, figuratively and literally.

GEMMA: Of course.

ALBA: I thought I told you...

GEMMA: And what's your style?

MAURICI: I haven't quite defined it yet.

GEMMA: Oh.

MAURICI: Everything in due time.

GEMMA: It's ok.

MAURICI: Sure. It's a matter of time, development. But I like to be provocative.

GEMMA: Interesting.

MAURICI: Yeah, I like to go beyond what's considered politically correct. And now there's a lot of censorship in that respect. You can't say anything that might offend other people. Our skins are way too thin. I want to go against all that.

GEMMA: Sure.

ALBA: Maurici, we should start preparing the opening, don't you think?

MAURICI: Alba, I think I've finally decided what I'll do for the fair.

ALBA: Really?

MAURICI: Yes.

Pause.

ALBA: Is it what we talked about yesterday?

MAURICI (*confident*): Yes.

GEMMA: Oh, so you're showcasing a piece too?

MAURICI: Yes.

ALBA: Well...

GEMMA: That's great, isn't it Alba?

ALBA: Yeah...

Alba gets nervous.

GEMMA: And when's your show?

MAURICI: At the opening.

GEMMA: Wow, that's amazing.

ALBA: Well, we still have to talk about that, we don't know...

MAURICI: Of course we know!

GEMMA: It's a very important art fair: congratulations, Maurici. It's a great opportunity.

MAURICI: Thank you.

GEMMA: It'll have a great audience. And what is it?

ALBA: You know what, Gemma? It's way too long to explain it right now. Why don't you come by for dinner some time and we'll tell you all about it?

MAURICI (*to Gemma*): It's not that long. I'll make it short.

ALBA: Maurici, I really need you to start organizing all this.

MAURICI: Where's Lída? She should be here already, shouldn't she?

GEMMA: I'm curious.

ALBA: Well she's not here. Can you help me?

MAURICI (*to Alba*): It'll be just a moment! Go get ready in the meantime, and don't worry I can tell her all about it while I finish this up. What's left to be done?

LÍDIA (*offstage*): Here I am!

MAURICI: Look...

ALBA: You need to finish hanging the paintings in the other room.

MAURICI: Those? Sure thing. And these too, right?

ALBA: These are ok here.

Lída enters.

LÍDIA: I'm so sorry, so much traffic...

MAURICI: It's ok, Lída.

ALBA: Where were you? I had to do everything on my own.

LÍDIA: There was an accident.

ALBA: Ok, it's ok...

MAURICI, *to Alba:* I have to move that painting, it looks too constrained there. Don't you think?

ALBA: I like it.

MAURICI: I don't know...

ALBA: I think it goes well with the other two.

MAURICI: It's constrained in there. What do you think, Lída?

LÍDIA: We've always arranged it this way.

Maurici takes the painting off the wall.

ALBA: Can you please leave it where it was?

MAURICI: I don't like it. No. I don't know... No.

LÍDIA: What if we hang it in the other room?

MAURICI: What do you think?

ALBA: I don't see it.

MAURICI: Don't worry. Trust me. Trust my taste. Come on, let's go to the other room.

ALBA: But...

LÍDIA: People will be coming in soon...

ALBA: Yes.

LÍDIA: So, should this go on the other room, or...?

ALBA: No.

LÍDIA: Ok.

Alba puts the painting back where it was. Lída exits.

MAURICI: If someone comes, I'll take care of them. Don't worry and go get ready for the opening. What's more, I think I could use an outsider's opinion. *(To Gemma)* By the way, do you want some coffee?

GEMMA: Yes, please.

MAURICI: Black?

GEMMA: Ristretto. No sugar.

Alba exits.

MAURICI: Great. Italian coffee is my specialty. (*He makes coffee.*) As I was saying, I like being provocative. Everything that is considered politically incorrect. I'm sick of seeing lame art and politically correct humor everywhere... So you have to understand my work from that perspective, ok?

GEMMA: Ok.

MAURICI: What do you do?

GEMMA: Auctions.

MAURICI: What kind?

GEMMA: Art, of course. Antiques.

MAURICI: Very interesting. Ok then, listen. I don't have a title for it yet, but I'll probably call it "Lamp Lady."

GEMMA: Why?

MAURICI: Because that's exactly what it'll be. A woman posing as a lamp.

GEMMA: A sculpture?

MAURICI: No, no. An actual woman with a lampshade on her head. It'll be an electric installation.

GEMMA: Oh.

MAURICI: Most probably we'll have her stand at the entrance of the event. But it seems pretty normal so far, right? Well, here's the provocative part. The woman will be naked... Wait, no. Here comes the provocative part: on top of that, she'll wear a tampon with a string attached to it. People will pull it to turn the light on and off as many times as they want.

Pause.

MAURICI: What do you think?

GEMMA: A naked woman posing as a lamp with a tampon... And people would turn on the light by pulling the string, right?

MAURICI: Exactly.

GEMMA: So provocative.

MAURICI: Isn't it? It's amazing. A startling image! A great concept!

GEMMA: And how long would it last, all of this?

MAURICI: Well, a few hours at least. Several days.

GEMMA: And do you have the woman?

MAURICI: Well, I spoke to a girl on Facebook. She's a dancer. I told her that it is a performance in which she'd have to be naked. But honestly... I'm not sure about her.

GEMMA: Why not?

MAURICI: I think she might have tattoos.

GEMMA: And is that a problem?

MAURICI: Of course.

GEMMA: Why?

MAURICI: Well, because that's not the idea. I want to provide a more critical vision, you know? Tattoos... I don't know. It may read as if she were a woman with a hard life or a more modern woman. I want something aesthetic, something classical.

GEMMA: I see.

MAURICI: Otherwise it loses its appeal. It's not the same seeing a normal woman than a woman with very visible a scar or a tattoo...

GEMMA: Because then the woman has a defined personality...

MAURICI: Exactly, right? We understand each other, Gemma, we connect! I want an image without signs of identity.

GEMMA: And that means you need a normal woman then?

MAURICI: A neutral woman.

GEMMA: I'm glad I'm not an art critic. I wouldn't know what to make of your lamp.

MAURICI: And what did you feel?

GEMMA: Feel?

MAURICI: Yes. What do you feel when you think about this performance?

GEMMA: Disgust.

MAURICI: What more?

GEMMA: Loathing for the artist.

MAURICI: Fantastic. That's perfect. It'll be something people will talk about. A lot!

GEMMA: And what do you want to achieve with all that? A critique of sexism?

MAURICI: No, no! There're too many of those already. No... I just want to go against everything that's considered politically correct. I told you. Think about it: what if, instead of a woman, it were a man posing as a lamp? Nothing, right? That doesn't interest me. I want to challenge those who feel uncomfortable with any little thing. And I want to challenge everything that is considered taboo. I want to talk about those we can't talk about: people who have gone through rough times, those who are terminally ill, pederasts, refugees, jihadists, etc. To hell with everything! We live obsessed with morality. Morality is the worst form of censorship. And it's clear that feminists won't understand my piece, but my art's not for them.

GEMMA: And for whom do you make art?

MAURICI: For whom? I don't know. (*He stares at her*) For whom do I make art? I don't know... But people will talk about it. Alba can't see it, but her art fair needs to be more transgressive, different. Provocative! Everything's too orderly, too structured. I'll provide what's missing.

GEMMA: She's so lucky you're with her.

MAURICI: Thanks. Before, these works were just critical. Now they're transgressive.

GEMMA: And why do you want to be so provocative?

MAURICI: Because it's a lot of fun.

GEMMA: But shouldn't you be taking into account that every work of art, provocative or not, carries a message? And you could be conveying a message that's not the one you anticipate.

MAURICI: Believe me, that doesn't concern me.

ALBA (*off-stage*): Maurici, I think someone's knocking.

MAURICI: Duty calls. Wanna come?

GEMMA: I'd love to. I wouldn't miss it for the world.

ALBA: Sorry, I've come for...

GEMMA: The baby wipes?

ALBA: Yes.

MAURICI: Excuse me.

Maurici grabs the painting and exits with it.

MAURICI: That's better.

2. Terra Siena.

Alba and Maurici's apartment. Alba is reading a book.

MAURICI (*offstage*): Hello! Alba?

Maurici enters, leaving his jacket and keys around. He kisses Alba, but Alba does not respond. He sits down. Alba still says nothing. Maurici looks at her.

MAURICI: Hello.

ALBA: Hi.

MAURICI: Did you eat?

ALBA: Yes.

MAURICI: What did you eat?

ALBA: Soup.

MAURICI: Is there any left?

ALBA: No.

MAURICI: I don't know what I want for dinner, to be honest.

ALBA: If you want there are croissants left, from the opening.

MAURICI: No but thank you. I'm exhausted.

ALBA: Doesn't surprise me.

MAURICI: It's crazy how many paintings we have to arrange every day...

Alba keeps reading. Maurici tries to make conversation.

MAURICI: And what did you have for lunch?

Alba stares at him.

ALBA: Nuggets.

MAURICI: Sounds great. (*Pause*) I ate chicken.

ALBA: Fantastic. And Lidia, what did she...?

MAURICI: Tacos.

ALBA: Great.

MAURICI: Yeah, she loves them.

ALBA: Really?

Alba keeps reading.

MAURICI: I'm gonna go see what's left in the fridge.

ALBA: There's nothing really...

MAURICI: No yogurt left?

ALBA: No. None.

MAURICI: Well, I'll look anyways...

ALBA: There's nothing, I told you.

MAURICI: Nothing at all?

ALBA: No.

MAURICI: Not even ketchup? Water? Not even...

ALBA: Well, yes, ketchup, water, yes.

MAURICI: Oh, so there's something.

ALBA: I don't think we can consider that something, do you? At least not something edible...

MAURICI: Can I look in the fridge and decide for myself if there's something to eat or not?

ALBA: Oh, of course. Suit yourself.

MAURICI: Thank you.

Maurici exits. Noise of the fridge door opening. He returns and grabs his jacket.

ALBA: There's nothing, right?

MAURICI: Only ketchup. And mayonnaise. And a rotten lemon.

Alba keeps reading.

ALBA: Aham. And is any of that edible?

MAURICI: No. What's the matter with you today?

ALBA: With me? Nothing.

MAURICI: Oh, sure!

ALBA: Should anything be the matter with me?

MAURICI: Ok. I won't go shopping. I'm going to bed.

ALBA: Make some coffee. You love making coffee...

MAURICI: We don't have a coffee maker...

ALBA: Oh, no, wait, even better. Why don't you change all the paintings in the house? Don't you think they're all constrained? I don't know... I'm just not sure.

Pause.

MAURICI: Are you upset?

Alba looks at him and then turns to her book. Maurici sits next to her.

MAURICI: Really?

Alba keeps reading.

MAURICI: Alba, it just looked better that way. If the paintings looked better the way I arranged them, what's wrong with that?

ALBA: She was my guest.

MAURICI: I wanted to tell her about my performance.

ALBA: You should've been helping me, not making coffee.

MAURICI: Are you angry just because I made coffee? And the paintings, they just didn't look right there, between the other two. Don't you understand?

ALBA: It's not that.

MAURICI: No? I don't see the problem. We changed them. That's all.

ALBA: Then that's it.

MAURICI: I don't understand where all this is coming from.

ALBA: Sure, because on top of it all, you didn't let me help you at all... You just sent me home.

MAURICI: Alba, you can't carry weight around, what was the point of...

ALBA: But you should've asked me! Do you think that's normal? Come on, changing the paintings around! I didn't tell you to fuck off, I don't know why. My sister didn't know what to do with herself.

MAURICI: I thought you wanted to be with her, and to be honest, I was right... And what was I to do? Not change them so I wouldn't hurt your feelings?

ALBA: Please...

MAURICI: You have to admit I have a certain sensibility when it comes to arranging these exhibitions.

ALBA: Oh.

MAURICI: I pay attention to detail,

ALBA: Are you serious?

MAURICI: Yes. Don't you think so?

ALBA: Certainly not more than I do.

MAURICI: Very well.

ALBA: What?

MAURICI: I don't know.

ALBA: Are you really telling me that you pay more attention to detail than I do? Please tell me!

MAURICI: Well... I don't know. Don't take it the wrong way. It's constructive criticism, ok Alba? Don't make a fuss. Understand? Constructive criticism. Sometimes I get the feeling that you approach exhibitions mechanically... You aren't so passionate about it anymore.

ALBA: Excuse me?

MAURICI: Lidia can arrange any exhibition with her eyes closed. Always the same distance between paintings, the same signs for the names... That's not how it should be. Everything is just... right. You don't ever challenge the norm. Look, that's what she said, wasn't it? That's the way we always do it.

ALBA: What you're saying is not true.

MAURICI: Lidia told me that the way I arranged the paintings was better.

ALBA: Not while I was there.

MAURICI: When you left...

ALBA: I see that Lidia and you get along wonderfully now.

MAURICI: Are you upset?

ALBA: Yes.

MAURICI: I didn't think you were jealous.

ALBA: What bothers me is that you two don't seem to be aware that there's a hierarchy.

Pause.

MAURICI: Calm down. We are perfectly aware.

ALBA: I hope so. Do you know what you're doing, being such good friends with her? You'll make her stop respecting me.

MAURICI: You're too proud, Alba.

ALBA: I'm her boss! You should be on my side, not hers!

MAURICI: I'm on your side! Alba, please, don't be so paranoid! You're too sensitive lately. All those hormones are working you up!

ALBA: I'm fucking sick of talking about the fucking hormones!

MAURICI: I'm telling you this because I love you. Because I think... that you're wrong.

ALBA (*dry*): Thank you.

MAURICI: I'm not hungry anymore.

ALBA: Didn't you want to go on a diet?

MAURICI: I'm here to help you.

ALBA: Maurici, you have to help me with logistics, not with my artistic criteria. I thought we had agreed on that...

MAURICI: But your program...

ALBA: What's wrong with it?

MAURICI: Nothing.

ALBA: What's wrong with my program?

MAURICI: I don't know...

ALBA: Say it!

MAURICI: It lacks... strength. It's too polite. Too feminine, you know? If you want to start strong, you should develop a style, a signature that is more you, Alba. Somehow it seems that what you're doing is a continuation of what Carles did.

ALBA: And is it so bad to follow his style? It could give me some advantage.

MAURICI: But if you continue to do what Carles has been doing all these years, no one will remember your name, only his. You should leave your own imprint. What's more... Lúdia...

ALBA: What about her?

MAURICI: Didn't Carles tell you?

ALBA: No.

MAURICI: He's having her design part of the program.

ALBA: What?

MAURICI: Yes.

Pause.

ALBA: Why? Where is this coming from?

MAURICI: I don't know. She told me after you left. It seems that Carles is having trouble with some artists that have fallen through and she had already presented him a proposal some time ago... And now he accepted it.

ALBA: That bitch! What proposal?

MAURICI: She didn't want to tell me because it's not a sure thing yet.

ALBA: And what do you think the program's lacking? According to you.

MAURICI: Risk.

ALBA: Risk?

MAURICI: Yes, risk!

ALBA: Please, enlighten me.

MAURICI: I don't have to show you anything.

ALBA: Sorry, I thought that the whole thing was that I didn't pay attention to detail, and now I'm suddenly confused.

MAURICI: Your pride, bossing everyone around, you're not using your common sense. If you think I'm not good enough for you...

ALBA: I did not say that...

MAURICI: No, you didn't say, but you think so. Do you think I can't see it? You think that my work is shit, that my decisions are always questionable...

Silence.

MAURICI: You have nothing to say?

ALBA: It's not that...

MAURICI: Then?

Pause.

ALBA: I just don't know what to say any more.

MAURICI: Do you really think my art is shit?

ALBA: Your installation...

MAURICI: What about it?

ALBA: It is just so sexist!

MAURICI: Sexist? It's always the same shit! Seriously... I'm so sick of it. Everything's sexist. Can we talk about something else? Something that's not patriarchy, fucking parity? Everyone, everyone's against women, it's true, all men, we're all such sons of bitches, right?

ALBA: Turning a woman into an object? With a tampon? Are you out of your mind?

MAURICI: You have to look beyond...

ALBA: Please...

MAURICI: You're only seeing a part of everything I want to create.

ALBA: No...

MAURICI: Yes.

ALBA: I can't have that in the program.

Pause.

MAURICI: What? With everything I'm doing for you? That's how you pay me back? I'm making no money for all this work, you know?

ALBA: Come on, man. You're just loving it... You went from being the IT guy to being an artist.

MAURICI: I've always been an artist, don't get me wrong.

ALBA: Oh, sorry. I've been in this for a really long time, much longer than you and still, you treat me like I'm a newbie.

MAURICI: It's not that but, honestly, I think you need me to come up with a more transgressive program...

ALBA: What?

MAURICI: What you've put together is too fluid! I'm sorry.

ALBA: Should we talk about your work? Because without me you wouldn't be working at the gallery or participating in the fair. You have no experience in this world! And you dare talk to me about my program?

MAURICI: If you don't add my installation to the program, Lidia will.

ALBA: Who do you think you are?

MAURICI: And you?

ALBA: Look, I'm the acting art director at the gallery. And you're just my assistant. Get it? My assistant!

Pause. Maurici grabs his jacket and prepares to leave.

ALBA: Maurici, please, I didn't mean... Sorry.

MAURICI (*turning around*): But you said it, Alba. That's exactly what you said. Your fucking assistant. That's all I am, right? Your fucking assistant! May I get you a decaf, miss? May I clean up your vomit, miss?

ALBA: Excuse me?

MAURICI: I can't believe that you're actually the one who makes decisions at the gallery. What kind of art have you ever made? Eh? Tell me. Because, as far as I know, you've always wanted to make art, but you've made none. Always finding excuses, and you know it. Always hiding behind someone else, working, polishing someone else's work so that they may shine. The only art you've ever made is writing emails about paintings.

ALBA: It's not...

MAURICI: And even if to you it's shit and it's sexist, at least I've made some art. I've put myself out there and I've been brave enough to show what I've got. I've risked making mistakes, searching... I've painted till I got dizzy with the smell of turpentine. I've had never-ending conversations and I've created non-stop. It is easy to sit around and say that everything's fucked up. What have you ever done? Other than being a secretary? An assistant?

ALBA: Is that what you really think about me?

MAURICI: You wouldn't understand...

ALBA: Try me! Make me understand! Maybe I'll understand, you know?

MAURICI: Alba, please...

ALBA: No, tell me! I think I might be able to understand!

MAURICI: Stop shouting, it's late! The neighbors...

ALBA: I'll shout as much as I fucking want. This is my house, get it?

MAURICI: You're hysterical.

ALBA: Yes, I'm a fucking hysterical whore. Hormones are taking over my brain and I don't know what the fuck I'm saying, and the baby will also be completely hysterical! Are you happy now?

MAURICI: Shut up!

Alba exits. Long silence.

ALBA (*offstage, quietly*): Maurici.

MAURICI: What?

ALBA (*offstage*): We have to go to the hospital.

3. Zinc White

Alba and Mauricio's apartment. Gemma is there. Alba is in the bathroom and we can hear her moaning. Gemma opens a box of chocolates.

ALBA (*offstage*): Oh... no...

GEMMA: What? Artichokes again?

ALBA (*offstage*): No. Hemorrhoids.

GEMMA: Come here.

We can hear Alba offstage moaning. Gemma takes a bite from a chocolate, then puts it back in its wrapper and puts it away. We can hear the toilet being flushed. Alba enters.

GEMMA: Yeah?

ALBA: No.

Alba is about to sit, but she stops. She thinks. She starts walking in circles.

GEMMA: What are you doing?

ALBA: Walking.

She walks faster and faster.

GEMMA: You can't walk more than twenty steps a day...

ALBA: I need to walk.

GEMMA: Alba...

ALBA: I need to walk...

Gemma tries to stop her but Alba walks faster and faster.

GEMMA: Whatever you want.

ALBA: I need... I need to.

Alba stops suddenly. She feels her underwear.

ALBA: No! Napkins, napkins!

GEMMA: Shit!

Gemma runs around looking for towels or napkins. Alba gets some and checks whether she's bleeding.

ALBA: False alarm.

GEMMA: You shouldn't...

ALBA: Yes, yes.

Alba sits down, beaten. She shows Gemma the napkin.

ALBA: Oh, sorry... Could you?

GEMMA: Yes, sure.

ALBA: Sorry.

GEMMA: And now. Are you ok?

Gemma throws the napkin away and gives Alba a chocolate.

ALBA: You didn't need to bring me chocolates.

GEMMA: Of course I had to.

ALBA: Everyone brings me chocolates. Tons of chocolates. I hate them! Don't they fucking know what else to bring a pregnant woman?

GEMMA: Is there anything I can do?

ALBA: Eat chocolates.

GEMMA: No, thank you.

Pause.

GEMMA: How long do you have to be like this?

ALBA: Four months. Till the pregnancy is over.

GEMMA: My God!

ALBA: The baby's held back by one stitch only, I have hemorrhages... Issues with the placenta.

GEMMA: But are you ok?

ALBA (*ironically*): Great!

GEMMA: Well, at least you'll have some me time... You'll have time to read all those books... I brought you some magazines.

Gemma shows her a bunch of baby and parenting magazines.

ALBA: Thank you.

Alba, not even looking at the magazines, throws them on the coffee table.

GEMMA: Now you'll have time to do everything you've always wanted to do... Take it as four-month-long sabbatical. Do whatever you want to do.

ALBA: I want to be at the gallery. I want to go to the art fair.

GEMMA: When is it?

ALBA: In three months.

GEMMA: Don't worry about that. Maurici will be there, won't he? You're so lucky. Not everyone has a partner who's so helpful; and there's also that girl.

ALBA: So lucky.

Silence.

GEMMA: And the baby, how is he?

ALBA: In my belly.

GEMMA: I'm dying to meet him. I love kids.

ALBA: Please, rub my belly for luck and then go buy a lottery ticket.

GEMMA: Are you serious?

ALBA: No.

GEMMA: Want to see what's on TV?

ALBA: No.

GEMMA: I also got you this.

Gemma shows Alba a breast pump. Alba stares at it.

GEMMA: I thought it might be useful and probably you don't have one yet. It pumps out breast milk...

ALBA: I'm not gonna breastfeed the baby.

GEMMA: Oh, no?

ALBA: I'm sorry. I'm such a bad mother.

GEMMA: I think I still have the receipt; I'll get something else. Don't worry.

ALBA: Yes, if you don't mind.

GEMMA: I'll buy some formula.

ALBA: Perfect.

GEMMA: Which one do you prefer? Well, I'll take a look in the store. You might still change your mind.

Alba doesn't say anything.

GEMMA: And how's Maurici's installation going?

ALBA: I'd rather not talk about it.

GEMMA: Why?

ALBA: It's terrible.

GEMMA: What?

ALBA: Everything.

Pause.

GEMMA: I already signed the papers. It all seems correct. It'll go right through. We should sell the house, don't you think?

ALBA: It makes me sad but yes.

GEMMA: Same, of course.

Pause.

GEMMA: I found a space for the office. It's cute. I think the Japanese will like it.

ALBA: That's great.

GEMMA: Yes.

Silence.

ALBA: How is it, living over there?

GEMMA: Very different and also very interesting.

ALBA: You're so lucky.

GEMMA: Yes.

ALBA: You've really won at life.

GEMMA: No, Alba. That's not true.

ALBA: Oh, isn't it?

GEMMA: This isn't the job I really wanted.

ALBA: What's wrong with your job?

GEMMA: You already know.

ALBA: It's been a long time since I've heard anything about you.

GEMMA: Because you haven't wanted to.

Pause.

ALBA: Are you still mad at me?

GEMMA: I brought you chocolates.

ALBA: And magazines.

GEMMA: I think it's not the time or the place.

ALBA: And when would it be the time or the place? I'd like to know why you stopped talking to me. But, if you prefer, we can talk about the weather till we get bored.

GEMMA: If you want, once you give birth, we'll talk...

ALBA: Let's talk now, I have all the time in the world.

GEMMA: I don't think it is the right time for you, in your condition?

ALBA: I'm tired of how all of you talk about my condition.

GEMMA: I'm not judging you.

ALBA: I don't know what the hell annoyed you so much. Could you tell me, please? Talk to me.

Pause.

ALBA: Please. I don't know if I'll see you ever again after all this.

GEMMA: You already know.

ALBA: I swear I don't.

GEMMA: My idea.

ALBA: I don't understand, Gemma.

GEMMA: Oh, don't you?

ALBA: No.

GEMMA: My idea... Yes, come on... that montage that you made your own... You still don't know what I'm talking about?

ALBA: But...

GEMMA: The one you used to get this job you have now at the gallery.

ALBA: We already talked about all this, I thought that everything...

GEMMA: You talked.

ALBA: Gemma...

GEMMA: No one had done it before, in a national art fair, and I wanted to be the first but, of course, you couldn't allow that, right?

ALBA: It was very different...

GEMMA: No! No, it wasn't! The original idea was the same. But it's all gone now, because I'll never be able to prove it. What does anyone care anyway? Who will people think copied who? Me, who's never done anything, or you, who's been working in the field for years?

ALBA: It was just a series of coincidences... And it ended up looking a lot like your idea, unintentionally. But it wasn't yours, it didn't come from you. I swear it was completely different.

GEMMA: Thanks to that you made a name for yourself.

ALBA: I have no name anymore...

GEMMA: That's why, when I got this job in Japan, I went away, wanting to be as far as possible, to get away from ever having to see you again. You had everything I'd ever wanted. And my stomach churns every time you tell me about your fucking gallery. I thought you had changed. The other day... you looked so vulnerable.

ALBA: And is that a good thing?

GEMMA: It's a human thing.

ALBA: To be vulnerable, Gemma, is useless.

GEMMA: You're so wrong...

ALBA: I'd love to be wrong, I'd really love to be wrong! But that's the way I see it. I had to work really hard to be where I am, you know? Very hard! I had to prove so many things... So many... No one's ever given me anything for free. Get it?

GEMMA: I gave you my idea.

ALBA: You've achieved so much more than I ever did.

GEMMA: Yes.

Pause.

ALBA: And now everything I ever achieved is going away because I'm sick.

GEMMA: You're not sick. You're pregnant.

ALBA: I'm sick!

GEMMA: You're so lucky for everything that's happening to you and yet you...

ALBA: I'm sick! Look at me! I can't move from this stupid bed! I can't! And I still have a month and a half stuck in here! You must be happy, aren't you? You should be! I have no fucking idea of what they're doing at the gallery!

GEMMA: What do you mean?

ALBA: I didn't want to have a baby! I didn't! But he was so happy when I told him! Killing his baby... What was keeping me from having a child, just living life a little? Fulfilling my dreams? It would've been so selfish, wouldn't it? But now? Really? Did this have to happen to me now? Right when I was about to live the most intense year of my life? Right when my professional future was at stake? And now everything is ruined. Why? Why are they keeping me here in bed when I should be taking over the world? Why?

Pause.

ALBA, defeated: I'm just a piece of meat... I'm turning into mum.

GEMMA: That's not true.

ALBA: What would you know?

GEMMA: It's just different.

ALBA: You haven't been here. You don't know how it's been. You know nothing.

GEMMA: I think it's gross that you talk about that just now.

ALBA: Really?

GEMMA: Yes.

ALBA: Why didn't you come back when it all started? Why did you leave me alone?

GEMMA: I couldn't.

ALBA: I needed you and you weren't here.

GEMMA: I couldn't...

ALBA: And I could. I don't regret a single thing but it was because of all that, that I couldn't make that name for myself, as you say, because I had to take care of her all alone.

GEMMA: I didn't have the kind of money you had...

ALBA: You could've done other things.

Gemma is about to start crying.

GEMMA: I helped from where I was.

ALBA: You didn't have to help from there, you should've been here. You should've come. But you were in Japan living the good life!

GEMMA: I was working...

ALBA: Me too.

GEMMA: It's the truth, it was hard coming here at that...

ALBA: She always asked about you... I didn't know what to tell her!

GEMMA: Believe me, it's the truth!

ALBA: Would you like to stay for the burial? I put a lot of effort into organizing it.

Pause.

GEMMA: I'm really sorry. So sorry. You don't know...

A tear runs down Gemma's cheek. Long silence.

ALBA: I know.

Gemma gives her the papers.

GEMMA: I'll pay the remaining balance... Do whatever needs to be done. I trust whatever decisions you make.

Gemma exits.

ALBA: Are you leaving again?

Gemma returns and sits besides her.

ALBA: Thank you.

GEMMA: I came back to see you because I thought that's what she would've wanted.

ALBA: Yes, but if you want, we can leave it here. I give you your freedom.

GEMMA: It's not that.

ALBA: I don't want you to be here just because of mum, or out of pity.

GEMMA: I don't pity you.

They laugh.

ALBA: I thought that, after everything, I would be the one traveling around the world.

GEMMA: You'll do it.

ALBA: In ten years maybe.

GEMMA: Not necessarily.

ALBA: I wish I had lost him.

GEMMA: It's your child...

ALBA: I wish he was dead. I don't know why I didn't take that fucking pill when I still had time... So little time until I become a mother and here I am, wishing I had lost him. And I wish it with all my heart. I don't want anything else. And I feel so guilty but, in fact, he's the one to blame. For everything that will never happen to me. Everything I'll never be.

GEMMA: What do you mean?

ALBA: What I've been thinking for the last five months.

GEMMA: Don't you feel any love at all?

ALBA: Everything's different. Everything. I'm so sad... This is all I am now... A mother... A mother that has to take care of her child. Nothing else.

GEMMA: It's not true.

ALBA: It's done.

GEMMA: Yeah.

ALBA: Yes.

GEMMA: You still have the gallery. And Maurici. Carles...

ALBA: Maurici won't have his installation. Carles has removed it from my program... It's done.

GEMMA: Yes.

Long pause.

ALBA: Play some music. I want to dance.

Gemma plays music and they begin to dance with all the energy they've got left. Every time Alba seems more and more worn out. It is harder and harder for her to dance. Time goes by. Lidia and Maurici work nonstop at the gallery, packing paintings ceaselessly. Alba falls to the ground, exhausted. Lidia brings a bottle of whiskey and leaves it on the table. The music stops.

4. Amber

LÍDIA: We've worked enough for the day.

MAURICI: There's still a lot to do. The programs...

LÍDIA: We'll send them tomorrow, what do you say?

MAURICI: Yeah, maybe.

Lidia pulls out a cigarette and gives another to Maurici.

MAURICI: I thought smoking wasn't allowed in here.

Lidia lights the cigarette.

LÍDIA: It's true.

They look at each other and smile. He also lights the cigarette.

LÍDIA: Ice?

MAURICI: Yes, please.

Maurici's phone rings.

LÍDIA: Aren't you gonna get that?

MAURICI: No, it's not work-related.

LÍDIA: Sorry, I didn't want to...

MAURICI: It's ok. I'm... weird.

LÍDIA: Whisky doesn't fill the soul but it fools an empty stomach and, sometimes, that's enough.

Lidia pours whisky. She does not get any ice in hers.

MAURICI: Good whisky.

LÍDIA: Always. Are you nervous, about the fair? There's only a couple of days left.

MAURICI: No.

LÍDIA: To the fair.

MAURICI: To the fair.

They toast.

LÍDIA: How's Alba doing? When is she due?

MAURICI: A month and one week.

LÍDIA: Time flies...

MAURICI: Yeah.

LÍDIA: Is she doing better?

MAURICI: Yeah. No, she's not well. She's obsessed.

LÍDIA: With the baby?

MAURICI: With that.

LÍDIA: Ah.

MAURICI: She calls me ten times a day to ask me how everything's going. She wants to do everything herself but she can't... She doesn't realize... Since she's doing complete rest... It's getting worse. Sorry Lída, I don't want to...

LÍDIA: No, it's ok. And now what?

MAURICI: I... I don't know.

LÍDIA: We don't have to talk about it if you don't want to but I'm sorry that you won't get to have your installation. I know how important it was for you. I just wanted you to know.

MAURICI: Thanks.

LÍDIA: Yeah, because I didn't have the chance before, but... you know you're great, really. And the installation was very risky, it had a lot of charisma.

MAURICI: Yeah, although now I just write emails about paintings... It's not... I have resigned myself and I've gone on as if nothing happened, working so hard for... What for?

LÍDIA: No, I don't think that's true.

MAURICI: I'm just here because she's on leave. It makes no sense to keep doing this work.

LÍDIA: No one's essential in this world, Maurici. If you want to go, then go, we'll manage. There's not so much left to do now anyway. Do what you want to do when the fair's over.

MAURICI: You're right.

LÍDIA: But if I were you I wouldn't let this opportunity go away.

MAURICI: Do you think that being a secretary is an opportunity?

LÍDIA: Am I not one?

MAURICI: That's different.

Pause.

LÍDIA: You'll go to the national art fair. Do you know how many people want to be there?

MAURICI: I don't. If my art's not there, I don't see...

LÍDIA: Maurici, make the most of this fair: get to know how this world works. It's your moment. Now, believe me. Now. Seize it... Meet the ones who run and rule the art world now... Go have dinner with them, laugh, chat...

MAURICI: I don't want to kiss anybody's ass.

LÍDIA: It's not about that... Just go to the places where the artists go. Be the incredible company you know how to be, the kind of person they need at those boring places. Meet the journalists,

auctioneers, art directors... Everyone does that, and those who say they don't, well they're just lying. It's impossible to make art when you're no one.

MAURICI: I'm someone.

LÍDIA: But you have to be someone for them. If you do it right, you can get a lot from this. And you wouldn't only have your art featured there, but wherever else you wanted.

Maurici's phone rings again. He checks the caller and silences it.

MAURICI: Do you do that?

LÍDIA: Don't see it as a failure, but as a bridge to get where you want to be.

MAURICI: I want to be a creator.

LÍDIA: If you go there and make space for yourself, you will be. Sitting at home you'll get nothing. And, what's more, I need my future partner by my side at the fair.

Pause.

MAURICI: Partner?

She shows him the programs.

LÍDIA: The programs have gone through many changes, it's true. But not all of them have been negative. That's more than being a secretary, right?

Maurici's phone rings again.

LÍDIA: Is it...?

MAURICI: Yes.

LÍDIA: Do you want to...?

MAURICI: It sounds as if you're asking me out.

LÍDIA: Don't be so arrogant! I don't like to mix things up. That's why I never drink whisky with ice. Partners, equals. (*She motions to shake his hand.*)

MAURICI: Yes.

LÍDIA: Perfect. What can you lose, right?

MAURICI: It sounds good.

LÍDIA: We'll be a team.

MAURICI: Great.

Maurici takes out another cigarette.

LÍDIA: Let's smoke somewhere else.

MAURICI: Let's go out.

LÍDIA: It sounds as if you're asking me out.

MAURICI: Don't be so arrogant!

LÍDIA: I can't help it.

Maurici's phone rings again. He leans on the table as he reaches for the phone, thinks twice, looks at Lída. He leaves the phone on the table.

LÍDIA: The first one's on me.

Lída and Maurici exit. There's no one left at the office. The phone rings again and again. It goes dark, slowly, while the phone continues to ring again and again...

5. Veronese Green

We can hear a baby crying. Alba is lying on a bed with Gemma by her side.

GEMMA: Everything went great. The baby's beautiful.

ALBA: Is he?

GEMMA: Yes.

ALBA: Where is he?

GEMMA: They're running some tests.

ALBA: That's bad, isn't it?

GEMMA: It's normal. They always run tests when a baby's born. I had him in my arms while he was sleeping. He's so small...

ALBA: How does he look?

GEMMA: It's definitely not an alien.

ALBA: Then he doesn't take after me.

GEMMA: It's just preventive, but everything looks fine. Weight is stable, his lungs are mature... He's fine.

ALBA: Are you sure? I was so scared... There was so much...

GEMMA: Yeah.

ALBA: Can I see him?

GEMMA: Later.

ALBA: I didn't imagine it would be like this. I thought... I don't know... I'm...

GEMMA: It's ok.

ALBA: And Maurici? Where is he?

GEMMA: He's downstairs with the baby... He arrived a while ago.

ALBA: I want to see him...

GEMMA: Get some rest.

ALBA: Yeah.

GEMMA: Alba... Don't worry about anything. I'm here. For real this time.

Maurici enters.

ALBA: Maurici...

MAURICI: Alba! Finally! Finally... How are you?

ALBA: Everything's fine.

MAURICI: Forgive me, forgive me... I forgot my phone...

GEMMA: I'll be outside.

Gemma exits.

MAURICI: I'm so sorry. Forgive me...

ALBA: Hey...

MAURICI: Are you ok?

ALBA: Exhausted.

MAURICI: Do you need anything?

ALBA: Everything's under control.

MAURICI: I'll never forgive myself.

ALBA: You're here now, everything's ok.

They look at each other.

ALBA: Everything's ok.

MAURICI: Thank you.

ALBA: What?

MAURICI: Alba... You look so beautiful.

They smile.

ALBA: What do you mean?

MAURICI: Very beautiful. Glowing!

Maurici kisses Alba's lips.

MAURICI: Want to go meet our child?

ALBA: I'd love to.

6. Pearl Grey

Gemma enters with a basket. She puts some clothes inside and starts tidying up. The table is full of chocolate boxes. Gemma looks at them but does not take any. She goes on tidying up more rapidly. Alba enters.

ALBA: We leave tomorrow! Tomorrow! Tomorrow!

GEMMA: Alba, please, you have walked too much already...

ALBA: Too many hours left until tomorrow. Did you get it?

Gemma takes out a box of cigarettes. Alba is about to light one up.

GEMMA: What are you doing?

ALBA: I'll go in the bathroom.

GEMMA: No!

ALBA: Why are you so boring? I'll go downstairs.

Gemma takes the cigarette from her.

ALBA: Then why did you bring them?

GEMMA: Tomorrow.

Alba lies on the bed.

ALBA: Tomorrow. Always tomorrow... And... what is it that I can do now?

GEMMA: You can eat chocolates.

ALBA: I'm fat enough. And you know it.

GEMMA: It's been only two days since you gave birth!

ALBA: Then, all the more reason. And when the hell will this shit go away? I'm gonna buy a girdle. How much do you weigh?

GEMMA: I'm gonna go get some diapers, there's none in the baby care package they gave you.

ALBA: Ok.

GEMMA: Look who's here.

Maurici comes in with a bag. Gemma exits.

ALBA: Hi!

MAURICI: Hello...

ALBA: Tomorrow I'll be free!

MAURICI: Yeah?

ALBA: I'm feeling great.

MAURICI: I can see that.

ALBA: I'm so happy! So happy!

MAURICI: Me too.

ALBA: I'm so happy...

MAURICI: Thank you, Alba, for everything.

ALBA: No, thank you Maurici. Without you... Thank you.

MAURICI: I love you.

ALBA: Me too. Tomorrow. Finally... finally...

MAURICI: Yes.

ALBA: I'll finally be able to go to the fair.

Pause.

MAURICI: What?

ALBA: I'll finally be able to go to the fair! Thanks for everything. Since all this happened sooner than expected, I'm ready to go! You don't need to carry all the responsibility! I can do it on my own. Thank you, without you...

MAURICI: What do you mean?

ALBA: Now that the baby's born, I can go back to work at the gallery, and fix...

MAURICI: This is just unbelievable. You just went through all this, and yet... The baby's very premature.

ALBA: But he's fine.

MAURICI: Alba, we can't go on doing everything the way we did before.

ALBA: What do you mean?

MAURICI: We have a newborn now.

ALBA: Yes, two days ago.

MAURICI: It's not right.

ALBA: But you plan to go, don't you?

MAURICI: It's different.

ALBA: Why?

MAURICI: You're on leave, don't you get it?

ALBA: I'm fine.

MAURICI: No, you're not.

ALBA: Yes.

MAURICI: No.

ALBA: So you mean that I shouldn't...

MAURICI: Think about the fair?

ALBA: The fair is in ten days. The fair needs me now!

MAURICI: You need the fair.

ALBA: Maybe, yes.

MAURICI: And doesn't your baby need you?

ALBA: Doesn't he have a father, my baby?

MAURICI: And he'll always have one.

ALBA: These days are vital for the fair.

MAURICI: And for our baby too.

ALBA: I want to be someone!

MAURICI: He's a newborn...

ALBA: If I were pregnant and in danger I wouldn't have gone! Isn't that what I've been doing until now? I've been in complete rest for so long, now I need...

MAURICI: Yes, but... I don't think it's right.

ALBA: Did I ask your permission?

MAURICI: You're not totally recovered.

ALBA: Don't worry, I can assure you that...

MAURICI: No.

ALBA: Maurici...

MAURICI: I should be the one to go.

Pause.

ALBA: But...

MAURICI: That's it, isn't it? We've helped Alba so far and now Maurici can go to hell, right?

ALBA: No!

MAURICI: That's how I feel.

ALBA: This has nothing to do with you...

MAURICI: Thank you. Thank you very much.

ALBA: I want to show Carles that I'm ready to be an art director. That's all... Then I'll come back. It's only a few days...

MAURICI: What do you mean, art director?

Pause.

ALBA: What do you mean?

MAURICI: I'm gonna go see the baby.

Alba gets up to go with him.

MAURICI: I want to be alone.

Alba stays, alone. She sits on the bed. She sees Maurici's bag and opens it taking the programs that are inside. She reads them.

ALBA: That bitch...

LÍDIA, (offstage): Hello! May I come in?

Alba puts the programs away.

ALBA: Lídia...

LÍDIA: Hello honey! How are you?

Lídia kisses her on the cheeks. She gives Alba a box of chocolates and some flowers.

ALBA: Thanks...

LÍDIA: Do you like them?

ALBA: I love them.

LÍDIA: You're not lactose intolerant, are you?

ALBA: No.

LÍDIA: Gestational diabetes?

ALBA: No. And I'm not pregnant anymore.

LÍDIA: Great. Where is Maurici?

ALBA: With the baby.

LÍDIA: He's so cute... Flowers always bring some joy, don't they? They're lively.

ALBA: Here, anything brings joy.

LÍDIA: And is everything ok?

ALBA: Great.

LÍDIA: Congratulations.

ALBA: Thanks.

LÍDIA: And you, how are you?

ALBA: Fine.

LÍDIA: It was awful, wasn't it?

ALBA: Yeah.

LÍDIA: Does it hurt?

Lídia points at her belly.

ALBA: Well, they just got the baby out.

LÍDIA: But you look wonderful.

ALBA: Yes, I do look great, yes.

LÍDIA: Then look, speaking about that. The other day I thought about you.

ALBA: Really?

LÍDIA: Yes. I went to pilates and I saw that there's a course of post-partum yoga, pelvic exercises and all that...

ALBA: Yes, I know what it is.

LÍDIA: I wanted to give you a gift, but something that's for you, not for the baby. For you. The course is in the mornings.

ALBA: Don't worry, Lída.

LÍDIA: Oh, it's nothing, really. I wanted to ask you because I've heard that the body recovers quicker with that kind of exercise. You know... Although I don't think that's your case, but some help is always welcome.

ALBA: It's not necessary.

LÍDIA: Do you have Chinese balls?

ALBA: No.

LÍDIA: They're great, vaginal exercise.

ALBA: I just had a C-section.

LÍDIA: Ah, of course. Then, crunches. (*Small pause.*) Do you mind if I use the bathroom? I'm on my period.

ALBA: That door.

LÍDIA: Thank you.

Lída goes to the bathroom. When she comes back, Alba shows her the programs. She's taken aback.

LÍDIA: Did Maurici show you?

ALBA: I found them on my own.

LÍDIA: Do you like them?

ALBA: They look a lot like last year's, don't you think?

LÍDIA: Sort of, yes. Well, I'll let you rest. You must be exhausted...

ALBA: Not at all.

LÍDIA: Oh, no?

ALBA: I'm great. And you, are you tired?

LÍDIA: Why would I?

ALBA: Things.

LÍDIA: Say goodbye to Maurici for me. It suits you, being a mother.

ALBA: Changes are always good, don't you think?

LÍDIA: It depends.

ALBA: And how does it suit you being art director for the fair?

Pause.

LÍDIA: Co-director. It's different. Don't you think?

ALBA: Very different.

LÍDIA: Maurici is a man with a lot of initiative, a risk-taker.

ALBA: He certainly is.

LÍDIA: You're so lucky to have him by your side.

ALBA: And you too.

LÍDIA: Associates help each other out, wouldn't you agree?

ALBA: Associates?

LÍDIA: Yes.

ALBA: And those who aren't, what do they do?

LÍDIA: They don't help each other.

ALBA: Whose idea was it? Yours or his?

LÍDIA: What do you mean?

ALBA: Who wrote me as Assistant Art Director? Was it you or him?

LÍDIA: Carles.

ALBA: I don't believe you. He wouldn't...

LÍDIA: Alba, this year you've been on leave for a long time, don't you agree?

ALBA: I was on leave, yes, but...

LÍDIA: But? I don't know why it is so hard for you to understand...

ALBA: It's not what you think.

LÍDIA: If we're being fair, I think that what's undeniable is that Maurici and I have been the ones really taking care of the show. And, honestly, during this time... no...

ALBA: No?

LÍDIA: You have not been professional. I'm sorry to have to say it.

ALBA: What do you mean?

LÍDIA: You mixed the personal with work-related things and, eventually, Carles and I decided to include Maurici's installation.

ALBA: Since when do you get to make decisions in the gallery?

LÍDIA: Someone has to do it.

ALBA: Maybe I was wrong. But I don't get why you would want to make him your associate.

LÍDIA: He's not a great artist...but he's knowledgeable and committed. He was a great substitute and, really, Alba, I'm really sorry, don't take it the wrong way...

ALBA: And how do you want me to take it?

LÍDIA: This year Maurici and I deserve acknowledgement for all our hard work. Next year, we'll see. Carles has decided to leave the gallery when all of this is over. We'll be three associates. You've always been great with logistics.

ALBA: No one asked me if I wanted to be your associate.

LÍDIA: Maurici and I want to be associates. If you want to work with us, you'll have to be one too.

ALBA: You've never done half of what I do at the gallery.

LÍDIA: And what does that matter?

ALBA: You've done great, Lidia, congratulations.

LÍDIA: I think we could be great colleagues.

ALBA: I'll talk to Carles. The job you've taken over was supposed to be mine.

LÍDIA: Talk to him. He thought it was a wonderful idea, the three of us working together.

ALBA: Since when...?

LÍDIA: What's wrong with Maurici being co-director? He's your partner; won't your family benefit from it? I thought you'd be happy.

ALBA: That was my job, mine! He was just supposed to help while...

LÍDIA: Why should we all have jeopardized our positions when we could all win? It's ridiculous! I kept you in mind, didn't I?

ALBA: Logistically speaking, right?

LÍDIA: Making Maurici part of the gallery is a guarantee measure for our future. The way things are going, if they had to choose between you and me, I would be the best option: I present more positive traits... I have more availability, more freedom and more time. But Carles couldn't just leave you out, you two go back a ways... But leaving the gallery to the three of us... That's different. We need each other. Think about it, now you'll be very busy with the baby, won't you? Everything will be different. You'll be on leave for a few months, you will lose the rhythm of the work, too many changes... Alba... You have to look after yourself. These months are key for the gallery. If the baby gets sick, what will you do? Who will take him to the doctor? If you work with us, you can take a day off whenever you want, or you can go part-time. Balancing work and family life won't be a problem.

ALBA: You have everything planned out, don't you?

LÍDIA: Not every woman gets such perks. You're lucky. Do you know how many women would want to be in your position?

ALBA: Would you want to?

LÍDIA: I won't have that problem.

Enter Maurici.

MAURICI: Lidia! You came...

LÍDIA: Congratulations.

MAURICI: Want to go see the baby?

LÍDIA: Another day, I have to go now.

MAURICI: It'll just take a minute.

LÍDIA: No, thanks.

MAURICI: Oh, come on! I want you to see my baby.

LÍDIA: Tomorrow, ok?

MAURICI: But why? Are you in a hurry?

ALBA, interrupting the conversation: Maurici, Lidia and I have been talking.

Small pause.

MAURICI: About...

LÍDIA: Yes.

MAURICI: I wanted to tell you when we were back home. When you were back on your feet.

LÍDIA: Well, I think it's best if I...

MAURICI: Yeah.

LÍDIA (*to Alba*): Congratulations. It suits you, being a mother.

Lidia exits. Silence.

ALBA: Why did you hide this from me?

MAURICI: I thought you'd be happy...

ALBA: Being your assistant?

MAURICI: That we'll all be running the gallery together.

ALBA: You've made a fool of me!

MAURICI: It's just temporary, next year...

ALBA: Next year? Come on!

MAURICI: Of course, next year!

ALBA: Do you really believe that shit? Please!

MAURICI: What did you want me to do? Let Lidia get it all?

ALBA: Or let me get it all, right?

MAURICI: With you, would I have been an associate?

ALBA: You'll never know now.

MAURICI: You'll only be an assistant once Carles leaves...

ALBA: And is that a good thing?

MAURICI: Being associates is better than being enemies.

ALBA: So everything is settled then.

MAURICI: You're ruining everything, Alba!

ALBA: And I said that I wanted to be the new art director...

MAURICI: What did you want me to do?

ALBA: Nothing. That is precisely what you had to do. You did not have to make any decisions. It should've been me, do you hear me?

MAURICI: I'm just as qualified as you are.

ALBA: I see that. Everything's gone to shit now. Everything.

MAURICI: This way we make sure we don't lose our place.

ALBA: I've lost mine.

MAURICI: Nonsense. We're a team Alba! We're all equals this way. In the end, it is an advantage, because we're two...Get it?

Pause.

ALBA: It's the same thing again.

MAURICI: What?

ALBA: Nothing.

MAURICI: Please...

ALBA: Why did I do it?

MAURICI: What are you talking about?

ALBA: I did it for you.

MAURICI: What?

ALBA: Just because you wanted to. I never wanted it. You fooled me into it...

MAURICI: No.

ALBA: You made such a fool of me...

MAURICI: When? Alba, when did I fool you?

Alba says nothing.

MAURICI: It's always the same. You never value my efforts. You've been so ungrateful all this time... Do you even know everything I've done so that you wouldn't lose your job at the gallery? It's been so hard, all these months...

ALBA: That night.

MAURICI: What are you talking about?

ALBA: You fooled me that night. I needed you to tell me the truth... But no. I didn't know...Shit.

MAURICI: I don't know what you're talking about. Which night? Which one?!

ALBA: The night that I smoked a whole box of cigarettes and gulped down three gin and tonics. The night that I hit my belly with all the strength I had. The night that I went and got a bunch of cash to hit the clinic the next day. The night that I realized that no, I wasn't ready to be a mother. The night... that I decided to have a baby with you.

MAURICI: Did you do all that?

ALBA: I knew that if I didn't make the decision to leave all this madness behind, my life would be different... And there you were. I had it all figured out. I just had to make the decision, I just had to do it. My breath stank wonderfully. And then you looked at me and I saw it. You took me by the hands. Everything was so fragile... You told me that you'd always be there for our child, that you'd help me through the pregnancy, that we'd be a team, the two of us. You wouldn't leave me alone. Two equals, no differences between us. I could hear the silence, but like a real silence, you know? And when I looked you in the eyes... No. Then I just threw the cigarettes in a drawer... And then... No.

MAURICI: Why didn't you tell me any of this?

ALBA: I was scared.

MAURICI: But I helped you, didn't I?

ALBA: I thought you did, but not really.

MAURICI: How can you say that...

ALBA: Only when you benefited from it. You've used me to become stronger. Accept it!

MAURICI: If I've become stronger is just because I've achieved it myself. Don't you think?

ALBA: You never wanted to do it, for real. You'll never do it.

MAURICI: Yes, yes I will.

ALBA: I'd like to believe you.

MAURICI: Believe it.

Pause.

ALBA: I want to be the one to go to the fair.

Pause.

MAURICI: And that way, would I have helped you?

ALBA: Yes.

They stare at each other.

MAURICI: Ambition is getting the best of you. How can you ask me that? You're crazy.

ALBA: Why?

MAURICI: Because, at this point, it's just stupid.

ALBA: It is. I'm certain it is.

MAURICI: There are only 8 days left.

ALBA: I'll be discharged tomorrow.

MAURICI: And the baby?

ALBA: You take care of him. You're his father. You will be as much help as I would.

MAURICI: Service? Don't you feel... anything? A baby has to be with his mother, and even more now, when he needs you more than ever. Nature has it that way, it's not my fault, you know? I can't breastfeed him.

ALBA: There're many babies that don't breastfeed.

MAURICI: You're not going to breastfeed him?

ALBA: I already told you.

MAURICI: But what did you think all this was about, being a mother?

ALBA: You knew what kind of mother you were having this child with. Don't force me to be something I'm not.

MAURICI: I don't recognize you, Alba.

ALBA: Whereas I recognize myself more and more.

MAURICI: You've also fooled me then. You told me you'll be a mother to this child and you're just a selfish bitch!

ALBA: You're right.

MAURICI: Go to hell! Can't we speak like two adults?

ALBA: We're not adults.

MAURICI: Alright.

ALBA: What can I teach that child, I, who know nothing?

Long pause.

ALBA: Go.

MAURICI: What?

ALBA: Go, Maurici.

MAURICI: Are you talking about the fair?

ALBA: Yes.

MAURICI: How're those related? Is this some kind of trap?

ALBA: No.

MAURICI: You're strange, Alba.

ALBA: Go, Maurici. Go. Go and be who everyone needs you to be. Make a name for yourself. Enjoy every single moment life is giving you. And when you've done it all, return triumphant to your office. Quietly, feel the chair under your hips, the smell the paintings. Make the most of every sensation, moment after moment. And one day, a day just like any other, sooner or later, you'll get sick, you'll go on leave, or maybe you'll just grow old. Any excuse will do. It might be only for a few days, or maybe after a more reasonable time... You'll turn off the lamp as you leave the office. And after doing that, when you're not there anymore, someone will take care of everything for you. But they will take care of things just so that you disappear, go away. Now go. Go.

MAURICI: I'll come back tomorrow. I love you.

ALBA: Good bye, Maurici.

Maurici kisses Alba. He grabs his things and exits. Alba is left alone, thinking. She takes off her ring and leaves it on the bedside table. After a while, Gemma enters.

GEMMA: And Maurici, where is he?

ALBA: He'll come back tomorrow.

GEMMA: Here are the diapers. You want them in the baby care bag?

ALBA: Yes. Do you have everything?

GEMMA: Yes.

ALBA: Thanks.

GEMMA: Listen, I've been talking with the midwife and everything seems to be going perfectly normal. She says you shouldn't worry if you have no milk right now, it is normal after the c-section. (*Alba laughs to herself.*) She'll come up to show you a couple of things so that you can breastfeed the baby... She'll teach you how to hold him so that you don't hurt yourself with the wound and all. It seems that is not as easy as... Are you listening to me?

ALBA: Yeah.

GEMMA: There are many different ways you can nurse... It's amazing.

ALBA: Great.

GEMMA: She'll be ready in a moment and she'll come upstairs. Is that ok?

ALBA: Perfect.

GEMMA: Do you have a nursing pillow?

ALBA: No.

GEMMA: Are you ok?

ALBA: Yes.

Alba gets up and puts on a robe.

GEMMA: Do you wanna use the bathroom? I'll help you.

ALBA: I can do it.

Alba looks out the window.

ALBA: Tomorrow will be a great day.

GEMMA: Yes.

ALBA: One of those days in which silence is real.

GEMMA: Did something happen?

ALBA: No, nothing happened.

GEMMA: The midwife will be here any minute.

ALBA: Perfect.

Alba motions to leave the room. Gemma gestures to go with her.

GEMMA: Alba, what are you doing? You've walked enough already...

ALBA: You stay here. Do it. Please.

GEMMA: What?

ALBA: Please. I want to be on my own. Can you stay?

GEMMA: Yes.

ALBA: Thank you.

Gemma and Alba stare at each other. Alba leaves.

GEMMA: But...where are you going?

No response.

GEMMA: Are you gonna go see the baby? Alba? Alba?...

Gemma stays looking out the door as Alba leaves. A baby cries in the distance. Gemma comes back in and sits on the bed. She sees the ring on the bedside table and the baby care package. A baby cries in the room next door. The baby cries shyly and from afar at the beginning, we can barely hear him. But this crying, small and insecure becomes, little by little, stronger, even savage. The crying is vital, solid, demanding. Its sound is disturbing, raucous, full of life.

THE END

End of the World

By Astrid Saalbach

Translated by Michael Evans

A flight attendant suffering from severe jet-lag and premature hot-flashes has just returned from a long and stressful tour abroad. Her passengers panicked for no apparent reason. On her way home from the airport she gets lost and can't find her house. A strange girl, who would rather be a horse, offers to show her the way, but leads her instead into a world beyond our time zones, a world where airplanes are a thing of the past (because they inexplicably started falling from the sky), and where a roller bag can be traded for a baby.

When working with playwrights I often ask them to tell me about the fictional world that their play takes place in. What are the “rules” that govern this world? Playwrights of a fantastic bent sometimes answer: “I want to create a world where anything can happen.”

Then I know we've got a problem. Because if anything can happen in a play, nothing can *mean* anything. In order for meaning to arise in a play, the status quo and the actions of the characters have to be circumscribed by a set of rules that obtain in this particular fictional world.

The social and physical rules that the world Astrid Saalbach has created in *End of the World* are vastly different from the world we live in. But they add up to a coherent alternative world. Strange things happen, but not just anything. It's all perfectly logical, in its own way.

Saalbach's fictional world is the fascistic opposite of the world we want to live in. Through some advanced form of gene splicing, the authorities are attempting to create the perfect woman. Four of the young women we meet are science's rejects, failed experiments, but necessary steps toward perfection. (They are all played by the same actor; they are apparently near clones.) Each of them has been designed to have a particular skill or attribute: a talent for math or drawing, generosity or empathy. In this the authorities have succeeded. But each also has a major defect: one is autistic, a second one was born with a grossly deformed head, a third with no legs, a fourth with no eyes.

Perfection is this society's only goal. For them, winning is all; there is no place for losers. Once out of office, popular politicians are viewed as a threat. Soccer teams that lose are hounded and often killed. In this world, there are no second acts, no second chances. When your time is up, it's up.

Why is this particular flight attendant thrust into this particular topsy-turvy world? Again, it's no coincidence.

Saalbach writes obliquely. Much is left understated, and any plot summary will necessarily be a ham-handed interpretation. But this much is clear. Prior to the start of the play, Xenia, the jet-lagged flight attendant, was feeling out of sorts and went to the doctor. He, a young man, diagnosed her as approaching menopause. This came as a shock. While having a great time travelling around the world, she hasn't been paying attention to her biological clock – which is ticking alarmingly fast. Her visit to

the doctor is the play's "inciting incident," the action that causes the rest of the play. She feels that her time is up.

The action of the play can be understood in various ways. Maybe it's all Xenia's dream or nightmare. Or, perhaps, it could be her thoughts in the minute or so before her plane crashes. Certainly she is confronted with her greatest hopes and fears. In this world Xenia acquires everything she always wanted, but had neglected in her life—only to lose it all again.

In the final scene Xenia sees the tail of an airliner sticking up from the sand. Do we see it, too? This is a major design question; there's no stage direction one way or the other. If the set includes something that looks like the tail of an airplane, then it would seem that her plane had crashed, and she somehow survived. If we don't see the tail, we have to guess.

One production didn't leave the audience guessing. Théâtre du Trillium, an experimental group in Ottawa, staged the whole play in the rubble of a crashed airliner. This strikes me as chewing the audience's food for them, but the production won several awards.

Astrid Saalbach has had an impressive career, both as a novelist and playwright. *End of the World* won two major awards, best Danish play of the year and best Nordic play. Several of the productions in Europe have also won or been nominated for awards for acting, directing and design. The play is published in book form in the original Danish and in French, Romanian and Cantonese. It appears here for the first time in English. And, strangely, given the play's international appeal, it has never been performed in English.

Astrid Saalbach trained as an actor at the national theatre school in Copenhagen, but found her calling as a playwright. Her first effort, the radio drama *Tracks in the Sand*, was produced in Denmark and several other countries in Europe. Her first full-length play for the stage was *Ballet Lesson* in 1986, a play that has been revived many times. Since then she has written ten full-length plays for the stage, two television dramas, six novels and one collection of short stories. Her plays have been seen in many countries in Europe and have won three pan-Nordic best play awards. She is a member of the Danish Academy. Her agency is Colombine Teaterförlag in Stockholm, info@colombine.se.

Michael Evans is an American expatriate who has been living and working as a dramaturg and translator in Norway since the 1980's. His translation of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* has been produced five times in Norway, and his translations of Saalbach's plays have been seen in London, Chicago and Ontario. His textbook *Innföring i dramaturgi* (Principles of Dramaturgy) is widely used in Scandinavia and is currently in its fifth printing. He has guest lectured at universities in Oslo, Aarhus, Stavanger and Kabul. His articles have appeared in *Theatre Forum*, *Ibsen Studies*, *American Theatre* and *Shakespearetidsskriftet*.

END OF THE WORLD

Characters:

Xenia	in her early forties
Girls 1-4, a Nomad Girl	between 16 and 20
Kaa	in his forties
Do	in her thirties
The Young Man	in his twenties

SCENE 1

Late afternoon, somewhere in a suburb near the sea.

A girl is playing alone, alternating between being a horse and a rider. She makes noises and tries out various gaits. Her clothes are strange and ill-fitting, her shoes mismatched. Xenia enters, dragging her roller bag. She is wearing the uniform of a flight attendant, with matching overcoat and high heels. She sees the girl.

XENIA: ...Excuse me?

GIRL 1: *(No reaction)*

XENIA: Hello...?

GIRL 1: *(No reaction)*

XENIA: Can't you hear?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Can I ask you something? Do you know where Ahorn Avenue is?

GIRL 1: *(Stands still)* Yeah...

XENIA: How to get there from here?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: *(Relieved)* Whew! *(Laughing)* I'm lost! It's ridiculous, I live there, it's around here somewhere. I was walking along the road by the coast—couldn't find a taxi, and the buses weren't running. Suddenly there were two dogs right in front of me. I don't usually get scared, but they were huge and seemed threatening. One of them had a big gash on its neck. So I turned around and went down a side road... *(laughs)* And now I have no idea where I am! But I bet you do?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: So, how do I get there?

GIRL 1: (*Doesn't answer. Plays at being a horse*)

XENIA: ...Do you understand what I'm saying?

GIRL 1: Yeah, yeah.

XENIA: Of course. Sorry. (*looks around*) ...Everything seems different—when you've been away for a while. Do you live around here?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: In one of those houses?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Those big rocks, is this an ancient ritual site?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: I wish I could sit down on one of them for a while, but I'd just fall asleep. I'm so tired, but I have to stay awake until evening, otherwise I'll never get back into the right rhythm. (*Looking at her watch*) ...Do you know what time it is? I forgot to reset mine... (*Looks at the girl and smiles*) Looks like somebody left in a rush today; your shoes don't match. And you forgot to zip up.

GIRL 1: (*Looking at her clothes and shoes.*) Yeah...

XENIA: In a hurry?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Going somewhere?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Well, I won't keep you. Just point me in the right direction.

GIRL 1: (*Takes Xenia's roller bag.*)

XENIA: Hey, hey! That's mine. What are you doing? Do you want to pull it for me?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Show me the way?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: That's very kind of you. I need someone to show me the way; the trip home was the worst ever. The passengers panicked; we couldn't understand why—there wasn't any turbulence, nothing out of the ordinary. First it was a young mother; she got out the life-jackets and started putting them on her children. Then somebody tore down the oxygen masks. Have you ever flown?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Of course, who hasn't? Did you like it?

GIRL 1: Yeah...

XENIA: We kept serving one thing after another, the captain tried to calm things down, but it just kept getting worse. Some of them began to cry—sobbing loudly—others prayed, one person fainted, another one we had to put restraints on: he started thrashing about and tried to break into the cockpit. Everyone was calling for us, we ran back and forth for I don't know how many hours. My legs are still shaking...my jaws ache from all that smiling... (*yawns*) That blue stripe out there—is that water or sky?

GIRL 1: Yeah...

XENIA: Is that all you can say?

GIRL 1: No. It's just hard. (*Plays at both horse and rider at the same time.*) I would rather be a horse.

XENIA: Than a human?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: (*Looking at her*) Well, you're doing a good job. I don't know what I'd rather be. A bird maybe.

GIRL 1: Giddy up!

XENIA: Do you have a horse?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: I had one too, when I was your age. Tonga was his name. A big stallion. My best friend. Every morning before I went to school I rode my bike out to the farm where we kept him, gave him feed and fresh water, brushed and groomed him and cleaned his hooves; nobody else was allowed to touch him. Every afternoon I rode him, galloped over the fields...

GIRL 1: (*Neighs*)

XENIA: One day, in the forest, he suddenly collapsed under me, and died. Congenital heart defect, they said. I cried and cried, mourned like he was a person. For years I couldn't bear to hear his name or see a horse that reminded me of him.

GIRL 1: Come.

XENIA: (*Surprised*) Is this the right direction?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: (*Hesitates*) Are you sure?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: (*Following her*) Oh, I am so looking forward to home. Sitting curled up in my own sofa, watching my own TV!

SCENE 2

In a forest.

Xenia and Girl 1 with the suitcase.

XENIA: ...Wait! You're going too fast. Are you sure this is a shortcut?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Imagine, was I really so far off? I didn't know there was a forest here. What a scent...! Can you pick mushrooms here?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: I'd like to. Learn how to find them, what's edible and what's poisonous. Oh, I could lie down on that moss—it looks so soft! Close my eyes. (*hears a noise and starts*) ...What was that? An animal—that stepped on a twig?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: I can't remember the last time I was in a forest. I only go outdoors when I have to. I'm a couch-potato—most of us are. You wouldn't think so, but when you travel as much as we do, literally living out of a suitcase, then home really means something. I'm hungry. You too?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: (*Taking something out of her purse*) I got this for my neighbor, because she takes care of my cat. It'll soon be more attached to her than to me. (*gives the girl a piece of chocolate*) Wait, you have to take the wrapper off first...

GIRL 1: (*Eats*)

XENIA: Do you like it?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: You have something in the corner of your mouth. (*removes it*) How old are you? Sixteen? Seventeen? Older? Nineteen, maybe?

GIRL 1: ...Yeah.

XENIA: Do people get angry with you very often?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: You could be my daughter. I'd like having children. It would give my life a center, an anchor. When we've got unaccompanied minors on a flight, usually from broken homes, shuttling back and forth between the two parents, I'm the one who looks after them. Making sure they get something to eat, talking to them, as much as time allows, getting them to feel safe. And I'm the one that hands them off to the mother or father, who's sometimes drunk, usually the father. Or even worse, sometimes the parent has forgotten and doesn't show up. Then I get the urge to take the kids home with me and keep them. Am I talking too much?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: I know, I know, but I have to, to keep awake. It would be nice if you said something too. Where were you going when I came? To some activity?

GIRL 1: (*Neighs*)

XENIA: Going riding?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: By yourself, or with someone? Are they waiting for you somewhere? Getting worried because you're late?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: It's my fault. We'll have to get going.

GIRL 1: (*Takes the suitcase and starts to go*)

XENIA: (*Following her*) ...Stop.

GIRL 1: (*Stops*)

XENIA: ...It's not that way. We're getting further and further away. Where's the sun...? Already pretty low... Where was it? In front of us or behind us? Which side...? I'm so tired I can't remember...can't think straight... We have to get our bearings...

GIRL 1: (*Pointing*) There.

XENIA: A star. Do you think that's enough?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: I don't even know what it's called. (*Starts.*) There it was again, that noise! Did you hear it?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: We have to stay calm, keep a cool head. We came from that direction. Or was it from there...?

GIRL 1: Yeah...

XENIA: You don't sound so sure. I thought you knew the way, had an instinct.

GIRL 1: *(Takes the suitcase, starts to go)*

XENIA: *(Holding her back)* ...That's not the way, it feels wrong. We're going to get lost, if we're not already. Just what I need—having it all end here, in the middle of a forest, after flying halfway around the world. Let's turn back. See if we can find our way back to the city. It has to be that way, toward the light...

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: So why are you always leading me in the opposite direction? Weren't you supposed to take me home? Or did I get that wrong?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Did I misunderstand...?

GIRL 1: *(Lets go of the suitcase and starts walking off)*

XENIA: Stop! Come back...!

GIRL 1: *(Stops)*

XENIA: Do you want to go?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Without me?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Leave me here...? No, don't. I won't manage... I wish I could talk with you! Where are you going? What's drawing you away? Are you meeting someone?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Here? In the middle of the forest?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Who? The people you're going riding with?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: *(Relieved)* Are they waiting for you out here? You could have said so!

GIRL 1: *(Takes the suitcase and starts to leave)*

XENIA: *(Following her)* I hope they're still there. And that they can help me find what I'm looking for.

SCENE 3

Somewhere in the forest.

Girl 1 enters with the suitcase, Xenia following.

XENIA: Either we're going in circles or this is one big forest—huge... Ah, ow! My ankle... *(hobbles over to a tree stump and sits)* ...Just what I needed. After hopping and running around... *(fighting back tears)* ...You don't have to feel sorry for me, but a little sympathy would be nice.

GIRL 1: *(Picks up something, maybe a pinecone, and throws it at Xenia)*

XENIA: You hit me!

GIRL 1: *(Does it again)*

XENIA: Stop it! What's the matter? Can't I cry?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: *(Blows her nose, wipes her eyes)* ...Okay, I'll stop. It doesn't hurt that much anyway. It doesn't take much nowadays, to set me off. My doctor thought it probably has to do with my age. "Have you thought about that?" What does he know? A young guy with tattoos and a stupid smile. I'm 42 for Christ's sake! That's not old. But he's made me feel old. Now when I look at myself in the mirror, I don't see myself, but an older woman, no longer attractive, no longer able to have children... *(Cries)*

GIRL 1: 6,571.

XENIA: What?

GIRL 1: 6,571.

XENIA: ...What? *(following the girl's gaze)* Trees?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: *(Starting to laugh)* How? You must be some sort of savant. I hope your sense of direction is as good.

GIRL 1: *(Sees something, picks it up)*

XENIA: Did you find something? A glove...? It's very unusual.

THE YOUNG MAN: *(Enters, wearing a worn and dirty outfit, a t-shirt with wide blue and white stripes and matching scarf, and jogging pants)* That's mine. It's a keeper glove...

XENIA: *(Laughing)* Oh, you scared me!

THE YOUNG MAN: *(To Girl 1)* Who's she? Why did you bring her along?

XENIA: Do you two know each other?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Is he the one you were going to meet? Who's been waiting...?

GIRL 1: Yeah.

XENIA: Maybe you can help me?

THE YOUNG MAN: I can't help anyone, not even myself.

XENIA: Who are you? What are you doing in the forest?

THE YOUNG MAN: Live here, until I can show myself again.

XENIA: What have you done?

THE YOUNG MAN: Nothing.

XENIA: So why do you have to hide?

THE YOUNG MAN: I was on the wrong team, the one that lost.

XENIA: Is that so bad?

THE YOUNG MAN: They burn all the banners, kill all the fans of the losing team, when they get ahold of them. Everybody runs, pushing and shoving and trampling each other. Then they storm the field, break into the locker rooms and drag the players out one by one. Toss them to the lions, if they aren't lucky and escape.

XENIA: What kind of sport is that? What's it called?

THE YOUNG MAN: If I had stopped that last ball, we would've won. Then it would have been the others.

XENIA: ...Does it always end like that?

THE YOUNG MAN: Always.

XENIA: That's insane! (*Mops her brow*)

THE YOUNG MAN: ...You're sweating.

XENIA: I'm hot.

THE YOUNG MAN: That's weird.

XENIA: I get this way sometimes, always when it's least convenient, like walking in the desert in the middle of the day, in the burning heat. Not able to find shade or a cool spot anywhere...

THE YOUNG MAN: Your face is red.

XENIA: I know.

THE YOUNG MAN: I've never seen anyone sweat like that. At least not a woman.

XENIA: Maybe that's the problem, maybe that's what's happening. I'm finished as a woman.

THE YOUNG MAN: I can smell it.

GIRL 1: *(Neighs)*

THE YOUNG MAN: Sugar...? *(Takes out a lump of sugar and offers it to Girl 1, with the lump on his flat hand. She takes it with her teeth. The Young Man strokes her hair, takes out the bridle and puts it on her.)*

XENIA: What are you doing...? What's that you're putting on her?

THE YOUNG MAN: A bridle.

XENIA: Take it off!

THE YOUNG MAN: She likes it. That's why she comes here every evening.

XENIA: To ride? To be the horse?

GIRL 1: *(Neighs)*

THE YOUNG MAN: Easy, easy.

XENIA: Stop! I won't have it!

THE YOUNG MAN: You don't get to decide.

XENIA: I can't just watch this.

THE YOUNG MAN: Then go.

XENIA: But where? I don't know where I am, that's the whole problem! I'm lost! Leave her alone...she's just a child. Let go of her...!

THE YOUNG MAN: Mind your own business, you old hag. You just don't get it. Giddy up! *(rides off)*

XENIA: Come back! Don't leave me alone! With just the trees... Six thousand, seven hundred... Do you hear me? Come back! ...I'm so tired. Should never have sat down... *(closes her eyes and falls asleep)*

(Lights change, birds sing. The Young Man comes back, carrying Girl 1.)

THE YOUNG MAN: *(To Xenia)* ...Wake up!

XENIA: ...Did I fall asleep? What's happened?

THE YOUNG MAN: She just collapsed, had a seizure and started foaming at the mouth.

XENIA: Lay her down here, on her side. *(helps put Girl 1 down)*

THE YOUNG MAN: Are you a doctor? Nurse?

XENIA: No.

THE YOUNG MAN: I'd have thought...

XENIA: She's not breathing. The bridle is too tight, cutting off circulation...!

THE YOUNG MAN: I've strangled her!

XENIA: Help me. (*freeing the girl from the bridle*)

THE YOUNG MAN: I can't... I told her I didn't like it, but she wanted it like that, tighter, tighter, all the time tighter...!

XENIA: (*Trying resuscitation*) ...Come on, breathe!

THE YOUNG MAN: Breathe, breathe...!

XENIA: Please...! (*gives up*)

THE YOUNG MAN: She's dying! Don't stop! Move over, I'll do it... (*shakes the girl, trying to revive her*)

XENIA: There's nothing more to do.

THE YOUNG MAN: I killed her.

XENIA: No, no...

THE YOUNG MAN: No, it's my fault.

XENIA: And mine. For letting it happen, for not stopping...

THE YOUNG MAN: Now I can never come back.

XENIA: I can help you, if you help me. Get me away from this place!

THE YOUNG MAN: (*Gathers up his keeper gloves and disappears*)

SCENE 4

Somewhere in a suburb.

A baby carriage with a screaming baby. Xenia passes by it with her roller bag. Stops, goes back. Looks into the carriage.

XENIA: ...There now, there now little one. Are you lying here all alone...? Why are you crying? Did you have a bad dream. Are you cold? Hungry...? There now, there now, you mustn't cry like that. Like it's the end of the world... (*sniffles*) Then I start in too... (*blows her nose, wipes her eyes*) ...You're hoarse, you must have been crying for some time. What should we do? Where's your mother...?

GIRL 2: (*Appears, wearing provocative, tight-fitting clothes, high heels and something covering her head*) Hallo there!

XENIA: Hallo...

GIRL 2: Wonderful weather! Not too cold, not too hot.

XENIA: Is this your baby?

GIRL 2: Your baby or my baby, whatever, but yeah, they say it's mine.

XENIA: You're very lucky. Is it a girl or a boy?

GIRL 2: Girl. (*looks at Xenia's roller bag*) Pretty clever, those little wheels.

XENIA: Hardly a new invention. Aren't you going to pick her up?

GIRL 2: Same to me. Doesn't bother me.

XENIA: Poor little girl...

GIRL 2: Helps develop the lungs, they say. So she'll be able to play an instrument.

XENIA: No, not anymore; now you're supposed to pick them up. I've read about this. Hold them tight so they know you're there. Talk to them, so they can hear something besides their own crying. Not picking them up when they cry makes them feel abandoned—a feeling that never goes away. (*sniffles*)

GIRL 2: Ring around the moon today, I guess, huh?

XENIA: (*Blowing her nose*) It's silly, I know. But the sound of a baby crying just...

GIRL 2: So hold your ears.

XENIA: Pick her up, please. She's unhappy.

GIRL 2: Do it yourself.

XENIA: May I?

GIRL 2: At your own risk.

XENIA: (*Picks up the baby*) There now, there now...don't cry little one. She's wet.

GIRL 2: More than that, I suspect. Unless someone put a plug in her hole.

XENIA: (*Rocking the baby*) She's a little sweetie. And beautiful.

GIRL 2: Doesn't take after her mother, fortunately.

XENIA: I've never seen such a headdress before.

GIRL 2: It's not a headdress. It's a sack, so I don't scare the hell out of people. They start screaming when they see me. Because of my face.

XENIA: It can't be that bad.

GIRL 2: Well... (*removes the sack*)

XENIA: (*Screams*)

GIRL 2: What did I say?

XENIA: How did that happen...?

GIRL 2: One of the whims of nature, or whoever it was that was having fun that day. But my body's okay, that's what my friends say, the men. And they like the sack; it helps them imagine I'm their wife or girlfriend or whatever, when they're doing me.

XENIA: Is that your profession?

GIRL 2: Oh, I don't do it for money. It's a calling. My contribution to a better world. I like giving. Sometimes though I do get something, little presents from particularly good friends. Well, I can't stand here all day, there's already a line...

XENIA: Is that them, your friends?

GIRL 2: They're so patient. Can stand there and wait all day.

XENIA: In front of that shack.

GIRL 2: The Palace, people call it.

XENIA: Who looks after her, while you're tending to your calling?

GIRL 2: She looks after herself; she's a clever little girl, my Pearl.

XENIA: But a baby...

GIRL 2: They're more capable than people give them credit for. Oh, I'm going to be sick...

XENIA: Are you nauseous? Would you like a bag?

GIRL 2: Throw up every morning.

XENIA: One more on the way?

GIRL 2: Guess so.

XENIA: Already.

GIRL 2: It'll be great for Pearl, she won't be alone so much. What do you say, pretty Pearl. You want some company? A little sister, or brother? (*looks at the suitcase*) Can I try it?

XENIA: Sure, go ahead.

GIRL 2: (*Pushing and dragging the roller bag around*) How do I look? Does it suit me?

XENIA: Yes.

GIRL 2: Trade you.

XENIA: What?

GIRL 2: I get the suitcase.

XENIA: For what?

GIRL 2: For her.

XENIA: Your child. You'll give her away?

GIRL 2: You're supposed to give away the best thing you have, didn't you know that?

XENIA: But you can't; it's illegal. And you'd regret it...

GIRL 2: I've done it before, with two other ones.

XENIA: Gave them away, to strangers?

GIRL 2: You said you came from around here.

XENIA: I do.

GIRL 2: Otherwise I wouldn't.

XENIA: You won't be able to live without her.

GIRL 2: There's another one on the way.

XENIA: I'll take good care of her. Give her love and a good upbringing, make her feel safe. I'll re-do a room for her...knit tiny little booties, buy...she'll have everything. Travel with her, when she's a bit bigger. Love her, never leave her...

GIRL 2: (*Weeping*) My baby!

XENIA: (*Alarmed*) Hush...! (*looking around*) What's the matter? No one's going to take your baby. Stop it. It was just a joke. A stupid game... (*giving her the baby*) Here.

GIRL 2: Don't you want her?

XENIA: Well, of...

GIRL 2: Then take her, and go. Let's get it over with. (*toying with the suitcase*) How do you open it?

XENIA: Like this. (*shows her how*)

GIRL 2: ...And it's mine, right? All of it?

XENIA: Yes.

GIRL 2: Here, you'll need her blanket; I'll keep the carriage for the next one. (*tosses things out of the suitcase*) What a lot of stuff...!

XENIA: (*Exits with baby*)

SCENE 5

In Do's house.

A spacious, semi-dark living room. Curtains are drawn shut, here and there we see drawings on the walls. At first they look like a child's scribbles.

Xenia enters with the baby, wrapped tightly in her blanket. She looks around. Kaa, hidden, watches her silently.

XENIA: ...Hello? Anybody home?

(Kaa disappears. Do comes forward, cautiously. Her face is covered with a greenish paste or mask. She follows Xenia with her eyes.)

XENIA: Hello...? (*sees Do*) ...Excuse me! I knocked, and tried the doorbell, but it didn't work.

DO: What do you want?

XENIA: To ask directions, to a place; it's not far from here.

DO: Where did you come from?

XENIA: From—what's it called again, that city with the muddy river, and all the houseboats, that we started out from?

DO: (*Reaching out for the baby*) Shall I?

XENIA: No, thank you, she's not heavy.

DO: Have a seat.

XENIA: I can stand.

DO: It doesn't look that way.

XENIA: I'm in a hurry, I have to get her home.

DO: How old is she?

XENIA: (*Taken by surprise*) A few weeks. Two, three...

(Ka appears again. He looks at Xenia, then disappears.)

DO: Be careful with her head.

XENIA: Am I holding her wrong?

DO: You're supposed to support her head.

XENIA: Oh.

DO: (*Sees the airline insignia on Xenia's jacket*) That's very pretty.

XENIA: The airline's insignia.

DO: Reminds me of when people used to fly.

XENIA: Used to...?

DO: Ages ago, I don't know exactly when, dates are not my strong suit. I've seen it in old movies; the air full of silvery machines, like long tubes with wings!

XENIA: So what happened?

DO: They started falling.

XENIA: Crashing?

DO: They couldn't figure out why. Some people thought it was metal fatigue, others said that they were carrying too much weight, still others claimed that they were flying too slow, that the air was creating too much resistance. They kept on debating, the planes kept on falling. Sometimes over cities, destroying whole blocks. Finally, they stopped flying. Since then, no one has tried.

XENIA: Where am I. On a different planet?

DO: The pond over there was caused by that, a plane crashed and made a crater. Once when Kaa was little he came home with a piece of metal he found there; he pretended it was a wing.

XENIA: What has happened...? Is this punishment for crossing too many time zones in too few days?

KAA: (*Enters. Looks at Xenia*) ...You let someone in. Who's she?

XENIA: My name is Xenia Jensen. This is my daughter...Baby.

DO: The young lady has gotten lost.

XENIA: Young?

KAA: Who isn't young? Who doesn't grope around in the dark? Mistaking the light of the fire for the light of the sun? Mere shadows for humans of flesh and blood?

DO: You recognize Kaa, of course.

XENIA: ...Do I? Should I?

KAA: Have I changed that much? Gotten thin and gray in my exile? (*stretches out a hand*) Kaa Buu, also known as The Wolf.

DO: Politician and former minister. Leader of the Supreme Council, until just recently.

KAA: (*Lightly*) Now, with a bounty on my head.

XENIA: Why's that?

DO: Kaa's period was up.

KAA: My time.

XENIA: Couldn't he get a new period?

KAA: When your time's up, you're finished.

DO: Everyone would've voted for Kaa again, if they could have. He was the most popular leader ever.

KAA: You're exaggerating.

DO: Didn't they march in torchlight processions? Hail you as the greatest leader ever?

KAA: And the next day they were ready to hail someone else. That's just how it is; power must not have a face.

XENIA: I thought it was supposed to...

KAA: (*Opens the curtains*)

DO: No, don't...! What are you doing?

KAA: Looking out.

DO: At what...? Kaa is a dreamer. He never compromises!

KAA: Stop it.

DO: Carries out his plans, no matter the cost. Never thinks about the consequences for his own safety. Beauty is the only thing that counts. How he can open the people's eyes. He wants freedom.

XENIA: I do too!

DO: Love, and peace.

XENIA: Yes, yes. Wonderful! Too good to be true. I'm going to start crying... (*dries her eyes*) I didn't know that there were any politicians who could be like that.

DO: Close the curtains. Don't stand there, they can see you...!

XENIA: Is there anyone out there?

KAA: Not a soul.

DO: They could be hiding.

XENIA: Who? What's the matter? Why do the curtains have to be closed?

DO: A person who eats even the tiniest lump of human flesh, mixed in with animal meat, turns into a wolf. Do you know that story?

XENIA: No.

KAA: (*Nodding toward the baby*) It's not appropriate for children.

DO: You have to enjoy it, when they are babies and you can hold them in your arms. Protect them.

KAA: Mother...

XENIA: (*Looks from one to the other surprised*)

DO: Kaa is my son.

KAA: Mother refuses to get old.

XENIA: Can you do that?

KAA: If you're willing to pay the price.

DO: And I am. Do anything, pay any price to postpone it. I can't live without love.

KAA: That's not love, mother.

DO: Call it whatever you like. (*touches or scratches her face*)

KAA: Don't touch! Mother has just had a new face made.

DO: (*removing the mask*) What do you think? They can make anything, except hands. But they'll get that done some day. Until then I have to wear gloves.

XENIA: I think I will sit down... (*starts to sit*)

DO: That's not a chair!

KAA: (*Helps her sit somewhere else*) Nothing here is what it seems to be.

XENIA: My head...I'm afraid that something happened, that I've had a stroke, or some kind of fast-growing tumor that makes everything seem foreign, strange.

KAA: Exhaustion—completely normal to feel that way, when you're on the run.

XENIA: I'm not on the run—did I say I was? My heart, it's beating wildly. Is that dangerous?

KAA: Let me feel. (*puts a hand on her heart*)

DO: I'll get you some water.

XENIA: (*Looking around*) ...Did I bring in all that dirt?

KAA: Doesn't matter.

XENIA: I must look terrible.

KAA: On the contrary.

XENIA: (*Notices something*) There's a leg...

KAA: My sister Rose. She leaves them lying all over. She came to the world without legs, but she's very good at drawing and painting. Mother lets her do her thing everywhere, even on the walls if she wants.

XENIA: (*Looking at a drawing on the wall*) Horses...

KAA: She loves horses.

DO: (*Enters with a glass of water*) Here you are.

XENIA: Thanks. (*empties the glass, gets up*)

DO: Are you leaving? Now? With the little baby?

XENIA: I have to get home. We have to go home.

KAA: It's getting dark. I wish I could escort you home, walk ahead of you with a lantern. Stay here tonight, we have plenty of room and everything you need. You're tired, sit down before you collapse.

DO: I'll take the baby.

XENIA: No, no...

DO: It gets the hormones going, sitting with a baby. Just having one in the house.

XENIA: She's asleep. (*Do takes the baby.*) I will be too in a minute...

DO: She looks just like Rose when she was a baby. The same colors, same long eyelashes. Exactly the same profile.

XENIA: I don't understand it... How can this have happened? How can everything you know just vanish, like it never existed? (*falls asleep*)

DO: ...Whose child do you suppose it is?

KAA: Hers.

DO: No...

KAA: It takes a thief to suspect one.

DO: Look at the insignia on her jacket.

KAA: Wings?

DO: That could be your salvation, if we act now.

KAA: I'm not that desperate.

DO: I am.

XENIA: (*Talking in her sleep*)... Hope you've had a pleasant flight. Passengers... other destinations... baggage here...customs...

SCENE 6

The same room, or perhaps a different one, in Do's house.

The curtains are drawn. On all the walls we see drawings and paintings of horses and other cloven animals. Rose (Girl 3) is sitting in a wheelchair, with a brush and paint. Xenia is holding the baby.

ROSE: You look like you've just seen a ghost.

XENIA: ...How could I forget her!

ROSE: Who?

XENIA: The girl...

ROSE: Has something happened to her?

XENIA: No, no...she was interested in horses too.

ROSE: I often dream that I'm riding. Galloping off on a big stallion. I'd love to try it for real, but mother won't let me.

XENIA: How can two people look so much alike? Do you have a sister?

ROSE: Not as far as I know; I'm adopted. Mother found me in a garbage can, she heard something whimper. At first she thought it was a rat! (*laughs*)

XENIA: Who would ever put a baby in a garbage can?

ROSE: Oh, lots of people here. If there was something wrong with it.

XENIA: What kind of place is this?

ROSE: I wish I had a sister—I used to pretend I had one, when I was little. Lots of sisters. Made mother set places for them at the table, and they had to get presents when I got presents. Do you like my horses?

XENIA: They remind me of some drawings I once saw in a cave. What's that?

ROSE: A woolly mammoth.

XENIA: And the ones with the long necks?

ROSE: Giraffes.

XENIA: All of them drawn in profile.

ROSE: I like them best that way. Is it true that people where you come from walk on their hands?

XENIA: (*Laughing*) No.

ROSE: Is it true that you have ten days in a week? And that children eat roasted puppy dog tails dipped in chocolate?

XENIA: No!

ROSE: And that women don't wear panties on their birthdays?

XENIA: What a strange idea? Who told you that?

DO: (*Enters. She is wearing some type of leather bodice with a helmet or mask.*) What are you two talking about?

ROSE: (*Falls silent*)

XENIA: The horses. They're wonderful...! So simple, yet lifelike.

DO: Rose is clever. Why don't you have your legs on?

ROSE: I can't find them.

DO: You lose them on purpose.

ROSE: They're too long!

DO: They are as long as they are supposed to be; as long as your own legs would have been, if you had legs.

ROSE: I don't like them, I'm afraid I'll fall.

DO: You could learn how to walk if you wanted to. Dance if you put your mind to it. But you cling to your chair. What are you going to do when I'm not here anymore? Who'll carry you up and down the stairs when I'm too old...? Go find your legs.

ROSE: (*Exits*)

DO: She's asleep.

XENIA: I know. But I just can't put her down.

DO: (*Looking at the baby*) ...She's ugly. Looks retarded. Should never have been born.

XENIA: Excuse me!?

DO: Shh! That's to fool the gods, so they don't see her and take her back. Are you sending signals, telling them where to find Kaa?

XENIA: If I could send signals, I'd be home by now.

DO: I know you've installed microphones. So tiny that you can't see them.

XENIA: Do you think I'm a spy?

DO: I don't know what I think. If it were up to me, I'd send you packing, but Kaa wants you to stay here.

XENIA: He does?

DO: Don't start imagining things. Kaa can have anyone he wants, but he's choosy. More interested in his own ideas and dreams. Tell them to leave him alone...

XENIA: I will.

DO: He's not going to stage a comeback.

XENIA: Would that be so bad?

DO: The whole game would be changed, because he's so strong, so much smarter. Kaa could save all of us, if he came to power again.

XENIA: *(Puts the baby down)*

DO: Do me a favor; hang this weight on my mask.

XENIA: *(Taking the weight)* Won't this hurt?

DO: You have to suffer for beauty.

XENIA: *(Hanging the weight on the mask)* Like this...?

DO: *(Suppressing a groan)* One more.

XENIA: Is it necessary?

DO: If I want to stay young.

XENIA: *(Hangs another weight on the mask)*

DO: *(Moans loudly)* Now the last one.

XENIA: No...

DO: Aren't you living in my house? Eating my food?

XENIA: *(Hangs the last weight on the mask)*

DO: *(Gasps and groans in pain. Pees in her pants)* Oh, oh...! Damn wrinkles, bloody bones! Miserable sack! Damn it to hell...! *(looks at her pants)* ...See, I've wet myself. I've lost control over my bodily functions. What's the point? Why do we have to get old?

XENIA: I thought there was a cure, pills or injections.

DO: There are, but you still have to do things for yourself or else the cure won't work. Use a corset and mask. Hang weights on it, in order to strengthen the musculature. Train with heavier and heavier weights for more and more hours each day the older you get. After a while, all your time is spent training.

XENIA: For who's benefit?

DO: For my benefit, isn't that enough? And for Kaa; he doesn't deserve an old mother. When he was little, he used to cry over each new wrinkle he found on my face, and each new gray hair, because he was afraid of losing me. Sometimes I want to give up, just sit in a comfy chair and let it happen, but then I see myself in the mirror, try to imagine how I'll look... (*looks at her pants again*) I have to change... (*exits*)

XENIA: (*Walks back and forth with the baby, who has become restless. Speaks babytalk and sings.*)

KAA: (*Enters. Listens*) You're singing...

XENIA: (*Stops*) I can't remember the words.

KAA: I don't like words. They can be dangerous.

XENIA: Your mother thinks I'm a spy.

KAA: Don't mind her, she sees spies everywhere. Is suspicious of everyone, even herself. Always assumes the worst of people.

XENIA: If only I knew I could get home again.

KAA: Is it so terrible here?

XENIA: No, no.

KAA: Perhaps there's someone waiting for you at home?

XENIA: For me? No. When I get back from a long tour I need to be alone, recharge my batteries.

KAA: I see. (*to the baby*) Kitschy-kitschy-koo!

XENIA: But there have been. Several, in fact. It's difficult; they get tired of waiting. And when I'm home again at last, we've become strangers. I've been out, meeting new people, changing, they say; so we have to begin all over again, getting to know each other. Again and again. The last one was a biologist. Raised frogs in my bathtub. He waited nearly three years before he gave up. I came home one day and found a letter. I wasn't even sad about it. The only thing I missed were the frogs.

KAA: You just haven't met the right man.

XENIA: I've been too demanding.

KAA: That's good.

XENIA: I was too critical, always complaining about something. Trivial things. I regret it now.

KAA: We all have things we regret.

XENIA: Do we?

KAA: Things we can't bring ourselves to think about. You think you always do the right thing, but... Sing that song again. I want to hear it.

XENIA: (*Sings or hums for the baby*)

KAA: (*Looking closely at her*) ... You're warm.

XENIA: Is it so obvious...?

KAA: I like warm women.

XENIA: Yes, but dripping?

KAA: The warmer the better. She's asleep... (*takes the baby and puts it down*) Your skin glistens. Glows like gold.

XENIA: My blouse is soaking wet.

KAA: Your hair.

XENIA: All my clothes.

KAA: From every pore. Such power!

XENIA: How awful.

KAA: What a sight! Like a goddess, rising out of the water.

XENIA: I don't feel like that.

KAA: I'll make you. Stay here, let us live together, all of us, as long as it lasts.

XENIA: You don't waste any time.

KAA: I don't know how much I have left.

XENIA: Who says you're my type?

KAA: Oh, but I am. I know.

XENIA: I don't like men who are too sure of themselves.

KAA: You just don't know yet.

XENIA: Normally I'd cross the street if I saw you coming, but here nothing is like it was before. Here I don't know what I'm doing.

KAA: Take off your clothes.

XENIA: No!

KAA: You're soaking wet, you'll catch cold. (*Kisses and caresses her. Puts a hand down her pants*) ...What's that?

XENIA: What's what?

KAA: Down there?

XENIA: You mean my...?

KAA: It felt...different.

XENIA: Different? Do you remove them here? Cut them off? Is this that sort of place?

KAA: No, no; I just forgot what it feels like.

XENIA: I know it's a bit big, and stiff.

KAA: Let me feel again.

XENIA: Don't stop, don't stop.

KAA: Then you'll stay with me?

XENIA: As long as it lasts. I knew it. I knew I'd fall, from the second I saw you!

KAA: I fell first. Saw you before you saw me.

SCENE 7

A room in Do's house.

Kaa and Xenia.

XENIA: (*Bent over the baby*) I can't decide. Should she go to a regular school, or a private school. On the one hand, you want to protect them; on the other, give them a realistic picture of the world. What do you think? I don't know what I'd do if they teased her. Probably kill them... (*to the baby*) Are you smiling? Smiling at your stupid mother who's always worrying about everything? Oh, my how you can kick and wave your arms! Those tiny little hands and feet, I want to bite them off and gobble them up...! (*talks more baby talk*)

KAA: She's ugly.

XENIA: Hideous. The most repulsive little baby ever. I wish she hadn't been born.

KAA: You're learning.

XENIA: She getting a tooth. You can't see it yet, only feel it. The jagged top. That's why she's drooling so much and crying at night. Won't stop. It hurts, every single new tooth. That's easy to forget.

KAA: (*Opens the curtain a bit*)

XENIA: Be careful.

KAA: I have to have light. See the sky.

XENIA: Is anyone there...?

KAA: No. As deserted as always.

XENIA: Not always.

KAA: You go crazy living like this, in artificial light, looking at the same four walls, day in, day out.

XENIA: I feel at home here, more than anywhere else on earth, if that's where we are. I could stay here, forever, if it was together with you, and her. Close the curtains, please, for my sake. Someone could be out there.

KAA: (*Closing the curtains*) Then take your clothes off.

XENIA: (*Giggling*) I've just put them on again!

KAA: The only thing that helps. Hurry. Let me...

XENIA: You're shaking. You tore a button. (*looks for it*)

KAA: You're torturing me.

XENIA: Found it...!

KAA: Come.

XENIA: Easy, you're tearing my blouse.

KAA: I want to see your breasts.

ROSE: They sag.

XENIA: ...Rose? Where are you?

ROSE: Here! Peek-a-boo! Behind the door...! (*comes into view. She has her prosthetic legs on.*)

KAA: (*to Xenia*) Come, my love. Don't think about her.

ROSE: I'll just watch, even though I'd rather...!

KAA: Rose loves romance. Can't see enough of us.

XENIA: She's seen us?

ROSE: Every time. I can't wait to be old enough to have a boyfriend. He's going to be just like Kaa, do it just like him... (*falls*) Ah, aw! Stupid legs, I said they were too long!

DO: (*Comes into view. She has a kind of frame on her head. Helps Rose up*) On your feet. Right.

XENIA: Do...? Are we all here now?

DO: Does that bother you? I don't know what it's like where you come from, but here we share both pleasures and sorrows.

KAA: (*Tries to take Xenia's clothes off*)

XENIA: Not now. Not in front of them...!

DO: You don't have anything to be ashamed of.

XENIA: I don't...?

ROSE: It *is* a bit stiff.

XENIA: What?

ROSE: You said so yourself.

DO: Other places you sag. You ought to work out.

XENIA: Give me my clothes...!

KAA: But that's how I like it... Soft, tender. Showing the marks of time.

XENIA: Tell them to go.

KAA: Do you want to disappoint them? Deny them the pleasure of seeing us together, as man and woman? What else do they have to pass the time here? They have so few things that give them pleasure. (*pulling her closer*) Look at me. Forget about them. Think of us. That we will be together forever... (*kisses her*)

ROSE: Yes!

DO: Good! Kiss her!

ROSE: Use your tongue!

DO: Naughty girl.

(*The doorbell rings, once, twice, before they notice it. Do peeks outside.*)

DO: Kaa...! They're here. Do you hear me? Let go of her.

KAA: I can't.

DO: They've found you.

KAA: (*Letting go of Xenia*) ...They have? What should I do?

DO: The cellar door is open.

KAA: Should I run? Where to? They'll find me no matter where. I knew this would happen some day, it was only a matter of time...

DO: Run.

KAA: *(To Xenia)* Come with me.

DO: She can't. Not with the baby.

XENIA: I'll follow later. Run, like your mother says. Go underground somewhere, I'll find you, I'm sure.

DO: Out through the garden, under the bridge, over the road and into the forest. Now! Hurry...!

(The doorbell rings again. Kaa disappears, Do goes out to open the door.)

XENIA: ...My clothes. Where are they? What have you done with them?

ROSE: I want the wings.

XENIA: Give me that. Spoiled brat—you can't have everything you want! Give it to me, I don't want to stand here half naked when they come...

DO: *(Enters)* They want to speak to you.

XENIA: Me...?

DO: Take you with them.

XENIA: Take me where?

DO: I don't know. To ask you a few questions, they say. Check your papers.

XENIA: How could they know I was here? Who told them?

DO: I'll take care of Baby.

XENIA: I'll take her with me.

DO: That's not allowed.

XENIA: How long will they keep me there? Where's Kaa?

DO: Over the hills. Come, they're waiting.

SCENE 8

A cell in a prison.

Xenia is sitting on a bunk. She is wearing some sort of prison outfit.

XENIA: (*Looking at the various things*) Ceiling...lamp...light...rays. Radiance...shadow. Wall...table. What's it called?; wood...chair...seat, sit, sit down. Legs...chair legs...floor. Floor, floor...what's it called? What's it called? Linoleum! Linoleum... Bars...bars... And what do we have here? (*goes down on all fours to look more closely*) ...Something moving? ...A little guest? A foreign intruder, with wings and eyes on stalks. What are you doing here...? Just visiting...visiting me? That's very kind of you, checking in on me. Say hello to Pearl. How is she? And Kaa...? Where is he now? What's he up to? Is he pulling any strings...?

(*A key is thrust into a lock. Xenia gets up. The Young Man, a prison guard, enters with a plate of food.*)

THE YOUNG MAN: (*Putting the plate down*) Food.

XENIA: Not hungry.

THE YOUNG MAN: Should eat.

XENIA: Can't. I miss my daughter. What kind of people are you? Separating a mother and child. Barbarians! Throwbacks...!

THE YOUNG MAN: I don't have anything to do with that.

XENIA: Then tell them. I'm going crazy. Won't eat until I get to see her.

THE YOUNG MAN: Okay.

XENIA: (*Taking out a baby sock*) It's hers. Smells of her... (*sniffs the sock. Looks at the guard*) You're new.

THE YOUNG MAN: Yes.

XENIA: We've met before.

THE YOUNG MAN: Have we?

XENIA: In a forest... I had different clothes on, and I was with a young girl.

THE YOUNG MAN: Don't talk about that! Don't tell anyone!

XENIA: Okay, okay, I promise. Take it easy, it wasn't your fault.

THE YOUNG MAN: I couldn't stay there, after that. Thought I saw her all the time running around through the trees, kept hearing the sound she made, that whinnying.

XENIA: She would have rather been a horse, she said.

THE YOUNG MAN: Than a human? She was weird. All of them are weird, even the ones that look normal. But they're easy to catch, way too easy, they follow you around. Do whatever you want. Creepy.

XENIA: Who...?

THE YOUNG MAN: Them. They bring out the worst in you, they should be put to sleep, that would be more humane. Eat.

XENIA: (*Shakes her head*)

THE YOUNG MAN: It won't help you to starve, they don't care. Take a bite.

XENIA: No...

THE YOUNG MAN: It's our national specialty. Do you mind if I...?

XENIA: Dig in. Old hag—you called me that.

THE YOUNG MAN: Sorry. I didn't mean it.

XENIA: You were right, I am old. Can't remember what things are called. Words disappear...

THE YOUNG MAN: That's normal. Everybody gets that way, when they've been here a while.

XENIA: How long will I be here?

THE YOUNG MAN: Until they're finished with your case.

XENIA: If I didn't miss my husband and my daughter so much, I wouldn't have anything against staying here. I like this kind of room, bare, impersonal, like a hotel room.

THE YOUNG MAN: Except for the locked door.

XENIA: But even that is a relief—being forced to stay in one place. No longer having a name, just a number. But you wouldn't understand, you're young.

THE YOUNG MAN: I don't feel young.

XENIA: Dream of getting out in the world.

THE YOUNG MAN: No.

XENIA: Seeing the world!

THE YOUNG MAN: It's the same everywhere, that's what they say, those who have seen it.

XENIA: Don't listen to them! Travel yourself, there's so much to see, so many places, each more fantastic than the last, if you're open and have an eye for it, and you do, I can see you do.

THE YOUNG MAN: Really?

XENIA: What happens when they're finished with my case?

THE YOUNG MAN: They'll send you home.

XENIA: Home...?

THE YOUNG MAN: That's the usual procedure.

XENIA: And where's that...? What is home...? Is it something in you, or outside you? An address...? Rent! Has anyone paid my rent? Maybe I don't even have a place to live any more. Maybe they've annulled my contract, and sold or given away all my things. Maybe someone else is living there... I don't want to go back, my home is here now. I have a family.

THE YOUNG MAN: Doesn't make any difference.

XENIA: But doesn't that matter? Don't they care? What happens if you refuse?

THE YOUNG MAN: Then they'll make you.

XENIA: Home...home...a while ago that was all I wanted. But now...

THE YOUNG MAN: (*Seeing something*) What's that?

XENIA: Leave it alone.

THE YOUNG MAN: An insect?

XENIA: My friend.

THE YOUNG MAN: A cockroach?

XENIA: Don't...!

THE YOUNG MAN: (*Stomping on it*) Sorry, but I had to. We have to be careful, it could be a new species, a threat to the native species. Happens all the time. They come in with your clothes, or in someone's hair, or maybe they're in suitcases and get transported over great distances, to the other side of the world, where they settle down and adapt, start to reproduce, and wipe out all the others. Are there any more?

XENIA: No.

THE YOUNG MAN: Thanks for the food.

XENIA: You're welcome.

(The Young Man leaves. The door is locked.)

SCENE 9

In the cell, half-light.

Xenia is sleeping. The door is opened, Girl 4 is shoved in, and the door is locked again. She gropes her way over to the bunk where Xenia is sleeping and sits on the edge. She lets her hands run over Xenia's body.

XENIA: (*Wakes up. Lies still*) ...Who are you?

GIRL 4: Your new cellmate.

XENIA: What are you doing?

GIRL 4: Looking at you.

XENIA: ...With your hands?

GIRL 4: Lie still.

XENIA: It tickles. Are you a foreigner too?

GIRL 4: No.

XENIA: Then why are you here? What are you charged with?

GIRL 4: Murder. (*laughs*) Gotcha! No, begging without a permit. Relax, then it goes faster.

XENIA: You're very thorough.

GIRL 4: Have to be, in order to get the image right. Sorry I woke you.

XENIA: Doesn't matter, I was having a nightmare. Dreamt that I saw a woman standing on a frozen lake, half naked, thin, with long, stringy hair. The ice wasn't thick enough, I knew. She'd fall through if she moved. She turned halfway around and looked at me. Instead of a nose she had a long, thick trunk like an elephant...

GIRL 4: (*Laughs*)

XENIA: Let's turn on the light; I can't sleep anyway.

GIRL 4: I thought it was on.

XENIA: (*Turns on the light, looks at Girl 4*) ...Another one! How many of you are there?

GIRL 4: Us? Now? Two or three hundred I should imagine. Some people say thousands, but they're exaggerating.

XENIA: Exactly alike.

GIRL 4: Except for the different mistakes and defects we have that make each of us unique. One of us for example has a head that is so big and heavy that she can't lift it, another one has a head as little as a fist. One of us came to the world with four legs, but no arms, another one was just the opposite.

XENIA: That's horrible!

GIRL 4: One has no skin and has to lie in water all the time.

XENIA: I don't want to hear.

GIRL 4: There's one who doesn't have a tongue, another one who doesn't have ears. Me, I'm lucky, the only thing I'm missing is eyes. When I was little I was always scratching holes in my face because I thought they had to be there somewhere, under my skin, but they weren't.

XENIA: It's criminal!

GIRL 4: We don't complain. Without us they won't be able to make the perfect human. We are stages along the way, necessary failures. Someday they'll do it, they say, and it won't be long now. Then she will come into this world, and all our suffering will have been worth it.

XENIA: That poor girl...

GIRL 4: Oh, she won't be alone, there'll be many more just like her, and they'll show all of you what real love is, what compassion is. Justice. They'll stop all the wars and conflicts.

XENIA: All of *us*?

GIRL 4: The unique ones. As long as that lasts.

XENIA: What do you mean?

GIRL 4: Watch out for the guards, don't let them take you and pluck something from you. Get it to grow in a dish, divide into new cells, then divide again and again, until you suddenly run into yourself on all the streets.

XENIA: Would they do that?

GIRL 4: They'll do anything. Nobody dares use a public toilet anymore, for fear that somebody might be collecting stuff and start to make it grow.

XENIA: I'm going to be sick...

THE YOUNG MAN: (*Enters. Kicks Girl 4*) Move!

GIRL 4: Ah! You don't have to kick. We are supposed to be treated like people, that's the law.

THE YOUNG MAN: Ghosts, that's what you all are. Freaks!

GIRL 4: Some day they'll worship us as divine prophets! We'll be carried around on pillows.

THE YOUNG MAN: You'd like that.

GIRL 4: Some places they've already started.

THE YOUNG MAN: Well, not here. Turn around, so I don't have to look at your face.

GIRL 4: It reminds you of someone, maybe?

THE YOUNG MAN: Watch your mouth.

GIRL 4: What happened out there, in the forest? Were you too rough? Did she die?

THE YOUNG MAN: Did you tell?!

XENIA: Not a word.

GIRL 4: We have a secret channel. We feel what happens to each other, when one of us comes to harm.

THE YOUNG MAN: Shut up! *(to Xenia)* Get your stuff.

XENIA: Am I going...home...?

THE YOUNG MAN: They won't take you.

XENIA: Can they refuse?

THE YOUNG MAN: Nobody wants you, so you have to stay here. You've been granted temporary asylum.

GIRL 4: Don't go! When you leave he'll attack me. Do to me the same thing he did to her...

THE YOUNG MAN: Shut your hole!

GIRL 4: ...kill me.

THE YOUNG MAN: *(Grabs Girl 4)* I'll shut you up good...!

XENIA: Let go of her.

THE YOUNG MAN: Weren't you leaving? The door's open.

XENIA: Leave her alone...!

(She tries to push the guard away from Girl 4. They start fighting. Xenia gets a bloody nose. The guard suddenly doubles over in pain.)

THE YOUNG MAN: *(Moaning in pain)* Aw, aw, aw! Where did you learn that?

XENIA: I took classes. *(takes his handcuffs and cuffs him. Grabs the girl)* Let's go... *(leads her out)*

THE YOUNG MAN: *(Yelling)* Stop them...! Old hag! I meant it, I meant it; you fucking bitch. Aw, aw, aw...

SCENE 10

In Do's house.

Xenia with the baby. She has visible signs of her fight with the guard..

XENIA: Little precious...! You're smiling! Do you remember me? Happy to see me? My baby, my dear, dear little girl. My how you've grown. Learned how to grasp things...! It's so quiet here—where are they? Where's Kaa? And Do? Rose...? Have they all gone and left you alone...?

DO: *(Enters. She is now very, very old)* I'm here.

XENIA: *(turns around, gasps)* ...Do?

DO: Yes.

XENIA: Is it you?

DO: I've aged.

XENIA: That went fast.

DO: It does, when you go off the cure. Each day adds several months to your age, you become old, really old, very fast. First your vision dims, then your hearing goes. Then your bones collapse, teeth fall out and your memory is shot. Actually the memory part isn't so bad...

XENIA: (*Looking at the baby*) She has two new teeth.

DO: Three. One upper. Look at me, if you dare.

XENIA: (*Looks at Do*)

DO: Do I look awful?

XENIA: No...no worse than me.

DO: You're lying.

XENIA: Yes.

DO: You also get a beard. Long hairs in your face and on your chin, which you pluck every day. Soon they'll start growing out of my nose and ears. If men only knew what we go through, what we have to hide so as not to scare them. I'm glad Kaa can't see it.

XENIA: Where is he?

DO: Kaa? Haven't you heard?

XENIA: What happened? Tell me!

DO: He's dead.

XENIA: Oh, oh...!

DO: One morning, not long after they came for you, he went out—even though I begged him not to. Down the street two men appeared out of nowhere; they came closer and closer, stopped him and it looked like they asked him something. Suddenly he collapsed. I ran out, the two men were gone, not a soul to see anywhere. I cried for help, but no one heard, tried to drag him back to the house, but he was too heavy. He bled all the while...stained everything red.

XENIA: Kaa...! No...!

DO: Don't cry, it ruins your skin. Salt water is the worst.

XENIA: What does it matter? Who will look at my skin now? Who cares if I'm attractive or ugly? I want to die...

DO: Then who'll take care of her? I'm too old. It was good that you came when you did. She can already sit, with support. Soon enough she'll be crawling around.

XENIA: He was supposed to be her father. We were going to be a family!

DO: Stop it.

XENIA: I can't...

DO: Pull yourself together. I have, and you can too.

XENIA: Was that why you went off the cure?

DO: Who am I supposed to look young for now?

XENIA: Where's Rose?

DO: Ran away. She forgot to take her legs, the little fool. She could have learned to walk, with a little effort, but she'd rather roll. I put a little food out for her each evening, in case she should be passing by. Once in a while it's gone. I'm glad you're back, I don't like living alone.

XENIA: Who says I'm staying?

DO: Where will you go, with the baby? Plenty of room here. We can help each other.

XENIA: You turned me in.

DO: To save Kaa. I told them about the wings.

XENIA: On my jacket? Why would they be interested?

DO: Why wouldn't they? They promised me they wouldn't hurt Kaa if they could take you instead.

XENIA: A horse trade?

DO: You'd do the same for her. A mother will do anything.

XENIA: I thought you became a better person when you got a child.

DO: Just more ruthless. Don't look at me that way. I've removed all the mirrors, because I couldn't stand the sight. I hate old people.

XENIA: Me too.

DO: Especially women.

XENIA: They're the worst.

DO: Always showing their weaknesses. Showing off their wounds.

XENIA: Impossible to please. The coffee's too hot, or the tea's too cold. "No, I'd rather have a window seat."

DO: You'll be like that too.

XENIA: I know.

DO: Sit down.

XENIA: She likes it best when I walk around.

DO: You shouldn't let them decide, they'll become tyrants.

XENIA: Not her, she's so happy and content. So easy.

DO: Smiles at everyone, just like Rose, when she was a baby. Resembles her more and more, of course except for the legs.

XENIA: She's got a bruise...

DO: It wasn't me. Do you think I could...!?

XENIA: Sorry, sorry. You get so suspicious.

DO: Sit down. My head can't take so much motion.

XENIA: *(Sits down. Looks at the baby. Smiles)* ...Listen, she's talking! Trying to tell me something.

DO: So am I.

XENIA: ...Those tiny little sounds, aren't they cute? "Aachoo!" *(delighted)* She sneezed! Wasn't that cute? An ittsy-bittsy baby sneeze! ...And one more! Now, now, no more, otherwise mommy will start to worry. Oh, the scent...! Those soft cheeks. That perfect little face. Look, she's kicking...! And waving her arms! Like she's trying to fly... *(sweats, mops her brow)* My cheeks...

DO: What a color.

XENIA: She's warm. It's like having a pile of hot coals in my lap.

SCENE 11

In Do's house.

Do is sitting, Xenia is pacing back and forth with the crying baby.

XENIA: There now, there now...

DO: It'll soon be light.

XENIA: There now, there now...

DO: You've been going back and forth with her all night long.

XENIA: *(To the baby)* Want me to sing for you...?

DO: Only interested in the baby. Don't see or hear anything else.

XENIA: You mean you.

DO: That's what it's like getting old. Nobody notices you, you might as well be invisible. When I see a young woman, I wish I could switch bodies with her. Or even with a young man, who cares? It could be fun. But who would take my body? Who would want this bag of bones?

XENIA: You stayed young a lot longer than most people.

DO: I can never get enough, that's my problem. I want to live long enough to see you get old, and the baby too. All of you! Where's Kaa?

XENIA: Kaa...?

DO: On his way home I should think. He mustn't see me like this! What should I do? Help me! Throw a blanket over me! A sheet...!

XENIA: Kaa is dead.

DO: (*Confused*) ...Dead?

XENIA: You're dehydrated. You have to drink.

DO: I'm not thirsty. You're not supposed to drink at my age.

XENIA: Do it anyway. (*puts a glass of water by her*) Here... (*looking at the baby, who has stopped crying*) At last...! (*lays the baby down carefully*)

DO: Is she sleeping? Wonderful.

(*The baby starts crying again.*)

XENIA: Oh God.

DO: Let her cry. This is a test. If she wins, she'll be the stronger of you two. That's not healthy for a child. It makes them anxious.

XENIA: There has to be something wrong.

DO: She can't be hungry.

XENIA: And doesn't need changing. Maybe she's getting a new tooth?

DO: While the last of mine are falling out. (*Xenia goes to pick up the baby*) Don't...

XENIA: I can't let her cry.

DO: Then let me. (*picks up the baby*)

XENIA: She's my child!

DO: Is she?

XENIA: She feels safest with me. (*takes the baby from Do*)

DO: Are you going to carry her around every time she gets a little bored?

XENIA: That's the way we do it where I come from.

DO: Here we put them down every once in a while. Let them cry, it won't kill them.

XENIA: I would go to the end of the world with her, if it would make her happy. My daughter will not be unhappy.

DO: (*Sings to herself. Perhaps a bandy song, or a love song*)

XENIA: What's that song?

DO: Don't you know it? Where's my mask, where's my weights? I want to start training again. Start a new cure! Do you hear me, Rose?

XENIA: Xenia. Rose isn't here.

DO: Xenia? Who are you? Where did you come from? You have to help me.

XENIA: With what?

DO: (*Whispers*) The little girl's room!

XENIA: You'll have to wait until she falls asleep.

DO: Then I'll just do it in my pants.

XENIA: You're not three years old you know!

DO: I'm not...? I want my mommy.

XENIA: Stop it! I'm tired. We both are, and too old...! Drink your water, now. The whole glass.

DO: (*Drinking*) You're so mean.

XENIA: Would you like to sit with her?

DO: Yes, please.

XENIA: You mustn't drop her.

DO: No. (*rocks the baby gently. Sings her bandy song*)

XENIA: Oh, my arms.

(*The baby is quiet.*)

DO: She likes my song better! She's burning hot. Her eyes are shining...

XENIA: What does that mean?

DO: Fever. Get her clothes off.

XENIA: Off?

DO: That's how we do it here. All these tiny strings and buttons...my hands are shaking, I can't...

XENIA: (*Takes the baby and starts undressing her*) Look, another bruise...! Bigger than the first one. And another. Every time I touch her, I make a bruise...!

DO: And you thought it was me...!

XENIA: How far is it to the nearest doctor?

DO: Pretty far.

XENIA: Do you know the how to get there?

DO: Yes.

XENIA: Give me the blanket. (*wraps the baby in the blanket*) Let's go—hurry!

SCENE 12

A bench outside a hospital.

Do and Xenia with the baby.

XENIA: Are we supposed to just sit here, with a sick baby? Under the open sky?

DO: We were lucky to find a bench.

XENIA: It could start raining.

DO: Not a cloud.

XENIA: One doctor for all these people. Why don't they call in more?

DO: There aren't any more. There's just one doctor at a time. When he or she is gone, you get a new one.

XENIA: Aren't there any outside the hospital system?

DO: No.

XENIA: What do you do when it's an emergency?

DO: Wait.

XENIA: That's crazy.

DO: That's the way it's always been. It promotes natural selection.

XENIA: Children should to be taken first.

DO: No, they shouldn't.

XENIA: She's trembling.

DO: Then her fever's going up. Pack her in tight.

XENIA: I liked it better when she cried.

DO: She's saving her energy.

XENIA: She's got another bruise, on her cheek, where I kissed her. I don't dare touch her. I hope it goes away, don't want her to be blue the rest of her life.

DO: As long as that lasts.

XENIA: What?

DO: Nothing.

XENIA: She's in pain. A cramp...! I wish I could be sick, and not her. What kind of place is this, where they let children suffer? There it was again, a spasm! What should we do?

DO: Be patient, that's all.

XENIA: You look tired.

DO: It took a while to get here.

XENIA: She's lying so still. So limp. How long do we have to wait? I can pay extra, pay them everything I have to get in.

DO: You don't have anything. And it wouldn't help.

XENIA: (*To the baby*) Little sweetie...soon it'll be our turn. Then the nice doctor will give you something and make you well again... Your eyes...why are you looking at me like that? Like I was far away. Or you were. Breathing so fast...? Way too fast! Do! Wake up, Do...! How do we know when it's our turn? Do they come out and get us? Do they know where we're sitting?

DO: They'll find us.

XENIA: (*To the baby*) Fight, sweetie, don't give up. There are so many places to see. So many things we'll do together. I'll show you things, the place I come from... She's not breathing!

DO: Move her arms! Lift her up...

XENIA: Breathe! Come on, breathe! What should we do?

DO: Nothing. There's nothing more to do.

XENIA: Go get someone, tell them to run! Get going, what are you waiting for?

DO: (*Looking at the baby*) ...It's done. She's gone.

XENIA: My baby...her hands are cold. I can't smell her anymore.

DO: (*Lets her hand glide over the baby's face*)

XENIA: What are you doing?!

DO: Closing her eyes.

XENIA: Don't touch her...! Who gave you permission? She should look at the sky, the trees! The birds, hopping from branch to branch. The little ones with the red and yellow feathers. She's like Rose, that's why. There is something wrong with them, all of them, and their children too. They weren't supposed to live. (*bending over the baby, rocking it gently*) My little precious, you're free now... (*hears a sound, lifts her head and looks up*) ...Look! That white stripe across the sky...! (*pointing*) There...! Can you see it?

DO: (*Looking up*) Yes.

XENIA: That silver arrow! That's a plane...!

DO: (*staring*) Is it?

XENIA: (*Following it with her eyes. Gets up*) Will you come with me?

DO: I'm too old. I'll stay here.

XENIA: (*Giving the baby to Do*) Take care of her.

DO: I will.

XENIA: (*Exits*)

SCENE 13

Somewhere in the desert, in the middle of the day.

Xenia staggers in with her shoes in hand. A young, veiled nomad girl with a small child on her back looks at Xenia from a distance. Xenia stumbles and falls.

XENIA: (*To the girl*) ...What are you staring at?

NOMAD GIRL: (*Doesn't answer*)

XENIA: So do something; help me up. Can't you see that I've fallen down?

NOMAD GIRL: (*Helps Xenia on her feet*)

XENIA: Is this the first time you've seen a foreigner?

NOMAD GIRL: (*Nodding*) My aunt says your eyes are shifty and that you are always tearing your hair out.

XENIA: Well tell your aunt she's right. I thought I was alone out here. The only living creature in the whole desert. The sand is burning. I can't stand having shoes on, or going barefoot either.

NOMAD GIRL: It's worse at this time of day, when the sun is highest.

XENIA: It bores right through you... (*shudders*) I'll freeze. Are there scorpions here?

NOMAD GIRL: Lots of them, they bury themselves and come out when it's not as hot.

XENIA: They're pretty smart. (*Looking at the girl's clothes*) You must be hot inside all that.

NOMAD GIRL: It protects.

XENIA: Then I wish I had an outfit like that. (*brushing away sand*) It gets into everything, eyes, ears, between your teeth, in your nose... (*notices the child on the girl's back*) ...Is that a child?

NOMAD GIRL: (*Nodding*) My sister.

XENIA: You sure do pack them in well. I'm dizzy...have been walking forever, many, many miles, following that white stripe there... (*pointing up at the sky*) Actually there's two of them, one from each of the engines, they get squished together. Where are you going?

NOMAD GIRL: Home.

XENIA: And where's that?

NOMAD GIRL: (*Pointing*) Over there. You can see the tents...

XENIA: Those black blankets, strung up like sails? I see some people in front.

NOMAD GIRL: My family.

XENIA: It looks like they're floating.

NOMAD GIRL: That's the heat.

XENIA: I'm thirsty, do you have anything to drink?

NOMAD GIRL: I just gave her the last of it.

XENIA: Do you know where I can find water?

NOMAD GIRL: On the other side of the reddish sand dunes over there, and before you get to the golden dunes on the other side, there's a well, but I don't know if it's dry or not.

XENIA: My lips are cracked...doesn't it ever rain here?

NOMAD GIRL: Once every hundred years, my uncle says. His father saw it; the whole desert started blooming.

XENIA: I would love to see that! There must be water here somewhere; there are plants here, small plants with thick leaves and thorns. Underground springs. I've tried digging with my shoe, but I guess I didn't get deep enough. Over there! There's something... A lake, right over there...! (*starts to go*)

NOMAD GIRL: Wait!

XENIA: And beyond it...a city!

NOMAD GIRL: That's a mirage.

XENIA: Impossible! I see it so clearly! The tall buildings...power plants! The towers and domes...! I recognize it! It's what I've been looking for...!

NOMAD GIRL: Fata morgana...

XENIA: Are you saying that it's not really there? Am I the only one who can see it?

NOMAD GIRL: No, no. But it's very far away.

XENIA: How far?

NOMAD GIRL: A thousand miles. They say it's like a photograph, carried through the air.

XENIA: Thousand miles...but it's there. It *is* there...! (*laughs*) I thought I'd never see it again! I'll just push on, until I get there, sooner or later?

NOMAD GIRL: Yes.

XENIA: Maybe I'll rest a bit first.

NOMAD GIRL: You can follow me.

XENIA: Where to? Over to those black tents? What will your family say?

NOMAD GIRL: Nothing. They'll give you something to eat and drink. A place to sleep.

XENIA: Let me borrow an outfit like yours?

NOMAD GIRL: Yes.

XENIA: How long can I stay?

NOMAD GIRL: As long as you like.

XENIA: They wouldn't have anything against that?

NOMAD GIRL: The more we are the better, my uncle always says. They would also like to meet a foreigner. Come... (*They start to go.*)

XENIA: Look, camels...are they real, or a mirage?

NOMAD GIRL: Real. Ours.

XENIA: A whole caravan. They don't have to drink, they have enough in their humps for a long time. The people following them, are they your family too?

NOMAD GIRL: Yes.

XENIA: You have a big family; that must be nice. What's that sticking up from the sand over there? A boulder?

NOMAD GIRL: I don't know.

XENIA: Looks like it could be something from an airplane. The tail section. But where's the rest of it...? (*turns around*) It's still there...the city. I wonder what they'll say when they see me? Will they recognize me at all? It's burning... I'm looking forward to the evening, when it's cooler. When I can see the stars, that must be fantastic.

NOMAD GIRL: You can sit outside, around the fire with us, and look up at them. Get someone to tell you where the different stars are and what they're called.

(End of play)

Staging the Spanish Golden Age: Translation and Performance

Kathleen Jeffs, Oxford University Press, 2018

Reviewed by Jean Graham-Jones, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Kathleen Jeffs' recent monograph, *Staging the Spanish Golden Age: Translation and Performance*, is a welcome addition to the growing number of studies of the period's theatre in contemporary performance (e.g., *The Comedia in English: Translation and Performance*, ed. Susan Paun de García and Donald Larson [Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008]; *The Spanish Golden Age in English: Perspectives on Performance*, ed. Catherine Boyle and David Johnston [London: Oberon, 2007]). Even more welcome is its sustained engagement with translation in and as performance practice, and there it complements Geraldine Brodie's recent study, *The Translator on Stage* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2018). Both books examine up-close the artistic complex too often reduced to a singular translator, a reduction that Brodie counters in her detailed study of eight London productions, all English-language translations of international texts, that premiered during the city's spring 2005 season. Jeffs' object of study takes an even more circumscribed focus—the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2004-05 "Spanish Season"—to argue for theatrical collaboration in any successful production of a translated text. While practitioners of translation in performance might consider this a commonsensical argument, Jeffs' detailed analysis of translation's involvement in and contribution to every stage in the design, selection, rehearsal, and performance process provides a timely and productive model for translation as artistic collaboration and textual interpretation.

Staging the Spanish Golden Age benefits from its author's own collaborative involvement. In her official role as academic script consultant for the season, Jeffs worked to develop a "translation and communication methodology that would feed the actors' and directors' creative processes" (1). Calling herself a "participant observer" and functioning variously as literal translator, dramaturg, communications specialist, and intermediary between director and translator, Jeffs was present in the rehearsal room, interviewed many of the season's participating artists, provided program notes, attended performances in Stratford and London, and served as company translator during its Madrid performances. First entering as literal translator for poet Philip Osment's version of Cervantes's *Pedro de Urdemalas* (*Pedro, the Great Pretender*, directed by Mike Alfreds), she worked as assistant dramaturg on Lope de Vega's *El perro del hortelano* (*The Dog in the Manger*, translated by David Johnston and directed by Laurence Boswell) and as researcher-period specialist for *Pedro*.

Jeffs structures her book chronologically, beginning with chapter one's recounting of the extended process of creating the 2004-05 season, initiated and overseen by Boswell. Translation played a key role in play selection, as literal translations and treatments were commissioned for multiple plays after recommendation from academic consultants. After much deliberation over dozens of plays, four were selected, with the other two being Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *La casa de los empeños* (translated by Catherine Boyle as *House of Desires*, directed by Nancy Meckler) and Tirso de Molina's *La venganza de Tamar* (*Tamar's Revenge*, translated by James Fenton and directed by Simon Usher). A fifth text, Calderón de la Barca's *La hija del aire* (*Daughter of the Air*, translated by Sarah Woods), received a staged reading that was subsequently aired on BBC Radio 3.

Chapters two through four take the reader into the rehearsal room to observe translation's multiple interventions (with five appendices providing supporting details). The second chapter examines in depth the various strategies employed in the collaborative process: translators' textual strategies and script-editing negotiations, directors' and actors' interpretative engagements, and the ever-shifting processes in shaping a translated text for performance. Chapter three delves into the ever-present question, when translating *comedias*, of verse. Here, Jeffs' comparative study of the four staged plays offers insights into four very different approaches to translating the period's polymetric verse, ranging from Johnston's focus on pace and line length to Fenton's modulated rhythms, to Boyle's storytelling orality, and to Osment's rendering of Spanish polymetrics in English. The productions' repertory-style casting meant that actors engaged with multiple translation approaches, and Jeffs describes those engagements in rehearsal, noting moments when verse structures influenced performance and staging choices, and in the process highlighting how polymetry is much more than a literary question.

Chapter four shares other rehearsal discoveries, here through the *comedia's* so-called types. Jeffs takes on the complexities abounding in period characterizations and the performance challenges in representing them today. An examination of multiple pairs of *gracioso*-servants and their masters in *The Dog in the Manger* and *Pedro, the Great Pretender* demonstrates the remarkable variety of characterization opportunities in a seemingly standard typology. Cervantes's town mayor exemplifies the challenge for translating a period-specific figure for contemporary audiences, while Lope's Diana offers an opportunity for both revisiting a *comedia* type as psychological character and digging into the problematics of translating the period's concept of honor for today's stage.

Chapter five moves out of rehearsals and into the Stratford and London performances by examining the four productions' quite varied metatheatrical approaches and their reception. As a spectator who attended all four performances in Stratford, I found Jeffs' critical description of moments of positive, negative, and confused audience engagements to resonate with my own. Reception and audiences also play major role in the book's concluding chapter, which reflects on the demonstrably positive impact of the RSC season on UK stages.

Through detailed description, thoughtful analysis, and critical reflection, Jeffs' book delivers on its objective to posit "a model for future productions of the *comedia* in English." Where this US-based reviewer diverges from her proposed model is in its reification of the assumed divide between the scholar and the theatre artist. Increasingly, such hierarchical vestiges are being eradicated by those of us who consider theatrical translation to be an artistic practice intrinsically linked to our other artistic practices as playwrights, actors, designers, and directors. And while Jeffs makes a case for the value of the "literal translation" (defined by Jeffs as a translation intended only for reading and not acting) within the collaborative process (indeed, three of the five RSC translators worked from literal versions), she passes too quickly over what I consider to be the major limitations of the largely UK-based practice: unlike Jeffs, most literal translators are left out of the collaborative process, and they remain under-recognized (indeed, often unnamed—something Jeffs takes laudable pains to rectify) and under-paid, as they are excluded from the box-office percentages afforded the credited, higher-profile translators. Such quibbles aside, Jeffs has provided us with a functional collaborative model that we should continue to revisit and develop. *Staging the Spanish Golden Age* serves as a detailed, critical

record of an important translation event for the English-speaking stage and as an insightful provocation for future theatrical-translational collaborations.

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***The Mountain Girl from La Vera (La Serrana de la Vera)* by Luis Vélez de Guevara
Translated with a Critical Introduction by Harley Erdman, Liverpool University Press, 2019
Reviewed by Kathleen Jeffs, Gonzaga University**

Here is an engrossing and troubling play in a translation crying out for contemporary performance. In fact, this translation was published in the midst of the performance process as Harley Erdman and Gina Kaufmann also adapted this play for the University of Massachusetts Department of Theatre, performed under the title *Wild Thing* in February 2019. The version under review here, in facing pages with the Spanish as is the custom of Aris & Phillips in the Hispanic Classics series, is built for the reader in conversation with the Spanish but is clearly written with an eye (and ear) for creating moments for actors onstage.

The introduction is an authoritative study of the playwright and his world, sources and contexts, historical events, including a critical analysis, textual and stage history, and bibliography. The translator's note includes an acknowledgement to C. George Peale for allowing his and William R. Manson's Spanish edition to appear in this work, noting that the editorial decisions are theirs for the Spanish. Erdman has included scene breaks and settings, and repositioned stage directions on the English side, also making suggestions for where a company might reasonably trim the text for performance. He offers a useful overview of his approach, which is to write for performers. "The side-by-side bilingual format of this series inspires me with the hope that my version, while containing every idea in Vélez's play, can stand on its own, facing it across the page as an equal, different from but not subordinate to the original. Think of it as a sibling that has adapted itself to thrive in another set of circumstances rather than a distant mirror of something more authentic" (28). This is consistent in his approach to the polymetry, 85% of which in this play is in eight-syllable forms such as *redondillas* and *romance*. He has not written the English in metered verse, but instead explains, "I have committed myself to keeping the line length short for this same 85% of the play, using lines of 7-9 syllables, generally speak-able in four beats. I have tried to maintain attention to the integrity of the line as a unit of thought meaning" (29). The translation is mostly unrhymed apart from some internal and end rhyme woven into the rhetoric "whenever the opportunity presented itself without a risk of twisting the meaning" (29). Erdman takes inspiration from translators such as Boswell, Boyle, and Johnston, who write their translations of *comedias* for actors in the UK, playing at the Bath Theatre Royal and the Royal Shakespeare Company, among other places. Erdman's approach foregrounds meaning as the highest value, endeavoring "never to sacrifice meaning for a turn of phrase" (29).

The plot is true-to-form *comedia* complexity, with delightfully unexpected twists around every corner. The play is structured like tragicomedies such as *El caballero de Olmedo* (c. 1620), full of festival and rural tradition, peppered with comedic tropes until the fatal turn to tragedy. Gila, the "moza varonil" ("He-Girl") (152-3), falls in love, only to be seduced and betrayed by the object of her admiration and affection, a noble Captain who promises marriage but abandons her. She retreats to the wilderness where she transforms into the *Serrana* of legends, killing any man who approaches her until she is finally able to kill the seducer himself. Bereft of her honor, and already reviled as a manly woman, "lobo y zorra en la cautela" ("A girly fox, a mangy he-wolf") (120-1), what future can she have other than as a *serrana*, fundamentally excluded? In the society dominated by the "Reyes Católicos"

("Catholic Kings") and rigid code of honor in which Gila lives (this play was written in 1613, but is set earlier), one could argue that the Captain killed her first; deceiving her out of her virginity strips her of any possible identity and wrests away her future. All the typical gender-inversions and questions arise that one would expect from a *comedia* in the *mujer varonil* tradition, but this time, there is a dark twist: Gila is a tragic figure, brutally executed for her crimes. Pierced by arrows in her San Sebastian-esque execution, we see the public performance of what had been her inner reality of a death by a thousand cuts, an image resonant with many who experience "failed sociality" (21, Erdman quoting Heather Love's *Looking Backward* 22).

The hierarchies of gender and power are sustained and undermined in Lacanian fashion (Erdman quotes Henry Sullivan, arguing that "the fundamental element underlying all *comedias* is Lacanian: the 'unresolvable dialectic' between Desire and the Law (333)" (14). Vélez pulls no punches and takes his fight straight to the Law's top enforcers: Queen Isabella herself expresses a bootless sympathy for Gila as she faces her fate at the hands of the "Brotherhood," a "powerful rural police force" whose prerogatives even fall outside of royal control (253). It is more than just 'patriarchy' that Gila threatens, but society itself, and Erdman persuasively argues that Gila has to burn down her own future in order to exist in the present. "Logically, the only space from which she can realize her commitment to no future is outside the space of society, in the sierra, from which she takes her epithet that gives name to the play" (22).

As the *Serrana*, Erdman points out that the *way* Gila kills is meaningful. She bloodlessly and rather perfunctorily throws men off a cliff, then marks the places with crosses. "By murdering not only the guilty but the innocent, she renounces narrative temporality, relinquishing her own future and any possibility of pardon or social reintegration. Indeed, she embraces this role and accepts her fate. Her war, after all, is not just with the Captain but everyone around her" (22). This is what is so moving about her situation; even from the beginning, she is utterly friendless and unaccepted. Her cousin Madalena, the closest she gets to a friend, says "Erró la naturaleza, / Gila, en no herte varón" ("Nature should have made you a man") (78-9). This is what everyone, including Gila herself, wishes; not that she could be accepted in her queer state of being, but the acknowledgement that nature has made a mistake, that she is an aberration instead of a known quantity. The tragedy rests not in her choices, nor in her father's choices when raising her, nor in the Captain's vindictive seduction of her, but in the fact that her entire existence is a tragedy from the start: she is doomed before she even *does* anything. (She is to gender as the South African writer Trevor Noah speaks of his mixed race in South Africa: "Born a Crime.") This is, I think, what makes the play so captivating; Gila's unacceptability is built into the situation of the "Catholic Kings" whom Gila idolizes, and whose abdication of authority to a rule by the local Hermandad (Brotherhood) ensures she is eliminated. Ferdinand and Isabella abdicate their power to step out of their role as judges, conquerors and enforcers of the faith, even when their hearts suggest another course of action. King Fernando recognizes Gila too late (she had craved the royals' recognition in the first act when it was denied her by the news that the Prince had been wounded in battle). Measuredly, the King asks her why she is killing men, and then, seeming to understand her logic, he behaves somewhat sympathetically to her with a non-committal warning: "Serrana bella, / guárdate de mi Hermandad" ("Lovely serrana, / Beware my Holy Brotherhood")

(198-9). King Fernando calmly orders her to spare Don Rodrigo (Girón, of famous nobility, known to *comedia* readers and audiences for appearing in *Fuente Ovejuna*), whom Gila holds at gunpoint. Acquiescing, Gila points out that the King thus bears a responsibility to her, to which he magnanimously replies: “Esa es deuda / que yo os la agradezco y todo” (“I acknowledge this great debt”) (200-1). The King shows her this respect and treats her as he would a nobleman, not like a “Mountain Girl” (or “Wild Thing,” as Erdman’s performance translation for Amherst dubs her). Yet he does not call off the Brotherhood, allowing himself to appear to be unable or unwilling to control them. The law of the land is that the Brotherhood will execute her unless she specifically appeals to the mercy of the King and Queen, and everyone is aware of this practice, down to the little girl Pascuala, who laments that the royals’ entrance happens the moment *after* Gila dies:

MADALENA ¡Pascuala, estos son los Reyes!	MADALENA The King and Queen are entering!
PASCUALA ¡Oh, si primero llegaran!	PASCUALA They came a moment too late!
MADALENA Adrede llegan agora, porque quieren que su Santa Hermandad castigue. (244)	MADALENA It’s all with express intention, So the Brotherhood could inflict Their punishment upon her first. (245)

The Spanish is clear that the “intention” is that of the royals; “su” in Madalena’s reply indicates that the royals are perceived to see this group as belonging to them, “theirs.” This reveals that the apparent sympathy or respect Fernando showed to Gila in his interaction with her was, ultimately, empty courtesy. His sentiments did not entail any actual action or willingness to engage with the root of her suffering. It is an interesting comment on the complex duty of monarch-as-judge, who must act according to the letter of the law (i.e. murder cannot be allowed to go unpunished, no matter how sympathetic one might be to the murderer’s circumstances, or how justified the motivation). The King thus fails, in some ways, to enact true justice, paradoxically admiring her but not enough to prevent her annihilation at the hands of popular justice.

The Mountain Girl from La Vera is full of ideas to engage the brains of the audience, but its true aim is at the heart. The moment that really sticks with me after a reading of the play is Gila’s inversion of Christ’s on-the-cross forgiveness of his oppressors, when she refuses to give the society that both created and destroys her the benefit of the doubt that “they know not what they do.” Instead, Gila shames her father, inviting him to draw in close only to bite off his ear in a horrific inversion of Simon Peter’s assault on Malchus in the garden of Gethsemane. As her father stands in shock and pain, holding his ear, Gila chastises him for failing to nip her masculine behavior in the bud:

GILA: [...] Si tú usaras rigor conmigo al principio,	GILA: [...] Had you shown more discipline When I was young and first inclined
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<p>de mi inclinación gallarda yo no llegara a este extremo. Escarmienten en tus canas, y en mí, los que tienen hijos. GIRALDO: Confieso que es justa paga a mi descuido. DON JUAN: ¡Estraña cosa! Subid con ella. <i>(Éntrese con ella agora, y queden PASCUALA y MADALENA.)</i> MADALENA: Pascuala, ¿has visto tal cosa? PASCUALA: El viejo sangre y lágrimas derrama. (242 and 244)</p>	<p>To a daring way of life, I would not be here today: Let your gray locks be a searing Example to anyone daring To raise children in this world, And let me be an example as well. GIRALDO: I confess, it's what I deserve for My neglect of you. DON JUAN: Remarkable! Bring her on up over here! <i>(Don Juan exits with Gila. Pascuala and Madalena stay.)</i> MADALENA: Have you ever seen such a thing? PASCUALA: The old man's dripping blood and tears. (243 and 245)</p>
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Gila's complicity in her own oppression by turning the blame on the person entrusted with raising her is an arrestingly sad capitulation to an inhumane social order.

Other plays from the Spanish Golden Age have shown gender and sexuality to carry consequences proportional to the form: *La Serrana* ends in tragedy, but comedies also bring the complexities of gender identity to light. The parallels between Gila and Hipólita, the heroine of Guillén de Castro's *La fuerza de la costumbre* (*The Force of Habit*) (c. 1610-15) (also published in a dual-language edition with Aris & Phillips in 2019), are striking, though Castro's play ends as a comedy with social reintegration and requisite matrimony. Some of the moments are interesting to compare, such as how their suitors' admiration of the "lady's" strength and battle-hardiness inspires sexual desire in the men. Performative aspects of gender expression associated conventions of dress, such as the wearing of high shoes such as 'chapines', is referred to in both plays, and gender identification as a process of learning / education is also explored in both plays. Recent performances of both texts bear out a *zeitgeist* of interest in these themes on contemporary stages.

The Spanish edition of *La Serrana de la Vera* by C. George Peale and William R. Manson that appears in this version brings the plays by Luis Vélez de Guevara released in 2019 to a generous number, for which the *comedia* community has to thank C. George Peale. Juan de la Cuesta released Vélez's *La rosa de Alejandría* edited by Peale this year, as well as *Correr por amor fortuna* and *Celos, amor y venganza*, which

Peale edited in collaboration with William R. Manson. Peale's contribution to bringing Vélez's work to light has made a major inroad in widening the field of study beyond the typically better-known works of Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Calderón de la Barca. The landscape is open for new studies and performances of Vélez's work due to Peale's rigorous and precise approach to the publication of these texts in modern editions. A generous collaboration between Peale, Erdman, and Bolaños yields rich scholarly apparatus including a thorough explication of terms, literary and geographical references, and historical illumination found in the helpful endnotes.

The field of translation and performance studies of the Spanish Golden Age is richer for the addition of *The Mountain Girl from La Vera*. We are fortunate that Erdman was inspired to take on the project by a 2016 ASTR working session paper by Harrison Meadows "arguing for a trans lens on Gila" (Acknowledgments). After refining the text and translation through the crucible of readings aloud and the opinions of experts in the theatrical and dramaturgical nuances of the play, Erdman has produced a work of great value to *comedia* and translation students and scholars, as well as theatre practitioners hungry for fresh classics.

Kathleen Jeffs teaches theatre from the perspective of performance using both classroom and studio methods. Kathleen began directing at Gonzaga University in 2012 with her translation of a Spanish Golden Age play, *The Force of Habit*, written by Guillén de Castro, followed by *Alice*, an adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* by Devin Devine. Kathleen was the co-director and dramaturg for the Magnuson audience record-setting *Jesus Christ Superstar* with Suzanne Ostersmith, and for the musical-history-comedy-tragedy version of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, adapted by Sara Romersberger of Southern Methodist University. Recently she has collaborated in the Spokane community on *Hapgood* and *Arcadia*.

***The Force of Habit. La fuerza de la costumbre* by Guillén de Castro**

Translated by Kathleen Jeffs, Edited by Melissa R Machit, Liverpool University Press, 2019

Reviewed by Gregory J. Racz

As far as this reviewer can ascertain, Kathleen Jeffs's translation of *La fuerza de la costumbre* (publ. 1625) is, somewhat incredibly, the first published English-language version of this play by the largely neglected Spanish Golden Age dramatist Guillén de Castro. (A recent translation by UCLA's Working Group on the *Comedia* in Translation and Performance may be found online, while a second print translation of the play, by Barbara Fuchs, is scheduled to appear soon from the Juan de la Cuesta Hispanic Monographs series.) The project represents Jeffs's ongoing engagement with this author, a version of whose best-known work, *Las mocedades del Cid* (usually translated as *The Youthful Deeds of the Cid*), exists in an unpublished script from her hand, following a scholastic bilingual edition from Robert R. La Du, Luis Soto-Ruiz, and Giles A. Daeger (1969)—the only other complete rendering of the play—and excerpts from it by J. D. M. Ford (1919), George Ticknor (1849), and Lord Holland (1806). The relative antiquity of these dates is astounding and underscores the valuable service Jeffs has rendered the world theatre community in rescuing this overlooked figure from undeserved obscurity. In this she is aided greatly by her collaborator, Melissa R. Machit, whose "Introduction," "Critical Essay," and notes (not to mention exhaustive "Index of Variants") provide the volume great versatility as a script for actors, text for students, and resource for scholars, no doubt ensuring it will enjoy a long shelf life. Lovely black-and-white stills from the two university productions of the play in translation further round out this latest bilingual title from the Aris & Phillips Hispanic Classics series.

Guillén de Castro's *La fuerza de la costumbre* is certainly a singular, if not outright challenging work for modern sensibilities, the main plot revolving around young adult siblings having their "correct" gender identities "restored" to correspond with each one's biological sex. Don Félix de Moncada is raised in an "effeminate" manner by his mother, Doña Costanza, who feared losing him after her husband, Don Pedro, fled following the murder of a brother-in-law who opposed their marriage. Don Pedro escapes with the youth's older sister, Doña Hipólita, while she is still an infant, subsequently disguising her as a man so that she can better make her way among the soldiers he has joined in Flanders. The action is set against the philosophical backdrop of classical and Renaissance views regarding the ways in which habit shapes behavior and, in addition to the usual Golden Age shenanigans involving mistaken identity, intrigue, deception, and the rigor of upholding strict codes of honor, brings the issue of cross-dressing to the fore. Machit does an excellent job framing the prevalent theatre debates of the period, pointing out that there were periods when women were banned from performing on both British and Spanish stages, compelling males to act in all roles. While England fretted most about female lewdness (it was thought that men's clothes, generally more tight-fitting, proved too form-revealing on women to maintain public morality), the Inquisition's obsession with sodomy, and Spain's fear that a forced effeminacy on actors would only weaken the empire as a colonial power, ultimately led to a return of women to the floorboards. Machit insightfully points out that, unlike most gender-switching in contemporaneous dramas, Don Félix and Doña Hipólita's is imposed on them by their parents. While she goes on to state that their genders in this comedy are "performative and hyperbolic,

bordering on caricature,” the major shock for modern audiences will come from Doña Hipólita’s offstage rape by her suitor Don Luis, not to mention her subsequent confession to Doña Costanza: “since that moment I am a woman.” Machit grounds the event in classical precedent and, most sophisticatedly, in the medieval *cantigas d’amigo*, which she calls “the space of sexuality and sexual initiation in the gallego-portuguese lyric tradition.” An illuminating footnote cites examples from this poetic genre “in which daughters confess their sexual awakenings to their mothers,” although such canonical models do little to assuage the offense of sexual assault or to suggest how such action could best be staged today.

In her “Translator’s Note,” Jeffs writes: “It is my intention that this version here provides an experience of the play for readers interested in it on the page and for the stage, as it is very much a living, breathing text that has been tested in the crucible of performance.” This may be, in a nutshell, the ultimate standard for all plays in translation, though bridging the page/stage divide can prove particularly difficult with dramas from past centuries. Jeffs opts to forgo the tight meter and rhyme scheme (or assonance) of the Spanish source text, rendering *La fuerza de la costumbre* in essentially lineated prose, as has been the vogue with such plays for decades now. With an ear attuned to contemporary diction, she provides some fine lexical touches, translating “mi consuelo todo” as “my one consolation”; “hombres mujeres” as “girly men”; “cortésmente” as “with empty flattery”; “los contrapuestos hermanos” as “the crossed-dressed siblings”; “en el blanco da” as “[h]e’s right on target,” and “te extrañas” as “you act against your own / nature,” among other similarly impressive examples. Indeed, Jeffs appears to have intelligibility for contemporary audiences very much in mind, deftly explicating “temía...el sereno” (lit., he feared the dew) as “was afraid of the dark,” adding “it’s a long walk” when the servant Galván complains about not having been lent a mule, and clarifying for Anglo-American readers and/or theatregoers that “el famoso Campeador” is “the famous champion, El Cid.” When Doña Hipólita in frustration decides to rip off a cuff that forms part of the gender-specific attire to which she still has not grown accustomed, the Spanish reads: “Más de Alejandro ha tenido / el romper, que el desatar,” which Jeffs expertly untangles as “Like Alexander, / I’ll cut through this Gordian knot, / rather than wait to be untied.”

Is it this desire to modernize the language of an early seventeenth-century play that leads to some unevenness in register? Actors can certainly nuance dramatic discourse in performance, but this reviewer was struck by the appearance of such slangy terms as “keep slogging away at it,” “the hang of them,” “that’s my girl,” “[h]ave you no guts,” “wimp,” “that got to her,” and even one “Hey, gentleman!” This is hardly a critique, yet these words and phrases appear alongside what at times seem like needlessly close or “rank-bound” correlations based on awkward line-for-line correspondences as in the rendering of “Esta honrada emulación, / ¿cómo no te mueve el alma...” as “This honourable emulation, / why does it not move your soul...” or “Yo vengo, señor, / porque es más propia que ajena / la causa” as “I come, sir, / because it is more close than distant / this matter.” Perhaps, the use of such word order reflects Jeffs’s attempt to season a mostly updated language with the archaization of strained syntax. Certain lines clearly might have flowed more smoothly with a peppering of participles instead of finite verb forms. Undue repetition and a reflexive hewing to source-text punctuation also occasionally held up this reviewer who, as a reader, was left wondering

whether these touches were intentional. Ditto for some strange phrasing. Caught between the depoeticized diction of current parlance and the opposite pole of heightened metrical dialogue, could some stiffness of expression be construed as a sort of linguistic compromise? What to make of “That’s a noise” or “if I can unbind myself” or “they’ve just about left me without feet” or “my soul is grinding in my teeth” or “[t]his forces doubt into my mind”? Again, this may well reflect a confidence that actors will sort out such incongruity.

Jeffs, who is associate professor of Theatre & Dance at Gonzaga University, is a skilled enough translator to put her English-language rendering of *La fuerza de la costumbre* to the nuanced service of the play’s themes. When, upon his return home to Zaragoza, Don Pedro sees Don Félix for the first time after a twenty-year absence, he asks why the young man is wearing a “hábito largo,” wondering whether his son is studying for the priesthood. Instead of rendering this phrase as (long) “habit” or “frock,” Jeffs writes “long dress.” A few lines on, when Don Pedro states that Don Félix “se ha de quitar el vestido,” Jeffs again chooses the gender-laden rendering “he’ll have to take off that dress” instead of the more neutral word “clothing.” Later, as Don Pedro despairs of instilling manly virtues in his son, he tells Don Félix that, if the latter’s Christian bent precludes him from upholding family honor in accordance with the hyper-masculine, potentially violent chivalric code, he should seek serenity “retirado en un convento.” A “convento” can be a place where monks reside—i.e., a “monastery”—yet, here Jeffs artfully chooses its competing signification, translating the line as “hidden away in a convent.” These are wonderful touches that go a long way toward underscoring the play’s latent dynamics.

In short, kudos to all involved in introducing English-language audiences to Guillén de Castro’s overlooked play and in salvaging it, thus, from the limbo of unmerited oblivion.

Gregary J. Racz is professor of English, Philosophy and Languages at LIU Brooklyn, review editor for *Translation Review*, and a past president of the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA). His most recent theatre translations of works by Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, and Sor Juana appear in *The Golden Age of Spanish Drama: A Norton Critical Edition* (2018).