

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 10, Number 1 (Spring 2024)

Editor: Adam Versényi
Assistant Editor: Meaghan Jeanne Coogan
ISSN: 2160-3316

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

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

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

For translations of plays or performance pieces, unless the material is in the public domain, please send proof of permission to translate from the playwright or original creator of the piece. Since one of the primary objects of *The Mercurian* is to move translated pieces into production, no translations of plays or performance pieces will be published unless the translator can certify that he/she has had an opportunity to hear the translation performed in either a reading or another production-oriented venue. **All material published in *The Mercurian* is protected by international copyright law.** Inquiries related to production or reproduction should be directed to the translator of the piece in question.

The Mercurian

Volume 10, Number 1 (Spring 2024)

Table of Contents

Editor's Note	3
<i>June Night</i> By Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz Translated from Polish by Magda Romanska	6
<i>The Mountain King and the Misanthrope</i> By Ferdinand Raimund Translated from German by Michael McDowell and Laurence Senelick	56
<i>The Bullet</i> By Sergio López Viguera Translated from Spanish by Jacqueline E. Bixler	126
<i>Kafka In Love</i> By Luis Araújo Translated from Spanish by Phyllis Zatlin	159
<i>Fauna and Other Plays</i> By Romina Paula Edited by April Sweeney and Brenda Werth Translated by April Sweeney, Brenda Werth, and Jean Graham-Jones. Reviewed by May Summer Farnsworth	192
<i>Nothing to Do with Love and Other Plays</i> By Santiago Loza Edited by Samuel Buggeln and Noe Montez Translated by Samuel Buggeln and Ariel Gurevich Reviewed by Amalia Gladhart	195
<i>Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare: An Anthology, 1987–2007</i> Edited by Alexa Alice Joubin Reviewed by Zhixuan (Mia) Zhu	198

Editor's Note

Welcome to the Spring 2024 issue of *The Mercurian*!

Following up on Magda Romanska's translation of the great Polish film director Andrzej Wajda's adaptation of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* published in the Fall 2023 issue of *The Mercurian*, this issue begins with Romanska's translation of Wajda's adaptation of Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz's stage adaptation of his novella *June Night* (2001). Long time readers of *The Mercurian* will also remember her translation of Polish playwright Boguslaw Schaeffer's play *HereThere*, which appeared in Volume 2, No. 1. As Romanska explains in her introduction, Iwaszkiewicz prepared the stage adaptation especially for Wajda who directed it in 2002. The stage version of *June Night* was filmed for the Polish Television Theatre, and following Iwaszkiewicz's death, in addition to Wajda, two other screenwriters contributed to the adaptation, Andrzej Domalik and Zbigniew Kamiński. This translation is of that final film version adapted and directed by Wajda, and his collaborators. Set in 1863 in a portion of what was then Poland and is now Ukraine, the play opens in the aftermath of the January uprising, one of several failed attempts to end Russian occupation, making it all the more pertinent to the present day when Russia has invaded Ukraine. Wajda's adaptation focuses upon the ethical choices individuals make in the face of historical events that confront us with questions of life and death.

June Night is followed by Michael McDowell and Laurence Senelick's translation of Austrian Ferdinand Raimund's "Romantic-Comic Original-Musical Play" *The Mountain King and the Misanthrope* from 1828. As Senelick's introduction to the translation describes, *The Mountain King and the Misanthrope* is a prime example of the magical farce, a peculiarly Viennese dramatic genre popular during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the best known of which is Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Raimund's folk comedy filled with mountain sprites and comic human characters combines the tragic with the humorous to explore the nature of justice and human existence. In a curious way *The Mountain King and the Misanthrope* is an appropriate companion piece to *June Night* since at the time that Raimund wrote the play Austria was a police state under Metternich's rule and what could and could not be said on stage was highly restricted. The magical farce genre provided a way to evade censorship and stimulate audience imagination.

Next comes Jacqueline E. Bixler's translation of Mexican playwright Sergio López Viguera's 1985 play *The Bullet*. As Bixler talks about in her introduction to the translation, López Viguera's play is a compressed piece of theatrical poetry that explodes like the firing of a bullet. This short play dives deeply into the daily lives of working-class people in Mexico City. Bixler's translations of Emilio Carballido's *Photograph on the Beach* and Alejandro Ricaño's *Hotel Good Luck* appeared in Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 2014) and Vol. 7, No. 3 (Spring 2019) of *The Mercurian* respectively.

The Bullet is followed by Phyllis Zatlin's translation of Spanish playwright Luis Araújo's play *Kafka in Love*. Araújo's epistolary play is based on the letters between Franz Kafka and Felice

Bauer from 1912-1917, as well as references to Kafka's works such as *The Trial* and *Metamorphosis*. While characters reading letters on stage can result in a static theatrical experience, Araújo's text and, in Zatlín's description of it in her introduction, the play's initial staging, avoided that trap. Zatlín's work last appeared in *The Mercurian* in Vol. 9, No. 3 with her translation of Spanish playwright Gracia Morales' *Unidentified NN 12*. Her translations of both French and Spanish playwrights' work can be found in Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 2007), Vol. 2, No. 3 (Spring 2009), Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 2015), and Vol. 8, No. 3 (Spring 2021).

The issue concludes with three book reviews: May Summer Farnsworth's review of Argentine playwright Romina Paula's *Fauna and Other Plays* translated by April Sweeney, Brenda Werth, and Jean Graham-Jones; Amalia Gladhart's review of Argentine playwright Santiago Loza's *Nothing to Do With Love and Other Plays*, translated by Samuel Buggeln and Ariel Gurevich; and Zhixuan Zhu's review of *Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare: An Anthology, 1987-2007*, edited by Alexa Alice Joubin.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can be found at under the "Archives" tab on our website: <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 10, No. 2 Fall 2024 will be September 15, 2024.

—Adam Versényi

Advisory Board

Neil Blackadder, Translator

Catherine Coray, Director, The Lark Middle East/US Playwright Exchange/New York University

Richard Davis, George Mason University/Theater of the First Amendment

Jean Graham-Jones, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York

David Johnston, Queen's University, Belfast, N. Ireland

Kirsten Nigro, The University of Texas-El Paso

Caridad Svich, Playwright/Translator

Paul Walsh, Yale School of Drama

June Night: Of Love and Duty (1980)

By Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz

Translated from Polish by Magda Romanska

Polish poet, novelist, and playwright, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, was a complex figure with conflicted biography. Born in 1894, near Kyiv during the time of Russian Empire's rule over the region, Iwaszkiewicz studied law at Kyiv University and traveled the world, before settling in Warsaw. During the World War II, he was a partisan fighter, participating in the Underground Army (Armia Krajowa), and sheltering, with his wife, their Jewish friends, and neighbors (for this, he was recognized with the Righteous Among the Nations distinction). After World War II, when Poland came under the Soviet regime, Iwaszkiewicz became part of the communist administrative infrastructure, chairing the Polish Writer's Union, which was subject to the Communist Party of Poland. He died in 1980, only a year before the government instituted a Martial Law, triggering the countrywide Solidarity movement. Although in its obituary, *The New York Times*, called him "leading writer in Poland," Iwaszkiewicz was mostly forgotten in Poland.¹ After the 1989 Fall of the Berlin wall, many began considering him a Soviet sympathizer, and his works fell out of favor with Polish intelligentsia. Nonetheless, nominated for Nobel Prize in Literature four times during his lifetime, Iwaszkiewicz was an influential figure of the Polish literary world, and eventually, both Nobel-winning writer, Czesław Miłosz and Oscar-winning director, Andrzej Wajda called on reevaluation of Iwaszkiewicz's works and his status in the landscape of Polish literature. As a result, in recent years, his impact and literary accomplishments have received increased recognition.²

Iwaszkiewicz was a writer and playwright, who also adapted many of his prose works to stage. The dramatic version of *June Night*, adapted shortly before his death, was based on his novella of the same title³, and it was specially prepared for Andrzej Wajda, who directed in it 2002. This was not Wajda's first encounter with Iwaszkiewicz's work. In 1979, he made a film version of *The Birch Wood* (Brzezina), and in 1979, also the film version of *The Maids of Wilko* (Panny z Wilka), which was nominated for Oscar in the category of foreign film. The stage version of *June Night* was filmed for the Polish Television Theatre, and following Iwaszkiewicz's death, in addition to Wajda, two other screenwriters contributed to the adaptation, Andrzej Domalik and Zbigniew Kamiński. This translation is of that final film version adapted and directed by Wajda, and his collaborators. Since it was filmed and directed by Wajda with Iwaszkiewicz's approval, it should be considered the definitive version of the adaptation. This translation was commissioned by the Polish Institute in New York a couple of years ago for the retrospective of Wajda's films and is published here with their permission.⁴

¹ "Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, 86, Dies; Was a Leading Writer in Poland." *The New York Times*, 3 Mar. 1980, www.nytimes.com/1980/03/03/archives/Jaroslaw-iwaszkiewicz-86-dies-was-a-leading-writer-in-poland.html. [Accessed November 15, 2023].

² For more extensive online bibliography, see the entry on Culture.pl: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/Jaroslaw-iwaszkiewicz> [Accessed November 15, 2023].

³ Iwaszkiewicz, Jarosław (1976) "Noc czerwcową." *Noc czerwcową, Zarudzie, Heydernreich*. Warszawa: Czytelnik: 5-29.

⁴ The film is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pB5zm0YuoJM> [Accessed March 3, 2024].

Set in 1863, after the failed January Uprising, Iwaszkiewicz's novella was based on real life figure of Jonna Moszyńska who fell in love with a Tzarist officer and married him instead of following her husband, Piotr Moszyński to Siberia. The story takes place in the area of Podole, current territory of Ukraine, back then part of Polish region under Russian occupation, following the hundred years of partition. The novella was part of Iwaszkiewicz's trilogy which focused on the January Uprising, and which also included two other stories, *Zarudzie*, and *Heydernreich*. The January Uprising was one of many failed attempts to regain independence from Russia, and its participants were harshly punished, with death or exile to labor camps in Siberia. Although we never see him, the novella focuses on one such participant, Peter, who is about to be sent to Siberia, and on his wife, Countess Ewelina, who is obliged, by the current standards of the patriotic wifely duty, to follow him. Polish wives who do not follow their Polish husbands to Siberia are shunned by other local Polish estates, so the price of not complying with the marital duty is permanent social ostracism. Ewelina's choice is additionally complicated by her ambivalent feelings towards her husband whom she does not appear to love. Their marriage was an arranged business transaction, and she does not understand or care for her husband's patriotic fervor.

We meet her during the night before her obligatory departure. While she is unable to decide whether to go or stay, the servants and her aunt Daniela conspire to prevent the voyage. Their motives are mostly self-centered: they are worried about the estate and their own futures without the Countess to manage it. In addition, she is to leave her young daughter, Mary, behind, alone under the care of the governess. The Countess's estate has been spared from confiscation, despite her husband's subversive activities, due to her family being distantly related to the Romanovs. The estate has many characters, including young Polish-Ukrainian officer serving in Russian army, Edmund, who minds the horses. Knowing Edmund's quiet affection for Ewelina, Aunt Daniela and the servants encourage him to convince her to stay. Edmund does, and the novella ends with him calling from the window of Ewelina's bedroom on the stable hands to bring back the horses. The Countess is not going to Siberia.

The stage adaptation of the novella adds a second act, which takes place twenty years later.⁵ Peter returns from Siberia finding Ewelina alone on the estate. They divorced and Ewelina married Edmund, but their happiness lasted a short time. He leaves her alone and she spends her days lost in solitude, feeding local swans. Her daughter also does not visit, and Ewelina's life appears to be void of meaning and purpose. Peter, on the other hand, though physically ruined by the harsh labor, seems to be psychologically intact; his continuous commitment to the cause of Polish freedom giving him and his life and suffering a unfaltering purpose.

The story illustrates the difficulty of sacrificing one's personal happiness for the welfare and freedom of the nation, but also, as critic Grzegorz Głąb (2014) pointed out, the fundamental impossibility for one individual to alter the flow of history, a kind tragic irrelevance of the ethical choices we make in the face of life and death historical upheaval.⁶ The story also illustrates the convoluted nature of the society under Russian occupation, with some, who like Edmund chose to collaborate with Russians by joining their army and others, like Peter, who

⁵ Iwaszkiewicz, Jarosław (1980) "Noc czerwcową." *Dramaty*. Warszawa: Czytelnik: 171-248.

⁶ Głąb, Grzegorz (2014) "Powstanie Styczniowe w tekstach Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza." *Niepodległość i Pamięć*. 21/1-2 (45-46), 293-316: 293.

throw away their lives in what can be viewed as naïve and hopeless struggle.⁷ Wajda's adaptation and direction illustrates his profound understanding of the complexities of such choices, the fundamental conflict between the self and society and the questions we all grapple with: What do we owe to others? What do we owe to ourselves? What are the lines we cannot cross?

Magda Romanska is Professor of Performing Arts at Emerson College, Boston, MA, Faculty Associate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard, and a Principal Researcher at metaLAB (at) Harvard. She is the author or editor of five critically acclaimed scholarly books, including *The Post-traumatic Theatre of Grotowski and Kantor* (2012); *TheaterMachine: Tadeusz Kantor in Context* (2020); *Reader in Comedy: An Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2016); and *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*. She translated five plays from Polish of Boguslaw Schaeffer, and published, *Boguslaw Schaeffer: An Anthology* (2012). Romanska's scholarly research has received awards from the Polish Studies Association and the American Society for Theatre Research. As a playwright, she is a recipient of the MacDowell Fellowship, the Mass Council Artist Fellowship for Dramatic Writing, the Apothetae and Lark Theatre Playwriting Fellowship from the Time Warner Foundation, and PAHA Creative Arts Prize. She has taught at Harvard University, Yale School of Drama, and Cornell University.

⁷ Mazur, Aneta (2013) "Archeologia dziewiętnastowiecznej pamięci w insurekcyjnym tryptyku Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza (*Noc czerwcową, Zarudzie, Heydernreich*)."
Wiek XIX : Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego imienia Adama Mickiewicza. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich. 6 (48), 393-423: 397.

June Night

Written by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz

Adapted for Television by:
Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz
Andrzej Wajda
Zbigniew Kaminski
Andrzej Domalik

Directed by Andrzej Wajda

Translated by Magda Romanska

Year 1864

Poland has been partitioned since 1795 between Russia, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1864, the January uprising has been quashed. Russians punished many Polish patriots, sending them to Siberia. Among them was Peter, Ewelina's husband. At that time, it was a wife's duty to follow her husband.

SOLDIERS

/singing in Russian/

*Down the country path, three pine trees grow,
My beloved said goodbye to me, see you next spring,
She swore to God she loves only me,
And when I'm far away, in other lands, she'll never forget me.*

SCENE ONE

PRIEST

Let us all pray so that God has you in his care during your travels, dear Countess. Let us pray that God watches over those who are there already . . . and those who are no longer . . .

ALL

Oh Lord, dear Lord, have mercy on us. Oh, Lord, watch over us . . .

PRIEST

From air, hunger, fire and war, save us Lord. God in heaven, oh Lord, have mercy on us . . .
From sudden and untimely death, save us Lord. We, the sinners, beg you, hear our prayers, oh Lord.

ALL

Have mercy on us, oh Lord.

EWELINA

Thank you all for coming here to say goodbye.

WOMAN

/giving Ewelina a letter/

I don't know where my husband is, but if the Countess meets him sometime maybe, please, give him this letter and tell him that . . . I love him very much. . . . and we're waiting for him.

EWELINA

I'll do everything I can to find him.

BOY

And please, tell him that not all is yet lost. . . . We will keep on fighting . . . like they did.

EWELINA

I'll tell him. I promise.

BOY

Thank you.

PRIEST

May God be with you, Countess. Please, pass these holy pictures to them.

What am I? A poor priest, what more can I do . . .

EWELINA

Thank you. I am sure the pictures will bring them solace.

OLD WOMAN

Dear Ewelina, when I think about your poor husband, these words of the poet come to my mind:

/opens the book and reads/

'This hand and this head will stay in my mind's eye,
And they'll stay in my thoughts – and in my life's path
Like a compass, they'll show me the way to true virtue:
And if I forget about them, you God in heaven, please,
Forget about me.'

KUKULUSIA

Oh, what a horrible journey you have to undertake, Ewelina!

CHWALIBOG

Why 'have to'? She wants to.

AUNT DANIELA

Don't tell us you don't know why.

KUKULUSIA

Has to. Her husband was sent to Siberia. Loving wives follow their husbands.

FLORENTYNA

Why can't she just stay home?

CHWALIBOG

Miss Florentina, you are a foreigner. You can never understand it. It is a wife's responsibility to stand by her husband. She is following her husband. 'Until death do us part' – she swore it.

FLORENTYNA

Ridiculous promise.

CHWALIBOG

Miss Florentina, Ewelina is not just a Catholic. She is also a Pole. I can't imagine what her social position would be if she didn't follow in Count Peter's footsteps. He's her husband.

KUKULUSIA

It will be hard for the Countess to leave her household.

EWELINA

Miss Florentina, please take Mary with you.

FLORENTYNA

/in French/

Please, repeat after me. . . .

SCENE TWO

/Mary and Florentine study French/

FLORENTYNA

Let 's continue where we left off last time, ok?

MARY

Ok.

FLORENTYNA

Let us read. This is a magnificent text.

MARY

It is.

SOLDIERS

/singing in Russian/

*Down the country path, three pine trees grow,
My beloved said goodbye to me, see you next spring,
She swore to God she loves only me,
And when I'm far away, in other lands, she'll never forget me.*

SCENE THREE

FLORENTYNA

The June day is almost over.

CHWALIBOG

The coach is just standing there. Why aren't they loading it? The horses were supposed to walk ahead of you with the carriage. Are you all packed up?

FLORENTYNA

Yes. The baggage just needs to be taken outside. I don't have a lot of things.

CHWALIBOG

I know what a woman's 'not a lot of things' means. How many dresses alone? Twenty.

FLORENTYNA

Where from? Me? A poor servant.

CHWALIBOG

You came from France to make some money here. Or maybe you just collect everything in a stocking?

FLORENTYNA

Mr. Chwalibog, you always so cruelly joke with me.

CHWALIBOG

Do you think I don't know what is going on?

FLORENTYNA

I feel really bad leaving like this, even farther away from my country. Now, Mary has only you to take care of her.

CHWALIBOG

There is Broncia, Kukulusia and Aunt Daniela. They'll give her the best care possible. They're taking their time with those bags. The coach is still empty.

FLORENTYNA

Nothing strange in that. Countess Ewelina is sitting in her bedroom. Broncia is packing up her clothes and Ewelina is just sitting there and crying. It takes such a long time because they have to pack all of her warm clothing. You need to be ready for the Siberian winter.

CHWALIBOG

One good fur coat would be good enough. They won't be so considerate of her over there as we are here.

FLORENTYNA

You're cruel.

CHWALIBOG

A woman's imagination is so limited. I don't think the Countess is sufficiently prepared for the Siberian winter. She can't even imagine what such a winter looks like. And she's crying?

FLORENTYNA

Yes, she's been crying all day. I don't quite understand it. Isn't this sacrifice too much for a husband who has no more life left for him . . .

CHWALIBOG

You see, Miss Florentine, Ewelina must feel very attached to Count Peter. You know how they got married? It was just an arrangement. When her family found him, he was already a widower, and they got married only so that Ewelina's wealth would stay in the family.

FLORENTYNA

Is her wealth really that impressive?

CHWALIBOG

It's vast. Russians didn't confiscate it only because Ewelina is related to the Romanovs. And the name deal, well, at the end that didn't turn out too well. They only have one daughter, who will herself get married soon enough. The Countess is under the care of the Tzar

FLORENTYNA

The Countess is under the care of the Tzar, and the husband is being send to Siberia.

CHWALIBOG

The sun is setting, and the bags are still not out.

FLORENTYNA

We have a whole night ahead of us. The Countess put off the trip until morning. Maybe that's why she isn't packed yet.

CHWALIBOG

Nights are short in June.

FLORENTYNA

But morning will be beautiful.

CHWALIBOG

What about the supper?

FLORENTYNA

It should be served soon. Mary should go to sleep earlier. I have to admit I drank a glass of champagne to cheer myself up before the trip.

CHWALIBOG

I'll order the supper to be served. Phillip . . . Phillip. . . .

CHWALIBOG

Give me a bottle of champagne.

PHILLIP

There are none left, Sir.

CHWALIBOG

What do you mean, there are none left?

PHILLIP

Everything was drunk.

CHWALIBOG

Who drank it?

PHILLIP

Everybody, but nobody remembered to order new bottles. The last time we ordered it last year, from Berdyczow.

CHWALIBOG

But I saw a case myself.

SCENE FOUR

FLORENTYNA

We've seen each other today already. Day is almost coming to an end.

You look terrible, Lieutenant.

EDMUND

So, so.

FLORENTYNA

Cheer up. They'll be bringing champagne shortly.

EDMUND

I don't need such cheering up.

FLORENTYNA

Don't tell me you don't need to be cheered up.

EDMUND

I'm calm.

FLORENTYNA

I wish you were calmer and stronger. It would help Ewelina.

EDMUND

I don't understand what are you trying to say.

FLORENTYNA

You don't need to pretend. I understand everything.

EDMUND

There is nothing to understand here.

FLORENTYNA

Of course. You hide your feelings very well.

EDMUND

The Countess and I, we didn't have any . . . explanations.

FLORENTYNA

Explanations? Do you really need explanations?

EDMUND

What are you talking about?

FLORENTYNA

Are explanations really necessary? One look should be enough.

EDMUND

It might be enough for you, but not for Ewelina. She doesn't suspect anything.

FLORENTYNA

You think so? A woman's heart suspects everything.

EDMUNDS

Not Ewelina's.

FLORENTYNA

Ewelina is like any other woman.

EDMUND

She is going away. Going away to Siberia. Do you understand what that means?

FLORENTYNA

I understand it very well. I'm supposed to go there with her, but I can't imagine what it's going to be like.

EDMUND

You can't imagine it. It's unimaginable.

FLORENTYNA

You've put on your uniform, Lieutenant. What's the occasion? I like you best when you're sitting by the samovar in your black silk shirt.

EDMUND

Have you been watching me?

FLORENTYNA

I have. You look good.

EDMUND

Wearing a black shirt?

FLORENTYNA

A silk one, if I'm not mistaken.

EDMUND

You're mistaken. It's satin.

FLORENTYNA

With a black belt.

EDMUND

You noticed the belt as well.

FLORENTYNA

A braided one.

EDMUND

For naughty children.

FLORENTYNA

You're joking. You sing with such a soft baritone. I love Russian songs.

EDMUND

Those are not Russian songs. They're Ukrainian.

FLORENTYNE

Even better. They're very beautiful.

EDMUND

It's not nice to eavesdrop on someone without their knowledge.

FLORENTYNA

I'm not eavesdropping. I just pass by your place sometimes. I hear you singing then. You have a nice voice.

EDMUND

Sometimes I sing Polish songs.

FLORENTYNA

Patriotic ones?

EDMUND

Why are you so surprised? You say it with such irony.

FLORENTYNA

Not at all.

EDMUND

You treat me rather ironically, I must say.

FLORENTYNA

Me and irony? I can only pity you. You found yourself in difficult situation.

EDMUND

I'm afraid that your imagination draws for you this non-existent difficult situation. What difficult situation am I supposed to be in?

FLORENTYNA

You can answer it yourself.

EDMUND

Miss Florentine. Do you understand that I don't have any situation here? I simply cannot have any situation here. What role can I have here in this grand house, me, who merely fulfills his soldierly duties.

FLORENTYNA

Aha, that's called 'acquisition.'

EDMUND

Yes. Acquisition.

FLORENTYNA
Don't be mad at me.

EDMUND
I have to pick horses for our unit. I'm mad because they've picked me for this job.

FLORENTYNA
Why are you talking like that?

EDMUND
So you'd become touched by my helplessness.

FLORENTYNA
I'm not going to be touched by such things. I don't like men like that.

EDMUND
And what kind of men do you like?

FLORENTYNA
Real ones.

SCENE FIVE

PHILLIP
There is one case left, but the Countess is taking it with her.

CHWALIBOG
What does the Countess need champagne for in Siberia?

PHILLIP
You think they don't drink champagne over there? They drink it, they do.

CHWALIBOG
Philip, Miss Florentine is waiting.

PHILLIP
The French lady wants champagne, phew!

CHWALIBOG
She is accompanying the Countess to Siberia.

PHILLIP
No woman, no crying.

CHWALIBOG

Come on, Philip, you try some too.

PHILLIP

What am I to do with you?

KUKULUSIA

What's going on?

PHILLIP

They're asking for champagne.

KUKULUSIA

The Lieutenant is all dressed up in his best uniform. Champagne needs to be served.

PHILLIP

All right, all right, I'll do it myself.

CHWALIBOG

Take one bottle to the corner room, and bring another one here.

KUKULUSIA

But Sir!

BRONCIA

My head is spinning.

CHWALIBOG

Is the Countess packed? We should start carrying out the bags.

BRONCIA

Nope. Nothing's ready yet.

KUKULUSIA

We have a whole night ahead of us.

BRONCIA

June nights are short.

KUKULUSIA

Night brings good advice.

CHWALIBOG

And what advice is there left?

KUKULUSIA

You want to stay here all by yourself, don't you?

CHALIBOG

What's that to me!!!?

BRONCIA

She's not packed yet. She ordered me to pack up everything, empty all of her closets and dressers, and then, she asked me to take it all out of the trunks and put it all back into the closets. Now, all of her trunks are empty.

CHWALIBOG

And the Countess?

BRONCIA

She is standing in her nightgown in front of the mirror and crying. Then, she powders her face so it doesn't show that she was crying. She asked for little Mary to come over, and when the girl did, she didn't let her in.

CHWALIBOG

Crying? Why?

BRONCIA

You'd be crying too if you had to leave everything and go away, so far, far away. What's surprising in it?

PHILLIP

The Countess doesn't have to. She wants to . . .

CHWALIBOG

The Countess thinks it is her sacred duty to follow her husband.

PHILLIP

Sacred duty to follow your husband . . . but so far, far away?

AUNT DANIELA

What is that? Looks like a war room?

CHWALIBOG

Why are you surprised? At such a moment, we need to discuss everything.

BRONCIA

Our mistress is abandoning us.

AUNT DANIELA

When does the Countess want to leave?

BRONCIA

She was going to leave in the evening, but now, she's staying until daybreak.

PHILLIP

Thank God. At least the horses will get fed.

CHWALIBOG

She put off the trip a couple of times already.

AUNT DANIELA

She's hesitating. Sure.

BRONCIA

She can't decide.

PHILLIP

That's not good.

CHWALIBOG

She'll have to make the decision sometime.

AUNT DANIELA

I just hope she won't regret her decision.

CHWALIBOG

The Countess never regrets anything.

AUNT DANIELA

She has a strong character. Maybe there is something she does regret.

CHWALIBOG

Well, she never shows it.

AUNT DANIELA

She can control herself. She was taught to do that from very early. She didn't have an easy youth. Before they found her this husband.

CHWALIBOG

She's the silent type.

BRONCIA

And when someone's passing under her window, she is crying even louder.

AUNT DANIELA

And who can be passing there under her window?

BRONCIA
Who knows.

PHILLIP
The Lieutenant was passing by there.

AUNT DANIELA
Yes? Hmm. . . .
I would like to talk to you, Sir. Where is Miss Florentine?

CHWALIBOG
She's in the corner room, with the Lieutenant.

AUNT DANIELA
I'd like to see that.
Bring them some of the champagne.

CHWALIBOG
Bring one bottle here.

BRONCIA
What? You don't want it to cool first?

CHWALIBOG
They'll drink it as it is. No time now for cooling.

AUNT DANIELA
Go, Broncia, and ask the Countess if she wants some champagne?

BRONCIA
She hasn't eaten or drunk anything all day today. I won't even bother asking.

AUNT DANIELA
She needs to eat something. . . . before the trip.

CHWALIBOG
You said it . . . you sound strange. You don't believe that she wants to go?
Philip, grab the bottles. Where are they?

PHILLIP
There won't be anything left for the Countess.

CHWALIBOG
I told you already, the Countess won't need any champagne.

BRONCIA

Maybe the Countess won't go.

AUNT DANIELA

That would be best.

CHWALIBOG

It seems that the decision has been made already.

BRONCIA

She might not go regardless.

CHWALIBOG

Do you have that champagne?

AUNT DANIELA

Stop it, with this champagne. All you talk about is champagne, as if that was the most important thing in the world now.

CHWALIBOG

Maybe it is the most important thing.

AUNT DANIELA

What an idea!

CHWALIBOG

Where are the bottles?

PHILLIP

Here. I have them here.

BRONCIA

He hid them for himself.

AUNT DANIELA

Shame on you.

PHILLIP

Here's a bottle, and glasses. It looks nice.

BRONCIA

We have everything nice.

KUKULUSIA

Maybe even too nice for you.

AUNT DANIELA
Don't argue you two.

BRONCIA
I'll get the door.

AUNT DANIELA
What about supper?

KUKULUSIA
We won't forget.

AUNT DANIELA
I don't know if the Countess will come down to eat.

KUKULUSIA
I don't think she will. She's not thinking about food now.

AUNT DANIELA
True. She can't think about food now.

SCENE SIX

CHWALIBOG
Can I?

EDMUND AND FLORENTYNA
Of course.

EDMUND
Miss Florentine will accompany Countess Ewelina on this journey?

FLORENTYNA
Yes, like a lady's companion.

CHWALIBOG
In the worst-case scenario, you can always turn around. You're under no obligation to accompany her on such a long and dangerous journey.

FLORENTYNA
There are no obligations, but how can I let her go all by herself? She's still so young.

CHWALIBOG
You mean, she is young in spirit, because she is not that young in years.

EDMUND
She looks very young.

CHWALIBOG
We are all old and we'll be getting older.

FLORENTYNA
Some are young their whole lives.

EDMUND
Like Countess Ewelina.

CHWALIBOG
Countess Ewelina!

EDMUND
Yes, her.

CHWALIBOG
You got quiet all of a sudden. Let's drink to your trip.

EDMUND
Will the Countess come down?

CHWALIBOG
The Countess will not come down, I think.

FLORENTYNA
I'm not surprised.

CHWALIBOG
Let's drink to your trip.

FLORENTYNA
The bubbles are all gone.

CHWALIBOG
It's just a gesture. You don't drink?

EDMUND
I'm hesitant.

FLORENTYNA
Why?

EDMUND

Maybe all this drinking is not needed. Feels like a funeral banquet.

FLORENTYNA

Funeral banquet? We drink to life.

CHWALIBOG

Not to death, to life.

EDMUND

One never knows.

FLORENTYNA

You think about death?

EDMUND

You should always be ready for . . . everything.

FLORENTYNA

For everything, but not for death. I still can't believe in this trip.

EDMUND

Well, they gave you champagne to celebrate.

CHWALIBOG

It took a while to find it.

FLORENTYNA

I've never heard about drinking champagne to strengthen up.

CHWALIBOG

They give it sometimes to the dying.

FLORENTYNA

Maybe.

EDMUND

It might be your Slavic custom. I don't know whether this drink can give you eternal life.

FLORENTYNE

Or whether it strengthens you in real life.

EDMUND

Supper won't be served for another hour. I'll go to my place for now.

FLORENTYNA
But you'll be back later?

EDMUND
Of course.

FLORENTYNA
Come have supper with us.

EDMUND
At your orders, Miss.

CHWALIBOG
And why don't you change? You look silly in this uniform.

SCENE SEVEN

CHWALIBOG
The Countess hesitates.

FLORENTYNA
It's an important decision.

AUNT DANIELA
Give me some wine.

CHWALIBOG
We drank for good luck and a good journey. Drink with us.

AUNT DANIELA
I'm glad to find the two of you here. We need to discuss what to do.

CHWALIBOG
What is there to discuss?

FLORENTYNA
We don't have any control over what will happen.

CHWALIBOG
No matter how much we discuss it, the decision has been made already.

AUNT DANIELA
Until the horses leave, any decision can be reversed.

FLORENTYNA
Who can reverse it?

AUNT DANIELA
If something needs to be done, the doer will be found.

CHWALIBOG
That's a dangerous theory, Aunt Daniela.

AUNT DANIELA
That's not a theory. That's experience.

FLORENTYNA
Interesting.

AUNT DANIELA
Think about it. Imagine what will happen when the Countess Ewelina leaves. Who'll stay? Little Mary, maybe Miss Florentine, or some other governess. Who is going to run the entire household? Who is going to order that we're to be waited on like we have been so far? The changes can be very unpleasant . . .

FLORENTYNA
Indeed, but what can we do?

CHWALIBOG
What can we do? It may not be so bad.

AUNT DANIELA
We have to do everything we can so that she'll stay.

AUNT DANIELA
You seem too eager to stay here all by yourself.

CHWALIBOG
You see it all too dark.

AUNT DANIELA
Possibly. She has to stay or we will all go bankrupt! I don't want to go beg on the streets. Do you understand?

FLORENTYNA
Well enough.

AUNT DANIELA
Well. Who will speak with the Lieutenant then?

CHWALIBOG
With the Lieutenant?

AUNT DANIELA
Of course, with the Lieutenant.

FLORENTYNA
What an idea.

AUNT DANIELA
It all depends on him, and he's so awkward, so inexperienced.

FLORENTYNA
But he's handsome.

CHWALIBOG
He's young.

AUNT DANIELA
Not so young. Just old enough to be led.

CHWALIBOG
Not too young, but inexperienced. He never was a player, doesn't know what to do with a lady.
He simply has no clue.

AUNT DANIELA
Someone needs to teach him. Miss Florentine! He needs to stop Ewelina. Otherwise – we all are doomed.

CHWALIBOG
Auntie, why don't you talk to him.

AUNT DANIELA
That's not my role. It must be a man, in manly conversation, man to man.

CHWALIBOG
But the affairs of the heart - those are women's missions.

AUNT DANIELA
But I can't do it.

CHWALIBOG
What about Miss Florentine?

SCENE EIGHT

AUNT DANIELA

We can't let her leave. Just imagine, my dear Florentine, what will happen once she leaves. Who will give orders here? The servants and the maids? Can you imagine what it will look like? What will I do? Maybe they'll throw me out on the street. That's for sure. And what happens to you when you get back, after you take her up to Siberia? You'll stay here? With little Mary, at the mercy of the servants?

FLORENTYNA

Yes, you're right, Auntie.
The night is so warm.

AUNT DANIELA

A sense of duty requires that she go. But, tell me dear Florentine, what good does it do to anyone? Such duty can be ruinous to many.

FLORENTYNA

Ruinous?

AUNT DANIELA

Simply destructive. You don't think it all will get ruined and destroyed? The house, the estate. And what about little Mary? And Ewelina's life?

FLORENTYNA

Everything passes.

AUNT DANIELA

You're right. That's so *à la mode*, in poetry and all. Everything passes, my dear, everything passes . . .

FLORENTYNA

That's so sad.

AUNT DANIELA

Of course. But I want to remind you that whatever passes may be either pleasant or unpleasant.

FLORENTYNA

Maybe so.

AUNT DANIELA

It's better if what passes were pleasant, so that the memories at least are bright, like a lamp in the night.

FLORENTYNA

What are you talking about?

AUNT DANIELA
Maybe I said too much.

FLORENTYNA
Not at all.

AUNT DANIELA
Yes, everything passes, but whatever existence there is, it can vary. Why should we exist in poverty, when everything depends on one thing . . .

FLORENTYNA
What one thing?

AUNT DANIELA
One June night. Do you feel it, my dear Florentine, how the night envelops us? What a savory night.

FLORENTINA
It's not quite dark yet.
/Edmund approaches/

FLORENTYNA
Wearing a black shirt, just the way I like him.

AUNT DANIELA
Go to him – tell him . . .

FLORENTYNA
What should I tell him?

AUNT DANIELA
Tell him everything. Tell him about love.

FLORENTYNA
About love? I don't understand . . .

AUNT DANIELA
About love. He hasn't yet heard a woman talking to him about love.

FLORENTYNA
Well, maybe I've never heard anyone talk to me about love. I don't know how to talk about love.

AUNT DANIELA
A night of love. Tonight is St. John's Night. You see yourself that tonight is ideal for dreams. You had some dreams in the past?

FLORENTYNA

Do I know?

AUNT DANIELA

Don't be stupid. He had dreams too.

FLORENTYNA

A man's dreams. . . .

AUNT DANIELA

And Ewelina is also stupid. She chose such a night to go, to leave her home, to say farewell to Edmund . . .

FLORENTYNA

But there is nothing between them.

AUNT DANIELA

Nothing? Nothing? You're such a materialist, are you, like all of you French. You want them joined in bed right away? What about the law: 'separated from bed and table.' They were first joined by the table.

FLORENTYNA

I didn't think of it.

AUNT DANIELA

Yes, of course. It was a table of love, not a bed of love. They don't know themselves how much it meant that they were eating together, at the same table, day after day, for so many months.

FLORENTYNA

They talked about her husband, the martyr.

AUNT DANIELA

For Edmund, he wasn't a martyr. He was a rebel. Edmund hated him on the spot. Oh yes, from the very first moment.

FLORENTYNA

But Edmund didn't even know him.

AUNT DANIELA

It will be easier to talk him into it . . . talk him into . . .

FLORENTYNA

It may not be too difficult to talk him into Ewelina.

AUNT DANIELA

But my child, he himself doesn't know anything. You know, my child, he does not understand

himself yet. And certainly, he doesn't know what he wants. He doesn't seem to think that Ewelina's decision is very patriotic. He's wondering. But why does he wonder?

SCENE NINE

AUNT DANIELA

Why doesn't the Lieutenant sit down with us.

EDMUND

Thank you.

Isn't it such a shame that such a beautiful young lady doesn't know how to ride horses.

MARY

I'm not a lady and I don't like horses.

EDMUND

How can you not like horses?

AUNT DANIELA

Mary, why don't you eat anything?

MARY

I can't, Auntie.

AUNT DANIELA

Maybe just chicken soup? You need to be brave.

MARY

But, Auntie, Mr. Edmund also doesn't eat anything.

FLORENTYNA

But, Mary, the Lieutenant is a grown-up man.

EDMUND

I'm not hungry.

FLORENTYNA

And I'm hungry all of a sudden.

CHWALIBOG

The Lieutenant won't let go of the bottle though.

EDMUND

I have a strong head.

MARY

I would like to try it!

AUNT DANIELA

But Mary!

EDMUND

What do you mean?

CHALIBOG

You don't mean strong as in resistant to wine.

MARY

I talk nonsense.

AUNT DANIELA

Indeed, my child.

EDMUND

Want some?

CHWALIBOG

Thank you.

AUNT DANIELA

/whispering to Florentine/

Don't let him drink so much. It may weaken him.

FLORENTYNA

Weaken him? In what?

MARY

Tonight is the kind of night when everyone wants to do something stupid. Say something stupid.

EDMUND

Your hand is shaking.

CHWALIBOG

Well, such an evening, such a farewell.

AUNT DANIELA

Nothing unusual in that.

Poor child.

FLORENTYNA

Maybe that's too much?

AUNT DANIELA

Maybe the Lieutenant is used to it, used to drowning all his sorrow in alcohol?

FLORENTYNA

You can't really compare our small sorrows to the Lieutenant's. The Lieutenant doesn't care about our local sorrows here, or maybe even our national sorrows.

EDMUND

How do you know what I care about? You don't know anything about me, anything about what's inside me.

FLORENTYNA

I don't know, and I'm not interested. The Lieutenant is free to think and feel whatever he wants to.

EDMUND

It's very good to hear that we're completely indifferent to each other.

FLORENTYNA

You're not completely indifferent to me.

MARY

This heat is getting to everybody.

FLORENTYNA

I simply feel sorry for you.

CHWALIBOG

Lieutenant, the Countess wants to see you upstairs.

FLORENTYNA

You're afraid!
/Edmund leaves/

CHWALIBOG

He changed his uniform, but didn't take the spurs off.

SCENE TEN

PHILLIP

Are we going to burn the wreaths? It's St. John's Night!

BRONCIA

I have so much work, I don't know where to start.

PHILLIP

But at night, when all of that is over . . .

BRONCIA

I don't know what the majordomo will say . . .

PHILLIP

She'll let us. She's got a good heart.

BRONCIA

What does her good heart got to do with anything? The trunks need to be packed up . . . when the Countess finally makes a decision. Who will need to do all the work? Me . . . and that's all that I'll have.

PHILLIP

Oh, well . . . I'll be waiting. . . .

BRONCIA

Philip can always wait . . . of course.

SCENE ELEVEN

AUNT DANIELA

My dear Florentine, you need to be patient, my dear. You learned nothing by living in this house?

FLORENTYNA

If I am to go with the Countess, I should know that ahead of time. Although I'm already packed up . . .

AUNT DANIELA

My dear, on such a long journey, you need to be prepared for anything. They didn't teach you patience? And you don't really know what's that all about. When the Countess leaves, Chwalibog will be ruling here all by himself, disrespecting us left and right.

CHWALIBOG

God is watching.

AUNT DANIELA

And if she stays, that would mean something.

KUKULUSIA

I'm afraid that even if the Countess decides to stay, the social position of her estate will be much lowered. Everyone will condemn her decision. They will be afraid to be associated with a compromised household.

AUNT DANIELA

Eh. The night's so warm.

SCENE TWELVE

EWELINA

I would like to say goodbye. I'm sorry I didn't do it earlier, but I was so absorbed by this trip, I couldn't put my thoughts together. I wanted to say goodbye and express my gratitude for the sensitivity you have shown in my house. I regret I can't say 'our house' . . . because you haven't been here when my husband was still living with us.

EDMUND

I also regret it.

EWELINA

Please, believe me, I really appreciate your sensitivity and your good manners. Neither in words nor actions, you never hurt my feelings in any way.

EDMUND

But Countess! I did my best....

EWELINA

And those feelings of mine, they were very susceptible to be hurt, falling victim to some strange undefined waves . . .

EDMUND

Those strange, undefined waves ended with a very definitive decision.

EWELINA

Yes. I'm leaving.

EDMUND

I'm sorry to hear that

EWELINA

What can I do?

EDMUND

Please, Countess, believe me that I . . . honestly . . .

EWELINA

These aren't just empty words. I was raised not to believe young officers . . .

EDMUND

Yes.

EWELINA

. . . and. . . – I have to admit – I never knew any young officers. They never stayed at my parents' house, nor at our house. Of course, I had a distorted opinion of who they were. I'm very happy to welcome you in. . .

EDMUND

. . . and say farewell to me . . .

EWELINA

. . . . a decent man, who only shines with his knightly predispositions.

EDMUND

You shame me. I'm not deserving of such a good opinion.

EWELINA

Maybe. But for six months, you were in a very difficult situation, staying at the house of a woman who was neither married or widowed. More so, there was no man around to lean on and sometimes, it seemed to me like a great burden. You understand, if Mary was a boy, at her age, I would already feel like I have a manly shoulder to lean on.

EDMUND

That's true.

EWELINA

But a girl still needs my care, and she'll need it for a long time yet.

EDMUND

And you're leaving her all alone?

EWELINA

The life circumstances require . . .

EDMUND

There is no other choice?

EWELINA

We, Poles, must sacrifice much on the altar of duty.

EDMUND

So you believe it is your sacred duty to follow your husband?

EWELINA

Yes, sacred.

EDMUND

Did you consult anyone about it?

EWELINA

Yes. I consulted my conscience.

EDMUND

Did you consult your heart as well?

EWELINA

Of course, my heart as well.

Would you like some tea?

We, Poles, when we fulfill our duty, we do it with joy – and we gain peace of mind.

EDMUND

Did you need peace of mind?

EWELINA

I don't understand?

EDMUND

Was your mind not at peace before?

EWELINA

But of course!

EDMUND

And you couldn't find balance?

EWELINA

It's not difficult to understand. I wasn't at all privy to Peter's secrets. I didn't know what his trips were all about.

EDMUND

He didn't tell you anything?

EWELINA

He was traveling all the time.

EDMUND

So you weren't his accomplice?

EWELINA

The uprising surprised me as much as anyone else, and I had no idea that Peter was somehow connected to it.

EDMUND

I'm surprised by the Count's behavior.

EWELINA

He never considered me even for a moment.

EDMUND

And when you found out, you had to condemn him?

EWELINA

I didn't understand him at all, but I didn't condemn him. I didn't have a right to do that.

EDMUND

But Countess!?

EWELINA

I didn't have a right to condemn him.

EDMUND

Why? It was extremely disloyal of him, to commit treason like that. And how dangerous. It's good it ended only with Siberia.

EWELINA

It could have been the death penalty.

EDMUND

And confiscation of all your property.

EWELINA

The estate is mine. The Emperor knew he couldn't suspect me of being disloyal. My husband's business was completely foreign to me. I was free of him.

EDMUND

Why are you taking on yourself this punishment which was justly served unto him?
What if you won't be able to handle all of the difficulties . . . ?

EWELINA

I will be able to handle everyone, once I know I did the right thing . . .

EDMUND

Do you really think so? Are you sure you're able to commit the same treason that he did?

EWELINA

Lieutenant, I am a Pole. The same as Peter. Do you think that plotting against Russian power is treason?

EDMUND

Naturally. . . .

EWELINA

And shouldn't Poles strive for freedom? Isn't it their natural right?

EDMUND

Countess, my dear, and what is freedom? What is a man's natural right? Is there even such a thing?

EWELINA

Lieutenant. . . .

EDMUND

I'm sorry.

EWELINA

I don't understand.

EDMUND

It's a horse-riding injury. I'm sorry!

EWELINA

You're asking me questions that I can't answer. I don't reason like men do. I follow my instinct.

EDMUND

You don't have any guarantee that you made the right decision.

EWELINA

It follows my sense of the self as a dutiful wife.

EDMUND

Maybe, but it may not be right.

EWELINA

Night's coming.

EDMUND

Evenings are long and nights are short.

EWELINA

Could you pull the curtains over the window. The one that's closer to the bed.

EDMUND

When are they going to bring horses?

EWELINA

At dawn, around three or four in the morning.

EDMUND

Now, dawn starts at four.

EWELINA

How tall you are. When we were riding horses, you didn't seem so tall.

EDMUND

I grew.

EWELINA

Sit down.

More tea?

EDMUND

No, thank you.

EWELINA

Cognac?

EDMUND

No, thank you. I drank a lot with supper.

EWELINA

What did you talk about during supper?

EDMUND

What else, your trip.

EWELINA

What a fragrant night. . . .

EDMUND

Are you thinking about our walks?

EWELINA

Our horse rides?

No.

EDMUND

You never rode horses with your husband?

EWELINA

No, never. But before you showed up, we didn't own any good riding horses.

EDMUND

You seem to be born to ride horses. You should breed them here.

EWELINA

Now, when am I leaving?

EDMUND

But you can't leave.

You can't let such a gorgeous estate go to waste.

EWELINA

My husband has different ideas.

EDMUND

Just imagine what will happen when everything is administered by a government bureaucrat and the only person you know is Chwalibog.

EWELINA

Mary will grow up soon.

EDMUND

Until then, everything will be ruined. As a citizen, it's your duty to take care of the estate . . .

EWELINA

You're so impatient. Aren't you a nobleman?

EDMUND

Countess, you're offending me. In name alone . . . It's true that I come from an impoverished but noble family. My mother lives on a small estate in Bila Tserkva. That is all we have left. I serve in a good garrison, but I can't afford all the leisure activities that others can. They send me to acquisition horses, and there aren't that many temptations on this job.

EWELINA

Not many temptations?

EDMUND

Maybe. . . .

EWELINA

Can you tell me something about your mother? Are you her only son?

EDMUND

I have one sister. She is already married and much older than I am.

EWELINA

And your mother?

EDMUND

She loves me very much, of course.

EWELINA

Hard not to love your only son.

EDMUND

Well, who am I? I can't do much, and I'm not well organized. The only thing I know is horses. I don't even speak French all that fluently, just a bit.

EWELINA

You should marry someone rich, Lieutenant.

EDMUND

I wouldn't think such a thing! Poor like a church mouse, awkward and without any talents.

EWELINA

You? Awkward?

EDMUND

Good for nothing.

EDMUND

Please, don't go, Countess, please, don't go, Mrs. Ewelina.

EWELINA

What are you doing! . . .

EDMUND

I would do anything to make you stay. . . . Countess . . .

EWELINA

I beg . . .

EDMUND

I beg you . . . I beg you It doesn't make any sense to go. Going with your husband to Siberia, you're taking on yourself all of the conditions of the criminal. Anyone can offend you. They can beat you, humiliate you. Every soldier, every scum can hit you – worse, he will have a right to pinch you, hug you, kiss you. You'll be starving and you may never even see your husband. You never really loved him, and you don't love him right now Admit it, you never loved him? You never rode horses with him, never danced with him, never ran around with him in the garden You never loved him.

EWELINA

Tell me, tell me: 'Stay, Ewelina! Stay, Ewelina!'

EDMUND

Stay, Ewelina! Stay, Ewelina!

EWELINA

What's going to happen if I stay?

EDMUND

Nothing will happen. Everything will be all right.

SCENE THIRTEEN

/Edmund opens up the window/

EDMUND

Take away the horses.

The Countess won't leave today.

CHWALIBOG

The Countess will never leave.

SCENE FOURTEEN

/Mary wakes up in the carriage/

SCENE FIFTHTEEN

Sign: 'Twenty years later'

KUKULUSIA

Oh, my God. Count Peter!

PETER

Not a word to anyone. I have a passport in a different name. Please, tell the Count . . .

KUKULUSIA

He's not the Count.

PETER

Tell your master then.

KUKULUSIA

He's not here right now. He left the Countess and he is staying in town now, at his garrison.

PETER

I have a passport with a different name and I am here legally.

KUKULUSIA

I understand, my dear Count.

PETER

Don't call me Count. You got older, Kukulusia.

KUKULUSIA

I was there . . . that day, when the Russians . . .

PETER

Pss . . . We all forgot about that. Tell the Countess that Mr. Mackievich, from Cracow, wants to see her.

KUKULUSIA

Mackievich?

PETER

It feels so empty here. Dust all over . . .

KUKULUSIA

The Countess rarely comes down.

PETER

And guests?

KUKULUSIA

What guests. Nobody comes to visit.

PETER

Nobody?

KUKULUSIA

Sometime, a friend of . . . Mr. Edmund.

PETER

Nobody comes hunting?

KUKULUSIA

Sometimes just to buy a horse. We have beautiful horses now.

PETER

Officers?

KUKULUSIA

Yes, officers. They come . . . to play cards.

PETER
Cards.

KUKULUSIA
But the Countess never comes down to see them. Never. They get drunk sometimes, and shot,
like officers. . . .

PETER
And nobody comes to visit the Countess?

KUKULUSIA
Who would do that?

PETER
Potockis . . .

KUKULUSIA
They've forgotten how to get here.

PETER
And others?

KUKULUSIA
Everyone's afraid to go out, and even more to visit us . . .

PETER
What do you mean?

KUKULUSIA
Not worth talking about.

SCENE SIXTEEN

EWELINA
Peter. I was told someone came to see me.

PETER
It's me. I have another name now. Don't be offended, but my name is now Mackievich.

EWELINA
Why would I be offended? I'm glad to see you.

PETER
Really? You're glad? It doesn't look like it.

EWELINA
Edmund will be also glad.

PETER
I'd be happy to meet your new husband.

EWELINA
New? It's been twenty years.

PETER
Time flies. We're all old now. And you, as always, beautiful.

EWELINA
Untimely courtesy.

PETER
I don't throw my words in vain. You're beautiful, as you used to be.

EWELINA
You never gave me such compliments.

PETER
Do you regret it?

EWELINA
Oh, no. What are compliments, really? Dry leaves carried by the wind.

PETER
You said it so beautifully. Do you read a lot of poetry now?

EWELINA
Yes. Poetry . . . and romances . . .

PETER
Are you bored?

EWELINA
It's empty here.

PETER
The older we get, the emptier it gets around us.

EWELINA
I am not that old yet.

PETER
Does Mary come to visit you sometimes?

EWELINA
No.

PETER
It must be sad indeed.

EWELINA
None of our relatives comes to visit.

PETER
And Edmund?

EWELINA
Edmund? I love him.

PETER
I suspected as much.

EWELINA
What brings you here? Business?

PETER
Yes. Business.

EWELINA
What do you want? We divided everything in court.

PETER
Yes, you were very generous.

EWELINA
Edmund wanted it that way. We didn't want there to be any ambiguities.

PETER
You both were generous.

EWELINA
We didn't want people to talk.

PETER
Yes, people. I understand. They talked nevertheless.

EWELINA

They talked, but they no longer do.

PETER

Not quite.

EWELINA

Time changes everything.

PETER

And brings memories. You seem very melancholic.

EWELINA

You forgot I've always been this way. Melancholia is the landscape of my soul.

PETER

You weren't that sad before.

EWELINA

I was a silly young girl – before. How irresponsible a person is in his youth.

PETER

Not everyone.

EWELINA

Wasn't it irresponsible of you to get yourself all tangled up in the uprising? Admit it, it didn't make much sense.

PETER

Maybe it didn't make much sense, but it did mean something.

EWELINA

No sense – much meaning? I don't understand.

PETER

You didn't understand it then. I thought you would understand it now.

EWELINA

Now? When?

PETER

Now, when you're a mature woman. But you're that kind of woman that never matures.

EWELINA

You're wrong, Peter.

PETER
I wish.

EWELINA
Loneliness makes us mature fast.

PETER
You don't have any company here?

EWELINA
Nobody.

PETER
Chwalibog?

EWELINA
He died a long time ago.

PETER
Florentine?

EWELINA
You don't know? She went back to France right after our marriage.

PETER
And Aunt Daniela?

EWELINA
Aunt Daniela is a crazy old lady. She doesn't know what's happening around her. You'll see, she'll be here in a minute to ask us if we want some coffee.

PETER
Do you read a lot?

EWELINA
Oh, yes, I do.

PETER
Are you minding the household? Housekeeping was never your strong suit.

EWELINA
No? I don't know much . . . and nobody needs me . . . I feed the swans.

PETER
You have swans now?

EWELINA

Yes, they breed endlessly.

AUNT DANIELA

Ewelina, do you want some coffee?

EWELINA

Auntie, we have a guest.

AUNT DANIELA

Who are you calling guest . . . It's the master of the house . . . Good morning, Peter.

PETER

Auntie recognizes me?

AUNT DANIELA

How can I not recognize you? I saw you just yesterday.

PETER

But Auntie . . .

EWELINA

Yes, almost yesterday.

AUNT DANIELA

He doesn't come down too often, but he came down here yesterday.

EWELINA

But Auntie, he just came back from Siberia.

AUNT DANIELA

Isn't it all the same? Here? Or Siberia?

PETER

O! Auntie, it's not all the same.

AUNT DANIELA

Every Pole has his own Siberia.

PETER

Well, if so . . .

AUNT DANIELA

And Ewelina does not suffer here? Oh, she suffers, she suffers . . .

EWELINA
Auntie shouldn't talk like that.

AUNT DANIELA
We all suffer. It's God's will.

PETER
God doesn't send us suffering.

AUNT DANIELA
If not God, then the devil – what's the difference.

EWELINA
Auntie! What are you talking about? It's unbecoming.

AUNT DANIELA
Yes, it's a sin. Do you want some coffee?

PETER
With pleasure.

AUNT
From table to table. That's life.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

EWELINA
I regret now that I didn't follow you.

PETER
Really? You're not the only one who didn't. If all wives of the men who were sent to Siberia followed them, there wouldn't be enough space. . . . You wouldn't have helped me, and at least, you found some happiness for yourself here.

EWELINA
Happiness It was so brief.

PETER
No Polish happiness lasts for long. Maybe you got on a wrong track, turned left . . . or maybe right.

EWELINA
Peter.

PETER

My dear Ewelina, none of that matters now. How did Aunt Daniela say it just now? Every Pole has his own Siberia. I had a real one. Chained to my wheelbarrow, I worked and didn't think much about you. I would have had to imagine you in your velvet dress, or in a summer dress – and such thinking didn't bring much peace. I tried not to think about you and Mary. It was better that way. For a year or two, I thought about my friends, those whom they hanged. I thought, good thing it wasn't me. A man chained to a wheelbarrow doesn't have much energy to think about grand things. Slowly, he becomes very simple – all the grand thoughts leave him. All he thinks about is bread, soup, sleep. You stop thinking there. You don't think about anything anymore. You're old, tired and wasted. Everyone will tell you you didn't change much, but that's not true. You changed inside. And when people tell you about love and happiness, you don't understand what are they talking about. You simply don't understand. That's your Siberia.

EWELINA

One loses the will to live listening to you. Would you like to tell me why are you here?

PETER

I didn't have a chance to get rid of all my papers.

EWELINA

We burned them. Chwalibog destroyed everything, and Aunt Daniela helped him.

PETER

There is a secret drawer in this desk. Nobody knew about it. I left there a very important paper.

EWELINA

You thought that nobody would find it? For twenty years? Even if just while cleaning?

PETER

Empty. Really empty.

EWELINA

What was it?

PETER

It was a list of local estates involved in the uprising.

EWELINA

And that is what you came here for?

PETER

Farewell. I can't stay any longer.

SCENE XX

AUNT DANIELA

Peter, here you go.

PETER

Auntie, you kept it?

AUNT DANIELA

It's nothing. It's just a list of people.

PETER

I would like to visit some of them. Make them look into my eyes.

AUNT DANIELA

But Peter, you're leaving in such haste.

PETER

I don't want to ruin your happiness.

AUNT DANIELA

For God's sake, where are you going? Where are you going? Peter. Peter.

The Mountain King and the Misanthrope (1828)

By Ferdinand Raimund

Translated from German by Michael McDowell and Laurence Senelick

The *Zauberposse* or magical farce was a dramatic form peculiar to Austria and especially Vienna in the latest eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A baroque genre that made its appeal to popular, rather than court, tastes, it was usually interspersed with songs; the music might be written for the play or drawn from existing tunes, like the French *vaudeville*. The *Zauberposse* known to most theatregoers is *The Magic Flute*. Mozart's opera lent the otherwise local phenomenon a universal appeal. So did the ethical concerns of Ferdinand Raimund. He raised the folk comedy to the level of a "forum for universal justice." In his fairy-tale plays, filled with rich humor sometimes bordering on the tragic, Raimund touches on the common criteria for human existence.

Of humble antecedents, Raimund (1791-1836), at the age of 18 became an actor in dramatic roles with a travelling company; but when in 1814 he joined the suburban Viennese Theater am Josefstadt his comic talent was revealed. Three years later he won a clamorous success at the rival Theater am Leopoldstadt. Fed up with the mediocrity of the plays he had to perform in, he decided to write and act in his own. In 1823 he made his debut as playwright with *The Barometer Maker on the Enchanted Island* which made a great hit. There followed another six works in the fairy-tale farce mode: *The Spirit King's Diamonds*, 1824; *The Peasant Millionaire*, 1826; *The Fettered Imagination*, 1827; *The Mountain King and the Misanthrope*, 1828; *The Bad-luck Crown*, 1829; and *The Spendthrift*, 1834. Most critics consider *The Mountain King* and *The Spendthrift* to be his masterpieces.

This was a period when Austria was a police state under Metternich, and there was tight control over what could and could not be spoken from the stage. Consequently, the "magical play", which conveyed ordinary Viennese citizens to fantastic realms or introduced supernatural elements into everyday life, found a way around these strictures. While the audiences could identify with Raimund's middle-class characters, their imaginations could be stimulated by the grotesque or outlandish situations in which these characters were placed. And the censor had nothing to delete.

Although Raimund's plays always provide a happy ending, full of confidence, hope and consolation, these are not easy solutions. His view of human nature is born of a bitterly lived cynicism, that in *The Mountain King* questions whether humanity is "a denatured species." Unlike the fatalistic attitude of a Strindberg, however, its romantic melancholy is countered by liberating forces which help human beings by means of reformation and self-improvement. Raimund is implacable in revealing human flaws, but rather than succumbing to hatred or resignation, he offers charitable understanding and makes an appeal to divine goodness. As in Swedenborg's cosmological system, the "spirit world" in Raimund is divided into two realms: helpful, tutelary genii and demons who lead men to perdition. The good spirits are heralds of a life intended for meaningful service. Raimund does not present them as a *deus ex machina*; instead, they induce the characters to recognize their true selves by transforming and

curing them. No mere elves, Astragalus and his sprites create conflicts of emotion in the human heart which result in profound self-awareness.

In *The Mountain King*, the universal tragicomic ordeal is imposed on an egocentric self. The powerful supernatural force, Astragalus, opposes the misanthrope Rappelkopf, whose extreme self-absorption is only one aspect of his true “self”. (His name means “Hothead” or “Raving Mad.”) The brilliant device of having the Mountain King become the misanthrope, allowing the protagonist to see himself from the outside, enables Rappelkopf to subjugate his worst qualities and re-adapt to human society, curing his hatred by bringing him to love and charity. (It also allows an actor a virtuoso opportunity.) Raimund’s achievement is all the more admirable, since Rappelkopf was based on his own personal shortcomings and he played the role originally. *Mutatis mutandis*, Rappelkopf is worthy to be listed with the great misanthropes of world literature: Menander’s *Dyskolos*, Molière’s *Alceste*, and Shakespeare’s *Timon*, who is evoked in this comedy.

Michael McDowell commenced this translation of *Der Alpenkönig und der Menschenfeind* when he was a Harvard undergraduate in the 1970s. A decade later we undertook a collaboration to prepare it for publication, but other projects intervened. After Michael’s death, as I was going through his papers, I came across the draft of the translation and decided to get it into print as a memorial tribute. The process of revision was thoroughgoing, especially in the case of the songs. As before, outside pressures and competing tasks delayed completion, but at last the new text was ready to be submitted to an editor.

From a translator’s standpoint, the play is not very difficult to put into English. Raimund, I’m relieved to say, rarely uses Viennese dialect (which his colleague Nestroy does frequently). The characters in the scene of the charcoal burner’s hut speak a generic demotic and I have been careful not to localize it. (That scene has been described as equal in its squalor to a genre painting by a Dutch master.) I also anglicized the first names. The Mountain King often speaks in a grandiose manner, but most of the dialogue is colloquial, with an occasional play on words. The songs present the greatest challenge: I have been careful to preserve both the meter and the rhyme scheme.

The play has never left the German-language stage and was even turned into an opera by Leo Blech; but it is almost unknown outside Central Europe. In 1831 *The King of the Alps*, a drastically abridged version by John Baldwin Buckstone, based on a literal translation by Lord Stanhope, appeared at the Adelphi Theatre in London; most songs were dropped and a subplot involving the charcoal-burner added. Buckstone radically tamed the language and sentimentalized the tone, which enabled the comedy to be well received by a middle-class British public, but it dropped out of the repertoire almost at once. This is the first complete translation into English. My hope is that it can inspire an ingenious director or an ambitious actor, so that its qualities can be revealed to a contemporary audience.

Michael McDowell (1950-1999), a Ph.D. from Brandeis University, was the author of over thirty novels, including *The Amulet*, *The Elementals*, *Gilded Needles* and the *Blackwater* series. He also wrote a number of screen- and television plays, among them *Beetlejuice*, *Tales from the*

Darkside and *The Nightmare before Christmas*. He taught screenwriting at Boston and Tufts Universities. His papers are at the Popular Culture Library of Bowling Green State University and his collection of death artifacts at Northwestern University.

Laurence Senelick (b.1942) is Fletcher Professor Emeritus of Drama and Oratory at Tufts University and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has published translations from seven languages, including the complete plays of Chekhov. Among the German-language authors he has translated are Schiller, Brecht, Georg Kaiser, Klaus Mann, Karl Valentin and Ferdinand Bruckner. His most recent books are *Jacques Offenbach and the Making of Modern Culture*; *The Final Curtain: The Art of Dying on Stage*; and *The Crooked Mirror: Plays from a Modernist Russian Cabaret*

The Mountain King and The Misanthrope

(Der Alpenkönig und der Menschenfeind)

A Romantic-Comic Original-Musical Play in Three Acts

By Ferdinand Raimund

First produced at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, Vienna, 17 October 1828.

Translated from the German by Michael McDowell and Laurence Senelick

CHARACTERS

ASTRAGALUS, the Mountain King

LINARIUS}

Alpine Sprites

ALPANOR}

HERR VON RAPPELKOPF, a wealthy landowner

SOPHIE, his wife

MOLLY (Malchen), his daughter by his third wife

HERR VON SILBERKERN, Sophie's brother, a merchant of Venice

AUGUSTUS THORN (August Dorn), a young painter

LIZZY (Lischen), Molly's maid

HABAKKUK, Rappelkopf's man-servant

SEBASTIAN, Rappelkopf's coachman

SABINA, Rappelkopf's cook

CHRISTIAN GLOWWORM (Glühwurm), a charcoal burner

MARTHA, his wife

SALLY (Salchen)}

HANKY (Hänschen)}

} their children

CHRIS (Christoph)}

ANDY (Andres)}

FRANK (Franzel), a woodcutter, engaged to Sally

CHRISTIAN'S GRANDMOTHER

GHOST OF VICTORINEN}

GHOST OF WALLBURGA} Rappelkopf's deceased wives

GHOST OF EMERENTIA}

Alpine sprites, Genii in the Temple of Understanding, servants in Rappelkopf's home

The action takes place on and around Rappelkopf's estate.

ACT I

Scene 1

The overture begins quietly, in imitation of birdsong, then turns into a fanciful hunting halloo, accompanied by rifle shots. The curtain rises on a picturesque spot at the base of an alp, which ascends majestically in the background. Downstage center, a rosebush. Down left, a shattered tree trunk. Down right, a steep crag.

A chorus of Alpine sprites, Linarius among them, all clad in gray as roebuck hunters, and each with a slain roebuck slung over his back, hurry down the mountainside, and gather together downstage.

CHORUS. Spirits, quit the chase! Come, come, it's
Time to leave these Alpine summits –
To the verdant valley jaunt,
There, quite eager to display
All the game we shot today
In that bosky huntsman's haunt.

Astragalus, clad in gray as an Alpine hunter like the others, a hunting rifle over his shoulder, enters.

ASTRAGALUS (*gruffly*). Holla, huntsmen, quit your toil,
Be content with this day's spoil.
Comrades, drunk on hunting stag,
No more quarry shall you bag.
Long enough our hunting calls
Have echoed through these stony halls.

LINARIUS (*first Alpine spirit*). Sov'reign, you've but to command,
Submissive is your faithful band;
Wearily we drift in dust,
Just as leaves in storm wind must.
There is no one here who cares
To prolong the chase – or dares,
Though we treasure nothing more
Than 'midst Alpine peaks to soar.
Lightning flashing from a rifle
Serves the prey's life-breath to stifle;
When the golden bullet's shot
And penetrates the vital spot
Bang! on target with a thud,
Then out there spurts the roebuck's blood.

ALL. That's what sets us all afire!
That's a huntsman's heart's desire!

ASTRAGALUS.

By the icy polar billows,
Huntsmen, you are lusty fellows.
Carry on your chase for venison
For it serves as local benison.
Whatever we from mountains take
Is only for the valley's sake.
On those who in poor huts do dwell
And hunger pangs know all too well
All our quarry we bestow
And, unseen, in their houses throw.

LINARIUS.

Always noble your endeavor,
And we hasten now as ever
Proud to honor and fulfill
Our ruler's great, well-meaning will.
To the huts we shall draw near
To hear their tenants, as they cheer
When in the roebuck's hide they find
Golden bullets left behind.
Each grateful tear they shed's a gem
From which we shape a diadem.
And on your throne we place these bays
As loving tribute in your praise.

(Exeunt all but Astragalus.)

ASTRAGALUS.

In the spirits' high domain
Charity and love should reign,
And strength with freedom should combine.
Such sway, in aspect all sublime,
Might, when loosed from earthly link,
Whirl along the Æther's brink.
But mankind cannot share this glory.
Its case is quite a different story.
Good and ill are set by Fate:
One man will love, another hate.
In the world below these skies
Not all souls do upward rise,
Condemned by their mortality
They're void of all nobility,
From above an Archfiend glowers,
Bound to serve the darker Powers,
And on him all strife's dependent,
Making pain the world's ascendant;
He through air the clouds pursuing,
He the earth with graves bestrewing,

He sets soul 'gainst soul to rise,
He the shark its force supplies,
Its rage that makes the seas all cower;
He bids the north wind crush the flower;
He sends the ship into the blast
And wrecks it on the rocks at last;
He turns men into warring hosts
That they may, in their hateful boasts,
Across their brothers' corpses stride
And call for laurels in their pride.
Peaceful sprites are those I treasure,
Helping men's my chiefest pleasure.
I, by rocky crags unbound,
Am only in the fresh air found.
On the summit, brightly shining,
Upon glacier's ice reclining,
Is my crystal palace placed,
Whence the stars' long paths I trace.
And when through limpid space I scan
On earth the pointless dreams of man,
My heart is stirred on his behalf.
When I see (no cause to laugh)
Many lost souls vainly erring,
Then from cloudy heights bestirring
I climb down to earthly land,
And gently take them by the hand,
Lead them through the Temple gates
Where Knowledge of the Self awaits.

(Exit.)

Molly and Lizzy enter from the opposite side of the stage. First Molly, in a light blue summer dress and straw hat, runs in merrily.

MOLLY. Well, that's what I call a good long run. Love can make you outrace the wind. *(Looking around.)* Everything's in full bloom and the sun is shining twice as brightly today, as if it were high holiday in heaven and he were founder of the feast. Thank you, Your Majesty, for bringing back my Augustus. Lizzy, Lizzy! *(Calling offstage.)* Where are you? *(Lizzy enters.)* You look scared. What's wrong?

LIZZY *(most upset and babbling).* Oh, Miss, how *could* you come to this horrid, haunted place today? Didn't you hear all that shooting? The Mountain King is on the loose today. And if I had known that, a score of wild horses wouldn't have dragged me out of the house. But, no, you had to wake me, order me to hurry and get dressed, just so you could run up here and meet Augustus back from his painting tour of Italy.

MOLLY. So I did. And here I am, waiting for Augustus. His last letter said *this* was to be the

day. Three years ago, in this very spot, we said our goodbyes most tenderly – with Mama standing by. Even then Father was dead set against our love. And when Augustus' uncle died and left him a little property, Father still refused to consent to our marriage. He flew into a rage and told Augustus he had no talent at painting whatsoever. Augustus was hurt very sorely and decided a trip to Italy was the best cure for his hurt – he could pattern himself on classical models. Here is where he pledged me his eternal troth. Mama promised to help us, but you know what my poor father is like. Here is where we said goodbye and promised that someday right here we would rush into one another's arms. According to his letters, he's getting on very well with his painting.

LIZZY. What's the point of Italy? What's the point of painting? What's the point of all the painters in Italy and Austria? The Mountain King lives in these parts, and if he catches sight of us, we're goners.

MOLLY. Take it easy, Lizzy. He won't chop off your head.

LIZZY. But it might cost us our good looks, and, for a young girl, losing her beauty is the same as getting it in the neck. And you know how closely our necks and our looks are connected. Who's going to neck with us, if we aren't pretty anymore? Don't you know that any girl who sees the Mountain King automatically ages forty years? You won't be able to talk him down to one minute less. Forty years, plus how old we are now – won't that add up? Just imagine what we'd look like then! What would your darling artist say if he saw you not as a budding spring landscape but an ice-skating scene by some Dutch master? What would all my admirers say if they saw my cheeks pleated like hundred-year-old parchment?

MOLLY. Who told you such fairy tales? It's enough to scare me out of my wits – *if I believed in the Mountain King.*

LIZZY. Is that so? All right then. But soon I'll be treating you like my *grandmother*. If you don't come away with me, I'll have to escape on my own. (*She starts to go.*)

MOLLY. Don't go. Augustus will be here soon, the noonday sun is shining, and you have to help me do my hair. The wind mussed it all up. You brought the hand mirror I told you to, didn't you?

LIZZY. Yes, but I wish I'd forgot to bring all these jitters.

MOLLY. All right then. (*Sits on the tree stump and arranges her hair as Lizzy stands before her, holding the mirror.*) Keep still, Lizzy, you know I have to look my best. He's coming all the way from Italy, and they say the women there are truly beautiful.

LIZZY (*laughing*). Is that a fact? Well, I know of only one beautiful girl in the whole world, and you know who I mean.

MOLLY (*taking the compliment as meant for herself*). You flatter me, Lizzy. I don't deserve it.

LIZZY (*aside*). She thinks I meant her. How could anyone be so conceited? I was referring to

myself, of course.

MOLLY. There now, Lizzy. My hair's just right. Don't go, the Mountain King isn't going to harm us.

LIZZY. For heaven's sake, don't even mention that awful name. (*Startled.*) There's something moving in that bush! Oh, Lord, I'm going to drop the mirror... (*A wood grouse flies out of the bush. She screams.*) Eyyy! The Mountain King. (*Runs off, with the mirror.*)

MOLLY (*calling after her*). Lizzy, Lizzy, don't be scared, it's only a bird. Oh, for heaven's sake, she took the mirror with her and she's bound to run straight home. Oh, Lizzy, why won't you listen to me? Oh, my hair! Wouldn't it be awful if Augustus came now and saw me looking like this? I wouldn't survive it. Oh, goodness, I daren't even think about it, that's the most awful catastrophe that could ever happen. (*Pulling herself together.*)

Oh, pooh, don't be silly, Molly. Augustus doesn't love you because of your hair. (*Angrily.*) No, but it helps, and if men are like that, what can I do? And why are they called locks, if they weren't intended to lock men in our arms? (*Looks offstage.*) Oh, he's coming up the hill now. Oh, joy, oh, rapture! (*Jumps up and down.*) Oh, joy, oh, rapture! (*Suddenly still.*) If it weren't for this awful hair! I'll hide behind this rosebush, and perhaps I can re-arrange it there. (*Crouches behind the rosebush.*)

Enter Augustus in a simple travelling outfit, a portfolio under his arm.

AUGUSTUS. From the sea-girt foreign strand,
From the charming southern land,
With its golden fields of wheat
And with orange groves replete;
Where the lofty Appenines
After former greatness pine;
Where fine Art, or a selection,
May achieve ideal perfection;
Where we meet the awesome sight
Of colossal ruins by night,
Trembling, feel the force of time
And apprehend the All-Sublime:
From the southland's teeming womb,
Back to these calm fields I come;
To this dearest of all lands
I am chained with gentle bands
Of staunchest troth and tend'rest love.
The giant peaks that rise above,
Dream-like, form a vision, truly
Each one sends a welcome to me.

Mountains of my homeland, greetings! Ah, Memory, how you creep up on me, tenderly crowning my head with a wreath woven of bygone joys. Yet of all that is lovely here, I

miss the loveliest of all; of all that is dear to me, I miss the dearest of all. Where are you, Molly my beloved? Why aren't you waiting here for me? Perhaps she's ill. Perhaps she's not allowed out of the house this early. But she'll be here. Meanwhile I'll make a sketch of this little spot she loved so well and give it to her when she comes. (*He sits on the tree stump and begins to draw.*) It's splendid, the way the mountains glisten in the sunlight, the clear air, and here – this dark and rocky crag, all the wild roses – only these faded flowers seem out of place. I know some that are more beautiful, and they bloom in her cheeks. I wish Molly were here to tell me which colors to use.

MOLLY (*parting the rosebush with her hands, so that she is partly visible. She looks lovingly at him.*) Blue for loyalty.

AUGUSTUS (*overjoyed*). Amalia! (*They embrace.*)

MOLLY. Augustus, dear Augustus!

ASTRAGALUS (*appears on the crag*). Well, well, well! The valley seems to be brimming over with happiness today! (*He leans on his rifle and listens to the dialogue.*)

AUGUSTUS. Oh, dear, sweet, good Molly, how I've missed you – (*Suddenly teasing.*)
Naughty Molly, why do you let go of me so soon?

MOLLY. Don't tease me, Augustus.

AUGUSTUS. Well, I'll get even with this kiss. (*Kisses her.*)

MOLLY. Oh, you nasty man!

AUGUSTUS (*gently*). Angry?

MOLLY (*innocently*). Heavens, no! Take your revenge! Wicked people say revenge is sweet, and now I can almost believe it.

AUGUSTUS. Oh, Molly! I'm so happy to see you again. Nothing but death will ever come between us –

MOLLY. Except Father, who's a fate worse than death. If only *dear, good* Father weren't so *mean* to us!

AUGUSTUS. Don't worry, Molly, when he sees the progress I've made in my painting and realizes how much I love you, he won't be able to say no. I'll talk to him today.

MOLLY. It won't do any good. He won't speak to anyone outside the family and only rarely to the servants. He's turned into a misanthrope.

AUGUSTUS. Ridiculous. If that's the case, why do you always speak so highly of his kind heart and honesty?

MOLLY. Because he has both. You see, when he ran his publishing house in the city, it was doing so well; but he was cheated out of a lot of money he had lent to faithless friends out of the goodness of his heart. All that ingratitude and ill treatment led him to give it all up and hide out on his estate so that people like that could never come near him again. And now he keeps reading all these philosophical tracts that only make him more eccentric. There's no end to his distrust. He has a terrible habit of flying off the handle with everyone. He demands the simplest things in an absolute rage. No one, not even my mother, can stay with him for long. Everyone's afraid of him and runs away, and as a result he assumes everyone is betraying him. But he won't let anyone make explanations. This misanthropy has increased day by day, and we fear for his life. We'd do anything to convince him that we love him. But who can show him the error of his ways and rid him of this senseless anger? It makes everyone his enemy and prevents him from seeing humanity from the proper angle. We daren't even mention *your* name. He knows my mother approves of our love, and he hates her to death for it.

AUGUSTUS. Oh wretched fate, why must you dash my dreams once again? Then may I never call on you, Molly?

MOLLY. If only I knew a way to have you all to myself! If I were as free as that bird and could fly anywhere I wanted through the sky, I'd follow you throughout the world. Happy, enviable creature! What can rob it of its freedom? (*Astragalus shoots the bird, but it cannot be seen to fall. Molly is startled.*) Ah!

ASTRAGALUS (*gruffly*). A shotgun can, if you must know.

MOLLY (*looking upwards*). Augustus, look.

AUGUSTUS. Who are you, you old Jack-in-the-box?

ASTRAGALUS. I am known as the Mountain King.

MOLLY. The Mountain King! Oh, woe is me! (*She sinks unconscious into Augustus's arms.*)

AUGUSTUS. What's wrong, Molly? Help! Help! Come help her!

ASTRAGALUS (*laughing*). The very stones must sympathize with such a sight. Take pity, rocks, and open your heart to her. (*With the butt of his rifle he strikes the rock, which opens. Inside a small waterfall is cascading over rocks. Two Alpine sprites, kneeling beside the stream, dip golden shells into the water and sprinkle Molly with the water.*) Wake, foolish girl, who wished for wings to mock the earth.

AUGUSTUS. She's opening her eyes. What's the matter, Molly?

MOLLY. Oh, what's come over me? I looked on the Mountain King. I must be forty years older. Do you recognize me, Augustus?

AUGUSTUS. What are you talking about? You're just as pretty as ever.

MOLLY. Am I pretty? Really? What about the wrinkles? Not even one?

AUGUSTUS. Of course not.

MOLLY. Thank heaven! I've never been so scared in my life.

AUGUSTUS. What was the matter?

MOLLY. Well, Lizzy told me that any girl who looked on the Mountain King would age forty years.

ASTRAGALUS (*stepping forward*). She told you that?

MOLLY. Oh, there he is again! (*She hides her face.*)

ASTRAGALUS. Allay your fear and hearken to the Mountain King's words.

Both now and once before your hearts afire
I've seen, which glow like dawn on lily snow,
And tears, called forth by nobly born desire,
That down your bravely suffering cheeks do flow.
With such rare joy have I been so elated
To think that both in love should prove so true,
To you my sovran power I've dedicated
And my protection I bestow on you.

(*To Molly.*)

I've seen your father's hate for all his race
And overheard, when through the woods he ran
With boar-like rage, or on the mountain's face
To every wind he'd vent his curse on man.
Therefore, be constant, there's no cause to grieve.
His rage by Wisdom shall be brought in line.
The stars soon on your wedding night shall shine,

(*To Molly.*)

And I myself your bridal wreath shall weave.

(*Exit.*)

MOLLY. Did you hear what he said, Augustus? Was it a dream, or are we really going to be happy?

AUGUSTUS. Let's take his word for it. And even though I thought he existed only in fairy tales, I must believe he's real, or else deny the evidence of my senses.

MOLLY. Come on, let's tell Mother all that's happened -- I'll make sure you get to talk with her. We'll trust the Mountain King. He doesn't seem to be wicked, I looked him right in the eye, and he didn't do anything to me, did he, Augustus? I'm not any older than I was, am I?

AUGUSTUS. No, Molly. Since I last saw you, barely an hour older.

MOLLY. Barely an hour? (*Looking at him tenderly.*) Well, *one hour* I can easily get over. And it was a very happy hour, spending it with you.

AUGUSTUS. Oh, Molly dearest, you make me so happy!

(*They exit, arm in arm.*)

SCENE 2

Room in Rappelkopf's manor house.

SOPHIE, SABINA, COACHMAN, Various Servants.

CHORUS. Your kindness we appreciate,
And yet we find we cannot stay.
Our master's rage will not abate
And forces us to haste away.
He's quite beyond all help, we know.
We fear to stay, we'd better go.

SOPHIE. Don't let it get to you, good people, go on with your work just a little while longer. Maybe everything will have changed. Go back to work! I'd be scared to death if my husband came in now.

COACHMAN. Oh, what good's it do, ma'am, he oughta know we can't put up with him no more. We does our duty and he hates our guts.

SOPHIE. Things will all be different soon. I've written to my brother in Venice, described to him my husband's mental aberration, and told him of the dreadful things that might befall. He may even arrive today and find what's needed to cure my husband of his misanthropy. Or else take me away from the poor man.

COACHMAN. Well, it's high time, you jest ain't your old self no more, ma'am. He's killed off three wives already. He's a bony fide Bluebeard.

Enter Habakkuk.

SOPHIE. Oh, why do I have to listen to this vulgar chatter? Habakkuk, is my husband in his room? Has Molly come home yet?

HABAKKUK. Master's in the garden room again. He moved in his writing desk and chair himself and now is pacing up and down, seven yards per step. I assure you, ma'am, I lived in Paris for two years and never saw a master like him.

SABINA. Nail on the head, ma'am. Dassn't show my face in the garden, ma'am. Took the key right outta the gate, ma'am. Can't cook a blessed –

SOPHIE. You can go through the garden room.

SABINA. Dassn't set foot in that room so long's he's in it, ma'am. Foller the lion in his lair sooner'n go in there. Runs ever'body out. Comes in that kitchen, don't care what happens, it's under the stove I go –

HABAKKUK. Plenty of other vermin under there anyway.

COACHMAN. He can't stand me. So I always gotta hide in the hayloft.

HABAKKUK. He hates *me* up to here (*indicates his waist*). He said I wasn't more than half a man.

SOPHIE. But he's always giving you money.

SABINA. How's what matters. Insultin' us, ma'am. All the rudeness he can scrape together. Throwin' money on the floor, ma'am.

HABAKKUK. And that's when he's in his best mood. A while back he took out his gold watch. I thought he was going to give it to me, but he threw it at my head. In my opinion, there are certain contacts one does not care to make with one's master. I lived in Paris for two years, but I never had that happen. My head's full of clockwork already, so I don't need any *flung* at it.

SABINA. Can't do nothin' in a house where can't even git to the other side o' the garden –

HABAKKUK. Then we'd see how green the grass was!

ALL. We won't stay.

SOPHIE. So you'd pack up and leave me, even though I've always been so kind to you and you know I have to put up with the same treatment as my daughter. I can't let you go now, because my brother is coming today or tomorrow, and he has plenty of influence over my husband. So until then you'll just have to put up with my husband's temper.

ALL. 'Tain't good enough, ma'am, we can't take it.

SOPHIE. Well, take this little something instead. (*She gives each one a silver coin.*) And nourish your patience with that. Just maybe you'll manage to live through it all.

ALL. Oh, thank you, ma'am.

COACHMAN. So far's I'm concerned, I'll see if I can't rub along with him somehow.

HABAKKUK. So long as we rub along with this silver, we can probably rub along with him too.

SABINA. Well aware, ma'am, wouldn't be so bad, the Master, that is –

COACHMAN. 'Course it wouldn't – if he was a differ'nt man.

HABAKKUK. Which is the *only* way things'd change.

SOPHIE. Now get on with your work as if nothing were wrong.

ALL. All right, ma'am. (*They start to go off.*)

COACHMAN. You're a right smart lady, ma'am. I allus said our mistress musta been a coachman, 'cause you know you gotta grease a wheel if you want it to go. (*Exits, laughing to himself.*)

SABINA (*kissing her hand*). True, ma'am. One lady in a million, ma'am. (*Exits.*)

HABAKKUK. I do assure you, ma'am, I lived in Paris for two years, but a heart like yours is really, as the French say, *nouveau riche!*

Lizzy enters.

SOPHIE. So you're back at last. Where's Molly? Has Augustus arrived yet? Did you meet him?

LIZZY. I don't know a thing about it, ma'am. All I know is the Mountain King (the one who's always chasing the girls, you know) was out a-hunting today. And I got so scared when we got to where we were supposed to wait, I ran away lickety-split.

SOPHIE. What about Molly?

LIZZY. She wanted to wait for Augustus, and I couldn't get her to budge an inch.

SOPHIE. But how could you leave my daughter there alone? You thoughtless thing. And I trusted you with my child! I'll have to send out a search party at once. Oh, if anything were to happen to her! Oh, heavens, there's always some new torment in store for me!

LIZZY. But, ma'am –

SOPHIE. Out of my sight! (*Exits quickly.*)

LIZZY (*angrily*). No, I'm fed up! This household is a regular torture chamber. How can they treat servants this way?

HABAKKUK. They're only human too. I'm a servant, but if I were my master, I'd kick me out too.

LIZZY. The idea of calling me a thing!

HABAKKUK. Some thing-ing going on in that head of yours!

LIZZY. Shut up! If only I didn't have these tiresome people around all the time.

HABAKKUK. I'm no misanthrope, but I do have a particular dislike for lady's maids. What I dislike about *this* "thing" is that she refuses to believe I lived in Paris for two years. (*Maliciously.*) Serves you right, Mam'zell Lizbeth!

LIZZY. Oh, you wretched creature! You don't deserve to have a lady's maid of my standing under the same roof with you.

HABAKKUK. Don't be so stuck-up about your position – you didn't invent the profession. I assure you, I lived in Paris for two years, and they have lady's maids there too – though to translate it into our language – she would be a femmedechamberry. All the servant girls in these parts would have to hide their heads in shame. And so would you, my dear ex-kitchen maid.

LIZZY. Listen, you biennial Parisian nincompoop, it would suit me fine if just once you said something nasty about me, because then I'd declare war on your cheeks and give you the most *striking* proof of how one of our own lady's maids can defend the honor of her calling. (*She boxes his ears and runs off.*)

HABAKKUK (*pressing his hands to his cheeks*). Oh, what I put up with in this house. I lived in Paris for two years, but nothing like this ever happened. (*Exits, still holding his hands to his cheeks.*)

SCENE 3

A somewhat smaller room. Stage right, a doorway, left a glass door opening on to the garden. On the same side is a large, old-fashioned table and a chair. Right, against the wall, a full-length mirror. A writing desk next to the garden door.

Rappelkopf rushes in through the glass door. His whole demeanor is extremely violent. He barely glances at people or observes them askance before whirling away from them in anger or disgust.

RAPPELKOPF. Ha! No!

Song

No, no! it can't go on this way:
With dev'lish plotting night and day!
To my face they tell me fictions.
Behind my back speak maledictions.
My gold I'll hide from all my foes,
Bury it from these thieving crows.
Not a penny do I owe –
My hundred thousand guilders, no,
They still are not enough for me:
A monarch's equal I must be.

All my crops were ruin'd by hail;
My horses bald from mane to tail;
Depressed and sad, my daughter dear
Has been lovelorn all this past year.
Every day that awful whining,
For that nitwit painter pining.
A man too paltry for abuse
With no thought of money's use.
My lady wife has not the sense
To help oppose this insolence:
"Born to be belov'd," she natters –
Wives know all about such matters!
This, you say, should not annoy me? –
To shoot myself would only joy me.
No pity wasted on my fate,
For my death they lie in wait.
Each the same, they're like that, all—
I could fairly burst with gall.

So I have decided with steadfast intention,
With the malice of man I'll have no more contention.
I'll get a divorce, for I've made up my mind;
On Michaelmas next I'll renounce all mankind.
For friendship and fealty and love and its troth
Are needless compared to my gold, 'pon my oath!
Those falsely alluring and cunning mam'selles
Who for fifty long years made my days perfect hells,
Like Timon of Athens, to breakfast I'll bring them
And scourge them, and into the temple I'll fling them.

It's over! The world is naught but toxic deadly nightshade. I've tasted it and it has made me mad. I need nothing from other people and they'll get nothing from me: nothing good, nothing bad, nothing sweet and nothing sour. I wouldn't even sell them wine that's gone off. I planted sincerity, but it came up deceit. It's disgraceful, but as matters now stand I'm about to be beggared by my own brother-in-law. He persuaded me to invest all my money in a Venetian company, which by now must be on the verge of collapse. I don't earn any interest, and get not a single letter from my hypocritical brother-in-law. I underestimated him, he may very well be in cahoots with those other traitors. That's how they all cheat me! Every damn one of them! So I want no other companion than practical experience, no matter how troublesome that may be.

A coward is cautious, weighed down by the world;
His battered-in nose by misfortune is curled.
The wounds on his skull are a million or more,
He's my man, and on him benefaction I'll pour.

I've suffered too much at the hands of the world. Friendship disappointed me, love

played me false, and marriage tormented me. I can prove it. I have four witnesses; I'm on my fourth wife. And what wives! Each one had a different vice. The first was domineering, she wanted to play queen. Until I made my entrance as King of Clubs. The second was insanely jealous. If a fly happened to glance in my direction, pow! she swatted it. Those were the first two – insult upon injury, one might say. The third was moonstruck, a loony. At night when I wanted to talk something over with her, I'd find her sitting on the roof. Now I ask you, was that to be endured? She claimed she couldn't live with me and died of sheer spite. But I still hadn't learned my lesson, and I was seized by an infernal longing to take a fourth. A fourth, who is four times as deceitful as the other three. She encourages my child in her disobedience. She encouraged that painter, that painter who turns every color with starvation. Nothing but endless whispering from that rabble I have for servants, plotting against their lord and master. (*Looks out the half-open entry way.*) Ah! There's that little maid sneaking about. She's already got more schemes simmering in her head. She wouldn't be so bad, this maid, she has the neatest little – but I hate her, with undying – I'll call her in here and pump her for information. Hey! Lizzy! (*Shouts.*) Get in here!

Lizzy enters, frightened.

LIZZY. Was there something you wanted, sir?

RAPPELKOPF (*harshly*). I want a word with you.

LIZZY (*frightened, aside*). I can tell already this is going to be a delightful conversation. And the looks he's giving me!

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). I'll have to use the greatest tact. (*Rudely.*) Get over here! (*In despair, Lizzy comes closer. Rappelkopf looks her up and down from head to toe, with disgust.*) You infamous...”thing”!

LIZZY. But, sir –

RAPPELKOPF. What sir? Sir me no sirs! Hold your tongue. Just answer my questions.

LIZZY. I can't do both.

RAPPELKOPF. *You're* capable of anything. There's no trick you can't pull off. You're a patchwork pieced together out of every kind of fraud. (*Aside.*) I'll have to be cautious lest I sound impolite.

LIZZY (*indignantly*). What sort of person would let a person talk to a person like that?

RAPPELKOPF (*violently*). You! You would! And I won't hear a word out of your mouth. What sort of treachery did you have in mind this time? Planning to rob me?

LIZZY. No!

RAPPELKOPF. What then?

LIZZY. Please let me go. (*She tries to leave.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*takes an unloaded hunting rifle from the wall*). One more step and I'll shoot.

LIZZY (*screams*). Help! Help!

RAPPELKOPF. Don't make a move! Answer me! Why were you sneaking around in that disgusting way? What are you up to?

LIZZY. Oh, Lord, what if it goes off?

RAPPELKOPF. Don't worry about that. Something has to go off, either your mouth or my gun.

LIZZY. Oh, why should I risk my life? (*Kneels.*) Dear, kind master, I'll tell you everything.

RAPPELKOPF. At last it all comes out. Heavens, open thyself!

LIZZY. I was trying to hear whether Miss Amalia's come back from the valley. Mistress scolded me for not staying with her while she was waiting for her sweetheart, who's coming home today. Mistress is on her side, but now that she's treated me the way she did, I'll tell you all about it.

RAPPELKOPF. What appalling treachery! Oh, that false Niobe! And you... "thing," with your mind in the gutter, you dare to betray your mistress – whom you owe nothing but gratitude? Oh, Humanity, humanity! O degenerate generation! Get out of my sight, you ungrateful wretch, I never want to hear of you again.

LIZZY. What should I have done?

RAPPELKOPF. You should have kept silent.

LIZZY. But, sir, you would have shot me.

RAPPELKOPF. Nonsense. It isn't loaded. One good trick deserves another.

LIZZY. Then I went through all this for nothing? How awful!

RAPPELKOPF. No, not for nothing. You crocodile of a lady's maid, you'll get a good deal in payment: my contempt, my hatred, my insults, my persecution, and your reward. (*Tosses a purse at her feet.*) Take it and get out of my house. Make yourself scarce or I'll pay you off another way. So take it – why don't you take it?

LIZZY. Oh, I'll take it all right. (*Thinks it over.*) Sir!

RAPPELKOPF. What are you thinking up, you viper! Take it and call my wife in here.

LIZZY (*pointing to the garden door*). There she is!

RAPPELKOPF. Where is she? Where? Bring her in here.

LIZZY (*quickly picking up the purse*). The old fool. (*Runs out.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*looking in her direction*). So she's made off with it already. O ye planets, collide and smash, now that this she-insect dares to make a fool of me! O Rappelkopf! How these people deceive you, while all you do is for their own good! Ah, here comes my wife, a ghastly sight. I must look like a porcupine, my hair standing on end like this.

Sophie enters.

SOPHIE (*patiently*). What is it you want, dear?

RAPPELKOPF. It's you I want, of all humankind, you! And from you I want my flesh and blood, my child! Where is she?

SOPHIE (*embarrassed*). She's not here –

RAPPELKOPF (*fiercely*). Where is she then? Where?

SOPHIE. You needn't get so excited about it.

RAPPELKOPF. Now I'm excited, am I, yet I'm rather surprised by my own calmness. She's out in the woods. Is my child lost to me forever?

SOPHIE. You know there aren't any bears in our forest.

RAPPELKOPF. But there are bare-faced young men – and so the little farce with the painter is not quite played out?

SOPHIE. And never will be, because your daughter's happiness and peace of mind depend upon it. She will always love him.

RAPPELKOPF. And I'll always hate him.

SOPHIE. What do you have against him as a person?

RAPPELKOPF. Nothing, except that he is one.

SOPHIE. What do you object to in his artwork?

RAPPELKOPF. Everything! I hate painting. It slanders Nature by belittling it. Nature cannot be pinned down. Nature is always in the flower of youth, while a painting is like a corpse with rouged cheeks.

SOPHIE. I won't accept your ideas, I dare not. My duty forbids it.

RAPPELKOPF. Because you've decided your duty is to hate me, deceive me, lie to me and so forth. (*Turns away from her.*)

SOPHIE. I just want to say –

RAPPELKOPF. A lie.

SOPHIE. I haven't said anything yet.

RAPPELKOPF. You've but to open your mouth and there it is.

SOPHIE. Just look at me a moment –

RAPPELKOPF. No. I have forbidden my eyes to look into yours. Out of my room! (*Sits and turns his back on her.*)

SOPHIE (*indignantly*). You turn your back on me?

RAPPELKOPF. Here's why: since you do everything behind my back anyway, you can talk to me behind my back as well. I'm no Janus, I've but one face, and there's not much of that, but if I had a hundred, I'd turn every one of them away from you. So please relieve me of your presence. Out, you monster!

SOPHIE. Husband, I warn you for the last time. I have not deserved this treatment, and I can endure it no longer if I want to preserve my self-respect. Nothing deserves your hatred more than your own behavior. It's the enemy that wages war in your own home. And it really is high time I left you, lest I commit the sin of wishing Heaven to release you from a world you find so burdensome to your soul. A soul devoid of love and a world in which your only pleasure is tormenting those around you. (*Exits angrily.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*alone*). Dreadful female. Everyone is against me, and I haven't done anything to anyone. If I do lose my temper from time to time, it's so seldom. Once I've talked myself out of it, I never remember a single word I've said. But human beings are wicked, they might poison me. And this woman, for whom I cherished such a criminal passion, is in a position to dupe me in just such a way. And yet she expects me to place my trust in her. Where am I to lay hands on that precious item? If only I knew someone who could lend me some trust, I'd pledge my whole fortune for it. (*Stands beside the garden door.*) This garden is still my only friend. Despite it all, Nature is wonderful. It's so well ordered. But look at those caterpillars devouring that tree. Creeping, parasitic horde. (*Laughing scornfully.*) Eat your fill, eat your fill! Until there's nothing left, and then start on the house. Ah, bravissimo! (*Remains standing, with downcast eyes, and arms crossed.*)

Habakkuk steps just into the entry-way, a kitchen knife in hand.

HABAKKUK. Let's make a stab at it. (*Sees Rappelkopf and starts.*) Oh, hell! He's standing there, right in front of the garden door. How am I going to get out? I can't walk past him, he'd pounce on me like a watchdog. Oh, what'll become of me? I lived in Paris for two years. If you'll permit, sir, to – (*Rappelkopf, startled, wheels around suddenly. Habakkuk is equally startled.*)

RAPPELKOPF. What is it? What do you want?

HABAKKUK (*aside*). Barking already! (*Without thinking, he hides the knife behind his back.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*seizes him by the collar*). What do you want in here? What are you afraid of?

HABAKKUK (*aside*). He's at me already. (*Aloud.*) Excuse me, sir, I have a –

RAPPELKOPF. What do you have? A guilty conscience, no doubt. What are you hiding behind your back? Into the light with it.

HABAKKUK (*shows the knife*). I'm not concealing anything, sir. It's a kitchen knife –

RAPPELKOPF (*reels back in horror*). Hell and damnation! He means to murder me!

HABAKKUK. Certainly not, I –

RAPPELKOPF. Admit it! This minute! (*Grabs him and wrests the knife away.*) Was this knife sharpened with me in mind?

HABAKKUK. Oh, you'd be mad to think such a thing. I only wanted to ask you, sir –

RAPPELKOPF. If you could murder me?

HABAKKUK. Of course not. I'd have to do a lot of asking before you'd –

RAPPELKOPF. Villain! Traitor!

HABAKKUK. Just let me explain –

RAPPELKOPF. No explanations! Get out!

HABAKKUK (*aside*). He won't let me get a word in edgewise. (*Aloud.*) Sir, you must hear me out. (*Approaches him.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*holding a chair in front of himself*). Don't come any closer! You probably still have a couple more on you. A regular gay blade.

HABAKKUK. Search me, sir, if you don't believe me.

RAPPELKOPF (*seizes him again*). I will. Confess, you masked marauder, who hired you?

HABAKKUK. Goodness me, sir, my mistress gave me –

RAPPELKOPF. Enough! I don't need to hear any more. How ghastly! (*Habakkuk tries to say something. Rappelkopf shouts.*) No more! My wife wants to have me killed. (*Sinks into a chair and buries his face in his hands.*)

HABAKKUK (*aside*). Oh, this is awful! I was only supposed to cut some chicory. (*Wrings his*

hands.) And he thinks I was trying to kill him. What a dreadful situation!

RAPPELKOPF. Yes, it is dreadful – it’s monstrous, it’s the most inhuman deed ever committed in the history of the world. (*Picks up the chair.*) Out, you assassin, you cutthroat, you monster in flunkey’s clothing!

HABAKKUK. But, sir –

RAPPELKOPF. Get out!

HABAKKUK. You see, I was...

RAPPELKOPF (*infuriated*). Out, I say, or else -- (*He chases him out.*)

HABAKKUK (*in the doorway, shouts*). I lived in Paris for two years, but I never went through the likes of this. (*Exits.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*alone*). It’s all over. I’m no longer safe in my own home.

Leave this house, just clear out –
There are murderers about!
Now I shall revenge enjoy,
All this furniture destroy.
By the coat-tails I’ll ensnare
First this forty-year-old chair,
Where there sat in turn each wife
As she gobbled up my life.
Ah! I trample you to dust.
(*Tramples on the chair.*)
So it dies – as all this must.
The table now, from which I sent
Letters steeped in sentiment
To false friends once. I’ll overthrow
And cleave it now with just one blow.
(*Smashes the table.*)
Mirror, which the world entices,
Polished, shining show of vices,
Beauty’s idol, which enslaves
All the idle fools and knaves.
There they stand and there they gape,
There they dress up like an ape;
Making faces, bowing low,
Baring teeth as white as snow.
Lying glass that peacock cheats,
Fooling women with deceits.
O you base and worthless chattel,
Wait, and I shall do you battle.
(*Looks at himself in the mirror.*)

This ugly face I so abhor.
I'll not endure it any more.
(Smashes the mirror with his fist.)
So – the champion lies there,
Armor shattered past repair.
(Looks at his hand.)
Ah! The shining cheat has maimed him
Who at last has broke and tamed him.
But I'd care not, if instead
A bucketful of blood I bled.
(Opens the desk and removes letters.)
And these letters packed with passion
I once wrote in frantic fashion,
Strew their fragments on the floor –
It's waste of paper I deplore.

(Tears them up and scatters the pieces on the floor. Takes rolls of coins and purses out of a cashbox.)

Only money, much maligned,
This world's precious concubine,
She alone I'll not forsake,
I'll pocket her and with me take.
(Stuffs it into his pockets.)
You four-walled room, you stupid ass,
My hate for you will never pass.
Why stare at me in such a way?
See you such as *I* each day?
I cannot follow suit and break you,
So an admission I will make you:
For the woods this home I quit
And never shall return to it.
(Runs out in a frenzy.)

Scene 4

TRANSFORMATION

The interior of a charcoal burner's cottage, with soot-stained walls. Sally is at the spinning wheel. Hanky, Chris and Andy are at the table. Martha is by a cradle with a baby in it. Beneath the table lies a large black dog. On the table, the cat the children are playing with. At the back, two tumbledown beds, Grandmother lying ill in one, Christian lying drunk on the other.

Quintet

SALLY *(cheerfully)*

When I think of Frank, it's true,
All goes well with me.
And the heart I give him too

Sings more merrily.

THE THREE CHILDREN.

Oh, Ma, you gotta give us bread,
Our bellies hurts so bad.

SALLY.

I find my hunger pangs have fled
If I but see my lad.
When I think of Frank, it's true,
All goes well with me.
And the heart I give him too
Sings most merrily.

THE THREE CHILDREN.

Momma, give us bread!

CHRISTIAN (*garbled and indistinct*).

Shut yer traps, you little brats,
Before I knocks you dead!

MARTHA (*shouting*).

Shut up!

BABY.

Waa! Waa!

CAT.

Meow!

DOG.

Bow-wow!

(*The first tune resumes.*)

SALLY.

My Franky is a lively boy,
Sings the livelong day;
Sings I'm the one that brings him joy
And no other may.

THE THREE CHILDREN.

If we don't eat, we jest won't make it,
Guess we're starvin' anyhow.

SALLY.

The baby's sleeping, don't you wake it,
So play with the dog for now.
My Franky is a lively boy,
Sings the livelong day;
Sings I'm the one that gives him joy
And no other may.

THE THREE CHILDREN.

A crust of bread!

CHRISTIAN.

If you do not shut your traps,

I will knock you dead!

MARTHA. Shut up!

BABY. Waa! Waa!

CAT. Meow!

DOG. Bow-wow!

MARTHA. Shut up, you noisy brats!

HANKY (*whining*). Ma, gimme some bread.

SALLY. There ain't none. Go pick some crabapples.

MARTHA. And not a peep when you do it. Yer pa's sick.

ANDY. What's 'e got?

MARTHA. Dizzy spells. (*Aside.*) The kids shouldn't oughta know.

CHRIS. Pa done sold all that charcoal –

ANDY. An' din't bring no money home. The crook!

SALLY. Whasit to ya?

ANDY. We ain't got nothin' to eat, 'cause he done had so much to drink.

SALLY. That's how Ma brings 'em up. No respect for their Pa.

CHRISTIAN. I'll massacre all of 'em! (*He tries to get up, but staggers backwards.*)

MARTHA. Lie down! (*She pushes him back into bed.*)

ANDY. Them's his dizzy spells.

THE THREE CHILDREN (*laughing*). Pa cain't even stand up.

MARTHA (*to Sally*). Keep an eye on the baby! (*Sally rocks the cradle.*) A cartload o' kids and a no-good husband. Not a penny in the house. (*In bed the Grandmother sneezes.*) Stop Gran'ma from sneezin'. Can't hear yerself talk.

THE THREE CHILDREN. That'll be fun.

ANDY. Hey, Ma's sore. Ha ha ha!

MARTHA. Ye'll be the death of me, y' damned brat. I'll larn ya to make fun o' yer ma!

(Takes him by the head and strikes him. Andy yelps and starts crying.)

SALLY *(jumps up and restrains her)*. Cut it out, Ma! *(The other two children sneak off behind the table and the bed.)*

ALL TOGETHER:

BABY. Waa! Waa!

GRANDMOTHER *(stretching out her arms in bed and sneezing)*. Aatchoo!

DOG. Bow-wow!

(The cat jumps down from the table.)

(Rappelkopf opens the door and stands there.)

RAPPELKOPF. Well, don't let me stop you, go on, this time pow! right to the head. Quite a little family gathering. *(Walks to the center of the room and applauds maliciously.)*
Bravo! Bravissimo!

SALLY. Of all the nerve! Whatcha want?

MARTHA. Whatcha want? Whacha starin' at?

RAPPELKOPF. You I don't want. Ancient of days! How much does this hovel cost? How much do I have to pay to throw you all out?

SALLY. Some sense o' humor.

MARTHA. You gotta lot o' nerve, comin' in here like that.

SALLY. Insultin'us like that –

CHRISTIAN *(half drunk, half asleep)*. T'row da bum out.

MARTHA *(irritated)*. Shaddap! *(To Rappelkopf)*. Whatcha want? I kin lick my kids all I want.

ANDY. Yeah, what's he care 'bout me getting' a lickin'? That what we git for dinner.

THE BOY UNDER THE BED. Sic 'im, boy!

DOG. Bow-wow!

MARTHA AND SALLY. Git out!

RAPPELKOPF. Stop! Not another word! *(Takes out two purses filled with money and jingles them.)* There's gold in here! And it all belongs to you. Understand? So act friendly. Give us a smile. Say please. Right now, you scum, right now!

MARTHA. Beg par'n, sir. Git up now, kiddies, kiss the nice man's hand. See if he'll give ya a little somethin'. (*The children creep out.*)

ANDY (*laughing aside*). He's got dough? Come on, let's kiss his hand, kids. (*They kiss Rappelkopf's hand.*)

RAPPELKOPF. Well, well, the whole little brood.

ALL THREE CHILDREN. Give us some money, sir, please.

CHRISTIAN. Send some over here, too!

SALLY. Ain't you ashamed o' yerselves? He's tryin' to make fools outa us.

RAPPELKOPF. And what is the lady asking for this cosy bungalow? I'll buy it, no matter the price.

MARTHA. Sir, you kiddin' us? Whatcha want with this lousy dump?

RAPPELKOPF. None of your business. Two hundred ducats enough for you?

MARTHA. Oh, sir! There ain't that much money in the whole world, that'd fix us up for life.

SALLY. But, Ma, you ain't gonna sell it, are ya? What's Franky gonna say when he finds out?

ANDY. Lettim have it, Ma, it ain't worth nothin' nohow.

MARTHA (*overjoyed*). Oh, thank God for all this luck! Now if my husband was well enough to talk business –

ANDY. Pa! Stand 'im up. Or else we're gonna sell the house with him in it.

MARTHA. Hey, husband! (*To herself.*) Oh, he makes me so ashamed in front o' folks. Cain't hardly move. (*During this speech the Dog rubs itself against Rappelkopf, who kicks him away. The Dog barks at him. Martha, aloud.*) Go on, sell the cottage. Listen: we're gonna get two hundred ducats for it.

CHRISTIAN (*drunk/asleep*). Not 'nough, not near 'nough.

SALLY (*aside*). Oh, don't let 'im have it, Pa.

MARTHA. My husband don't rightly know what he's sayin'. You kin have it, sir. Ever'thing's all fixed up.

RAPPELKOPF. Then I'll buy the lot, as is.

MARTHA. Oh, an' there's a kitchen out back, lots o' dishes.

ANDY. Nice 'uns too, and they're on the house.

RAPPELKOPF. Then here's the money. (*Flings the money at them.*) And I want you out at once. The lot of you. In two minutes' time I don't want to see any of you.

During the speech the children have cleared everything away, so that the downstage area is free of furniture, except for one chair which Rappelkopf sits on.

(Franky enters.)

FRANKY. Well, here I am, folks.

RAPPELKOPF. Another brute beast.

SALLY. Oh, Franky, see that man over there? Ma sold 'im the house, he's throwin' us all out. He awready paid for it.

FRANKY. But why'd ya do it, Ma? Give the ol' coot his money back.

MARTHA. Not never gonna give it back. Don't come across a dern fool like him ever' day. So shaddap: you kin git married on this money.

SALLY. Where we gonna stay? It's night awready!

MARTHA. This here money'll open any door in town. Hey, kids! Pa, Gran'ma, git up, git up – we gotta go.

ANDY. We're goin', we're goin'. I kin har'ly wait.

MARTHA. Git up, husband! (*She yanks him out of bed and shoves him forward.*)

RAPPELKOPF. Is he ill?

MARTHA. Guess so.

RAPPELKOPF. Has he had it long?

MARTHA. Oh yeah, this here's an old ailment. Started last year.

RAPPELKOPF. Lies. It started last night. Throw him out!

CHRISTIAN. I won't go till I get some o' that money. I'm on'y human, I got somethin' up here, so I want somethin' in my pocket too.

MARTHA. I got the money awready. (*Puts his hat and coat on him.*) So let's go. You brats pack up. (*Hanky takes the dog by its rope.*) Chris'll take Gran'ma. (*She hoists the old woman out of bed and puts a crutch in her hand. To Hanky.*) You take the dog and I'll take yer Pa.

RAPPELKOPF. What about the baby? What happens to it?

ANDY. He's going under my arm.

RAPPELKOPF. A tribe of Hottentots. All ready now?

ANDY. Yeah. Ready t' go.

RAPPELKOPF. Then get a move on.

SALLY. So we really gotta leave this ol' place –

CHRIS (*crying*). Where we was all borned and growed up.

SALLY. An' I know God's t' blame fer all the bad this man's done with his money.

Sextet

SALLY. Peaceful home, we now depart
With sorrow weighing every heart.

ALL EXCEPT RAPPELKOPF.
Peaceful home, we now depart
With sorrow weighing every heart.

SALLY. And should our fondest hopes come true
Our thoughts remain behind with you.

ALL. And though our fondest hopes come true
Our thoughts remain behind with you.

They go off, two by two. As they leave, they glance around sadly, the dog as well.

DOG (*in a subdued tone to Rappelkopf, as it is led away*). Bow-wow! Bow-wow! (*It follows behind, led on a rope by Hanky.*)

Song with chorus

RAPPELKOPF (*alone, leaps up from the chair*).
Now I am alone and I feel I should stay so,
This solitude fondly I'll wed, and I pray so.
And none but the mountains and crags I'll befriend,
To parasites buzzing like flies here's an end.
No longer I'll listen to women's vile gushing,
Much rather I'd hear the swift waterfall rushing.
As servants I've chosen the elements four,
Who are ready and able to do all my chores.
The West Wind as my barber I now designate,
Which fans me and curls me or combs my hair straight.
Had I a toupee, though expensive by half,

The storm wind would dress it then, à la giraffe.
In this dark house I'll live, as snug as I can,
And here laugh to scorn all the follies of man.

Crosses to center stage and stares about him. Near the cottage the former chorus is quietly sung.

CHORUS. Peaceful home, we now depart
With sorrow weighing every heart.

DOG. Bow-wow!

RAPPELKOPF (*stepping forward*).

I want to hear nothing from wicked folk ever,
The dull I despise and I flee from the clever.
If quarrels they're picking or if they are fighting,
If lawyers are suing and judges indicting;
If flatterers flatter and turtle-doves kiss,
If anyone sneezes, there's something amiss;
If sleepers sleep soundly and eat till contented;
If they're in their right minds or simply demented;
If far off in India oats are priced higher;
If it rains in the city so they stoke up the fire;
If they're celebrating a wedding or wake
(To think the two different were sheerest mistake):
In this dark house I'll live, as snug as I can,
And here laugh to scorn all the follies of man.

He hurls himself into a chair. Farther away from the cottage comes the chorus.

CHORUS. Peaceful home, we now depart,
With sorrow weighing every heart.

DOG. Bow-wow.

RAPPELKOPF (*leaps up and flings away the chair*).

Though all of the world were completely reversed;
Though folks were to virtue by gallows coerced;
Though chastity lay all defiled like a pig;
Though the sick and the dead were seen dancing a jig;
Though nursemaids were needed by ancient old dames;
Though the North Pole were blazing with flickering flames;
Though usurers gave away all of their gold;
Though crowns were as cheaply as cucumbers sold;
Though swords ceased to clash and nooses to swing;
Though eagles went soaring without any wings;

Though anguish and love were fore'er intertwining;
Though robbed of its sunbeams the sun were still shining;
I'd stay in this dark house, as snug as I can,
And here laugh to scorn all the follies of man.

He runs upstage and opens the window. The forest glows in the redness of the sunset, which shines on Rappelkopf. He looks out gloomily, and far in the distance one can hear:

CHORUS. Peaceful home, we now depart
With sorrow weighing every heart.

DOG. Bow-wow.

Scene 5

Slowly the stage is transformed into a small room in Rappelkopf's house. Center a large mirror. Daylight. Molly and Augustus lead in Sophie, who sits in a chair, weeping.

MOLLY. Don't fret so, mother dear. He'll come back when he's let off enough steam. You know how often he's left the house before and run off to the mountains.

SOPHIE. Oh, Molly, I've a feeling here (*points to her breast*) that we shall never see him alive and well again.

AUGUSTUS. If only you'd let me go after him, I'd do all in my power to calm him down.

SOPHIE. Oh, Augustus, the sight of you would make things worse. He was in a foul enough temper, but when he heard you were here, he flew into a rage.

MOLLY. Here come Lizzy and Habakkuk. Maybe one of them has some news.

Lizzy hurries in, dragging Habakkuk.

LIZZY. Come on in, you miserable wretch, and tell our mistress the whole story. In case you don't know, ma'am, Habakkuk was the last person to see the master. And it was Habakkuk's fault he left.

HABAKKUK. How could I help it?

AUGUSTUS. He's white as a sheet.

SOPHIE. Why didn't you tell us this before? What have you been up to now?

LIZZY. He was hiding in the barn out of sheer terror of our good, kind master. He tried to kill him.

ALL. Who tried to kill whom?

LIZZY. Habakkuk tried to kill the master.

ALL. Impossible!

LIZZY. Is that so? He confessed it himself. You can see for yourself, ma'am, he has a real bloodthirsty look about him. He'll kill us all in our beds.

HABAKKUK. Ah, the shameless hussy. Just let me get my hands on her for half an hour, ma'am... I can't take any more of this.

LIZZY. I dare you to come any closer, you renegade!

MOLLY. Don't you know how to take a joke, Lizzy?

SOPHIE. Speak up, Habakkuk! Why are you trembling so?

HABAKKUK. Out of sheer anger. I acted without any *présence d'esprit*. For two years I lived in Paris, but my knees are still knocking together.

AUGUSTUS (*offering him a chair*). Sit down here and explain it all to us.

HABAKKUK. All I can tell you is this: I was going to cut some chicory, as the mistress had asked, and when the master saw I was holding a knife, he thought I wanted to kill him with my bare hands. He didn't let me say a word, shook me like a fruit tree, and asked me who had bribed me to do it. I tried to say: the mistress wanted some chicory. But he wouldn't let me finish the sentence. As soon as I had said "The mistress," he leaped up, both feet off the floor, as high as the *plafond*. He kept yelling, my wife wants me murdered, called me a cutthroat and all sorts of names, and without further ado whipped me out the door. So then, out of sheer desperation, I hid in the barn. Until this scheming little vixen started rooting round for me, and now has garbled the whole story.

LIZZY. I heard him say –

HABAKKUK. That you were a low-minded baggage, to want to get a man of my caliber in trouble.

SOPHIE. That'll do, both of you. So that's the reason my husband was so angry. He thinks I want to murder him. The whole thing is absurd, but it's a good indication of his opinion of my character.

MOLLY. Calm down, mother.

AUGUSTUS. Who would ever believe that a sane mind could deteriorate so badly?

LIZZY. Our master always did have a gloomy air about him. When he was a bookseller, his books were always in order, but he *never* was.

HABAKKUK. He's a hypochondriac. His nerves are all on edge.

LIZZY (*laughing*). Isn't it awful – this man lived in Paris for two years, and he's as ignorant as an oyster.

HABAKKUK. One of these days I'll lay hands on you.

SOPHIE (*to Lizzy*). So you saw him running out of the house?

LIZZY. In the direction of the forest. After proving that he was stronger than the furniture.

SOPHIE (*weeping*). Oh, merciful heaven, what if he did himself an injury? I can't just sit here, I must go out –

AUGUSTUS. Do stay here.

MOLLY. Oh, Augustus. The Mountain King hasn't kept his word.

AUGUSTUS. Damn that hobgoblin!

A clap of thunder. The mirror opens and reveals the Mountain King sitting on boulders. In the background, distant mountains and a blue sky.

SOPHIE. Oh, Lord, what's this!

AUGUSTUS AND MOLLY. 'Tis he!

SOPHIE. Who?

HABAKKUK. The garbage man!

AUGUSTUS AND MOLLY. The Mountain King!

LIZZY. Heaven help us! (*She closes her eyes.*)

ASTRAGALUS. Why do you curse me?

AUGUSTUS. You Miracle Worker, whose power is infinite and unquestioned, since it speaks to eye and heart together, you promised us your protection. But, because there has been so much suffering in this house, I feared you would insure my beloved's happiness only at the expense of her father's misfortune.

MOLLY (*kneeling*). If you know where he is now, save him, great Monarch of the Mountains!

SOPHIE (*kneeling*). I don't understand what these children are talking about, but if your magic has some sway over my husband's heart and you are responsible for his turning away from us, undo it and we shall honor you forever as the soul of kindness.

LIZZY (*kneeling*). Mighty Mountain King, I don't dare look at you, and I know full well why not. But if you are a gallant gentleman, the pleas of an attractive lady's maid will have some weight with you.

HABAKKUK (*kneeling*). I too beseech you, terrified though I am, your royal Stoniness.

ASTRAGALUS. I thought as much; this fear is in your hearts instilled
Because my efforts start in such a vein.
Be not afraid! In matters such as these I am most skilled,
Well in advance I know what must be gained.
Before you can bend metal hard and straight
Deep in the oven's bowels soft must it grow.
So now his anger's tempered by hot hate;
His soul's impassioned sparks fly to and fro.
Then hammer blows will pound him till refined,
His former way of thinking I'll reverse,
And he'll forge his own peace with all mankind,
To seek its welfare and no longer curse.
Therefore, despite the ills you shall behold,
When by tomorrow's sun he comes again,
You all must trust my word, for truth be told,
The next sunset will see your joys begin.

He returns to his former position. The mirror appears as it was.

SOPHIE. Strange as it seems, he's made me feel easier. Let's go to my room. It faces the forest and we can watch for the men I sent to find your father. And you can tell me all about the Mountain King.

Sophie, Molly and Augustus exit.

HABAKKUK. The things that go on in this house are beyond belief. (*He approaches Lizzy.*)

LIZZY. What's up now, Monsieur? Why are you looking at me that way?

HABAKKUK (*deliberately*). You wanted to march me to the gallows. So all I've got to say to you is –

LIZZY. You lived in Paris for two years, you ridiculous person?

HABAKKUK. *Oui*, Mademoiselle, and that experience gives me the right to despise your vulgarity. (*Exits, dignified.*)

LIZZY (*alone*). And now I'll go to the master's room and look at myself in whatever's left of the mirror, and see if my beauty is still intact. Then I'll collect all the shreds of the love letters, and one by one I'll drop their trampled sentiments in the fireplace. That's what men are like: their vows of love are simply I.O.U.'s drawn on eternity, for none is ever paid off in this lifetime. If ever I'm reincarnated, I'll come back as a man. I don't want to be at all as I am now, though I would like to retain my ability to put one over on everyone and everything.

Arietta

If I a girl no longer were,
For that's not worth a flea –
The military I'd prefer;
A general I'd be.
Oh, I would be the bravest man,
And fight my way to fame.
Though when the cannonade began
"About face!" I'd exclaim.
Wherever flashing eyes were spied
I would direct my aim,
My army t'ward them I would guide
In heroism's name.
Their glances fly from ev'ry side
As fiery as grenades,
While to the front I boldly stride
Lest my troops be afraid.

"Brave warriors, don't give up!" I'd shout.
"We'll win by right of birth!
"If their left flank be put to rout
(*She points to her heart.*)
"We'll bring the foe to earth.
"And when of vict'ry we can brag
"Through staunchness of command,
"Right afterward, bright Hymen's flag
"We'll wrest from Cupid's hand."

And I'd parade with roundelays,
My troops march in review.
If I don't win a hero's bays
A wedding wreath will do.
My martial arts would all conspire
To conquer one sweet dove.
Then from the army I'd retire
My darling wife to love.

Scene 6

Deep in the forest. The charcoal burner's cottage, down right. It has a door next to a window, and a practicable window on the roof. Across the stage from the cottage is a large oak tree, and behind it a bush. Far upstage a small waterfall. Late evening. Rappelkopf comes out of the cottage carrying a water pitcher. He is in a soot-smearred nightcap, a round farmer's hat and the charcoal burner's old jacket.

RAPPELKOPF. Now – Timon of Athens is ready. All I need is his close friend, the ass – and if I'm not one now, I used to be. I was too kind-hearted, it was my greatest failing.

People don't like it. Some people, when they meet a man who's done them nothing but good deeds, will at most say to each other, "Oh, he's all right, wouldn't hurt a fly, perfectly happy if you just leave him alone. (*Trading half-hearted greetings.*) Good day. Good day. Hope I see you well." But when a man comes along who they believe can do them harm, they nudge each other in the ribs with "Oh, he's a wicked devil, you'd better be leery of him. (*Offering lavish compliments.*) Your humble servant! Your humble servant! Might I have the honor of inquiring after your health?" Once they get started, there's no stopping them. "Your humble servant." Oh! it'll drive you crazy! I'm no longer safe in my own home, my wife wants me killed. Did you hear that, you trees, all of you doubly persecuted for man deals you a two-fold death, first felling you with axe and then covering his tracks with fire -- did you hear that? My wife wants me killed! What, is the forest so poor in echoes that I'm the only one proclaiming this crime? (*Rustling is heard in the bush.*) Ah! who's moving around in there? If you're human, come out, so that I can insult you to my heart's content. Come on out! Who are you? Who goes there?

A bull sticks its head out of the bush where it's grazing and bellows loudly at Rappelkopf: "Mooooo!" From the neck down the bull is hidden by the bush.

RAPPELKOPF (*startled*). Well, that's one I didn't expect. (*Tears off a branch and chases the bull away.*) Shoo! I've yet to invite this kind of company.

ASTRAGALUS steps forward.

ASTRAGALUS. You don't deserve anything better. Why did you chase away this child of my herd?

RAPPELKOPF. Father had better look after his children. This is *my* turf, and I don't allow anything on the premises that has four feet or two. So clear out, father and son!

ASTRAGALUS. You're wrong if you think you rule your own turf. All the valley at the base of the Alps belongs to me. Let me ask *you*, how dare you utter these disgraceful curses here? They cling to these leaves like a poisonous frost. You abuse the world through which you crawl like a worm spawned in slime. You hide in the dark bosom of the forest because you are afraid to bask in the rays of a serene existence.

RAPPELKOPF. What's it to you? (*Aside.*) This fellow looks like he's made out of cast-iron. I'll ignore him, let him stand there. (*Starts to go into the cottage.*)

ASTRAGALUS (*taking aim*). Halt! Your answer or your life.

RAPPELKOPF. What kind of manners is it to shoot a human being?

ASTRAGALUS. You're not human.

RAPPELKOPF. Really? That's the first I've heard of it.

ASTRAGALUS. You've cut yourself off from humanity. Give me some indication that you are still a member of the race. Are you sociable like human beings? No. Have you feelings? Nothing but hatred. Are you intelligent? I can find no trace of it.

RAPPELKOPF. Of all the nerve!

ASTRAGALUS. Then tell me, with which species should I classify you? You combine a predator's ruthless brutality with the look and speech of a human being.

RAPPELKOPF. Oh, that's rich – his logic concludes that I'm a predator and a specimen of a new species at that.

ASTRAGALUS. What is your answer?

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). I'll give him an answer all right – if only he didn't have that gun.

ASTRAGALUS. Answer, are you fair game, a fitting billet for my bullets?

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). For the time being, I'll have to postpone settling scores with him. But I'd love to polish him off here and now. (*Aloud.*) Put the gun down. I'm human, far more than you'd suppose.

ASTRAGALUS. Then why do you hate the world?

RAPPELKOPF. Because I've been playing blind man's buff. I tagged Loyalty, but it turned out to be Treason. That stripped the blindfold from my eyes.

ASTRAGALUS. Then you must also flee the forest, for it harbors stunted trees; shun the earth, for it shoots up poisonous plants; distrust the sky's blue, because it is often veiled by clouds – if you insist on taking the part for the whole.

RAPPELKOPF. What does the whole do when every part does nothing but torment me? I'm no longer safe in my own home.

ASTRAGALUS. It's your suspicious nature that led you astray. Get rid of it!

RAPPELKOPF. My wife hates me, my child avoids me, my servants rob me blind.

ASTRAGALUS. Because your behavior has made them all wretched. Because you have earned all the hatred you are shown.

RAPPELKOPF. That's a lie. I'm as sweet as sugar candy. Mine are the only joys that have turned to gall, but I'm not to blame.

ASTRAGALUS. You are most to blame, because you don't know what you really are.

RAPPELKOPF. That's another lie. I am Herr von Rappelkopf –

ASTRAGALUS. And that is all you know about yourself. The fact that you're stubborn,

savage and sickeningly suspicious, that you're driven by obstinacy to the farthest verge of vulgar malice, that you mistake all your shortcomings for virtues – that remains a mystery to you, does it?

The moon rises.

RAPPELKOPF. One thing only is clear to me -- the fact that you're a liar. You accuse me of all sorts of faults I don't have.

ASTRAGALUS. I'll wager you have more than those. I'll prove my argument to you if you'll entrust yourself to my power and solemnly promise that you are willing to change.

RAPPELKOPF. If I'd given it a thought, I'd have done it long ago. I put my trust in no man. Deceit's what makes the world go round.

ASTRAGALUS. Do you believe the world was created just so that you could spew your venom on its fair name? Is humanity dependent on your whims? Why should others try to make you happy and not you them? Are you out of your wits, you presumptuous grubworm?

RAPPELKOPF. To hell with all this – worm me no worms, this whole business has become wormwood to me. I won't give in, you lackbrain logician! I'm too good and you're too wicked for me to stand here and take this. So get out of here, the moon's on the rise and you are on the wane. Henceforth I'll lock myself up in my cottage and plaster over the windows if I see anyone coming.

ASTRAGALUS. So you refuse to be reformed?

RAPPELKOPF. I'd accept nothing, not even if I were up to my neck in water.

ASTRAGALUS. Then come! The proof of this at once we'll find –
And since pure reason cannot sway your mind,
My magic power to good must bend your heart;
You'll find the Mountain King will make you smart.
Avoid this house or else, to your despair,
The livid past will meet you everywhere.
If you the elements your brothers name
Their rage and fury you must also claim.
If lightning should this cottage roof consume,
You'll find its flashing breast's a warm bedroom.
Since, rather than your wife, you'd kiss the breeze,
Why sure, the howling storm is bound to please.
Your brutish form this ground will never bear,
So over earth's ingratitude despair.
And since you think to be friends with the sea,
The flood around your neck will swirling be.
Betrayed by fire and water, earth and air,

Of my proposal you will gladly hear.
If to mankind your heart not loving flies
The forest beasts will prove your swift demise.

Quick exit.

RAPPELKOPF (*alone*). The most appalling boor! But I plan to do exactly as I please.
Exactly! You won't deprive me of my sleep tonight. Good night, friend forest.
Sleep well. Oak trees, I'll see you at breakfast.

He is about to go inside. When he opens the door he sees Victorinen's Ghost sitting in a chair. She is wrapped in a blue mantle and looks very spooky. Her face is pale, and her whole form gives off a greenish glow. She speaks in an undertone.

VICTORINEN'S GHOST.

And where, my dissolute husband, have you been so long?
At home much later than you ought,
Come right on in, I get so scared alone –
I'll tear out all your hair, for now you're caught!

RAPPELKOPF. Good heavens! My first wife. I can tell by the way she tries to boss me around, even from the grave. Nothing could make me go through that door. She's got the devil in her. Maybe if the window's open... (*Thunder.*) It's beginning to thunder. (*At the window Wallburga's Ghost peers out.*) Who's that inside?

WALLBURGA'S GHOST (*in a sepulchral voice*).

'Tis I, false man. Why can you not behave?
Why did you, after me, take yet two more to wife?
I love you so I can't rest in my grave.
Without you I can't live, you see how much I miss you.
No other will do. So come in, I must kiss you.

RAPPELKOPF (*panicked*). Oh, how ghastly! Oh, this dreadful night sends me the second one as well. I know it's she, by her jealousy. She's moldering away and yet she says she can't live without me. What an awful predicament. I've got shivers all up and down my spine. (*Lightning.*) The thunder is deafening and the lightning scares me to death. Maybe I can get in through the roof. But I need courage to try it. (*He clambers up. Meanwhile Emerentia's Ghost appears, sitting on the roof. Rappelkopf is terrified.*) Oh! And there's the third, as unfaithful to the graveyard as she was to me. (*He backs away.*)

EMERENTIA'S GHOST.

Where to? You can't go anywhere.
Stay here and watch the moon with me.

The moon sails out from behind the clouds, and is transformed into the likeness of a phantom head.

That pallid countenance up there,
The likeness of your present wife it took.
She weeps! Look there! Look! Look! Look!

RAPPELKOPF. Now the fourth one's grinning at me. A diabolical quartet. This fright is getting to me. Ah – leave me alone! I'm going to faint. A vengeful hell has done this to me. I won't stay here. I have to get away. (*Leaps off the roof.*) Oh, heaven be praised I'm on solid ground again. But now what will I do? (*Storm noises.*) The storm's getting worse every minute. It's pouring buckets, but those ghosts won't disappear. (*Rain pours down.*) The bottom's fallen out of the clouds. I'll have to climb this tree or else the water will sweep me away. (*He climbs up the tree. The ghosts disappear. Lightning strikes the house and it goes up in bright flames.*) If this gets any worse, it'll mean the end of the world. (*The cottage goes on burning. Torrential rain, a howling storm, and thunder. The water swirls higher and higher, until Rappelkopf, who is clinging to a branch of the tree, is up to his mouth in water and only the top half of his head is visible.*) Help me, help! I'm drowning!

ASTRAGALUS (*appears in a golden boat, which swiftly glides over to Rappelkopf's head*).
And just what do you intend to do now?

RAPPELKOPF (*terrorized*). I want to reform. I can see it now. The water's pouring into my mouth.

ASTRAGALUS. Then I shall take you to my palace.

Scene 7

RAPID SCENE CHANGE

The boat changes into two stone rams with golden horns. The tree changes into a gorgeous chariot of clouds on which Rappelkopf and the Mountain King now stand. The water vanishes. The entire stage is transformed into a picturesque rock formation depicting the Devil's Bridge in Switzerland. Children dressed as grizzled Alpine huntsmen discharge volleys of shots as the cloud chariot drives across the stage. Simultaneously, from within:

CHORUS

Now ended is the spirits' fight,
The sun shines through the darkest night.
The victor is the Mountain King,
With clear intent he's on the wing.

ACT II

Scene 1

The throne room in Astragalus' ice palace. Tall pillars of shimmering silver. In the foreground a picturesque high throne, which appears to be carved of ice. Astragalus is seated on it, wearing a long, sky-blue tunic with white embroidery and a capacious Grecian cloak. His beard is snow white and he wears an emerald crown. Alpine sprites, in short white tunics trimmed with green folio-sized leaves, kneel in a circle before him.

CHORUS. We thrill to see you on your throne,
Ruler of the Alpine field.
Your head is decked with Virtue's crown,
Vice to you must ever yield.

ASTRAGALUS (*stands and speaks*).
Upon my throne in ice-hewn hall
Your chorus do I gladly hear.
Now the mortal let us call,
For his time is drawing near.

ALPANOR. A long time now he's been our guest –
Outside we have let him stand.
As you suggested is he dressed:
Your merest hint is our command.

ASTRAGALUS. Deride him well, let him appear.

Rappelkopf is escorted in wearing a drab overcoat for travelling, drab gaiters with silver buttons. His hair is black and his forehead rather high.

AN ALPINE SPRITE. Prince, the misanthrope is here.

They all laugh.

RAPPELKOPF. What's so funny?

ALPANOR. They laugh because they thought they'd see
Beneath your misanthropic skin
The dragon you appeared to be,
Gigantic, fierce and grim within.
Instead they have the dwarf espied.
So why should they their laughter hide?
You must leave off this foolish guise –
Friend, you have a perverse touch.
You say you everyone despise?
You yourself aren't worth that much.

RAPPELKOPF. Let's get on with it. Tell me what I have to do. (*Aside.*) Damned fairies.

ASTRAGALUS. You struck a bargain with me that you would reform your disposition if I could show you your character flaws.

RAPPELKOPF. And I had four witnesses: earth, air, fire and water. Now convince me and leave me in peace in the forest.

ASTRAGALUS. Hearken to me. That you may see yourself as you really are, I'm going to remove your mind and soul from your own body and place them in another, newly created for the purpose.

RAPPELKOPF. In other words, you're going to pour my spirits into another bottle. I don't like it, you're up to some hocus-pocus. I'll have to be present at this bottling process. I might evaporate or get blended with something else. I don't trust anyone any more.

ASTRAGALUS. Nothing will go wrong. I swear by Chimborasso's ice-crowned brow. You'll behold your own thoughts, will, behavior and feelings in an exact replica of yourself.

RAPPELKOPF. Then what happens to me? Do I walk around without a soul or do I borrow another one somewhere?

ASTRAGALUS. You will appear as your wife's brother.

RAPPELKOPF. I never dreamed the two of us would get so close.

ASTRAGALUS. But you will retain the force of your present convictions.

RAPPELKOPF. You mean, I'll look just like my brother-in-law, but think the way I do now?

ASTRAGALUS. Precisely. Just so that you can learn what your wife, your child, the painter you hate so much think of you. And to make sure you won't ignore this likeness of yourself, but will thoroughly explore and examine yourself through him, I have made your future entirely dependent on this double's unrestrained actions. Whatever happens in your house because of him to your loss or gain will remain unchanged when he disappears.

RAPPELKOPF. So if he sells my house, I can go live on the street? Comfortable lodgings, I must say!

ASTRAGALUS. What's more, your very life will be attached to his. If he loses it while in your place, you'll die with him. And if it's his bad luck to lose his health, you'll grow ill along with him.

RAPPELKOPF. Two men with but one life! Nature is starting to economize. Death has it easy: now it can kill two birds with one stone. All right, we'll see what your sleight-of-hand can do. Court is in session. A hopelessly entangled lawsuit, which won't be settled over the course of a century. And now what happens? Do I still have my own soul or

someone else's? Am I my brother-in-law yet or am I still my brother-in-law's brother-in-law?

ASTRAGALUS. Everyone will think you are your wife's brother. Therefore I have patterned your outward semblance after his. Alpine sprites, take him to the foot of the mountain. There you will find a carriage and pair. The entire equipage will be covered with dust, just as if you had come all the way from Italy. He'll be driven to his home, where his arrogance will meet with disgrace, condemnation and judgment.

RAPPELKOPF. All right then, for one last time I'll step into that sanctuary of evil. I hand my soul over to you, though I know it has as few faults as the Danube has battleships, as the cherry tree has acorns, as your gray beard has blond hairs.

Exit with the Alpine sprites. Only Alpanor remains.

ASTRAGALUS. His obstinacy is what will make my scheme succeed. For once he knows what he is really like, he'll be just as obsessed with the urge for self-improvement as his mind is now obsessed with these delusions of hate. Alpanor! Have you dealt with the misanthrope's brother-in-law to prevent his turning-up at the house this morning too?

ALPANOR. It shall be done in a trice. The Alpine sprite Linarius is driving his horses and will maroon him in the mountains until you order his release.

ASTRAGALUS. I'll change myself to him from head to feet,
(He transforms himself into Rappelkopf's likeness, in his first costume.)
And make him act the fool in duplicate.
And as a metal rod upon a castle's roof
Against the lightning offers to be proof,
The hatred 'gainst the world so long he's vowed
Will rebound at the head he holds unbowed.
So let the thunder cloud be emptied there,
Let passion spend itself in flame and glare,
Till, from the ashes, life renewing then,
Just like the phoenix, love will rise again.

Scene 2

Wild, mountainous region. In the background a high, practicable cliff, which stretches from offstage right across two-thirds of the stage to approximately two feet from the wings at left, and which ends in a steep drop. On it a covered calèche with two white horses can be seen. The horses stand on the very edge of the cliff. The Alpine sprite Linarius sits on the downstage horse, wearing a postilion's outfit. Herr von Silberkern, dressed like Rappelkopf in the last scene, is seated in the carriage. He is threatening the postilion with his cane and shouting vehemently.

SILBERKERN. Stop! Stop! What are you doing, you confounded clod, I'll be killed! Where are you taking me?

LINARIUS. Patience, sir, we're almost there.

SILBERKERN. That's impossible. The fellow's as drunk as an owl, he must think there's a wine cellar down there. I'll break every bone in your body, you blasted dunderhead. What are you doing with those damned horses?

LINARIUS. I unharnessed them.

SILBERKERN. Listen to me, you sorry wretch! We're going to fall.

LINARIUS. We will if you keep jumping around like that. Your tip wasn't nearly big enough. Farewell, sir.

SILBERKERN. Where are you going?

LINARIUS. To fly through the air. *(The horses sprout wings. Linarius rises with them to half the height of the stage. The calèche stops short. At the same time, the back part of the cliff collapses and only the part that supports the calèche remains.)* You stay behind on this cliff and enjoy the fresh air. I'll hitch up the horses again in good time and then I'll ask for a proper tip. The relay station is at the sign of the Mountain King. Until then, farewell, and enjoy yourself. Hurray! Giddap, horses! Watch out for rocks! Farewell, Herr Passenger, mind you don't hurt yourself for my sake. *(Flies away, blowing his post horn.)*

SILBERKERN. Damned hobgoblin! The fellow flies around like a bat. Fly to the Devil, you treacherous raven! I don't need your horses. *(He starts to get out.)* Good grief, what's this? I can't get out. The carriage is suspended in the air. He's out to starve me. Confound you, come back here! There's nothing stirring. I can't see anyone, there aren't even any cattle grazing. I'm the only thing in the whole place. *(Shouts.)* Is no one here?

ECHO. No one here – *(More distant.)* No one here – no one here – no one here.

SILBERKERN *(stamping his foot).* I'm so mad I could burst.

The cliff on which he sits opens like a grotto and in it are a number of small Alpine sprites laughing heartily and maliciously. Others peer out from behind bushes, attached here and there to the cliff.

ALPINE SPRITES. Hahahahahaha!

SILBERKERN *(angrily, brandishing his cane).* Ah, you elfin rabble, you supernatural riffraff. Come out of there and I'll polish off every last one of you. Oh, this is a fine fix.

More laughter as the curtain quickly falls to reveal a room in Rappelkopf's house.

Scene 3

Several servants hurry on to the stage. Sophie comes on from the other side.

SOPHIE. Where, oh where is my brother?

SERVANTS. He's coming up the steps now. Here he is now.

SOPHIE. Run and call Herr von Thorn and my daughter. The luggage goes in the green room.

Rappelkopf rushes in.

SOPHIE (*running to embrace him*). Oh brother, my dear brother! (*She clings to his neck.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). How appalling! The viper flings herself around my neck. She doesn't recognize me. Get a grip on yourself, Rappelkopf! (*Affectionately.*) It does me good to see you again, sister dear. (*Aside.*) I can't even look at her. (*Affectionately.*) How are you, my dear, dear sister?

SOPHIE. Not very well, brother.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). Serves you right.

SOPHIE. What did you say?

RAPPELKOPF. That I'm right sorry to hear that, sister, downright sorry. I know what it is. Your husband is a despicable man.

SOPHIE. No, he isn't, brother dear. He's an unhappy man.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). Viper!

SOPHIE. If you knew how much I've looked forward to your arrival, so that I could pour out my heart to you.

RAPPELKOPF. Pour it out then. (*Aside.*) Now I'll get an earful. Pour it out!

SOPHIE. But hasn't the trip tired you?

RAPPELKOPF. My feet are tired, but not my ears.

SOPHIE. Then take a seat. (*She places a chair for him.*)

RAPPELKOPF. Thank you. (*He sits.*) A tricky business!

SOPHIE. My daughter and her fiancé will be here shortly.

RAPPELKOPF (*jumping up wildly*). What? (*Catches himself and then quickly, with a smile.*)

I will be infinitely honored.

SOPHIE. You seem so strange. Is anything the matter?

RAPPELKOPF. A number of things. The trip, the sight of you, I find it very affecting.

SOPHIE. Thank you. There aren't many brothers like you.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). I'll say!

SOPHIE. You've been away for five years. I've written you why I've become so depressed.

RAPPELKOPF. Yes, you hate your husband.

SOPHIE. What are you talking about? Where could you find a wife more devoted to her husband than I am?

RAPPELKOPF. Is that so? (*Aside.*) The things some people say.

SOPHIE. If you could only see my patience in putting up with his tantrums, how gently I treat him.

RAPPELKOPF. Yes, I'd like to have seen that. (*Aside.*) Her lies are staggering! They take my breath away!

SOPHIE. And his senseless misanthropy has made everything worse.

RAPPELKOPF. But why does he hate people? There must be some reason for it.

SOPHIE. Because he's a fool and misjudges everyone.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). Well, this is the last straw!

SOPHIE. And yet I love him so much –

RAPPELKOPF. Love a fool? Oh, foolish love! (*Aside.*) To hell with her!

SOPHIE. And I'm so worried. He's been missing since yesterday.

RAPPELKOPF. Where's he gone to?

SOPHIE. In a fit of madness, he smashed all the furniture. He thought the servant was trying to kill him and ran out of the house in an absolute fury.

RAPPELKOPF. Oh, he's bound to come back.

SOPHIE. No, he won't. Once he makes up his mind, he sticks to it.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). She grants me that, at least. (*Aloud.*) But how did he get the notion

that someone wanted to kill him?

SOPHIE. It's ridiculous. I told that silly servant to go into the garden and cut me some chicory, and the knife in his hand led my husband to assume he wanted to murder him.

RAPPELKOPF. He was told to cut some chicory?

SOPHIE. Of course.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). That can't be true or I'd be the biggest fool under the sun. (*Rapt in thought.*) He was told to cut some chicory?

SOPHIE. What difference can it make to you?

RAPPELKOPF (*casually*). Because the coffee I drank in the last inn gave me indigestion. It was poisoned with chicory too.

SOPHIE. What am I to do?

RAPPELKOPF. Let the fool run away.

SOPHIE. You can't be serious. He is my husband and I'll never leave him.

RAPPELKOPF (*quickly*). Do you mean that?

SOPHIE. Of course.

RAPPELKOPF (*pleased despite himself. Aside*). She's not really so bad after all. (*As before.*) And yet I know she's very wicked.

SOPHIE. Oh, brother! (*She sinks on to his chest.*) What if my husband were to do himself an injury! (*Weeps.*) There's nothing I could blame myself for, but it would my fault all the same.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). The woman is torturing herself. I'm sweating bullets. And these are real tears, my shirt frill is soaked through and through. But I won't believe her, women are capable of anything. (*Aloud.*) Calm down, someone's coming.

Enter Augustus and Molly.

MOLLY. Is it true, is Uncle here yet? (*Sees him.*) Oh, Uncle! We've so looked forward to your arrival.

RAPPELKOPF. As big a liar as her mother.

MOLLY. Augustus, come here.

RAPPELKOPF (*startled*). Who?

AUGUSTUS (*stepping forward*). My dear Herr von Silberkern – (*Draws nearer.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*recoiling*). Good Lord, what on earth is he doing here?

SOPHIE. What's wrong?

MOLLY. But, Uncle!

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). I must take control of myself, so I can get to the bottom of all this.
(*Aloud, with restraint.*) Forgive me, young man.

AUGUSTUS. Herr von Silberkern, if you will allow – (*Steps nearer.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*vehemently, as before*). No, I can't – keep your distance. (*Aside.*) I could poison the seducer.

AUGUSTUS. What does this mean?

MOLLY. Uncle!

SOPHIE. Brother!

RAPPELKOPF (*catching himself*). Excuse me, but you bear a likeness to, a likeness to –

AUGUSTUS. To whom?

RAPPELKOPF. To – to a man –

AUGUSTUS. What man?

RAPPELKOPF. A man who robbed me.

SOPHIE. Brother!

AUGUSTUS (*laughing*). Herr von Silberkern –

MOLLY. Oh, Uncle, he's stolen nothing but my heart.

RAPPELKOPF (*vehemently*). That's exactly what – (*Catching himself.*) I didn't mean.
(*Affectionately.*) Don't be so childish, I was only joking. (*Aside.*) Dissembling, come to my aid! (*Aloud.*) At long last we're happily met once again, children. (*Laughing maliciously.*) A happy day! (*Aside.*) I could jump for joy.

SOPHIE. We'll leave you alone now, brother, to take an hour's rest or so. I'm sure you must be tired. There's a sofa here, and in the meantime we'll try all the harder to find my poor husband. I won't know a moment's peace until I learn what's become of him. (*Exits.*)

RAPPELKOPF. Someone else may be able to figure this out, but I certainly can't.

AUGUSTUS. Herr von Silberkern, I know you have a good deal of influence over Herr von Rappelkopf?

RAPPELKOPF. You're right. If I don't, I don't know who does.

AUGUSTUS. Then you'll help me!

RAPPELKOPF. You! *(He laughs.)* I should hope so.

AUGUSTUS. When Molly's father returns and you succeed in making him see things more clearly, don't forget my case either. Tell him there is no young man on earth so devoted, so unwaveringly faithful to his charming daughter, or who feels such sincere gratitude to her honorable but misguided father as I, the unjustly persecuted Augustus Thorn. *(Bows and exits.)*

RAPPELKOPF *(his paternal feelings break out and he fervently sweeps Molly into his arms).* You are my child, even if I'm not your father. *(Holds her head in his hands.)* I can't resist. I have to kiss you, Molly.

MOLLY. Oh, uncle.

RAPPELKOPF. Tell me, do you truly love your father?

MOLLY. More than I can say, Uncle.

RAPPELKOPF. And you're not lying?

MOLLY. I swear I'm not.

RAPPELKOPF *(happily surprised).* That's good of you and it makes me happy. *(Lays her head on his breast.)* She loves me! So I know there's at least one soul in this world who loves me. But leave me now, I beg you for pity's sake, do leave me.

MOLLY. Are you throwing me out, Uncle?

RAPPELKOPF. No, of course not, I'd even like to kiss you once more. But leave me now or I'll do something I'll be ashamed of. Leave me.

MOLLY. Be sure and get some rest. *(Exits.)*

RAPPELKOPF *(alone).* This is disgraceful! I'm a misanthrope and yet I can't stop this kissing business. That was the first happy moment I've felt in five years. What *am* I feeling now? Am I drunk? Impossible. If what these people say is true, they'd be downright angels. That's ridiculous, there must be something behind it, some plot or other. My wife is a snake-in-the-grass. What does she need chicory for, when all we drink around this place is coffee? But my daughter is a wonderful girl. I won't do anything to hurt her from now on. I don't trust that young man either, they've rehearsed him. Ah, here comes that cutthroat Habakkuk. He'll tell me what I want to know.

Enter Habakkuk.

RAPPELKOPF. Hey, Habakkuk!

HABAKKUK. Sir? You've never seen me before, sir, how do you come to know my name?

RAPPELKOPF. I might have seen you somewhere else.

HABAKKUK. Of course. I lived in Paris for two years. Would you care for anything, sir?

RAPPELKOPF. What I meant to say -- *(Aside.)* I don't trust him. *(Aloud.)* Have you got a knife on you?

HABAKKUK. No, but I'll get one right away. *(He starts to leave.)*

RAPPELKOPF *(alarmed)*. No, don't. I don't need one at the moment. I only wanted to trim something. *(Aside.)* He would have done it, he was certainly ready enough to get one.

HABAKKUK. Well, I almost always carry a knife on me –

RAPPELKOPF *(aside)*. There we have it, he's a born cutthroat. *(Aloud.)* Now, my dear fellow, I'll make you a nice little gift, if you'll help me out a bit. As you know, I'm your mistress's brother.

HABAKKUK. Know all about it, sir.

RAPPELKOPF *(aside)*. Incredible! *(Aloud.)* Tell me, how does my brother-in-law treat his wife?

HABAKKUK. Shamefully, sir.

RAPPELKOPF. What did you say?

HABAKKUK. Ah, he's a pain in the neck, the sort of man who thinks other people exist only for his sake, so he can trample them under foot.

RAPPELKOPF *(aside)*. Well, a true word at last. He speaks his mind, at any rate. *(Aloud.)* No one should have to put up with that. And that's the very reason his wife can't stand him, eh?

HABAKKUK. What do you mean, sir? She cries her eyes out over him. Nothing I can do makes her feel better.

RAPPELKOPF. I was told, though, that she wanted to have him killed.

HABAKKUK. Oh, don't say that, sir. You can't be foolish enough to believe that, sir.

RAPPELKOPF. Yes, and you were the one, I believe, who went for him with the knife.

HABAKKUK. Me? No, sir! I faint when they slaughter a chicken. He was in the garden room and no one else would walk through it. The cook needed some chicory, and the mistress told me to cut some.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). That everlasting chicory! It must be true, after all.

HABAKKUK. Wouldn't let me get a word in edgewise, the fiend!

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). What gall! Slanderer! (*Aloud.*) Now tell me, is your master a man of sense?

HABAKKUK (*shaking his head no*). Hah! (*Confidentially.*) Just between you and me and the lamppost, sir, he's a little deficient up here. (*Taps his head.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). I can't take much more of this. (*Gives him money.*) There you are, my dear fellow, those are very charming things you've told me. I'm quite pleased with you. But leave me for now.

HABAKKUK. Thank you, sir. (*Aside.*) Ah, he likes to hear me dole out insults. He can't stand the master. I'll lay it on thicker and maybe he'll give me more. (*Aloud.*) You see, sir, I lived in Paris for two years, but I've never come across a more detestable individual. Everyone knuckles under to him, but it's no use, he'll never be cured. I'm no medical expert, but my prescription is: thrash him within an inch of his life and it'll work wonders.

RAPPELKOPF. I think it's time you left. Get out this minute. How dare you, you ingrate, talk of your master like that? Out this minute, or I'll break your arms *and* your legs. (*Looks for something to hit him with.*)

HABAKKUK. It stands to reason: now this one's starting in. (*As he leaves.*) Well, I'll say this: they're one horrific family, and I've had enough. (*Exits, muttering.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*alone*). This is one way of finding out about your servants. He doesn't speak so badly of my wife. He doesn't dare, because he thinks I'm her brother. But he's really too stupid to be a murderer. I thought him more cunning. It always boils down to the same thing in the end – chicory! It takes so much effort to talk to these people. But I'd better complete my investigation now I've begun it, because I never go back on anything – unless I'm forced to, as I was in the forest today.

Enter Lizzy.

LIZZY. Mistress wants to know if you'd like a cup of tea, sir.

RAPPELKOPF. No thank you. (*Aside.*) I'll put this one through the mill too. (*Aloud.*) What's my sister doing?

LIZZY. She's very upset.

RAPPELKOPF. Why?

LIZZY. Because of our master.

RAPPELKOPF. Because of me?

LIZZY. Oh no, not because of you.

RAPPELKOPF (*catching himself*). Of course not. (*Aside.*) She doesn't recognize me either. (*Aloud.*) And what is my niece doing?

LIZZY. She's talking to her sweetheart.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). Hellfire and damnation! (*He catches himself. Aloud.*) What sort of man is he?

LIZZY. Very loveable.

RAPPELKOPF. What does that mean? Is he courting you too?

LIZZY. Hardly. He doesn't dare look at another girl. He'll end up a henpecked husband. I'm sure he doesn't tip just so he won't have to touch my hand. He and the young mistress are perfect for one another, and it's a crying shame the master won't give his consent.

RAPPELKOPF (*angrily*). He's right not to give it. The young man has no respect for him.

LIZZY. He respects him far more – excuse me, sir, for talking like this about your brother-in-law – far more than he deserves.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). It's as if they've all ganged up on me. Patience, stand by me now! (*Aloud.*) I'd like to give you a little something, but you must tell me, quick as you can, all your master's faults and flaws.

LIZZY. Quickly? That's impossible, sir.

RAPPELKOPF. Why?

LIZZY. Because if I began this very moment, I wouldn't be finished by tomorrow morning.

RAPPELKOPF. I wish I had the patience to listen to it all.

LIZZY. Let's just say he's a misanthrope. I can't understand how a man with such a lot of money, such a good-natured wife, such a well-bred daughter, and such an attractive lady's maid could be a misanthrope.

Song

Oh, the world is blithe and bonny,
Life so lovely, bright and gay.
Why must man resist, how can he,

When good luck comes in his way?
All are seeking after pleasure,
The world unites in love and hope,
Nastiest beyond all measure
Is for sure the misanthrope.

Naught but cheerful feelings bless us,
Naught but joy uplifts the soul,
Naught but loving charms caress us,
Hate will only spoil the whole.
So when everyone is gladsome,
Bright stars in our horoscope,
In the gloomy wood, so sadsome,
Lonely sits the misanthrope.

Look upon this sun so golden,
As it leaves dawn's clouds behind,
How with joy it doth embolden
All our good will to mankind:
How can we wish ill to others?
Hatred's not within our scope,
Love your neighbors as your brothers,
You'll not be a misanthrope.

Exits.

RAPPELKOPF (*alone*). This is awful. Do I have to be sung at, into the bargain? This insult is played out fortissimo and I can't beat time to it. And that one word keeps recurring! Who's that now?

Sophie and Lizzy rush in.

SOPHIE. Brother, he's here!

RAPPELKOPF. Who?

LIZZY. The master!

SOPHIE. My husband!

RAPPELKOPF. I'm right here, so I am. (*He strikes his chest in glee.*) Since the world began no one has been so curious about himself as I am.

ASTRAGALUS (*shouting, still outside the door*). ...let no one be allowed near me!

RAPPELKOPF. My very voice. I hear my own self. (*Steps back.*)

Enter Astragalus transformed into Rappelkopf.

ASTRAGALUS (*when he sees Sophie, recoils and exclaims*). Ah! (*He starts to leave.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*quickly*). That's me all right.

SOPHIE (*holding him back*). Oh, please stay, dearest! We're so glad you're back.

ASTRAGALUS (*tearing himself loose*). Leave me. Either you go or I do.

SOPHIE (*making an effort to restrain herself*). No, you stay. I'll go. (*Exits, sighing.*)

Astragalus steps forward with a look of rage on his face, stops with his arms crossed and looks wildly about, without taking notice of Rappelkopf.

RAPPELKOPF (*staring at him from top to toe in horrified wonderment*). It is me – I'm not in a very good humor, but that's nothing new.

ASTRAGALUS (*to Lizzy*). What do you want?

LIZZY (*trembling*). To ask if you'd like anything, sir.

RAPPELKOPF. It's a pleasure to see how scared of me they are.

ASTRAGALUS. Where's the ink?

LIZZY. There. (*She points to the desk.*)

ASTRAGALUS. And the pens?

LIZZY (*frightened*). I don't have any.

RAPPELKOPF. So – the little goose is out of quills.

ASTRAGALUS. Then get some! Do you hear me? Get out, you serpent, you basilisk, you crocodile, you boa constrictor!

RAPPELKOPF. I seem to know my zoology.

LIZZY. Right away. (*As she leaves.*) The devil brought him back to us. I'll not show my face in this room again. (*Exits.*)

RAPPELKOPF. She's gone. I don't know, I'm rather pleased with myself. Although I am a trifle rash.

ASTRAGALUS (*decisively*). Yes! I'm going to draw up my will.

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). Will? Not a bad idea, though I'd better prevent him. (*Aloud.*) Greetings, brother-in-law. I've just arrived.

ASTRAGALUS. Who are you?

RAPPELKOPF (*delighted*). How odd to stand face to face with one's self.

ASTRAGALUS (*quickly*). What are you doing here? Why didn't you write? Have you brought the interest you owe me? What shape are my investments in?

RAPPELKOPF. Not bad, I'd like to know those things myself.

ASTRAGALUS. Our firm in Venice isn't supposed to be doing well. Has it gone under yet?

RAPPELKOPF (*startled*). Gone under? What an idea! (*Aside.*) It scares me too.

ASTRAGALUS. I haven't received my dividends.

RAPPELKOPF. Nor have I.

ASTRAGALUS. You must have. Otherwise, you would have sent them to me. There's something fishy about all this.

RAPPELKOPF. Well, let me say –

ASTRAGALUS. Don't say anything – I know the world, it's all a pack of predators –

RAPPELKOPF. I –

ASTRAGALUS (*angrily*). Silence!

RAPPELKOPF. I wish he didn't choose to yell so, it hurts my ears.

Enter Habakkuk, with quill pens.

HABAKKUK (*trembling*). Sir, here are the quills.

ASTRAGALUS (*amazed*). Ah! The murderer dares to show his face! (*Picks up the chair and steps back.*) Don't come near me! Cutthroat!

RAPPELKOPF. Ah, that's carrying it too far. Who could be afraid of this nincompoop?

HABAKKUK. The mistress wants to know if she can come back in.

ASTRAGALUS. No.

HABAKKUK. But she's crying badly.

ASTRAGALUS. Then she should learn to cry better. (*Laughs.*) Or I'll start laughing.

HABAKKUK. But what if it makes her sick?

ASTRAGALUS. I hope she gets gout! Off to the hospital with her!

RAPPELKOPF (*aside*). Peculiar sense of humor.

HABAKKUK. Ah, excuse me, sir, but that's going too far. I lived in Paris for two years, but I—

ASTRAGALUS (*jumping up*). If you dare speak that insufferable phrase in my house again, I'll— I'll give you your reward at once. (*He throws a purse at his feet, hitting Rappelkopf on the shin.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*lifting his leg*). Oh, damn! Watch where you throw your hard cash.

ASTRAGALUS. Did I hurt you?

RAPPELKOPF. I think I've got a dent in my foot.

ASTRAGALUS. Serves you right. (*To Habakkuk.*) If you say those words once more, you leave my service on the spot. Even if I'm not around. Take it!

RAPPELKOPF. My spittin' image. (*To Habakkuk.*) Well, pick it up.

HABAKKUK. Sir, I can't touch that money, because I've got nothing to be proud of except that I lived in Par—

ASTRAGALUS (*grabbing him by the throat*). I'll throttle you if you utter another syllable.

HABAKKUK. Help! Help me!

RAPPELKOPF (*springing between them*). But, brother-in-law, I can't believe what you're doing.

ASTRAGALUS (*still holding Habakkuk*). You lived where, for how long? Two years? In Paris?

HABAKKUK (*howling in terror*). No, in Stockerau!

ASTRAGALUS. Now you can go to Timbuctoo! (*Shoves him out the door.*)

RAPPELKOPF. There does seem to be something off-putting about my behavior. If this goes on, I don't think I'll be able to get along with myself. Well! I should put this money away. We have a tidy little counting-house here – when one throws something down, the other picks it up. If only it weren't true that whatever happens to him must happen to me. How long is he going to stay out there in that state of excitement? If he catches a chill, we'll both get colic.

Astragalus re-enters.

ASTRAGALUS. I found no peace in the forest, and they won't provide me any either. They're all so spiteful they might very well poison me. (*He sits.*)

RAPPELKOPF. That's going too far. If only he could be talked to. Brother-in-law!

ASTRAGALUS (*turning his back on him*). Out, you monster!

RAPPELKOPF. That's just the way I used to be... (*Aloud.*) What for? We're the best of friends.

ASTRAGALUS. I am no man's friend. I don't even want to look at you. There's something suspicious about your face.

RAPPELKOPF. But you don't think I'm a swindler, do you?

ASTRAGALUS. Perhaps not. Yet when I look at you, the thought comes to mind.

RAPPELKOPF. That's an insult. I wouldn't have thought myself capable of such rudeness, but I do remember similar remarks.

ASTRAGALUS (*shouting out the window*). Stop! Who's that sneaking out the door! Hellfire and brimstone! It's that young painter, the one that's after my daughter.

RAPPELKOPF. Here we go.

ASTRAGALUS. Wait, you won't get away from me. (*Dashes out the door, pushing Rappelkopf, who was in his way, to one side.*)

RAPPELKOPF. How can I be so frantic? I'm starting to be downright odious to myself. I never would have expected that.

ASTRAGALUS (*shouting offstage*). Get in here, I won't let go of you.

RAPPELKOPF. He's collared him.

ASTRAGALUS (*offstage*). Inside, I said!

RAPPELKOPF. And the way he yells! And all this goes on my bill. Before this is over, he'll have stripped my vocal chords.

Astragalus pulls in Augustus by the hand.

ASTRAGALUS. Inside, you seducer. How dare you enter my house? By what right came you here?

RAPPELKOPF. Well said. I like that.

AUGUSTUS (*quite pale*). My love, Herr von Rappelkopf, and my honorable intentions.

ASTRAGALUS. Ha! You couldn't afford any, since you have no intention of making a living.

RAPPELKOPF. Bravo!

ASTRAGALUS. I can marry my child to whomsoever I please, for I am her father.

RAPPELKOPF. Bravissimo!

ASTRAGALUS. And it's sheer impudence, your slinking around my house against my will, trying to make my daughter disobey me.

RAPPELKOPF. Very nicely put, I must give myself credit.

AUGUSTUS. Herr von Rappelkopf, I beseech you by all the passions that ever assailed your heart, take pity on mine. I cannot live without your daughter. I have been away for three years, and my feelings have not altered. I have a little property. I have improved my artistic abilities. If only you'll give me your consent, I shall never forget it, sir, and in me you will gain a very grateful son.

RAPPELKOPF. He's not so bad after all. My alter ego shouldn't be so hard on him.

ASTRAGALUS. I don't trust what you say, for treachery glowers in your eyes. Don't you dare darken my door again. My door will be open to ravening wolves before I allow birds of prey to nest under my eaves, before I nurse vipers in my bosom, before I let all contagions rage through the house. And I will invite the plague to sup at my table before I permit your lungs to draw a single breath in my home.

RAPPELKOPF. This is madness! It's almost incredible that a man can act like this.

AUGUSTUS. Herr von Rappelkopf, if a human life means anything to you, do not make me suffer so. Herr von Silberkern, please reason with him.

RAPPELKOPF. I really can't. I'll be lucky if he doesn't throw *me* out.

AUGUSTUS. Then you want to bereave me of my life by force?

ASTRAGALUS (*snidely*). I'd be greatly indebted if you made me a present of it.

RAPPELKOPF (*irritated*). Oh, that's horrible. Brother-in-law -- (*Starts towards Astragalus.*)

ASTRAGALUS (*violently*). Shut up! You're in cahoots with him. But I swear to you, by the bowels of Vesuvius, if you dare support my daughter in this intrigue, if you so much as *look* as if you disapprove of my opinions, you shall return to Venice with a souvenir that will appall all of Italy. (*Exits into the adjoining room.*)

RAPPELKOPF. No, he's not like me at all. He goes overboard. He's a frightfully vicious man, and I'm getting to hate him out of hand. If he keeps on like this, we'll both be goners in a week's time.

AUGUSTUS (*struggling to control his voice*). Good-bye, Herr von Silberkern. Kiss Molly for me and don't forget me.

RAPPELKOPF. Where will you go?

AUGUSTUS. Don't ask me. I won't be able to live without Amalia – (*Starts to go.*)

RAPPELKOPF. Calm down. I give you my word, she shall be yours.

AUGUSTUS. But if her father won't allow it?

RAPPELKOPF. He will, though. Don't worry. Meanwhile, off you go. I'll smooth it over, and if you have any love letters, give them to me and I'll deliver them.

AUGUSTUS. Oh, dear uncle, I must hug you. I won't let my happiness slip through my fingers this time. Tell Molly –

RAPPELKOPF. Just go.

AUGUSTUS. I'll never forget this kindness –

RAPPELKOPF (*forcing him out the door*). Good-bye. (*Alone.*) The fellow is quite acceptable. I almost misjudged him. Things finally seem to be dawning on me.

Enter Habakkuk.

HABAKKUK. Excuse me, sir, for running to you for protection, but it really is too dangerous to talk to the master. You only wanted to break my arms and legs, and that's the lesser of two evils, which is why I've come to you.

RAPPELKOPF. He is such a stupid fool I can't understand how anything he did could have offended me. Well, what do you want?

HABAKKUK. A favor, sir.

RAPPELKOPF. What sort?

HABAKKUK. You see, sir, I – (*Pauses and sighs deeply.*) I can't take it.

RAPPELKOPF. What can't you take? (*Aside.*) This fellow is insufferable. He's starting to get on my nerves.

HABAKKUK. Sir, as you know, I'm not allowed to say...certain words, and if things don't change, I'll die.

RAPPELKOPF. But what do you get out of saying that you lived in Paris for two years?

HABAKKUK. You can't imagine. Everything in the world matters to someone or other. I've said it dozens of times. In short, if I don't say it, I'll get heartsick and die.

RAPPELKOPF (*smiling in spite of himself*). I don't whether to lose my temper or laugh.

HABAKKUK. I've been stifling it and it worries me so. Because I lived -- (*Breaks off.*) You see, sir, I'm not doing at all well.

RAPPELKOPF. Well then, why don't you just say it?

HABAKKUK. He'll fire me.

RAPPELKOPF. But if he doesn't hear it?

HABAKKUK. What kind of ears do you think he has? There's no end to what that man can hear.

RAPPELKOPF. Still insulting me and doesn't even know it. The things I have to put up with. (*Severely.*) If he ordered it, you have to obey. I can't help you.

HABAKKUK. Then there's no way out. Good-bye, sir! But a time will come when it will be too late. I performed my duties well. I never stole a penny. But this is my passion and I can't give it up.

RAPPELKOPF. Then go on and say it –

HABAKKUK. I can't.

RAPPELKOPF. I'll be responsible.

HABAKKUK. Well, I assure you, sir, I lived in Paris for two years, but will never forget you did this. (*Drawing his breath, in relief.*) It's indescribably good of you.

RAPPELKOPF. Then I grant you permission from this moment forth to say it as often as you please, on condition that you will never again defame your master.

HABAKKUK. Oh, there's not another man like him. And now, sir, if you'll allow me to embrace you, sir. Sir, you're my benefactor, my second father. Today the only words anyone will get out of me are: I lived in Paris for two years. (*Exits.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*alone*). It's inconceivable that the one could be happy though totally lovesick, and the other happy again as soon as he's allowed to say he lived in Paris for two years. It's absurd, and yet it's not unusual. Everybody rides his own hobby-horse.

Aria

A motto for the world: It seems
A giant drunk on foolish dreams.
One with the stars alone would speak;
One blissful ignorance would seek;
A third one thinks that, to exist,
He must on perfumed clouds subsist.
One swallows pints of water madly,
One always drains his wine glass gladly.
One's dumb as lumber petrified;
One can barely move for pride.
One undeservèd wealth inherits;

One runs in debt for all his merits.
Ambition can some men inspire;
The rest wish only to retire.
For eyes the blind would gladly fight
While those that see would lose their sight.
And so the world rolls ever on,
Though never from its orbit gone,
With egoism for its axis.
And in the end, pride pays the taxes.
The world must be – I speak in rue –
A perfect madhouse through and through.
And I discover by this rule
I too am nothing but a fool.

Enter Sophie, Molly and Lizzie.

SOPHIE. Dear brother, what do you make of my husband's behavior? Have I deserved such treatment at his hands?

RAPPELKOPF. No, not so far as I can see, no. (*Aside.*) Unless something else happens.

MOLLY (*weeping*). Oh, Uncle, I'll be miserable for the rest of my life.

RAPPELKOPF. Don't carry on so, Molly! (*Aside.*) I feel sorry for the girl. I don't care a rap about the others.

Bell offstage.

LIZZY. He's ringing. Who'll go in to him?

SOPHIE. Well, he won't see me now.

RAPPELKOPF. And I don't want to see him.

LIZZY. I won't go in there.

MOLLY. Neither will I, mother.

RAPPELKOPF. I am so remarkably beloved.

MOLLY. Uncle, you go!

RAPPELKOPF. I? Not I! (*Aside.*) I'm too afraid of myself.

More ringing.

SOPHIE. He's ringing again. I have to –

LIZZY (*quickly*). I'll go, ma'am. (*She sticks her head in the door to the adjoining room and calls:*) What's wanted, sir?

ASTRAGALUS. Some water! Quick!

ALL THREE. What's wrong with him?

LIZZY. He's sitting by the window, looking very flushed. He doesn't seem to be very well and calls for water.

SOPHIE. Bring some. I hope he isn't falling ill.

Exit Lizzy.

RAPPELKOPF. Not a bad idea. I could use some too.

SOPHIE. Maybe it's a stroke.

RAPPELKOPF. Don't say that, you'll terrify me.

SOPHIE. Bring the first-aid kit. Something to calm his nerves.

RAPPELKOPF. Something to calm him, period, and on the double!

MOLLY (*removing a powder from the kit*). Here.

LIZZY (*entering with a glass of water*). Here's the water.

RAPPELKOPF. Wait, I'll mix it myself. (*Does so. Aside.*) I must watch myself to make sure what's in it.

LIZZY (*listening at the door, springs back*). He's coming!

Astragalus enters from the adjoining room.

ASTRAGALUS. So this is how my orders are carried out. (*To Sophie.*) What are you doing here? What did that painter want here in the house? We'll get to the bottom of this soon enough.

SOPHIE. Calm down, dear, you're not feeling well. Sit still and take some medicine. (*She hands him the glass.*)

ASTRAGALUS (*wildly*). I want water and nothing else!

SOPHIE. You must take it. I can't let you get ill. Please take it.

ASTRAGALUS. No!

MOLLY, Ah, Father, do take it!

RAPPELKOPF. They certainly do show patience. I'd like to box my ears, but on his head.

ASTRAGALUS. Then give it here. (*He takes the glass.*) Oh, hell, what's in it? It's cloudy. Confess, you've tried to poison me.

MOLLY. But, Father –

LIZZY. Sir!

ASTRAGALUS. No use denying it, the drink is poisoned.

RAPPELKOPF. Ah, the chicory all over again.

SOPHIE. If you'd only listen, it's just a little something to make you feel better.

ASTRAGALUS. You're lying.

RAPPELKOPF. I know how I'd cure him –

ASTRAGALUS (*dashing the glass to the floor*). I'm no longer safe in my own home!

RAPPELKOPF. Horrors! My very own words!

ASTRAGALUS. My wife is a murderess. Get out of here. You're a harvest ripe for my hate. (*He tears from Sophie's neck the necklace on which his miniature hangs.*) What's this you wear about your neck? Throw it away. All you should have as a remembrance of me is the curse with which I crown your malice. Now, heed me, you murderous female –

RAPPELKOPF. Enough, enough! He's the very same fool I was. I can't watch myself any longer.

SOPHIE (*collapsing into a chair*). Oh, I'm so unhappy.

ASTRAGALUS. Get out of my house! I want to live here alone, with a sign up saying Misanthrope. I want to know nothing more of you *or* the world. I curse you, curse my daughter –

RAPPELKOPF. No, by God, that's too much. This man is damning my entire family.

ASTRAGALUS. So go to your painter, the whole route, you can run the entire gamut of colors like a chameleon: green with gall, blue with bruises, red with shame, white with care, yellow with fever, gray with age, and –

RAPPELKOPF (*hopefully*). Well, at least he's run out of colors now.

ASTRAGALUS. But I never want to see your face again. Disown me, for I am your father no longer –

MOLLY (*weeping and embracing his knees*). Mercy, Father, don't reject me!

ASTRAGALUS. Get away from me. (*He kicks her away.*)

RAPPELKOPF. I won't stand for that. Damnation, I've had enough. I'll have to take my family's side. The man is destroying my wife and daughter. Oh, damn it to hell! You're not a man, you're a fiend painting me blacker than I really am.

ASTRAGALUS. Just as I expected, you shameless swindler! I want satisfaction for the plots you've been hatching behind my back. Give me an accounting (*seizes him by the chest*) of my investments –

MOLLY. Help! Uncle!}

SOPHIE. Help! Brother!} *together*

LIZZY. Help!}

RAPPELKOPF. What? Let go of me! This is an affront! I'll give you satisfaction all right: a duel!

All the servants enter.

ASTRAGALUS. Bring pistols!

RAPPELKOPF. Bring cannons!

ASTRAGALUS (*taking pistols from the wall*). Take these.

RAPPELKOPF. A regular Battle of Navarino.

SOPHIE. Oh, husband, please don't.

ASTRAGALUS. No use.

MOLLY. Uncle, don't be foolish.

RAPPELKOPF. Go away, I haven't any time for that.

ASTRAGALUS. Five paces will do. We fire together. At the count of three.

SOPHIE. Be reconciled!

RAPPELKOPF. We're the best of friends, we couldn't be closer. Go away, this is something I have to do. (*Counts and aims.*) One, two –

SOPHIE (*fainting*). Oh!

RAPPELKOPF. She fainted and I haven't even fired yet.

MOLLY. She's dying.

RAPPELKOPF. She'll keep.

ASTRAGALUS. Fire!

MOLLY (*clinging to her father*). Oh, Uncle, stop, or you'll be the cause of two deaths.

RAPPELKOPF (*staggering back*). What? No, I remember, I can't fight with him! We've only got one life between us. If I kill him, I'll be shooting myself dead. If I had fired, it would be all over now.

ASTRAGALUS. Come on! Why did you stop?

RAPPELKOPF. If one of us doesn't come to his senses, there'll be hell to pay.

ASTRAGALUS. Only one of us will fall, you or I.

RAPPELKOPF. That's not right, we'll fall together.

ASTRAGALUS. Same thing. It's a matter of life and death. (*He aims.*)

RAPPELKOPF. Stop! It's a matter of death and death!

ASTRAGALUS (*going up to him*). Why won't you shoot, you craven coward?

In the meantime Sophie has recovered.

RAPPELKOPF. Because I pity my sister. I don't want to make her a widow. And I pity your daughter and your brother-in-law and the whole lot of them. (*Aside.*) It's a pity I never know the right thing to say.

ASTRAGALUS. I won't preserve my life for her sake, and I am indebted least of all to you. It's of no use to me, I'll throw it away. I can do without these insipid dregs of age and decrepitude.

RAPPELKOPF. The way he tosses my life around. And it doesn't affect him a bit.

ASTRAGALUS. But I won't tolerate your cowardice. Clear out of my house or I'll throw you out –

RAPPELKOPF. Now he's going to throw me out of my own house! The man is making sport of me, and if I anger him enough, we'll both have a stroke. I don't know what he's going to do now, but I can see I was an irrational brute, a savage beast. And now I want to know what more is in store.

Habakkuk enters quickly with a letter.

HABAKKUK (*in a monotone*). A letter.

RAPPELKOPF. From Paris? You blockhead!

HABAKKUK. No, this time it's from Venice.

ASTRAGALUS (*lunges at him*). Venice? Give it here!

RAPPELKOPF. Give it here. I'm interested in this myself. (*Tries to peer inside.*)

ASTRAGALUS. What are you up to?

RAPPELKOPF (*indignantly*). So. Now I'm not allowed to read my own mail. You confounded double! (*As he reads, Astragalus is uneasy, pale and trembling.*) Must be lovely news.

ASTRAGALUS (*drops the letter, trembling. He speaks in horror*). I'm ruined.

RAPPELKOPF (*beginning to tremble*). Then so am I.

ASTRAGALUS (*sinking into a chair*). I don't feel well.

RAPPELKOPF. Neither do I. (*Sinks into the chair opposite.*)

ASTRAGALUS. I'm bankrupt.

RAPPELKOPF. It's all over.

ALL. Water! Water!

The women are attended to. Lizzy runs off.

ASTRAGALUS (*jumping up*). Water! Yes, now I remember. (*To Rappelkopf.*) This is all your doing, you traitor! (*He rushes out.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*also jumping up*). No, it's all my brother-in-law's doing. Where's that letter? (*Reads it, stiffening.*) "Dear sir, this is to inform you that the company in which your property is invested, has – has – has – collapsed." And I'm lying there beside it. Any minute now I'll drop dead.

Lizzy enters, quaking with fear.

LIZZY. Help! Help! Master's run off, he says he'll drown himself. He jumped in the river.

SOPHIE. Oh, my husband!

MOLLY. Oh, my father!

ALL. Stop him! (*Everyone runs out.*)

RAPPELKOPF (*frozen in fear*). Stop him, the miserable wretch! What is the man doing with my life? I escape one death and head for another. (*He falls to his knees.*) I can't move. He's jumping in. He's under water now. I'm starting to swim. (*Dragging himself*

forward.) God help me, I was a misanthrope before, but never again. Give me strength, Despair, or else I'll die. (Exit.)

Scene 4

An open area in front of the manor house. In the background a river, at the side a steep cliff.

The entire household. Molly. Augustus. Astragalus is secured. Sophie kneels before him. Tableau.

CHORUS. Stop him now! Stop him now!
Make sure he's held fast.
Don't let him go! Don't let him go!
His wits are gone at last.

Astragalus tears himself loose and rushes to the top of the cliff. At that moment Rappelkopf enters and shouts "Stop!" Astragalus jumps. Rappelkopf faints into the arms of his wife and daughter.

Scene 5

RAPID SCENE CHANGE

to the Temple of Knowledge. Tall pillars of crystal traced in gold. On the back wall a large sun, in whose midst Truth hangs suspended. Before it, an altar for votive offerings. The figure of Astragalus that had leapt into the water was a dummy, and he himself appears as at the start of Act II. With him are the Alpine sprites. Rappelkopf in the meantime has returned to his original appearance. Enter Sophie, Molly, and Augustus.

ASTRAGALUS (to Rappelkopf). Welcome to the Temple of Clear, Resplendent Knowledge, to the halls illumined by Truth. I behold you standing before me abashed and repentant.

RAPPELKOPF. Am I still alive? I didn't drown with you?

SOPHIE. You're still alive, dear husband.

MOLLY. You are alive, father.

RAPPELKOPF. And in future I'll live only for you. (*Embraces both.*) If I am not too wicked for you to live for me.

ASTRAGALUS. You have beheld misanthropy and the misanthrope's downfall.

RAPPELKOPF. And is he really gone, that accursed partner in flesh, that caricature of my beastliness?

ASTRAGALUS. He vanished along with the misanthropy.

RAPPELKOPF. Well, they made a pretty pair. I'm glad to be rid of them. But since your Highness is so mighty, perhaps you could also do something about my lost fortune. That way I can also forgive my brother-in-law, since he's the only one I still hate.

The sound of a post horn. Linarius, dressed as a postilion, enters with Herr von Silberkern.

LINARIUS. I now discharge my passenger from his journey through the sky. The Alpine air seems to have done him some good.

SILBERKERN. Just you wait, you liveried rascal. Brother-in-law, is that you?

RAPPELKOPF. You're my brother-in-law all right, showing up when everything's over and done with. My losses are your fault, I'm a beggar now.

SILBERKERN. One who possesses a hundred thousand guilders, which I deposited to your account in the bank, unbeknownst to you, before the company collapsed. I got wind of it and wanted to save your investment, so that I could hand you the receipts as I do now.

RAPPELKOPF. Oh, what a brother-in-law! This is splendid, to bring such gifts when you pay a call. (*Embraces him. Silberkern then embraces Sophie.*) Children, my fortune, this great quantity of "change" has quite changed my sorrow to sheer delight. Brother-in-law, I'll never forget you for this.

SILBERKERN. You can repay me for the anxiety I suffered on your behalf.

RAPPELKOPF. I'll trade my own for it. You didn't come off so badly.

SILBERKERN. But how does it all add up?

RAPPELKOPF. We'll tell you about it in the morning, otherwise it might be too much for these people. For I've already said so much today I can never say again, except (*to Augustus*): you shall be my son-in-law. Take her. But as you're a painter, mind you don't besmirch her or her reputation. Love her as much as I so wrongly hated her, and she's bound to be happy.

AUGUSTUS and MOLLY (*together*). Ah, Father!

RAPPELKOPF (*pointing to the Mountain King*). He's the one that deserves your thanks.

AUGUSTUS, MOLLY (*throwing themselves at his feet*). Mighty Mountain King, we thank you.

ASTRAGALUS (*warmly*).

I promised you a wreath just yesterday,
When in the vale I saw your bitter tear.
You see, my word I've broken in no way:

Your sorrow's gone and now your wreath is here.

He takes a wreath of Alpine flowers, handed to him by one of the sprites, and places it on Molly's head.

Accept it then, you maid of metal rare.
Hold fast the loving promise it will bring.
When I, as father, make you both a pair,
Take heed you don't forget the Mountain King.

Exits.

RAPPELKOPF. Children, I'm a misanthrope retired, stay with me and I will gladly spend the days of my life in the Temple of Knowledge.

FINAL SONG

Self Knowledge, you pleasing and bright-shining star,
Not everyone seeks you, some wish you afar –
For instance, the people who rob us and cheat us
Don't wish to be known. How then could they defeat us?

Let's speak first of beauties in dazzling array,
Whose beauty men know and respect right away.
Plain women take longer, but once understood,
They bless us with comfort and everything good.

For love above all needs sweet knowledge's savor,
Some artful coquette's always angling for favor –
Today if the flags in her praise are not flown,
It isn't because her desires are not known!

Youth flexes its muscles in knowledge's bower
And makes a great show of its reasoning power;
But when it's Maturity's turn to be tried
Then Knowledge itself will appear at its side.

All sensible humans should know themselves well,
A tenet on which ancient sages did dwell,
So that each one can say when put to an exam,
I now understand and I know who I am.

End of play

The Bullet

By Sergio López Viguera

Translated from Spanish by Jacqueline E. Bixler

The Bullet presents the story of Lauro and Valeria, who furtively glance at and wonder about each other every morning as they ride to their respective jobs on a *microbús*. On this particular morning, their daily routine as well as their lives change dramatically when two armed men board the bus to rob the passengers. Their verbal and physical abuse of the passengers forces Lauro and Valeria to reflect on their monotonous, lonely lives, to take action, and, ultimately, to speak to one another. *The Bullet* is a proletarian love story and at the same time a serious reflection on the numbing existence of the millions of people in Mexico City who get up each day in the cold hours of dawn and spend hours alone with their thoughts, on dilapidated buses, just to get to work.

A deceptively simple play, *The Bullet* is at once verbally beautiful and physically terrifying. But what truly makes it special, and at the same time somewhat difficult to translate, is the way in which the dramatist mixes not only the poetic and the vulgar, but also the voices of the characters. Rather than dialogue, the text consists of a series of interior and crossed monologues, particularly when the words of the leader of the two assailants are uttered by Valeria. As a result, we are left wondering if Valeria, Lauro, and Jonathan are speaking directly to the spectator, to one another, or just to themselves. The translator is further challenged by the multitude of uniquely Mexican vulgarities, the poetic structure, and the rapid-fire pace of the text.

Sergio López Viguera: The original text, *La bala*, was written by Sergio López Viguera (Mexico City, 1985). He studied Dramatic Literature and Theatre at the UNAM and has worked as a director, dramatist, and scenic designer for Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol, Seña y Verbo, La Máquina de Teatro, Área 51, and TeatroSinParedes, among others. *La bala* was awarded the 2017 Gerardo Mancebo del Castillo National Award for Young Playwrights and published that same year in *Teatro de la Gruta XVII*, Fondo Editorial Tierra Adentro. The play premiered in Mexico City on June 1, 2018, in the Foro La Gruta, directed by the playwright. Other plays written by the same autor include *La púa de la biznaga*, *Damiana y Carola*, *La luz del otro*, and *Tártaro*, the latter of which won in 2022 five Association of Critics and Journalists of Theater (ACPT) awards, including Best Monologue and Best Mexican Playwriting.

Jacqueline E. Bixler (Ph.D., 1980, University of Kansas) recently retired after 43 years of teaching Hispanic literature and culture at Virginia Tech, where she held the title of Alumni Distinguished Professor. A specialist on Mexican theatre, she has published nearly 100 articles as well as six monographs and edited volumes. She continues to serve as Editor of the *Latin American Theatre Review* and to be an active scholar. Her most recent endeavors involve the translation of plays by Sabina Berman (*The Narco Deals with God* and *Testosterone*), Alejandro Ricaño (*Idiots Contemplating the Snow* and *Hotel Good Luck*), Sergio López Viguera (*Tartaro* and *The Bullet*), Conchi León (*Extraordinary Events*), and Emilio Carballido (*Photograph on the Beach*).

The Bullet

Written by Sergio Felipe López Viguera

Translated by Jacqueline E. Bixler

LAURO

My blood is so cold.
It's a battle to get moving.
To wake up is not the same as waking up:
To wake up is to barely open my eyes
and surrender to the daily routine.
Six forty-five a.m.
Dawn.
Light that announces light,
an icy time of day.
My fingers stiffen in my pockets.
The street is empty.
The streetlights are on.
A pasty mixture of dust and dew
bathes the rear windows of the cars.
The scarf meant to keep out the cold is strangling me.
My breath fogs up my glasses.
My feet resist.
I think about my bed.
My flannel sheets, my blankets, my pillow.
I try to extend my toes inside my socks.
I think about the apathetic horde of students awaiting me
for the first composition class of the day
in a pretentious private prep school.
Two more blocks to go.
Then a minibus, the subway, a change to another subway line,
and four more blocks.
It could be worse.
The young neanderthals get there at 7:00.
Why bother if they're just going to end up holding up minibuses?

VALERIA

That's what they say.
It sounds good.
Sounds exciting.
"This is the first day of the rest of my life."
That's how it goes.
Okay.
Today I'm in control of myself.

That's what I should say to him: That's it, Oscar. It's over.
For me at least.
Truth is I'm bored.
I know it by heart:
promise, complaint, argument, reconciliation, promise.
That's how he's avoided decisions, but now it's my turn.
And I'm going to make it easy for him:
Either you leave me alone or I'll go up to Human Resources right now,
and let's see what you tell your wife when they fire you.

JONATHAN

Get up, the boss says, as he shakes me,
Today is the day.
I go outside and take a shit,
I wash my face.
There's bread and Nescafé inside.
Eat something, he says.
He prays.
I take a bite of bread and look at him.
Fucking fatso,
Someday I'm gonna be like him.

LAURO

The briefcase,
full of homework that the kids copy incorrectly off the internet,
and that I mark up,
hits my hip
with each step.
The strap presses on my shoulder,
wrinkling my gray sport jacket.
I leave it like that,
unwilling to expose my hands to the cold.
I approach the first station:
the corner bus stop
that sets everything in motion.
There she is.
Standing.
Like everyday.
Always.

VALERIA

Lauro arrives punctually at the bus stop.
His parents died when he was a child,
my mother told me.
She also told me that back then he had a lot of imagination.
That at an outdoor party,

next to the market,
there was a contest,
and he read the most amazing stories,
but the winner was another boy who recited a patriotic poem.
I don't remember any of that.
I know that he's now a school teacher.
Every morning
he comes to this corner to catch the bus
at 6:50 on the dot
and he looks at me.
He doesn't know me.
He doesn't know that I know him.
I like that he looks at me.
No one else looks at me like that.
Like a puppy anxious to grow up.

JONATHAN:

No bus is coming.
The tardiness makes the cold more acute.
If the bus arrives full as hell, you let it pass,
Otherwise you can't even move.
The boss says hello to a cop.
Hey, it's still early,
I haven't even pulled a job yet.

LAURO

Her hair pulled back in a ponytail.
Perfect, lint-free sweater.
Shiny shoes.
Those eyes that look the other way if I get close.
I think about the worn fabric of my sport jacket.
How much longer til the sales?
She must have a boyfriend.
He probably takes her to the movies, buys her gifts.
No doubt illiterate,
but nonetheless her boyfriend.

VALERIA

Lauro: one more of my daily certainties.
Seeing him here every dawn.
The number one daily certainty.
What will Oscar be to me, afterwards...?
Another certainty,
that of lost time?
Or will I end up coming back like I always do,
adrift,

bowing to his whims?

LAURO

We wait.

Birdsong announces the dawn.

Sixty seconds,
one hundred and twenty,
the lavender sky crackles.

We share sunrises,
does she realize that?

Of course not.

I'm pathetic.

Insignificant.

JONATHAN

It's better in the morning.

They're all sleepy, like calves.

They left home early for work or school.

At night they've had it.

It's harder if they're pissed off.

They get all fired up at the least little thing.

At noon or during the afternoon they're awake.

At this hour, however, they don't even expect it.

They have less money on them, but it's easier.

You get on and you hop off, without them even realizing it.

It's faster.

They don't even notice.

LAURO

The bus is coming.

The motor of its violent, criminal body
rattles and shudders.

Get on, get on, there's room.

VALERIA

I climb on.

LAURO

She goes first, I follow.

VALERIA

The same thing every morning.

I sit down.

LAURO

She sits down,

near the front.
There's an empty seat next to her.
I could sit there...
The driver steps on the clutch,
and shimmies the stick shift
until it goes into first and
makes the engine roar.

JONATHAN

The Boss knew how to do it.
He's the king of the street.
These streets at least.
He's already built an empire.
There are only three rules, he says:
Stay calm, stay calm,
above all, stay calm.
If you aren't calm, you fuck up.
You know what you're going to do,
you're doing a job.
You get there, boom, no hassle,
and let's go, on to the next one.
You don't even need to worry about it.

LAURO

I pay.
The movement of the bus rocks me.
I let inertia move me
down the aisle.
I leave her behind.
The seat next to her is still empty.
It's better that way.
What would I say to her?
"Hi, I'm Lauro,
the writer who doesn't write
and who plays babysitter in a prep school for seventy pesos an hour."

JONATHAN

That's how he did it,
without stopping to think about it.
He doesn't work for anyone,
whatever he earns is his.
If you try to compete with him:
You're an idiot, a fucking deadman.
It's not easy being the king.
I watch him, I see, I watch,
I study, I notice, I learn.

I look for details, cracks.
I'm not gonna let myself become his asshole forever.
Everyone has a secret,
finding it is just a matter of time.
One day the king will fall from his throne,
it's just a matter of knowing how to make him fall.

VALERIA

I sit down and let Lauro pass.
He looks so sweet in his cheap little suit.
I realized that he hesitated
as to whether he should sit down next to me.
I'll be getting off before him,
and seeing him again when I leave work.
As soon as he sees that I'm getting up,
he'll make eye contact,
hold it for a second,
and then turn toward the window.
That's the most we'll have today:
a second.
What would happen if I greet him one day?
Would it scare him even more?
What would he say if he knew that I think about him at night
and wonder if he's thinking about me
as he fondles himself under his briefs?

LAURO

I sit down in the rear.
I see the usual streets,
miniscule,
like an unconscious animal
taken every morning to the slaughterhouse.

JONATHAN

I follow his orders for today.
The classic:
he takes the driver,
I go down the aisle.
I've got a canvas bag
and a small 22-calibre pistol.

LAURO

I dissolve as the streets make me invisible.

VALERIA

Am I being too hard on Oscar?

It's true that he bores me,
but no more than the rest of my life.
I'm bored by Lauro and his timidity,
by his provincial, priestly seriousness.
The office bores me,
the return home bores me.
I don't suffer. It's not torture.
It's sheer boredom.
It's knowing that after I wake up the bus comes
and that after the bus comes the office,
and that after Monday comes Tuesday and so on until Friday,
and that my life will continue to bore me
and will bore me even more as I get older.

JONATHAN

Wouldn't it be a good idea to cover ourselves?,
I asked him once,
to cover our faces or something?
How can you think that?, he said.
That's more important
than the money.
They need to understand who's in charge,
know that someone controls this route,
and that that person has my face.
And now, your face, too.

VALERIA

A lover can at least be entertaining.
It's fun to watch him get upset
in the motel bed
when I remind him (yet again)
that the time by which he promised to leave his wife has almost expired;
watch him sob if his worries kill his desire;
watch him swagger if I make him believe that he's the one deciding.
No.
The truth is that it's not amusing.
I bore myself even more.
Oscar and I were a fling,
freedom, a game.
When exactly did I turn into a nagging broken record?

LAURO

The news stand, the hardware store,
the stoplight, the cables, rooftops,
pharmacies, 7-11's,
bridges, speed bumps, u-turns, median strips,

juices, coffee, tamales,
the one-way street that they transgress
to avoid the chaos of the intersection,
the building where I finished middle school,
where the pockmarked pubescents now get off the bus.
Everything in its place.
The dull melody that plays every morning.
Lauro's melody:
the symphony that never got beyond a monotonous hum.

VALERIA

Actually, what would change
if I left him?
What difference would I notice
between one meaningless day and the next?
What would I miss,
beyond the sweat and the scraped skin,
beyond the chafed knees
and the itch that comes on at the worst moment?

LAURO

Until they get on.

JONATHAN

He gets on first.
He's got the technique. He knows how to do it.
He knows the right moment.
That's the whole secret.
The exact moment when you raise the pistol
so that the driver doesn't get scared and keeps on driving.
When I learn that secret...

VALERIA

Shit, not again.
The second one already this month.
Even assaults have become part of the routine.

LAURO

There are two of them.
Over-sized hoodies.
A dark-skinned fat man and a pale skinny guy.
Their hands swimming in huge sleeves
like the mouth of night,
wielding pistols.

JONATHAN

Once he sees that I've gotten on,
he raises his pistol.
At that moment I can raise mine.
Same with the passengers.
Once they see that the driver has put the bus in gear,
that the driver is calm,
I can go back there with them.
I can't get on and immediately aim the gun at them.
An assault is like fucking: it's a question of rhythm.
A split second.
It's all about
discovering that secret.

LAURO

The gun metal reflects the January sun.
I feel frozen.
It's not the cold.
I rest my hands on my legs
and the sweat begins to soak my pants.
Don't move, Lauro.
The skinny guy goes down the aisle
threatening with an amateur clumsiness.
Up in front,
his pistol still trained on the driver,
the fat guy says,
not very loudly:

VALERIA

Okay, you fuckers, I don't want any nonsense.
Keep driving, what are you looking at?

JONATHAN

Everyone calm, everyone quiet,
you're going to take out everything you've got,
cellphones, wallets, bills, watches,
you're going to put it on your lap,
the Boss tells them,
and my friend is going to pick it up.
His friend is me.
I don't talk.
The Boss is the one who does the talking.
He knows how to do it.
On that we agree.
I obey.

LAURO

The fat one says:
Does everybody understand?
Quiet. I don't want any nonsense.
I close my eyes.
I could charge for writing them more original speeches.

VALERIA

They could at least not be all alike.
Tell a joke.
Say, "I wouldn't be assaulting you if..."
while they're actually doing it.

LAURO

I'm sure they didn't look me in the eyes.
They didn't see me with my eyes open.
I close them.
Not much.
Just enough so that it's not obvious that I'm closing them.
This shit always scares me stiff.
Even if I went through it a thousand times.
I try to pretend I'm asleep,
close my eyes and let everything happen.
Ten minutes, a trip, a lifetime.

JONATHAN

There's always one who pretends to be asleep,
a meddling old woman,
a child who starts to cry.
That's to be expected.
That's also why the Boss prefers to stay with the driver.
The people make him nervous,
he says that one day his gun is going to go off on him.

VALERIA

I open my purse and leave it on my lap.
I take off my earrings, they're costume jewelry,
and I put them next to the purse.
I'm also wearing a watch.
I happily take it off.
Oscar gave me that one.

LAURO

It's better to stay unnoticed,
to turn gray like the dirty seat covers.
It's better for me to stay out of it,

sink down onto the floor like a shadow,
be worthless,
insignificant.
If I get to school late, will I tell them what happened?
No.
The students would love it.

JONATHAN

Yes, we carry a pistol,
but it's a shield.
I've never shot anyone.
As for the Boss, I'm not sure...
Yes, I've seen people die.
I always know when I'm falling asleep
because I start seeing the faces
of those I've seen die.
But to be the one who shoots...

VALERIA

And your watch?, he's going to ask.
They ripped it off me!
I got robbed on the bus!
Since you don't have the balls
to tell your wife
to stop checking your bank accounts
and buy me a car,
I run the risk of being assaulted and raped.
I don't know why I'm telling you this,
when I already know that you don't care...

LAURO

What would I leave behind?
If someone had to go to my room to get my things,
what would they find?
Nothing.
Shirts and underwear.
A notebook of scribbles as testimony
of an absolute lack of talent.

VALERIA

This is what my entertainment comes to:
being assaulted on public transportation
and running to complain about it to a co-worker
who's lost the battle against baldness.

LAURO

And what about her?
I've been thinking only of myself,
I should...
No, they're gonna notice.
As if they needed more proof that I'm a coward.

VALERIA

The dumber one sticks his hand in my purse,
digs around,
feels the cellphone and the wallet.
Seemingly satisfied, he takes it all.

JONATHAN

I'm grabbing things from the purse of a homely young woman.

VALERIA

He's finished.
He's moved on.
Great, you idiot, at least you're clear about what you want
and you take it quickly and without hesitation.
Not like Oscar, the bald adulterer.
Not like Lauro, my eternal petrified suitor.

JONATHAN

The Boss is always fucking with me, urging me to grope the women.
That's not my thing.
He says I must be a faggot.
No fucking way, I tell him,
it's just that I get distracted.
I'm here to assault, and I assault.
Anything beyond that, we'll see.

LAURO

I hear
the collective resignation,
knowing that each one of them is where they're supposed to be
in this miserable play.
The choir of the lumpen,
shooting each other over crumbs.
Everyone barely breathing.
Everyone obeying, as if obedience would hasten the future.

JONATHAN

Everyone following orders, that's how I like it.
I don't like hassles.

I do my part, they do theirs,
slow and steady.
That's the way it should work.

LAURO

The only sound is that of the people's belongings
as they fall into the bag held by the skinny guy.
That's it.
That's all.

JONATHAN

Everything.
Rings, watches, necklaces.
The belt, too.
Take off the belt.
I said take it off.

VALERIA

Let them have it all.
I feel like shouting at everyone on the bus:
Let them take it all!
All the hypocritical gifts that you've gotten,
the stupid things you've bought to make yourself look better
for someone who doesn't deserve it,
the promises bound to fail.
Get rid of everything,
accept this cleansing!
But these two men
are gonna freak out if I open my mouth.
Their brains are obviously soaked with thinner.
I keep it to myself.
The urge is going to leave me with a cyst of mute shouts.

LAURO

Shameless scoundrels, an old woman dares to mutter.

VALERIA

Ma'am, please.

JONATHAN

Shut up!
You speak surprisingly well for someone who's missing a tooth!
Do you want me to knock out the one next to it?

VALERIA

It's better not to turn around or

Speak to them.
It's very simple, ma'am.

LAURO
I hear the old woman crying quietly.
I hear her tear duct emitting a dense, salty drop
that runs down her face to her jaw,
falls to the floor,
and breaks into millions of impotent, microscopic droplets.

VALERIA
We all hear it.
We can't take it any longer, but he can take it even less.

JONATHAN
The first passenger, to the left of the Boss.

LAURO
A man,
50 or so, 90 kilos,
blue jacket, who merely says:

VALERIA
That's enough, don't you think? It's all there. Take it.
What's the point of hassling that woman?

JONATHAN
You asshole!
Bam!
The Boss punches him right in the nose.

LAURO
Son of a bitch.
All that obesity channeled into that guy's septum.
Immediate hemorrhage.
I hear the blood spurting out.
Sir, that's why one has to stay quiet
and put up with this shit.
It won't make for a heroic epitaph,
but it will
let you live for another day.

VALERIA
You assholes!, shouts the guy in front.
I told you not to do anything stupid!
Who else is gonna fuck things up?

You think these guns aren't loaded?
I told you to fucking keep quiet!

JONATHAN

And you, asshole, what're you doing?, he asks me.
I don't say anything, but make a face as if to say, what do you mean what am I doing?
How am I to blame if these fucking people don't know how to keep quiet?
I lower my eyes and accept the scolding.
You're the boss.
But you've humiliated me.
And it's not the first time.
And it's starting to get to me.

VALERIA

I shouldn't look at him, but I keep looking at him.
His violence amazes me.
I feel something that I haven't felt all those years locked in an office,
what I haven't actually felt
since early childhood:
fear.

LAURO

The man's nose is still bleeding.
That's the only sound.
That and the frigid dawning of the day.
The winter light,
ready to fully unfold
across the dome of the atmosphere.
I don't see it. I hear it.
Just like I hear the windows condensing,
the tires rubbing on the pavement,
the swaying of terrified bodies.
My eyelids, motionless.
I seem more asleep than I did last night.

VALERIA

What are you looking at?

LAURO

The fat guy
asks her.
I can't see her, but I know he's talking to her.

VALERIA

Nothing.
What?

JONATHAN

That fucking creep is starting up.

VALERIA

I'm not looking at you.

What do you want, you little whore? This?

LAURO

I hear the swine's fingers sliding into her blouse,
slithering below her bra,
squeezing her breast with his calloused hand.

VALERIA

I tremble.

My chest shrivels as he touches me.

Should I cry, shout at him, push him away?

Should I just stay quiet and wait for him to finish
or should I fight,

somehow try to make him...?

LAURO

Let her go, you son of a bitch!, I should say to him.

I hear her quiver all the way from the nape of her neck to her heels.

How dare you, you beast?, but I don't say anything.

I hear her spine crackling as
a crude electrical charge surges through it.

Let her go, damn it! I don't dare, I'm a coward.

I hear her hair bristling,
her veins contracting.

I'm a piece of shit, I don't move an inch.

I hear the pig's taste buds salivating.

JONATHAN

Bam!

VALERIA

A loud thud.

The guy lets go of me.

I breathe again.

LAURO

A heavy blow makes my head rock.

My brain bounces around in my cranium,
the pain burns my face

from the right side,

the skin on my temple swells,

my ear boils,
buzzes,
my eyes open with the sheer force of the blow.

JONATHAN

That takes care of the annoying old woman and the bigmouth.

LAURO

My scarf is in the way,
I want to breathe.
I just want
to inhale...,
fill my lungs,
hang on to this moment.

JONATHAN

Wake up.
Don't pretend.

LAURO

Wake up, don't pretend,
the guy says to me,
his bony body shaking every time he laughs.

JONATHAN

How about that?
He wanted to play dead before it was even time.

LAURO

He found out.
I have nothing.
I am nothing.
Nothing but the pistol he's pointing at me
and the laughter coming from his rotting teeth.

VALERIA

They leave me alone, I calm down.
They're going after someone else, I worry.

LAURO

He points his gun at me, but looks beyond me.
He doesn't look at me, he doesn't need to look at me.
He's not afraid of me.
He aims his gun at me, but he's looking at his boss.
I'm the cowardly residue of a man who never dared to exist.
He keeps his pistol aimed at me, but turns his back.

JONATHAN

Fucking fatso, he's laughing even harder than I am,
then he's going to tell me that I get distracted.

LAURO

I'm suffocating.
I can't breathe.
I can't stand it any longer.
The gun is far away,
it doesn't get any closer,
but I feel how
I have no air left
inside.

JONATHAN

Hey, you fucking fatso, quit screwing around,
or you'll make me laugh even harder.

VALERIA

You wanted some action?
Well, now you've got it.

LAURO

I feel how the laughter and the pistol
are telling me:
You're a piece of shit.
You're a coward.
You aren't going to do anything.
Just like you don't do anything in your shitty job.
Just like you haven't done anything for yourself.
Just like you didn't do anything when they came to tell you that your parents...

VALERIA

Are you happy, Valeria?

LAURO

I let out a yell as I leap at the son of a bitch
who's pointing his pistol at me,
without him realizing that I'm twisting his arm behind his back
and grabbing the gun from his hand.

JONATHAN

What the hell?
No fucking way.
I'll shoot the gun... No.
The trigger is no longer in my finger.

LAURO

I inhale.

I fill my lungs with air.

I let out a cry like a newborn

letting the world know he's alive.

The roar of the beast

that's awaited its prey for almost thirty years.

JONATHAN

My shoulder, fuck!

LAURO

My briefcase fell on the floor along with my glasses.

My scarf is still getting in the way.

VALERIA

What's going on?

LAURO

I twist his left arm all the way back.

I want to tear it off.

JONATHAN

He has me...

bent over...

My arm, you asshole...!

I try to kick, but he twists my arm even more.

Let go!

LAURO

Feel that, you son of a bitch.

Feel the cold barrel of your own pistol on the back of your neck.

JONATHAN

He points the gun at me.

I hang on to the canvas bag.

Boss, do something, come on.

I try to shake myself loose.

It hurts.

LAURO

Be quiet!, I shout again.

Let me think, you little shit.

I keep on breathing.

I realize I haven't really thought.

I'm blindly following a fury that I never knew I had.

Calm down! What're you doing, shouts the fat guy.
The tone of his voice makes it clear
that he's so scared he shit his pants.

VALERIA
It's Lauro.
What are you doing?
No...
Let him go, run,
whatever, but don't...

LAURO
What the fuck, Lauro?
What are you doing?
The fat man's question rattled me.
Do you know how to shoot? Do you even know how to release the safety?
Never in your miserable life have you held a gun.
You're gonna do something stupid.
What do you want?

JONATHAN
Let go already!
Or pull the trigger.
But do it now.
What do you want?

LAURO
I don't respond. What is it that I want?
What am I doing,
subduing a guy and pointing a pistol at him?
I twist his arm even harder,
I need to think.

VALERIA
The guy being restrained by Lauro is howling.
What are you doing, Lauro?
You're nearly a child.

LAURO
Get off the bus, I say to them quietly,
but as firmly as I can.
Drop the bag.

JONATHAN
No fucking way, that's ours.
I'm not gonna let go of it.

Help me, you fat piece of shit!
He's an idiot, he doesn't know a fucking thing!
Pull the trigger, scare him!

LAURO

I don't know anything about pistols.
Nothing.
But I find a lever under my thumb.
I breathe.
I'm not struggling to breathe.
You're under my control, you scumbag.
I've got you, you're mine.
You're not going anywhere.
I'm gonna put this bullet in the back of your neck if you move,
and you'll spend all of eternity begging for mercy.

VALERIA

He's like a wild animal,
but it's clear that he's absolutely calm.
Serious, tranquil,
as if he's done this dozens of times.
I don't know what to think.
I don't want to move.
I feel like any false move
could work against him.
I'd like to tell everyone not to do anything,
not to move, not to breathe.
I think they all hear me,
because no one moves.

LAURO

If I'm only going to do one thing in this life, it will be this:
I squeeze the safety.

VALERIA

We hear a click.
The fat guy turns pale.
The skinny guy pleads with his eyes, but Lauro doesn't see them.

LAURO

Calm down, calm down right now!,
the fat guy shouts, desperate.
I feel the guy I've got in my hands trembling.

JONATHAN

Stop trembling, Jonathan.

He's gonna pull the trigger if you move.
Calm down, Jonathan, calm down.
Slowly, you calm down, and this idiot will calm down.
Let's see if you do something, Fatso, for fuck's sake.
I put the bag on the floor, very slowly.

LAURO

Everyone on the bus is looking at me.
Twenty pairs of eyes are glued to my eyes
as if they were watching someone on a tightrope.
She is watching me, too.

VALERIA

I look at him.
I feel him finding support in my eyes.
I'm not going anywhere.
Breathe.
You did it, he's putting the bag down.
Everything's going to be fine.

LAURO

We're all breathing at the same rate.
I cling to her eyes as if I were on the edge of a cliff.
I don't know what I'm doing.
Why did I leap like that?
I just cling to her, praying
that her eyes are the sign
that some way it's going to work out.

VALERIA

There are your things, now let him go, shouts the fat guy.

LAURO

You get off first, I respond.
The driver slows the bus down.

VALERIA

What are you doing? Don't slow down, you idiot, until I say so.

JONATHAN

Get off the bus, Boss.
That's it, let's go,
he's going to kill me.

LAURO

I said, get off the bus.

VALERIA

No fucking way, the fat guy says to his accomplice.
You aren't going to tell me what to do, you fucking little faggot!
If he shoots you, he shoots you, but hold on for now.
Fuck it all!

LAURO

He aims the gun
at her head.
Because she's the closest to him.

VALERIA

I see the pistol pointed just centimeters from my face.
I remember when I sat down here,
in this empty seat,
twenty blocks ago.
I remember when Lauro was about to sit down next to me.
Everything's going to be fine,
I try to tell him with my eyes.
His eyes see me,
but he's no longer there.

LAURO

Leave her alone!
Don't you get near her!
What are you doing?

VALERIA

You're going to keep quiet, says the man who is aiming at me,
and it's not an order.
It's a death sentence.

LAURO

I fall apart.
What have I done?
Leave her alone, shoot me, this is about me.

VALERIA

Now you're fucked,
and all because you wanted to play macho!
Go ahead, you idiot!
You wanna see what little machos can make happen?
Is that what you want?

JONATHAN

That was it, fucking slob,

that was his weak spot.

LAURO

Let her go or I really will...
I give his accomplice another yank on the arm.
The fat man laughs.

JONATHAN

I don't give a fuck.
That's what the Boss says to him.
He doesn't give a fuck.

LAURO

The fat slob doesn't care about his friend.
That was obvious.
Now I have nothing to negotiate with.
I loosen my grip, perhaps.
I barely understand that I've loosened my grip on his arm
when I'm already doubled over
from the elbow that he rammed into my stomach.

JONATHAN

There, you faggot, now you're fucked.
Punching is like fucking:
it's a question of timing.
I've realized that I'm on my own.

VALERIA

Lauro is writhing from the blow.
He looks like a little boy.
You're a puppy, Lauro, how did you imagine...?
I'm crying.
I don't know how long I've been crying.
I barely realize that I'm crying.
I confirm it by licking the salt of my tears.
Tell me, tears, tell me.
Whatever it may be, tell me that this is going to end.
Tell me, because I don't dare look to see
if he's still pointing a gun at my head.

LAURO

I try to hang onto the gun.
Whatever I do, I know I can't let go of the gun.
I cough, I heave, I can't breathe,
I get dizzy.
I remain bent over,

I just need to inhale.
Where did he go?
He yanks me.

JONATHAN
Who told you to wear that gay scarf?

LAURO
His knee... my face...

VALERIA
No!

LAURO
I don't understand any...
My hand, empty.
Shit.

VALERIA
Lauro is looking for the gun.
He doesn't have it anymore.
Is he bleeding from his nose or his mouth?

LAURO
Did he already get the gun?
I think that... I'm still... standing.

JONATHAN
I stick the gun in his ribs.
That's it, the party's over.
That's the end of Jonathan the nice guy.
That's the end of the idiot apprentice.
The one running the show here has my face.

LAURO
I can see her.
Barely.
Is it my eyes that hurt or my eyelids?
There's no longer a pistol aimed at her head.

VALERIA
I didn't stop looking at the pistol.
I saw his relief.
He's no longer aiming at me.

LAURO

That's it.

The fat guy's pistol
is now
aimed
at me.

VALERIA

Both guns are pointed at him,
but he's breathing again.
Is he calm?
Or is he in shock and no longer feeling any pain?

LAURO

My nose is bleeding.
I can't feel my face,
I think,
but I see
ahead of me
the pistol that belongs to the guy up in front,
the pistol that's no longer aimed at her.
It's now aimed right between my eyes.
I can rest my eyes on its chamber.
That's fine.

JONATHAN

Jonathan, you fucking idiot,
you can't do anything right,
that fat slob says to me.

LAURO

My rib is getting a break.
Is that what the gunshot was,
a break?

JONATHAN

Kill'em.
Pull the trigger,
he orders me.

VALERIA

The idiot withdraws the pistol from Lauro's ribs.
He opens his eyes a little wider.
He thinks.

JONATHAN

And then he says:

Are you afraid to do it, you little wuss?

Fucking faggot,

you can't even collect their things,

because some asshole pretends to be asleep and jumps you.

And now you can't pull the trigger?

What do you want?

You want me to pull it?

I have to do that, too?

LAURO

That's what it will be: a relief.

But I'm still standing.

I still see the pistol in front of me,

the bullet destined for my brain in the chamber,

the fat guy shouting and waving

his gun in the air.

VALERIA

Jonathan lowers his head.

He angrily bites his lip and makes it bleed.

JONATHAN

That's why you're never gonna be in control, he tells me.

You can't even control yourself, Jonathan,

how do you expect to do it here?

VALERIA

Jonathan extends his arm.

Then he raises his hand.

He aims his pistol at the fat guy.

JONATHAN

Laughing himself shitless at me:

You should have that kind of balls!

You don't dare, you skinny little shit.

When I took you in off the street,

you couldn't even suck my dick without squealing.

VALERIA

Jonathan's voice becomes deeper.

JONATHAN

You didn't fucking care.

VALERIA

What?, the fat guy asks.

JONATHAN

You didn't fucking care that he put the gun to my head.

You want to feel so fucking macho,
you want to make me feel stupid,
no problem.

But this asshole was gonna pull the trigger,
and you didn't fucking care.

VALERIA

Hey, Jonathan, hold on.

JONATHAN

Go to fucking hell.

VALERIA

He shoots.

LAURO

That bullet is an unstoppable eagle.

It compresses its full magnitude
and in that pause secures its power.

Its silvery feathers blind me:

light that fills caverns,
heat that melts the chest.

I go beyond that splendor and see his eyes.

I see the world reflected in his pupils:

the bus, passengers, assailants,
streets, offices, mountains,
molecules, storms, galaxies,
present futures and pasts.

Perceptions, images,
glimmers of glimmers.

Everything is futile, unreal, nonexistent.

The only certainty is this light that creates and destroys,
unshakeable, veritable.

And I am that light. This moment.

VALERIA

The bus brakes.

I lurch.

A second shot.

LAURO

The shot reverberates in my body.

JONATHAN

Can't you do anything right,
you sack of shit?, you said.

Die, you fat slob!

VALERIA

Lauro isn't moving.

He doesn't fall.

My face is wet.

Are those tears?

Blood splatters my clothes.

JONATHAN

Fuck, I shot him. What have I done?

LAURO

The fat guy's eyes go dead
and his one hundred and fifty kilos hit
the floor of the bus.

It wasn't an echo; there were two shots.

One for him, but what about the one for me?

JONATHAN

You messed up, Fatso.

What happened to your three rules?

Stay calm, stay calm, stay calm.

Or wasn't that the case?

Or was this the last lesson?

VALERIA

Lauro's okay, I think.

The blood from his nose is drying up.

He's crying.

He doesn't know it.

Only tears run down his cheeks.

JONATHAN

I did it.

I killed him.

There is someone controlling this street, Fatso,
and it's me.

VALERIA

Jonathan lets him go.
I'd like to hug him.
I'd like to run and tell him that it's all over.

LAURO

I haven't fallen over yet.
The bus has stopped.
Jonathan leaves the bag full of things on the floor,
goes over to the other man's body,
bends over next to him,
and whispers something in his ear.

VALERIA

The man's blood forms a puddle
and wets Jonathan's tennis shoes,
which leave his footprints on the floor
as he walks off the bus.
It's the same blood that's on my face.

LAURO

She sees my crying eyes,
through her own crying eyes.
She's the one who hasn't let me fall apart.
I still cling to her eyes.
My hands tremble.

VALERIA

Everyone on the bus lets out a sigh of relief.
There is crying, shouting, a laugh.

LAURO

Some of the passengers start to move,
get off the bus,
ask pedestrians for help.

VALERIA

The old woman who spoke up is the first to go
retrieve her things from the bag.
She repeats her word: shameless.

LAURO

The man they beat up sees me and nods,
I think it's his way of telling me
that we now share something:
a broken nose.

VALERIA

The driver is in the street talking on his cellphone.
He shouts.
His hands emphasize his words.

LAURO

No one approaches the body.
Why aren't I on the floor like him?
Why didn't the bullet hit me?

VALERIA

I get up,
I'd like to squeeze Lauro's hands so that they stop shaking.
Or let them shake, if he wants,
let him do whatever he wants.
I'm here.
Everything is fine.
But I don't approach him.

LAURO

I feel the sun on my face.
She is facing me and looking at me,
I feel calm.
We've lived through it all.
The two of us are weepy, splattered with blood,
seeing the light after the most violent birth.
Everything is new and real: everything is about to begin.

VALERIA

Who is this standing in front of me?
I never thought that Lauro,
the shy guy I see every morning,
had that in him...
But then again, he's not the same man as a few moments ago.
And what about me?
Who am I now?
I don't know.
I don't know if it matters.
I stop thinking.
I stay here.
Meeting his eyes,
in which everything is invented all over again.

LAURO

She's coming toward me, very slowly.
The last moment of my only life just passed, for the first time.

I'm ready now.
I'm ready for blood to irrigate veins that I didn't know I had.
Ready to leave behind the life I invented to paralyze myself.
Ready to awaken: to create everything anew.

VALERIA
My name is Valeria.

LAURO
I'm Lauro.

THE END

Kafka In Love

By Luis Araújo

Translated from Spanish by Phyllis Zatlin

Kafka In Love (*Kafka enamorado*) by Spanish playwright Luis Araújo is based in large part on Franz Kafka's letters, written from 1912 to 1917. Some brief scenes also evoke moments from Kafka's fictional works, *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis*.

Araújo's text reveals the romantic relationship between the author and Felice Bauer. The relationship failed both because Kafka feared that marriage would destroy his creative talents and because of his father's interference in his life.

The debut production at the María Guerrero National Theatre in Madrid featured a minimalist single set that facilitated temporal and spatial fluidity. Although the cast could include up to five men and two women, plus the offstage voice of Kafka's father, the Madrid production had two men and one woman handle multiple roles.

The Spanish premiere on March 2013 was under the direction of José Pascual. The play has since been translated and performed in various countries. The English translation is as yet professionally unproduced. The opening scene, however, appears in the on-line journal *Asymptote*, 2019.

The title deliberately mirrors the film *Shakespeare in Love*. Araújo's text, on the other hand, is based on letters, written by Franz Kafka from 1912 to 1917, that reveal a romantic relationship between him and Felice Bauer.

Temporal and spatial fluidity in *Kafka enamorado* leads to scenes in such varied places as train stations, hotels, homes, and a tailor shop. In cinematographic fashion, music and lighting guided the audience in following these transitions and Franz's emotions. The set design allowed spectators to see action upstage and downstage simultaneously. Particularly effective was the engagement party. Stage left, one could see Felice dancing even as Franz remained center stage, reluctant to join in the merriment.

The roles of Felice and her friend Grete, with whom Franz has a brief love affair, were doubled by one actor, who transitioned from one woman to the other by turning her back to the audience and changing costumes. Rapid costume changes also facilitated one actor playing Max Brod, Franz's loyal friend and editor, as well as the tailor who prepared him for his engagement party, a uniformed officer who threatened him, and a bellhop in a hotel in Marienbad where Franz and Felice escape together for ten days. Red lighting highlighted that romantic interlude.

Costumes for Felice Bauer reflected the evolution of her relationship with Franz. In opening scenes, she wore a conservative dark blue jacket and long skirt, appropriate for her career as a businesswoman; after the Marienbad tryst, she wore a feminine, summery, light gray dress.

The major clue to Franz's conflict with his father was provided in the opening scene. Downstage right, Franz, presumably locked in a bathhouse, covers his face while his father yells at him to open the door and get ready to go swimming, an activity Franz truly hates.

The prime source for Araújo's text is letters, which are read aloud to the audience. This strategy could lead to a static performance, but author and director cleverly avoided that pitfall, thus converting passive reading into dramatic action. In several scenes, Franz and Felice, separated at opposite sides of the stage, alternately read fragments of letters as writer and recipient.

Felice is an active woman, constantly in motion, in contrast to Franz, who is or wishes to be immersed in his anguished inner world. For brief moments that inner world emerges on stage in allusions to Kafka's fiction: when the man in uniform questions him (*The Trial*) and when he wakes up from a dream in which he has become an insect (*The Metamorphosis*).

Luis Araújo (b. Madrid, 1956) is a playwright, director, actor, and professor. Since 2014 he has been on the faculty of the University of Strasbourg in France and, most recently, the Académie de Rouen. His involvement in French-language culture dates back three decades; he holds an M.A. degree in theater from the Université de Montréal. In Spain, he participated actively in Asociación de Autores de Teatro (Association of Playwrights) and the journal *Primer Acto*. His plays have been performed to acclaim in Spain, Mexico, Argentina, and Puerto Rico, and have been translated and staged in France, Italy, Portugal, and other countries. Although he has also written children's plays, often his works center on issues of social injustice and develop psychological portraits of his characters. In the United States, his compelling drama *Vanzetti* was published in 1999 in the series ESTRENO Plays (trans. Mary-Alice Lessing). *Kafka enamorado*, the play featured here, opened at the María Guerrero national theater in Madrid in March—April 2013 and was given a second performance at that prestigious playhouse January 17—March 2, 2014. The Spanish production in New York of his play *Mercado libre* received 11 different prizes in 2022, including “Best Author” from the Hispanic Organization of Latin Artists (HOLA).

Phyllis Zatlin, retired professor from Rutgers University in New Jersey, has translated numerous contemporary plays from Spanish and French. Several of these have appeared in *The Mercurian*. Her interest in the theatre of Luis Araújo dates back more than thirty years, to her collaboration with the journal *Estreno* and the series ESTRENO Plays. She saw his *Kafka enamorado* when it was first staged in Madrid and has shared her enthusiasm for this work with fellow members of the Door County Playwrights' Collective. She and her husband now reside in Door County, Wisconsin.

Kafka In Love
(Kafka enamorado)

By Luis Araújo

Translated from Spanish by Phyllis Zatlin

CHARACTERS:
(In order of appearance)

FRANZ

An offstage VOICE

MAX

FELICE

A TAILOR

A YOUNG MAN IN UNIFORM

GRETE

A BELLHOP

All roles may be performed by three actors and an offstage voice.

Happy sounds from the area of bath houses along a river. Laughter, shouts, noises of children at play, splashing. Birds chirping. As the lights come up, FRANZ is immobile in the bright sunlight that comes through a small window in the changing booth. His big, terrified gray eyes stare into space.

(Pounding on the door.
FRANZ recoils in alarm.)

VOICE

May I ask what you're doing?

(More pounding on the door.)

Will you get out of there? Or do I have to come in and get you?

(Silence.)

More pounding on the door.)

Franz. Get out here!

FRANZ

(In a howl, like an animal in pain.)

I'm coming, Father.

VOICE

Son, come on out. We're going to swim! I said, we're going to swim. Get out of there, now!

(Silence.
The light disappears from the little window.)

FRANZ

Yesterday I saw the white horse for the first time. It came out of my head, went over me, jumped off the bed, and finally disappeared.

(MAX and FELICE at opposite sides of a table. In front of them, a briefcase filled with papers and an envelope.)

FRANZ

I'd like to be able to explain the feeling of happiness that comes over me when I'm writing. It's something effervescent that engulfs me, a slight tremor that makes me believe that I have talent.

(MAX closes the briefcase.)

MAX

We're going to leave it as is. Believe me, Franz, it's marvelous.

FRANZ

If you say so.

MAX

Have you finally decided on a title?

FRANZ

Meditation.

MAX

I like it. *Meditation.* (Referring to the envelope.) And this? New texts?

FRANZ

No. Those are photos from our trip to Weimar.

FELICE

I'd like to see them!

(FELICE grabs the envelope from FRANZ.)

MAX

Well, we have to decide which ones we can show.

(MAX takes the envelope away from FELICE, removes the photos, starts passing them to FRANZ who in turn passes them on to FELICE.)

FRANZ

Miss Bauer, this is Goethe's house.

FELICE

I've gone to Weimar so many times on business and I've never visited Goethe's house. What an

impressive garden!

FRANZ

He was a great naturalist. He personally grew all kinds of plants.

FELICE

I can't imagine him digging in the soil. I've seen him as a statesman, possessed by the Muses.

MAX

That he was.

FRANZ

But he studied nature. Look, his favorite tree was the ginkgo.

(Pointing to a photo)

This one. It's a prehistoric tree. A living fossil that's still there.

MAX

(Hiding a photo)

We found lots of interesting things in Weimar, didn't we, Franz?

(FRANZ, on his guard, says nothing.)

FELICE

What's this?

FRANZ

That's his writing stand. He wrote standing up, facing the garden window.

FELICE

He wrote standing up? Every writer is a world unto himself.

FRANZ

Yes, a world.

(Brief silence)

FELICE

Well, I'd better be going. Tomorrow I'll be traveling again. I have to catch an early train to Budapest.

FRANZ

We'll take you to your hotel, won't we, Max?

FELICE

I'd appreciate that. It's still raining and this morning I left my umbrella on the train from Berlin.

FRANZ

You must be exhausted. Ready, Max?

MAX

What? Yes, yes, of course.

(FELICE gets up and stumbles as she pulls out her chair. Both men gesture as if to help her, but they are on the other side of the table. FELICE laughs.)

MAX

I'm sorry, those are my mother's slippers.

FRANZ

Your mother's slippers?

FELICE

He lent them to me for inside, but my shoes have heels and I'm not used to walking without them.

(FELICE exchanges the slippers for elegant, high-heeled boots. FRANZ watches her. Then he takes a magazine out of his pocket.)

FRANZ

Do you know Palestine?

FELICE

No, but I'd love to.

FRANZ

(Ambiguously)

I'd love to, too.

(MAX looks at Franz in surprise.)

FELICE

I'm ready. Let's go.

MAX

Father, we're going with Felice.

VOICE

I'll catch up with you.

(Pause)

FRANZ

We could plan a trip for next year.

FELICE

That would be interesting!

FRANZ

(Holding his hand out to her.)

You're not saying that in jest, are you?

FELICE

(Shaking his hand.)

Of course not.

(MAX looks on scornfully as they shake hands. With a resolute step, FELICE exits. MAX continues to look at FRANZ in scorn. FRANZ shows MAX the hand that has just touched FELICE.)

MAX

You liked her from the first moment.

FRANZ

She wasn't very beautiful, right? A gaunt face, almost hollow . . . and that white blouse, without style. Straight, limp hair. When I got to your house that evening, I thought she was a servant.

MAX

(Laughing.)

A servant? She's the general counsel of a Berlin firm.

FRANZ

I can't stop thinking about her.

(MAX hands him the photo that he set aside.)

MAX

So that blonde in Weimar is history?

FRANZ

She didn't pay any attention to me!

MAX

Shall we go to the Trocadero? Maybe your Hansi will still be there.

FRANZ

So tomorrow I'll fall asleep at the office. This double life is going to drive me crazy.

MAX

Crazy in your case would be a workplace accident. And you'd have to process your own workman's accident insurance from your company office.

FRANZ

Now it turns out that the director of my brother-in-law's plant is away on a trip and my father is obsessed with the idea that if someone doesn't watch the employees, they'll take advantage of his absence. As if they were all thieves instead of normal people. I've been hard at work for two

days on a story, but now I have to interrupt my writing. I have to go to the factory every afternoon for two weeks to watch the wicked employees when truthfully I don't have the slightest idea of what they're supposed to be doing and the foreman knows much more than I do.

MAX

Your sister Valli is finally getting married?

FRANZ

Today my mother was complaining about my father's bad mood and illness, for which she says I'm responsible. I can feel bitterness growing inside me . . . unless it's a buildup of bile. I realize I have only two options: either I throw myself out the window when everyone in the house is asleep or I trudge off to the factory everyday for the next two weeks.

MAX

Stop it, Franz.

FRANZ

In the former option, I would be relieved of all responsibility, of course. In the latter, I would have to disrupt my work and pick it back up, assuming I could begin again where I left off today.

MAX

Did you hear me?

FRANZ

Yes, I heard you. You're getting married. My sister Valli is getting married. Everyone is getting married. And I'm getting farther and farther from my literary work, from the rhythm that let me write the book that you're going to publish and that took so much of my effort these past months.
(Silence.)

FRANZ

I didn't throw myself out the window, Max. I stood a long time with my head pressed against the glass, imagining how my fall would frighten the poor man in the toll booth on the bridge. In the end I thought that continuing my life would interrupt my work less than dying.
(Pause.)

What do you think, Max?

MAX

(Laughing.)

That you're loony. Come on, I think you better try to sleep.

FRANZ

To sleep . . . In the morning, at the office; in the afternoon, at the factory; this time of day, at home, with shouting in all the rooms. My sisters with their children, my parents playing cards with their sons-in-law. Tomorrow night I'll go get my little sister Otilie from the theatre. She's going to see Hamlet. I can't progress at all. As if I were made of stone.

MAX

Try to get some sleep.

FRANZ

To sleep . . . Yes, of course, if you can sleep . . . (Laughing.) Say, do you think it's possible to seduce a girl just with writing?

(Smiling, they hug.)

MAX

Good night.

FRANZ

Good night, Max. I don't know what I'd do without you.

(MAX exits. Silence. FRANZ sits down to write.)

FRANZ

Every night for a week the guest in the room next door comes to fight with me. I don't know him and up 'til now I've never said a word to him. We just fight. Then, through the wall of his room he yells at me, "Good night!" If I wanted to put an end to this friendship, I'd have to leave this room. Closing the door from the inside does no good. Once I locked it because I wanted to read, but my neighbor split the door in two with an axe. He even threatened me with the axe. But I know how to adapt. He always comes at the same time, so I start some simple task that I can interrupt immediately if necessary. I organize a drawer, I copy something, I read a book of no importance. No sooner does he appear in the doorway, I have to drop everything: close the drawer right away, drop the pen, throw down the book, seeing that all he wants to do is fight. Most of the time, our bodies are immediately locked in combat.

(FELICE enters.)

Today he had a girl with him. While I greet her, without paying attention to him, he jumps on me and tosses me into the air. "I protest," I shout, raising a hand. "Shut up," he whispers in my ear. I realize that at whatever cost, including dirty tricks, I want to win in front of the girl, to show off.

(FRANZ hands a sheet of paper to FELICE.)

FELICE

(Reading)

". . . In the likely case that you don't remember me at all, let me reintroduce myself. I am Dr. Franz Kafka. I met you for the first time one August afternoon at the home of Mr. Brod."

FRANZ

I can still feel in this hand, the one with which I now write, the touch of yours with which you sealed your promise to travel with me to Palestine next year.

FELICE

(Surprised.)

"It is absolutely necessary that we reach an agreement on our trip to Palestine!"

FRANZ

The previous night you had been reading until four in the morning, and you must have been exhausted. I write until very late myself. My whole life centers on writing. Indeed, that is the only activity that interests me. Since I met you, I've been writing furiously. I am consumed by feverish thoughts, Miss Bauer! A nervous storm bursts forth in my head without stopping. If I want something now, a moment later I don't want it. When I reach the top step, I don't know what mood I'll be in when I enter the house. Doubts have been piling up until finally I feel sure enough to write you these letters. I have a terrible memory. I'm lethargic. The other night, I got out of bed to jot down something I wanted to tell you, but I went back to bed reproaching myself for my agitation.

(FELICE laughs.

FRANZ openly stares at a young woman in the audience.)

FRANZ

The girl from the café. Tight skirt, white silk blouse, loose fitting, bare neck. Round, smiling face, trembling, a friendly look but a bit pretentious . . . Why do I get red in the face when I think about Felice?

FELICE

I'm going to Frankfurt to promote dictaphones.

FRANZ

Dictaphones?

FELICE

Yes, Dictaphones. Technology is progress, Franz.

FRANZ

Believing in progress doesn't mean that it has already happened. That isn't belief.

FELICE

I'd like to write you longer letters, but that's impossible. In addition to Miss Grossmann, another girl in the office is sick now and I have to take care of her work, too. That's what it means to be the manager. So I've had to extend my schedule to 8 P.M., and I can't even take a break at noon. By the way, do you know what companies in Prague don't have dictaphones?

FRANZ

Oh, my dear business woman! Impose your dictaphones throughout Bohemia. I'll attest that you are the best and most charming girl that exists and that the gadget is invaluable simply because of who is selling it. Let them ask me, let them ask.

(Pause)

FELICE

Did I tell you that I've met a very nice pediatrician? He's been a bit insistent--you know what I mean--so insistent that I had to lie to him. It's your fault. I don't stop thinking about you. I am captive to your letters. I live for them, but I can't respond to them one after another. Are you

trying to get us writing two or three times a day?

FRANZ

My lady of felicity! How have I, silly me, remained here instead of jumping on a train with my eyes shut and not opening them until I am by your side? Well, yes, there is a reason why I haven't . . .

FELICE
(Reading.)

. . . my health barely permits me to manage alone. It isn't good enough for me to marry and even less so to be a father.

FRANZ

When I read your letters, I avoid thinking about that. In all sincerity, it pains me, but I am captive like a spirit in the felicity of your name! If I had written you Saturday, asking you not to write ever again, and promising to do the same. . . Now everything would be clear. As it is, what solution is there for us? Would it help if we wrote each other only once a week, as friends? No, I can see that I won't even be able to write just a letter on Sunday. Thus, with all the strength that I have left, I beg you: Felice, if we value our lives, let us agree mutually to give it all up.

(Silence.)

FRANZ
(Timidly.)

Why don't you answer me?

(Pause.)

FELICE

Do you know that when I was little my brothers and cousins always used to beat me and my arms were always covered with bruises? I believe that hardened me for life. Don't be so anguished. You have to laugh at all those fears. I've put your photo in the locket I wear around my neck. I plan to have you with me day and night.

(Silence.)

VOICE

My dear friends: The Worker's Accident Insurance Institute this year has experienced considerable growth thanks to the effort of all of you. An effort whose humanitarian value is the only consolation in the lives of those workers who have had the misfortune of suffering an accident.

FRANZ

How humble the workers can be! They come to submit applications. Instead of taking the building by assault and ransacking it, they fill out applications!

VOICE

That is why I wanted to approach you personally and commend the work you are doing. And what better occasion than this to highlight the effort of some of our employees?. Dr. Kafka, for example, is an exceptionally efficient worker whose subtle talents and outstanding loyalty . . .

(FRANZ stifles laughter.)

. . . placed in the service of our Institute undoubtedly make him worthy of a promotion. Therefore we have decided to name him Vice Secretary and Editor of Reports, a position that in the future will identify Dr. Franz Kafka in all Bohemia as the spokesman of The Worker's Accident Insurance Institute.

(FRANZ bursts out laughing.)

FRANZ

(Unable to stifle his laughs.)

I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.

VOICE

The lad has an excellent sense of humor.

FELICE

(Entering.)

My dear Dr. Pribram, how pleased I am to see you. I wonder if you are acquainted with our very useful Lindström Dictaphones, manufactured in Berlin.

(Pause.)

FRANZ

My job is unbearable. It runs counter to my real desires. My only profession is literature. I am nothing but literature. I cannot and do not want to be anything else. This job can never motivate me. Rather it will destroy me. Indeed I'm not far from that condition now. If I cannot free myself from this office, I'm lost.

VOICE

Do what you wish. As far as I'm concerned, you are free. You're an adult. I don't need to give you advice!

(FELICE enters.)

FRANZ

Don Quijote's misfortune isn't his imagination. It's Sancho Panza.

(Silence.)

FELICE

I don't think I write you enough. You tell me everything but I hardly know what to talk to you about. I should write more, shouldn't I?

FRANZ

I was so enthusiastic about how "The Stoker" turned out, as a first chapter for a novel, that I read it to my parents last night. Well . . . there is no greater critic than myself when I'm reading aloud in front of my father, who listens to me in total disgust.

VOICE

Stop always thinking about the same nonsense.

FRANZ

Nevertheless, my love, how fantastic is the world in my head. How could I free myself of it without tearing it to shreds? How could I free myself without being torn to shreds, too? I would rather, a thousand times over, tear myself to shreds than repress that world and bury it inside me. It is perfectly clear to me that this is the reason for my life.

FELICE

Clearly yes. . .

FRANZ

Perhaps you can have a vague idea of what I mean. It truly frightens me that you might not understand.

VOICE

I don't want to hear even a word of protest!

(Pause.)

(A TAILOR enters and measures FRANZ.)

FELICE

(Reading.)

When you are reading this letter, surely I will be in a carriage, wearing an old tailcoat, shabby patent leather boots, a top hat that is too small for me, and my extremely pale face. I'll be seated next to a pretty, demure cousin, on the way to the synagogue for my sister Valli's wedding.

FRANZ

Among Jews, solemnity makes weddings and funerals look the same.

TAILOR

The tuxedo vest must be worn open, doctor.

FRANZ

Well I prefer it buttoned.

TAILOR

Sir, that doesn't make sense. You have to show the starched, white shirt.

FRANZ

On hearing that, I decided to fight with all my might. One has to resist such abuses.

TAILOR

What you want in no way resembles appropriate dress for a dance.

FRANZ

Well, it may not be appropriate dress for a dance, but I have no intention of dancing.

TAILOR

But my dear doctor, you can't appear in society with improper clothing. I'm sure that. . .

FRANZ

It was exhausting.

TAILOR

. . . you understand perfectly well that the ladies expect you to make an appearance in keeping with the dictates of fashion. This is the 20th century, my dear doctor.

FRANZ

Naturally my mother was there. So I was separated *forever* from the ladies, from making an elegant appearance, and from dances in society. *Forever*, according to my mother's reproaches, everything involving me is *forever*. I am a terrible disgrace for the family.

(To the TAILOR.)

You aren't measuring me for a coffin, are you?

(Offended, the TAILOR exits.)

FELICE

You make me laugh. Except for my work, I don't have much to tell you. I go to the theatre, I read magazines. . . I don't know. Well, today our man from Cairo came.

FRANZ

I can see the man from Cairo wearing a linen tunic that floats in the breeze and chasing you around the empty office.

FELICE

Silly! He's German.

(Pause.)

FRANZ

Oh! What nostalgia and yearning your photos awaken in me!

FELICE

Today I didn't get a nap. I always take one after eating. But I hardly have any free time and what little I do have I spend writing to you. Are you a vegetarian? Why? Do you have to be different in everything?

FRANZ

Could you send me a list of your books so I'll know what you're reading?

FELICE

I'd love to be at your side while you write, observing you and feeling how you do it.

FRANZ

But, my dear, if you were at my side I'd be incapable of writing! I already have to make a great

effort because of my headaches, but with someone observing me, I couldn't write at all.

FELICE

(Reading Franz's words with delight.)

Writing means to open oneself up without measure, in the most extreme sincerity, the most absolute surrender, with which any body dealing with other people would feel a loss of self and for that reason would draw back. Even so, it's only the most superficial layer of writing, and it falls apart like a house of cards when a true and profound feeling emerges . . .

FRANZ

(Continuing.)

For that reason, one never can be sufficiently alone when one writes, surrounded by sufficient silence, not even night is night enough. One never has sufficient time: the way is long and it's easy to get lost, one becomes afraid, wanting to retreat.

FELICE

(Still reading, annoyed.)

How much more so if the lips he most desires were kissing him.

(Silence.)

Come see me in Berlin, Franz. We could spend a few hours together on the weekend. What do you think? Or are the characters in your novel more interesting than I am? Are you trying to make me jealous?

FRANZ

Don't be jealous, please. If my characters find out, they'll run away from me.

FELICE

Don't write so much and relax more.

FRANZ

Don't make fun, my love. Right now my desire to have you here with me is frighteningly serious.

(FRANZ puts on an overcoat, scarf, and derby hat. He picks up an overnight bag.)

I often amuse myself calculating how many hours it would take, traveling as rapidly as possible, to be at your side.

FELICE

So, you're going to come?

FRANZ

But I never know if my work will let me go away for a few days. Sunday mornings I sometimes have to do extra hours. I therefore can't let you know well in advance.

(Silence)

What's happened, Felice? I'm in Berlin, I have to go back this very afternoon at 5:00, the hours are passing and I know nothing about you. I'm at the Hotel Askaniischer Hof. Please send

me a message with the bell hop.

(Silence.)

The window is open. Time after time, every quarter hour, I jump from the window. The train comes in and one car after another runs over my body, stretched out across the rails. One wheel cuts my throat and the other, my legs.. .

FELICE

I didn't go to the office this morning because I had to sign a contract on the outskirts of Berlin. I was far away from the center of the city when your note reached me, Franz. I am sorry. It took me almost two hours to get here. How are you?

(THEY look at each other in silence.)

FRANZ

Maybe in spite of these headaches, I'm still capable of creating something great, something that will let me believe in myself.

FELICE

(Affectionately.)

You're wearing yourself out writing at night.

FRANZ

If I lose my writing, I would lose everything, including you. I need for you to understand, please. It's . . . a steel locomotive that pursues me and that, nevertheless, I don't want to avoid. I try to attract it, I run in front of it at risk of my life, wherever it drags me... or where I take it.

(A brief, uncomfortable silence.

FELICE is frustrated.)

FELICE

The next time you come, we'll go swimming.

FRANZ

Swimming?

(Sunlight enters through the little window of the changing booth.
FRANZ's big gray eyes stare into space.)

FELICE

Yes. We can go to the Baltic. Haven't you been to Rugen Island? It's fantastic. We'll eat freshly smoked halibut and herring in horseradish sauce. I love them!

(Pounding on the door. FRANZ recoils in alarm.)

VOICE

Franz, come out of there!

(More pounding on the door.)

May I ask what you're doing? Will you get out of there? Or do I have to come in and get you?

(Silence.)

(The little window disappears. FELICE forces a smile. So does FRANZ.)

FRANZ

Do you really want to see me again?

(We hear birds singing and the wind in the trees. There is an uncomfortable silence between FRANZ and FELICE.)

FRANZ

Would you like me to read you what I've been writing lately?

FELICE

Franz, what do you . . . what are your plans for the future?

FRANZ

I . . . I'm the thinnest person I know, and I've been to several sanitariums. My physical condition is my biggest obstacle. With a body like mine you don't go anywhere. I wonder how such a weak heart, that worries me so, can pump blood through these legs.

(FELICE smiles. Then another embarrassing silence.)

Felice, I can't live without you.

(Pause.)

But I also can't live with you.

FELICE

I think you can, that you could be able to live with me.

(Pause.)

FRANZ

But it's your nature to be active, you think quickly, you're aware of everything. But when you're with me, you become reserved, you turn away. I have felt so insignificant surrounded by your family . . .

(Pause.)

FELICE

Leave that to me.

(Silence.)

FRANZ

My idea for the best life would be to shut myself away, down in a basement, with just a light and what I need for writing. They can bring me food and leave it at the outside door. My only walk would be through the passageway to get that food, wearing a bathrobe. Then I'd go back to my table, eat slowly while reflecting, and immediately get back to writing. What things I would write that way! From what depths could I extract them! But it anguishes me to think that if I failed even in those circumstances I would inevitably sink into complete madness.

(Silence.)

What do you say to that, my love? Won't you draw back from the inhabitant of that cave?

(Pause.)

FELICE

Come out of that cave, Franz. You recognize that it is driving you to madness. Stop doubting yourself, feeling insecure, go out to the street and enjoy life. On Fridays I go to the synagogue. And I've learned a marvelous new dance, very sensual, really fun. It's called the tango. We'll dance it together, you'll see. I forbid you to go into that cave, Franz!

FRANZ

If you don't understand that I need you, I'm going to cause you a lot of suffering. Besides, what a man I could become if you wanted . . .

(Pause.)

Do you dare make a decision? I mean, if you want ... to be my wife. Will you think about it? Promise me?

(Pause.)

FELICE

To get married there has to be agreement on almost everything . . . on aspirations, on ideas . . . so each one retains freedom.

FRANZ

Such agreement is impossible, my love. The truth is that I ... I think that I am a loss at dealing with other human beings. Except you.

(Silence.)

FELICE

My parents want you to know that they would be delighted to receive your family in Berlin.

FRANZ

My parents? Our parents?

FELICE

For our engagement party!

FRANZ

Our engagement party?

(The lighting becomes unreal. A YOUNG MAN in UNIFORM enters with a tray of drinks.)

FELICE

It's time for introductions, don't you think?

(FELICE and FRANZ turn to the audience and offer drinks to two older couples.)

Mr. and Mrs. Kafka, Franz's parents . . .

FRANZ

Father, mother, these are Felice's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bauer.

(The light from the little window shines again on Franz. They all

take their glasses to offer a toast.)

VOICE

It's a real pleasure, believe me. Of course I would have preferred a good beer like the kind we make in Prague, but that's not important. My son is a wonderful young man, as you will have occasion to learn. He received a promotion recently at the Institute, and if I'm not mistaken, he'll soon have another. Right, Franz?

(Embarrassed silence.)

These young people don't know what it takes to make their way in life. I had sores on my feet for years because of the cold.

FRANZ

Father, please!

(The MAN IN UNIFORM seats FRANZ facing the others.)

MAN IN UNIFORM

Please remain quietly here and wait until they decide something about you.

FRANZ

But I'm innocent. I don't have any plan. I can't direct myself to the future. I can throw myself into it, falling flat on my face. But I really have no plan, no perspective. I can't live with people. Everything that isn't literature bores me and I hate it because it bothers me. Well, I don't know, perhaps it's all just my imagination. Worries and doubts about my future and that of Felice.

VOICE

Son, don't twist things so

MAN IN UNIFORM

(To FRANZ)

Hard to believe that you can't understand your situation and you insist on provoking us for no reason, precisely us, the people nearest to you at this time.

VOICE

Couldn't you wear a black suit for an occasion like this?

FELICE

Don't worry about it, Franz. What do we care what they think? Later the two of us will go buy furniture, you'll see how nice that will be.

FRANZ

But you don't comprehend. I hate all my relatives, not because they are my relatives or because they are bad people, but simply because they are the people who live closest to me. I live among very good people, the nicest in the world, but I feel more like a stranger than an outsider would. With my mother. . . Mother, how many words on average have I exchanged with you in recent years? Twenty a day? Father, you tell us, we scarcely say hello and goodbye. With my sisters and brothers-in-law, I don't speak at all, not because I'm angry with them but simply because I

don't have a word to say to them. I lack the least sense of family life. I can't muster up the least feeling of relationship no matter how hard I try.

(An embarrassing silence.)

FELICE

It must be painful to live like that, Franz. You don't even know if you can bear a hermit's life, although I could replace all the other people.

(Pause.)

MAN IN UNIFORM

(To FRANZ)

So you would like to reach a settlement with us. No, I'm afraid that is going to be completely impossible. But that doesn't mean that you have to despair. No, why should you? You are only engaged, nothing more. It had to be communicated, we have done that, and, moreover, we've all seen how you've fitted in. That's enough for today. Now we have to leave. Although just for the moment, of course, The date has to be set.

(Disconcerting silence.)

FRANZ

In twenty years, Europe will be in ruins and beasts will wonder freely through the streets. There is a rotating knife stuck in my heart. I am enclosed in a strange house, among people who are strangers to me. Did I cease to exist these past two hours?

FELICE

(Kissing him.)

I've seen a Biedermeier credenza that will give our living room a very personal touch.

FRANZ

Furniture, heavy pieces of furniture that once put in place are impossible to move.

FELICE

Don't you like them?

FRANZ

I found that credenza suffocating. It was a perfect funeral piece. I wouldn't have been surprised to hear death bells tolling from the shop. Felice, my dear, my current state is an exception. You couldn't live even two days at my side.

FELICE

You and I were made for each other.

FRANZ

Now we are linked forever by the wrists, like couples that climbed the steps to the scaffold during the French Revolution.

FELICE

(Enters laughing.)

What ideas you have?

(Lights up. Silence)

(MAX hands FRANZ a copy of *Meditation*.)

MAX

Congratulations, Franz. Now you're a writer.

(FRANZ leafs through the book a moment and then closes it, anguished.)

What's wrong? Did something happen in Berlin?

FRANZ

Every step of that trip with my parents was martyrdom. When Felice came towards me in that huge living room to receive my engagement kiss in public, a shudder ran through me. That woman frightens me . . . really. How can I get married? I can't do that to the woman I love. She's a healthy young woman, happy, spontaneous, full of energy.

MAX

Why not? We all do.

FRANZ

I can't, Max. Everything in me rebels no matter how much I love her. It's . . . I feel that my work as a writer is going to be compromised. I am overwhelmed by doubt. I haven't been able to write a line since that day.

MAX

Well, I keep on writing. Felix Weltsch also got married, is still writing, and seems very happy.

FRANZ

Yes, Felix. I see his first year of marriage and am horrified to imagine myself in the same felicity: the elegant life of social circles. Those young couples, clean, well dressed, that stroll on the boulevard remind me of my own adolescence, and for that very reason dis . . . disgust

MAX

The poet feels shame when with serious people. Writing is a game compared to life.

FRANZ

With his marriage, we lost Felix. A friend ceases to be one when he marries.

MAX

My word, I didn't expect that.

FRANZ

You're different, Max. You and your brother Otto, you're generous, you're another kind of person. You're a great man, Max.

MAX
(Laughing.)

But you're a head taller than I am!

FRANZ
Is it true that when one finally learns to write, nothing can fail anymore, nothing can go under?

MAX
Well, it's rare that true grandeur surfaces.

FRANZ
Do I feel this way because my marriage is coming so soon? Someday people will read your work and ask why you kept a friendship with someone like me.

MAX
(Disagreeing, with a smile.)
Don't let literature torment you, Franz. After all, it's a diversion for people of leisure. Sublime at times, no doubt, but a diversion. It doesn't merit a minute of your anguish.

FRANZ
No, Max. No. Literature is the conscience of humanity and there are only a few of us who dare look it in the face.

(Silence.)

FRANZ
I am spiritually incapable of marrying. From the moment I decided to do it, I can't sleep. My head burns day and night. I am desperate, turning from side to side, obsessed by my fears, belittling myself.

MAX
We writers are like children.

FRANZ
Marriage would have to be a guaranty of liberation, of personal independence. Establishing a family is the greatest aspiration of any man.

MAX
The male defending the nest.

FRANZ
Yes, like you. Like my father. But I believe I couldn't go back to writing.

(Silence.)

Somewhere FELICE is listening)

I'm jealous of all the people she mentions in her letters, of the ones she names and those she doesn't, of men and of women, of businessmen and, especially, of writers. I would like to confront them all, separate them from her, free her so that she could talk exclusively of herself . . .

. and, naturally, of me . . .

(To FELICE)

You don't like my book, admit it. But you don't tell me that! Does it seem that dreadful to you? You told me you'd tell me, but you don't tell me anything! And you want to go see Schnitzler's *Professor Bernhard?* I'm going tonight to see Wedekind and his wife. Because, you should know, I don't like Schnitzler at all! That's enough. Basta! You can't talk about him and Wedekind in the same letter. May I ask where is your list of books?

(Silence.)

FELICE, in concern, looks at MAX.

Continued silence.)

FELICE

Why have you stopped writing me, Franz? What's happened? Since war broke out, I'm afraid you'll be drafted. Grete tells me that you've agreed for us to meet again at the Hotel Askanischer Hof. Will you really come?

FRANZ

Of course I went to Berlin. You two women made me feel like a criminal, handcuffed, waiting for the sentence before the court you formed against me. You sent your friend Grete to convince me and I, innocent that I am, told her everything. Everything, what I felt, what was going on in my head, what . . . Grete was . . . such a different kind of woman than you. I opened my heart to her, and she betrayed me. Yes, she entered the Askanischer Hof with all the letters in which I spoke of you and, simply, told you the truth.

(Pause.)

Even if you and I had the same perspective, the same possibilities, I couldn't marry you. I love you as much as I can, but my love is buried and suffocates under fear and reproaches I make to myself.

FELICE

You think that it's easy for me? It won't be a pleasure for me to be seated at the table in your house with all your family. Don't express your opinion without ever thinking if I'm going to like it or not.

(GRETE BLOCH enters, wearing traveling clothes.

She sits down with elegance and ease.)

FRANZ

Miss Bloch, I'll be very pleased to meet with you. But I must warn you that in my experience talking has never served to clarify matters at all. Quite the contrary, normally it complicates them. If you still insist that we meet to talk about my situation with respect to Miss Bauer, I have no problem seeing you at a time and place convenient for you. Sincerely, Dr. Franz Kafka.

GRETE

Delighted to see you, Dr. Kafka.

(Taking off her gloves and putting out her hand.)

I hope you understand that this situation is very embarrassing for me. My friendship with Felice Bauer obliges me to accept her request that we have this encounter. In her opinion, and permit

me to say that I am totally in agreement, that at the least you owe her an explanation. I can't believe that you can reproach her for anything, either with respect to her conduct with you and even less so for her irreproachable personal conduct.

FRANZ

Felice and I think, each one individually, that the other is immovable, merciless. But I am absolutely not going to renounce living for my writing. She wants a comfortable home, abundant food, going to sleep at 11 in a warm room, the factory. . . the mediocrity. She sets my watch at the exact time, and I've had it an hour and a half fast for three months. She speaks to me of a "personal note" in the décor, she treats my two older sisters as insignificant because they don't work the way she does. She's not interested in the youngest one, the one I get along with best. She doesn't ask me questions, she doesn't seem to comprehend at all what I write. I . . . need someone who really understands me . . . A person who would be a solid support for me . . . in every sense. It would be like having God. My sister Ottla, Félix, Max, my friends, they understand certain things. I suspect that Felice understands nothing at all.

GRETE

She's confused. Indeed she doesn't comprehend what's happening.

(Pause.)

FRANZ

Nevertheless, sometimes people understand even without knowing it. One day she was waiting for me in the subway: I was looking for her, anxious to find her as soon as possible because I thought she was up in the street, and I started to walk past her, not seeing her, when she, without speaking, simply took my hand.

(Pause.)

GRETE

Felice is very conventional in a way. You can't expect her to do certain things. She follows the example of her mother who, by the way, doesn't like me.

FRANZ

I don't think I'm the kind of son-in-law she had in mind either.

(THEY look at each other in silence.)

When I met Felice, I thought nothing could finish me off, nothing could destroy this hard, lucid, empty head, I will never close my eyes, not from being unconscious nor from pain, nor will my hands shake. But after our engagement in Berlin, the first sign of life sprang forth within me facing a Swiss girl in the train compartment on the return to Prague. For months I've not been able to write. I've thought of suicide.

GRETE

But why?

FRANZ

Do you think Felice would comprehend that?

(Pause.)

GRETE

Don't do it!

(THEY look at each other in silence.)

FRANZ

And you, Grete. Do you understand me?

(THEY look at each other.)

Do you feel free?

(THEY kiss. Then GRETE hastily leaves.)

FRANZ

(To Felice.)

Grete told you everything, she showed you my letters . . . I remember your face in the lobby of the Askanischer Hof, how you put your hands over your face. Suddenly you turn and let loose all the hostility you have built up against me for so long. Then Grete returns, we say goodbye, and you stay there in silence. You know that everything is destroyed but you don't move, you say nothing. I go up to my hotel room alone. It is unbearably hot. A bellhop moves around constantly, there's a noise of machines in the patio, a bad smell, bedbugs. Afterwards, in your house, your mother's tears, your father in shirt sleeves. He's traveled all night from Sweden, from Malmö, because of it and says that he understands me. He has nothing against me. It's Miss Bloch's fault. I seem satanic in my total innocence.

(Long silence.)

Grete . . . wasn't after anything. And for a moment she succeeded in making everything different.

(Silence.)

FELICE

Did you ever give me that opportunity?

FRANZ

In Bodenbach.

FELICE

My goodness! Bodenbach!

(Pause.)

FRANZ

We were alone for two hours in that room.

(FELICE lies down on the bed.)

FELICE

How nice it is here, my dear! Don't you think it's a darling hotel? Do you think I should change my hairdo? This afternoon at the office all the women knew that I was going to see you. Do you love me, Franz?

(Silence.)

What are you thinking?

(FELICE waits for Franz to make advances, but he doesn't.)

FRANZ

I said nothing, grief-stricken. We've not spent a single moment together when I breathed easily. Outside of letters, I've never felt with you the tenderness of a relationship with a beloved woman.

FELICE

You only spoke of yourself, you only thought of yourself. You didn't stop for a second to think about my feelings . . .

FRANZ

I admired you slavishly, desperately; I pitied you, and despised myself endlessly. I didn't know how to be at your level.

FELICE

My God, Franz, how I wanted you!

(Long silence.)

FRANZ

(To MAX.)

Probably now it's all over, and my letter from yesterday was the last one. I have no doubt that would be the correct solution. How I will suffer, how she will suffer . . . is nothing compared to the common suffering we would have had to face afterwards. We've not been able to open a path for the two of us in the middle of a rock. I will get myself together, little by little. And she will get married and have children . . .

(Pause.)

And if it isn't like that . . . I'll end up marrying her. I'm too weak to stand up to her faith in our happiness.

(Pause)

MAX

(To the audience.)

He was like an injured man when you touch his wound and he feels the worst pain again. You never learn these things even if you've had similar experiences. You have to relive them in their full horror.

FRANZ

I think it's impossible that we can ever be united, but when the decisive moment arrives, I don't dare tell her, I don't even dare tell myself. I hope her pain is not as great as mine, At least she doesn't have a feeling of guilt.

(Silence)

FELICE

Soon it will be the end of the year again and I've had no news from you since August. It would be nice for us to see one another again, Franz.

MAX

It's clear from her postcards that you're tormenting her.

FRANZ

(To FELICE.)

It would be nice for us to see each other again? Better we don't. Perhaps we would be happy momentarily, but we've already made each other suffer enough.

FELICE

I'll go to Prague to see you.

FRANZ

I'd rather you not come. I don't want to let myself be seen, I don't want to see you while I don't feel free. Think well of the previous times and you'll not want us to see one another again.

FELICE

Please, at least come to Marienbad in the spring.

(Pause.)

FRANZ

Marienbad is an incredibly beautiful place.

(A BELLHOP enters with suitcases and leaves them on the floor.)

BELLHOP

You have adjoining rooms here that connect on the inside. I hope your stay with us is pleasant. The management of the Balmoral Hotel invites you to a cocktail at 6:00.

(HE leaves the keys on a table and waits for his tip. FRANZ looks at him without understanding. FELICE gives him money.)

Thank you, miss.

(HE exits.)

FRANZ

He could have left my suitcase in the other room.

(HE prepares to pick up his suitcase and move it. FELICE takes it out of his hand.)

FELICE

What's your hurry? Leave it there.

(SHE kisses him tenderly.)

Look at that view.

FRANZ

You have to excuse me. I . . .

(Silence.)

FELICE seduces FRANZ.

MAX reads a letter.)

MAX

How beautiful the tranquil gleam in her eyes, that opening up to her feminine depths. I've seen her confident look as a woman and I couldn't close myself off. I have no right to resist and even less so, when, if this hadn't happened, I would have tried to provoke it, intentionally, if only to receive that look anew.

FRANZ

(To FELICE)

Really I absolutely did not know you. Nothing scared me more than being alone with you before the wedding.

(SHE embraces him and kisses him.)

Now it's different, and it's alright.

FELICE

We'll be married when the war ends.

FRANZ

And we'll live in Berlin.

FELICE

Just so long as you know that I plan to keep on working.

FRANZ

We can each take care of our economic problems. Don't worry. I'll see how I can manage mine.

(FELICE kisses him and exits.)

FRANZ

(Writing.)

It's been ten days since you left and I'm on your terrace, on your side of the table, as if the two sides were the weights of a scale. I feel that the balance of our evenings has been disturbed and I, alone on one side, am sinking because you are far away. While I write you there is a great silence here that I like so much: On the little terrace table our lamp shines and all the other terraces are empty because it's cold. From Kaiserstrasse there comes a monotonous murmur. Someone must be there. Someone has to keep watch. Fear and indifference are disappearing.

(Silence.)

MAX

So what do you want to do?

FRANZ

Leave Prague.

MAX

And quit your job?

FRANZ

My job is unbearable. So much security, so much planning for a lifetime that it isn't good for me at all.

MAX

But what are you going to do?

FRANZ

I'm not taking any risks. Anything that I do will be to the good. I'm an Austrian lawyer. What I can achieve I have already done and that satisfies me completely. I want to leave Prague. I hate Vienna. I have no talent for languages, so I can only choose Berlin. With my writing skills, perhaps I can work as a journalist in Berlin.

MAX

But you're used to a comfortable life.

FRANZ

No. The only thing I need is a room, a vegetarian diet, and nothing more.

VOICE

Your mother and I have found an apartment here in Prague, in the old Schoenborn Palace. Two spacious rooms. It's a shared bath but for the moment you could move there while Felice is looking for work.

(Silence)

FELICE

But didn't we agree to live in Berlin? Are you going to obey your parents your whole life?

FRANZ

I'm afraid that when I die they'll put me in a furnished niche to complete my life happy, thanks to their attentions.

FELICE

How can I trust you if you change your mind according to what they say?

FRANZ

What gives you the right to judge me? Do you think someone has the right to judge someone else? You've never understood my work, and nevertheless you've become my best ally and also my worst enemy. That's why I love you without reserve and I defend myself from you with all my might. There are two beings in me who fight each other. One is just the way you want him. The other one only thinks of work, that's his only preoccupation. That's why the most ignoble ideas absolutely do not seem strange to him. And he suffers because of that. These two beings fight, but the first one, the one you love, depends on the one who writes, and he could never defeat him. On the contrary, the first one is happy when the second one is. But when it seems that the first one is going to lose, the other one kneels down, anxiously, at his feet. The two belong to you, if you wish, but you can't make them change in any way without destroying them

both. To love means to renounce power. It's a surrender. You can't imagine how I understand you.

FELICE

You understand me? I'm not the one who goes through life begging for understanding. That's you.

(Silence.)

FRANZ

Don't you think I can sense your fear?

FELICE

My fear! Do you no longer remember Marienbad?

(Pause.)

Do you want me to be the one who moves to Prague?

FRANZ

I can't be free as long as I live in Prague.

FELICE

But you're incapable of living in any other city. Don't you realize that? Do you or don't you want us to get married?

FRANZ

Your letters from Frankfurt already revealed your fear on seeing the anxiety that you arouse in me. Then, at the Tiergarten in Berlin you were ready to take flight forever, but you preferred to remain silent. The first time you came to Prague, my lifestyle evoked such rejection from you that you decided to defy everyone. I had to fight for my work, that's what gives me the right to live. But your permanent fear became my greatest anguish.

FELICE

I was very . . . nervous, Franz. And now I'm demoralized, I'm at the end of my strength.

FRANZ

You want a home appropriate to a family of our position, like mine. The idea that you have means you're in agreement with them, but not with me. Others when they get married are already satisfied, marriage for them is icing on the cake. But I'm not satisfied, I have no need for a definitive residence; not only do I not need it, but it terrifies me. My hunger is for writing. But I live in totally adverse circumstances. If we set up a house in accord with your desires, we'll be perpetuating those circumstances. And that is the worst thing that could happen to me.

(Pause.)

FELICE

What are you doing with my life, Franz?

FRANZ

You mean . . . you feel dishonored?

FELICE

You didn't dishonor me, stupid. I seduced you. But you nullify me as a person. I no longer know what I feel. I no longer know if I'm a woman capable of satisfying a man, of sharing my life.

(Silence)

What's so important about writing?

FRANZ

The fault is mine alone. But someone has to open deep wounds in the conscience of a world that is coming apart. And yes, I have a big enough guilt complex that you don't have to feed it.

FELICE

Don't you want to cry sometimes?

FRANZ

When I was twelve years old, my father made me spend a winter night outdoors, shut up on a balcony. I don't remember crying since then. Life is a ruthless place where everyone deceives himself to avoid seeing what is happening in reality. Good knows nothing of Evil. But Evil knows Good perfectly well. Truth cannot look at itself. To know Truth requires Falsehood.

FELICE

Truth?

(Pause)

You desire me, Franz!

(Pause)

What do you feel when we make love?

(Pause)

FRANZ

It's like . . . trying to fill a bottomless well. The image of my parents' bed at home, the nightgowns carefully folded, nauseates me, leaves my insides empty. It's as if they had not finished giving birth to me, that I am constantly coming into the world with my feet entangled in that suffocating material. To me, sex seems to be the punishment to pay in exchange for the happiness of being together.

(FELICE looks at him aghast.)

There's a secret law in human relationships. I've pushed your life into a dead end street until our marriage has become an unavoidable duty.

(Pause)

I'm sorry. You asked for the truth.

FELICE

The truth! I've made you a man. You were a frightened child, with complexes about life because of your father. Incapable of loving a woman. You even thought you could not be a father. Well,

maybe now you are one. Ask Grete. I've gone through all this, I've turned you into a real man. And now what do you want? Literature? You want literature instead of all this? Instead of reality, a woman, a family, children, a home, a happy life, you want literature? Is that what you're trying to have me understand? Well, no. I don't understand it. No one in his right mind can understand that. Do you know why I've never told you what I think about your writing? It's because I've loved you too much to hurt you. Don't be an idiot, Franz. Are you going to destroy your true life, and mine along with it, in order to write stories at night?

(Long silence.)

FELICE

Give my thanks to your parents for everything.

(FELICE exits.)

FRANZ cries. Then he sits down to write.)

FRANZ

There's no need to leave the house. Stay next to your table and listen carefully. Or don't even listen, just wait. No, don't even wait. Just remain completely alone and in silence. The world will give you the chance to take off your mask. There's no way out of it. Immobile, it will twist in front of you.

(A violent attack of coughing.)

FRANZ takes out a handkerchief and wipes his mouth.

The handkerchief is stained with blood.

Silence)

Owning does not exist. Only being exists. That being who aspires until the last breath, until asphyxiation. To reduce oneself . . . reduce so that when the decisive moment arrives, you can hold yourself totally in one hand, like a stone you can throw, like a knife you use to kill.

(Coughing)

After a certain point there is no turning back. That's the point you must reach. That's what it means when the sword goes through your soul: keep a calm look, control yourself, welcome the cold of the blade with the cold of the stone. Make yourself invulnerable to the thrust. After the thrust.

VOICE

Franz, come out! Come out of there! Now!

(FRANZ keeps writing.)

FRANZ

I've once more entered that terrible, long, narrow crevice that, in reality, can only be crossed in dreams. I could never do it voluntarily being awake. The work that awaits me is tremendous. I have still not written the definitive work. No matter how wretched my abilities, I'm obliged to do with them the best that I can. And God doesn't want me to write.

(MAX is reading)

MAX

After a restless sleep, Gregor Samsa woke up, transformed into a monstrous insect. Lying on his back, now a hard shell, he raised his head and saw a protruding, dark belly, criss-crossed by

curving ridges. He could barely keep the quilt from sliding onto the floor. Many legs, pitifully thin compared to his normal legs, wiggled in disarray.

FRANZ

What has happened to me?

(HE coughs, raising the handkerchief to his mouth.)

BLACKOUT

Romina Paula. *Fauna and Other Plays*. Ed. April Sweeney and Brenda Werth. Trans. April Sweeney, Brenda Werth, and Jean Graham-Jones. Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2023. 164 pp.

Reviewed by May Summer Farnsworth

Fauna and Other Plays, edited by April Sweeney and Brenda Werth, offers four plays in English translation by Argentine playwright Romina Paula. The editors, Sweeney and Werth, include their own co-authored translations of *The Sound It Makes* (2007), *Fauna* (2013), and *Rewilding* (2016), along with a translation by Jean Graham-Jones of *The Whole of Time* (2009). The production photographs, translations, and introduction familiarize English-speaking audiences with one of the most innovative and acclaimed dramatists working in Argentina today. In the essay that accompanies the translations, “Rewilding the Poetics of Love, Life, and Intimacy in Romina Paula’s Theater,” Brenda Werth describes the combined effect of various artforms—music, dance, film, and painting—on Paula’s theatre, acknowledging the author’s vast experience with directing, performing, and writing. Werth situates Paula’s work within the tumultuous political and economic landscapes of Argentina’s post-dictatorship era, the presidencies of Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner, the return to neoliberalism, and the vibrant protest movements of recent decades related to gender, sexuality, and reproductive justice. Paula experiments with innovative approaches to the enduring themes of national trauma and memory, according to Werth, adding new ways of looking at gender, sexuality, and family dynamics. Rather than following the allegorical tendencies of previous generations of playwrights, however, Paula focuses on: “oppressive gender norms, intersectionality, a critique of interlocking systems of power, and social media as a powerful tool of activism” (xix). The four plays included in this volume clearly exemplify these distinct characteristics of Paula’s playwriting.

The selections and translations included reveal Paula’s penchant for blending everyday experiences with the uncanny and the metatheatrical. Werth aptly describes this as a “blurriness between fiction and the real” and an exploration of “what constitutes art, acting, experience, and identity” (xv) in twenty-first century Argentina. Paula revisits and reimagines works by legendary authors like Jorge Luis Borges and Rainer Maria Rilke, popular singers, like Marco Antonio Solís, and provocative visual artists like Frida Kahlo. *The Sound It Makes* (translated by Sweeney and Werth) reexamines and interrogates misogyny in Borges’s short story, “The Intruder.” Two brothers, Nacho and Colo, seem anxious in the company of a woman, adopting a fearful and guarded attitude toward Mariana, the confident, intelligent, and composed female cousin who comes for an unexpected visit. Mariana studies the brothers and asks probing questions. Sweeney and Werth’s translation captures the feminist wit and straightforward irreverence of the dialogue, as evident in Mariana’s blunt assessment of the men: “MARIANA. You never go upstairs. I can tell because it’s filthy up there. (Silence.) Are you traumatized, too? / NACHO. What? / MARIANA. I asked you if you were traumatized. / NACHO. No, from what? / MARIANA. I don’t know, it just seems like you are. You and your brother are a little weird. A little traumatized . . .” (23). *The Whole of Time* (translated by Graham-Jones) opens with casual conversations between siblings about machismo and gender-based violence in Mexican popular culture. The play references Frida Kahlo’s life and art, singer/songwriter Marco Antonio Solís’s hit song “Si no te hubieras ido,” and the theatre of Tennessee Williams. Along with her fluid translation of the dialogue and stage directions, Graham-Jones provides contextual notes on popular culture and violent crime in the River Plate in the 1990s and 2000s. Graham-

Jones points out, for example, that Ricardo Alberto Barreda became known as the “patron saint of misogyny” after killing his wife, his daughters, and his mother-in-law in the 1990s. She also notes that “Pantriste” refers to the nickname given to a student, Javier Romero, who shot thirteen classmates in 2000, killing three (47). In another footnote, Graham-Jones explains a reference to “Pepita la Pistolera,” a character from a Uruguayan film about a woman who committed a series of robberies by passing an umbrella handle off as a gun (48).

Fauna (translated by Sweeney and Werth) explores multiple interpretations of a single story through poetry, metatheatre, and divergent points of view. April Sweeney directed a production of *Fauna* in September 2022 at Torn Page in New York City with Laura Butler Rivera, Richard Jesse Johnson, Veraalba Santa, and David Skeist. A filmmaker, a daughter, a son, and a director attempt to make a movie about the life story of a charismatic and unconventional woman: Fauna. The central figure of their film evokes nineteenth-century discourses about civilization and barbarism. Fauna was known for riding horses, wearing men’s clothing, and translating poetry by Rainer Maria Rilke. Each character narrates their own understanding of Fauna’s legacy, but their stories do not neatly align. Paula’s text seeks to “capture what is true and real, and how to decipher where reality ends and fiction begins,” according to Werth (xxiv). Through minimalist set design and the technique of role play, Paula explores diverse possible motivations for the differing gender expressions of her captivating title character. Sweeney and Werth also offer an important note about the challenges of translating translations; since Paula had already translated Rilke’s “Todeserfahrung” from German to Spanish, Sweeney and Werth found value in incorporating both the original poem and the playwright’s Spanish rendering into their English translation. As I had the privilege of attending the English-language premier, I can attest that the language was as engaging and poetic in performance as it is on the page. I recall the audience’s rapt attention at the highly symbolic monologue in which Santos (Richard Jesse Johnson) describes the bizarre and tragic death of two mares: “Monito gets closer. He hears the intense buzzing of a swarm of bees. He sees the bees attacking the horses and devouring them. No longer standing, they now lie motionless, mares with still hearts, they walk no more, they want no more. The two bodies are even darker at night, engulfed by bees that have left nothing—not even a hair or piece of flesh” (108). The last play in the collection, *Rewilding* (translated by Sweeney and Werth), stands out for its abstraction and experimentation in dialogue and storyline, but it also retains persistent characteristics of Paula’s work: intertextual references, non-normative gender representations, and minimalist scenography. *Rewilding* explores classic and universal themes—art, love, family, and philosophy—through fragmented vignettes rather than conventional plotlines and linear narratives.

As a whole, *Fauna and Other Plays* makes an important contribution to Latin American theatre studies; it introduces Romina Paula’s theatre to a wider audience of students, educators and practitioners, while also connecting with previous studies of Argentine theatre in the ongoing post-dictatorship era, such as Diana Taylor’s *Disappearing Acts* (Duke UP, 1997), Brenda Werth’s *Theatre, Performance, and Memory Politics in Argentina* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Jean Graham-Jones’s *Exorcising History* (Bucknell UP, 2000), Jorge Dubatti’s *Teatro-matriz, teatro liminal* (Atuel, 2016), Jordana Blejmar’s *Playful Memories* (Springer, 2018), Cecilia Sosa’s *Queering Acts Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina’s Dictatorship* (Tamesis, 2014), and Paola S. Hernández’s, *Staging Lives in Latin American Theater* (Northwestern UP, 2021). Without a doubt, *Fauna and Other Plays* will inspire more theatre practitioners in the English-

speaking world to add Paula's theatre to their repertoire and will help educators update their syllabi in gender, Latin American, and theatre studies.

May Summer Farnsworth, PhD (She/Her) is a professor of Spanish and Hispanic Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, where she teaches courses and directs undergraduate research on language, literature, and translation. She is the co-editor of a two-volume anthology of plays by women in Latin America, *Escrito por Mujeres* (LATR press, 2016), and the author of *Feminist Rehearsals: Gender at the Theatre in Early Twentieth-Century Argentina and Mexico* (U of Iowa P, 2023).

Santiago Loza. *Nothing to Do with Love and Other Plays*. Ed. Samuel Buggeln and Noe Montez. Trans. Samuel Buggeln and Ariel Gurevich. London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2021. 199 pp.

Reviewed by Amalia Gladhart

In *Nothing to Do with Love and Other Plays*, translators Samuel Buggeln and Ariel Gurevich present an inviting and varied introduction to Argentine playwright Santiago Loza's work for readers and directors outside of Latin America. The volume includes translations of five of Loza's plays, selected with an eye to including both better-known texts and plays meriting wider attention. An introduction situates Loza's work within recent Argentine theater, and an interview with Loza offers further insight into the playwright's methods and concerns. Numerous photographs as well as detailed credits for the original Spanish-language productions provide valuable documentation for both scholars and practitioners. Three of the translations have been staged by the Cherry Artists' Collective, co-founded by Buggeln in Ithaca, New York.

The action in these plays is real and unreal, the impossible or fantastic incorporated unblinkingly. Loza's plays are poetic and elliptical, tending toward monologue even when two characters appear on stage. The protagonists are often marginal or forgotten, silenced characters who can assert themselves only in an act of self-destruction. As translated, the language of Loza's plays is natural and, sometimes, a little off—in keeping with the characters' idiosyncratic expressions and attitudes. The translators render Loza's wordplay successfully, attentive to sound and to the characters' use of colloquial language and idioms. Notes following each of the plays highlight particular challenges and their solutions. These notes offer the kind of nuts and bolts insight that can be endlessly fascinating to translators, and do so in a way that should allow nontranslators and those perhaps resistant to the idea of theater in translation to see beyond the barriers, real and imagined. The inclusion of images from multiple Spanish-language productions, as well as from the stagings of three of the translations, highlights the versatility of Loza's scripts in performance. In their note on *Altitude Sickness*, the translators observe: "As a matter of practicality, right now the North American theater ecosystem is so hostile to work in translation that one could argue that the translator's job is simply to remove as many obstacles to production as possible" (180). To that end, their discussion of differing expectations in Argentina and the U.S. with respect to the primacy of the playwright's text and the degree of latitude afforded a director, is particularly helpful.

Nothing to Do with Love (Makes Me Envious) [*Nada del amor me produce envidia*, 2008], places a 1940s Seamstress between rival cultural icons Libertad Lamarque and Evita Perón. Though the play evokes two larger-than-life historical figures, the Seamstress is alone on stage as she recalls her long career, the best dress she ever made, and the fierce competition occasioned by her handiwork. She directs her words to a dressmaker's mannequin, noting her need to chat lest her tongue dry out and taking pleasure in those words, in the sound of her own voice: "I like the word 'chitchat.' The same way I like the word 'locution,' the way the 'yoo' sounds: 'locution.' And I like the word 'interlocutor' even better. . . as if the 'yoo were hiding in there" (2). The Seamstress has been a figure on the sidelines, hiding the missteps and indiscretions of others, sparing brides public embarrassment with a strategic pleat or flounce. She says, "The world is made of two classes of people, those who decide, and those who comply. I belong to the second

category” (20). Yet the Seamstress ultimately finds her voice—her “I.” Claiming the coveted dress for her own, she is transformed, though the force of her self-assertion is spectacularly self-destructive, a moment of rapture that condemns her to, “This eternal life stitching and unstitching. . . The reduced heaven of the seamstress” (27).

In *Winter Animals* [*Pudor en animales de invierno*, 2011], an aging father travels from his rural home to visit his isolated, closeted son in Buenos Aires. Son and Father regularly speak past one another, at once seeking and avoiding intimacy. The encounter between these two distanced characters is complicated by the surreal introduction of a naked woman living in the son’s refrigerator. The woman’s nakedness is acknowledged, but never explained. The father tries to talk about women—their skin, their appearance, his first night with his wife—even as his son pulls away. Both have trouble sleeping, and each in turn watches the other sleep. The vulnerability of sleep, and the quiet observation of the other’s surrender, is poignant. They are, like winter animals, hibernating, their gestures toward mutual understanding and communication suspended.

I Was Born to See You Smile [*He nacido para verte sonreir*, 2011] is another accompanied monologue. Miriam, the protagonist, explains to her unspeaking son the decision to commit him to a mental institution, where she and his father will take him later that day. Miriam is a complex character. Entitled, wounded, she is cruelly dismissive of the needs of “dear Laura,” her son’s caregiver. Yet she is also a sympathetic figure, lonely and determined in her efforts to connect with and somehow understand her son. In a two-character play with only one speaking part and no stage directions, the photographs of previous productions offer a powerful visual aid (and a reminder of the son’s presence). Miriam’s repeated plea, “Look at me,” goes (verbally) unanswered. She is certain of her rationality, of a difference between herself and her son: “A person can be in reality, or not. I chose to stay. You left” (98). And yet her reality is blinkered, shaped by social class and self-image. When she and Laura dragged her son to the bath, “It was hard for me. Not for her. She has the brute force of the people who do that kind of work. . . service work I mean. . . I couldn’t serve other people, I don’t have the physique” (106). “Are you still you?” she asks her son, earlier in the play. “I’m still me. I’m still here, inside of myself” (92). She is still there at the end, readying him for the journey.

Altitude Sickness [*El mal de la montaña*, 2013] has the largest cast of the plays in this volume, four characters whose alternately intersecting and diverging experiences are not easy to pin down. The timeline and individual identities are ambiguous—is Pamela in fact the same woman each time she appears, or is she more than one person? The translators note that this play, written on commission, was something of a departure for Loza. It is the least compelling of the plays, at least on the page. The privileged characters’ thoughtless, unmotivated violence is stark and unsettling, as is their disdain for the poor and homeless cluttering their environment. Still, taken as a whole, the play is rather flat.

In *The Saint* [*La mujer puerca*, 2012], a pious young woman—she could be a nurse or a nun—who longs for sainthood, for a sign from God, describes the harsh treatment she has experienced since childhood. The ugliness of the abuse she has suffered contrasts with the wry quirkiness of her perspective. As she observes, “God punishes the curiosity of women” (184). Buggeln and Gurevich have retained the old man in the translated text, but also note that the Buenos Aires

production dispenses with his presence on stage. The old man's lines are brief and repetitive—often only three or four words—while the verbal weight of the play is fully carried by the Girl. The translators highlight the humor of the play in performance, observing that, at the time of their writing, the play was “still running in its eighth season in Buenos Aires, still starring the incredible Valeria Lois in the Girl's now-iconic pink turtleneck and lip gloss. Prospective performers of this text in English should note that as Lois performs her, the Girl is anything but self-pitying: the actress is famously comic, and the Girl often seems to embody an almost absurd and heartbreakingly funny impulse to look on the bright side” (192). And the Girl does get her sign. Having seen God, she assures the Man, “We'll go to sleep soon” (191).

Nothing to Do with Love and Other Plays is a valuable addition to the list of Latin American theater available in translation. Enjoyable and informative, it is also an attractive book, well-bound, laid-out, and illustrated. The characters, with their persistent search for respite and connection, are haunting, their voices distinctive and memorable.

Amalia Gladhart is Professor of Spanish at the University of Oregon. She has translated narrative and dramatic works by Patricia Zangaro, Angélica Gorodischer, Alicia Yáñez Cossío, and Gila Holst. Her translation of *Jaguars' Tomb*, by Angélica Gorodischer, was awarded the 2022 Queen Sofía Spanish Institute Translation Prize.

***Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare: An Anthology, 1987–2007*. Ed. Alexa Alice Joubin. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 303 pp.**

Reviewed by Zhixuan (Mia) Zhu

Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare: An Anthology, 1987–2007 (2022), edited by Alexa Alice Joubin, consists of an introductory chapter by the editor and seven English translations of Sinophone Shakespeare adaptations in different performance genres between 1987 and 2007, rendered by different translators. The anthology is divided into three sections, each focusing on two adaptations of one of the three tragedies, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, with a coda that merges the three plays together with *Othello* and thus brings the book full circle. These sections are also organized thematically under topics such as existentialism, self-identities, and the tension and connection between traditional and avant-garde performance forms. Ultimately, the book aims to broaden the English readers' perspective on the richness and diversity of "non-Anglophone understanding of Shakespeare and Sinophone performance practices today" (Joubin 2).

One striking feature of the anthology is its framework of "the region as method." Instead of using "Chinese-speaking" as its selection criteria, the book adopts the inclusive concept of the "Sinophone," which refers to "communities that are connected to or are resisting various forms of dominant Sinocentric ideologies" (8). Such a geo-cultural framework means that the selected plays may originate from regions beyond China and cultures that circumvent the nationalist pursuit of "Chineseness." They can be in languages in the Sino-Tibetan language family other than Mandarin, such as Suzhou vernacular in *Story of Bloody Hands* (chapter 4) and Taiwanese in *The Witches' Sonata* (chapter 5). By juxtaposing these diverse locations and languages, the book breaks away from the prevailing "East-West" dichotomy and the tendency to endow Shakespeare's original texts (and by extension, the Western dramatic tradition) with a canonical authority in the discussion of Asian Shakespeare adaptations. Instead, it emphasizes intra-cultural dynamics and the "connections between distinctive and often conflicting interpretations of Sinophone aesthetics and Shakespeare" (3). The regional framework is firmly anchored in the structure of the book: along with the opening chapter by the editor that introduces the Sinophone world in broad strokes, each translation is coupled with a detailed introductory passage that contextualize[s] and historicize[s] the adaptation by situating it within the larger region. Each chapter thus gives readers a snippet of the complex cultural and historical phenomena of the region by using the translated script as an access point.

To evaluate the language style and quality of these diverse translations, it is essential to understand their collective purpose. And it is commendable that the opening chapter states the anthology's three-fold goal clearly for the readers: artistically, it aims to showcase the Sinophone directors' "methodic transformations of three of Shakespeare's tragedies into various performance genres" (2); pedagogically, the plays are selected partly for their "curricular applicability" and it is intended as a tool for teaching global Shakespeare or Sinophone theatre. In terms of research value, the anthology "turns influential plays into stable, citable, common objects of study" (18) to provide researchers with an easier access to primary research materials. True to these functions, the translations do not prioritize the practical stageability of the language but offer an elegant language style that affords a smooth reading experience with detailed

annotations to facilitate study and research. For instance, with the operatic productions (chapters 4, 6, and 7), although the translations do not correspond perfectly to the rhythms of the stylized performance in highly condensed classical Sinophone languages, meaning that they might still need some polishing before being performed in English, the translators make an effort to render some of the rhymes into English that help preserve the poetic quality of the original texts.

While not primarily created for staging purposes, these translations provoke stage imaginations instead of limiting themselves to the page. For example, as classical Chinese lines in operatic forms boast rich imagery in poetic idioms and proverbial expressions that do not have an English equivalence, the translations often choose preserving the “foreignness” of the imagery and symbolism with a literal translating approach over “localizing” them in the English context. The metaphorical expression “hai yan he qing 海晏河清,” for instance, is translated literally into “The sea calm, the river clear, and peace we enjoy” (Chang and Joubin 217), rather than only its implication of the country in a peaceful and prosperous state. On the one hand, the imagery and symbols in traditional operatic performances often correspond to stylized gestures. Such a translation method allows the readers to imagine the gestures and make connections between the texts and the performance recordings linked in the chapters. The translations’ resistance to localizing the imagery and symbols also supports the book’s larger anti-Eurocentrism agenda and its infra-cultural focus. English readers are challenged to visualize these novel expressions by immersing themselves in the Sinophone context and language style instead of falling back on the original Shakespeare texts and the Western dramatic tradition to interpret Sinophone cultures and theatrical practices. As a result, the translations provide a solid ground for directors and producers in the English-speaking world to visualize the performances before making their own artistic choices in future productions.

Under the overall arch of the three-fold goal, each chapter demonstrates diverse language styles and translation strategies of different translators. Some of these strategies are exemplary in theatre translation. For instance, as many of the plays are translated not from textual scripts but video recordings, some translators, such as Siyuan Liu and Alexa Alice Joubin in chapter 4, add stage directions to the dialogues based on their professional analysis of the videos, facilitating the readers in visualizing the flow of the performances. The same chapter also attempts to preserve the musicality of the lyrical lines by translating them into English ones with corresponding syntax, temporal rhythms, and duration, cultivating an experience of the original operatic form in reading. The other side of the coin in juxtaposing a diverse pool of translators, however, is that the lack of cohesion in translation strategies becomes evident. Some of the effective strategies are regrettably not maintained throughout all chapters. For example, in the translation of *Lear Is Here* (chapter 7), while the production video presents rich interpretative potentials with the actor’s stylized movements and creative use of props, the translator does not add any stage directions and these embodied connotations are lost to the readers. There are also cases where the transitions from dialogue to singing in the operatic performances are not marked in the translations, which leaves a blank in the readers’ imagination of how the lines are delivered and the overall pace of the show. I believe such oversights can be overcome by establishing a closer collaborative relationship between translators, allowing them to share their experience and promote best practices.

Despite the minor strategic oversight, *Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare: An Anthology*,

1987–2007 is a worthy attempt not just in Shakespeare translation but also in using translation as a theatre studies and artistic methodology. Before this book, many of the selected plays existed only as ephemeral memories, fragments of reviews, or mediated photos/recordings. By translating and thus grafting them from the various media into an anthology, the book demonstrates how translation can be site of archiving cross-cultural exchanges and experimental theatre undertakings. The decision to pair the translations together and attach an introductory passage to each that explains their unique values in Sinophone theatre also shows the importance of contextualization and historicization in archiving theatre texts. By drawing on the collective wisdom of scholars and translators and juxtaposing their different approaches, the anthology practices polyphonic translation, generating a multitude of best practices for future researchers and translators. And by preserving the poetic imagery and symbolism of the Sinophone language in the translation, the book offers artists a window into the Sinophone performance style, which might facilitate their endeavor in staging these productions in English. As the first anthology to bring Sinophone Shakespeare adaptations into the English world through translation, it is worth the time and attention of both readers who seek information on Sinophone Shakespeare and those who are invested in the theories and practices of theatre translation.

Zhixuan (Mia) Zhu is a doctoral student in Theatre and Performance at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. She holds an MA in Theatre Studies from the University of British Columbia, Canada, and a BA in Translation and Interpreting from the Beijing Foreign Studies University, China. Her research interests include theatre and performance translation, performance and new media, puppetry and performing objects, and Chinese theatre history. Currently, she is investigating how the curation of performance sites contributes to the communitization of the audience. Her analysis of the theatricality of early 20th century Chinese woman playwright Bai Wei's rarely staged plays, adapted from her MA thesis, was published in *Asian Theatre Journal* in 2023 and her essay on the potential of performing objects in expressing political dissent is in *Puppetry International Research* (2023).