1971

Prometheus and Pandora and Macedonian rag, two plays

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The University of Montana

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PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA

and

MACEDONIAN RAG,

TWO PLAYS

By

Gerald D. Giss

B.S., Northern Arizona University, 1969

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1971

Approved by:

[Signatures]

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

Date
INTRODUCTION

The two plays herein contained are rewritten versions of one-act plays produced by the University of Montana Drama Department in May, 1971, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting. Some rewriting took place during the two and a half week rehearsal period, and each of these pieces was edited and rewritten at least twice before rehearsals for the thesis production began.

PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA, the earlier writing, was first produced in the University of Montana Drama Workshop, Winter, 1971, and subsequently with the same cast, at the Melting Pot, a student operated coffee house in Missoula. This production was directed by me specifically for the purpose of rewriting. At that time several minor syntactical changes occurred in the script as well as the addition of the ritual murder scene near the end. Subsequently, on impetus from that production, the character, "Squalor", and the "General-Prime Minister" scene in the beginning were added to the play. Rewrites during rehearsal for the thesis production consisted entirely of minor cuts and syntactical changes.

The first version of MACEDONIAN RAG was read in a playwriting class, Winter, 1970. At that time the play was a full-length, two act epic, written in verse. Upon oral presentation, both the form and the verse styles proved unsatisfactory to me; but the kernel of the plot, centering around the exile and death of Euripides, still intrigued me.

After wrestling with the problem for over a month, I hit upon a form which seemed generally much more suitable. It is essentially the same form which appears in PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA, and with which I had experimented earlier in a one-act play entitled THE FARCE. Montana Kaimin reviewer, Bruce Bigley, described it aptly as a farce centered
around a "nihilistic" core. Both an overlay of vaudevillian-like comedy and a detachment from stable moral values are readily accessible, I believe, in each of the thesis plays.

In parts of MACEDONIAN RAG, especially Apollo's early lines, I retained the verse form for effect, a generic mixture with which I had also experimented in THE FARCE.

A great deal more rewriting took place during rehearsal for MACEDONIAN RAG than for PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA. Acting partly on the suggestions of the director, Rolland Meinholtz, I re-ordered the appearance of the characters in the first half of Scene II, and did a great deal of cutting from the play. Unfortunately, the two and a half week schedule pressed the actors and directors for time and severely restricted the possibilities for textual revision. For that reason, the version of MACEDONIAN RAG presented here is yet a further revision, based on notes taken in the rehearsals, but rather modified from what appeared as the original production - especially, again, in Scene II where a specific setting has replaced a generalized one and a minor reworking of the plot has taken place.
COMMENTS ON THE THESIS PRODUCTIONS

PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA

This play was directed by Tom Blair, a graduate student in Drama. Because the exchange of ideas between playwright and director was in no way limited, and because relatively little rewriting took place for this show, Tom's choices of style and his interpretation were remarkably close to what I had envisioned for the script. That is not to imply that no controversies arose, but they were minor ones, and discussion and compromise took place in a fairly free atmosphere.

The play contains expressionistic elements closely related to Meyerhold's Bio-Mechanics techniques. Because I have had some experience in this form of movement, Tom asked me to oversee several exercise sessions with the Workers (a kind of chorus to the play); and this enabled him to concentrate more of his time and energy upon the major roles.

The setting for the play bespoke a farcical atmosphere, as did the costumes and essentially white face clown make-up. Exceptions to this, and rightly so, I feel, were the dress and make-up of Prometheus the Old Man, Prometheus the Young Man, and (especially in Scene II) those of Pandora.

Directorial impositions in blocking were moderate. One notable exception was in the French scene between Pandora and the Prime Minister. Tom's blocking here stressed an Electra-like relationship between the Prime Minister and his daughter. This relationship was not indicated in the script, but once I had seen the effect, I whole-heartedly concurred with Tom's approach.
Another example of directorial license appeared in the handling of the General-Prime Minister's monologues. Here, instead of having the actor himself affect the hat changes which indicate the two sides of the scizoid-like personality, Tom introduced two robot-like Workers used as mobile hat racks. I did not (and still do not) feel this imposition necessary. In fact, it seemed to me rather detrimental, in that a good deal of the comedy in the scene depends upon the exceptional exertion required of the actor in accomplishing the necessary feats involved in playing two characters simultaneously. The imposition also severely limited the possibilities for mime and pantomime in these solo scenes. I did not, however, think it my prerogative to object more vehemently than with a simple comment. Both Tom and the actor in this role, Glenn Gauer, expressed reluctance to deviate from the original blocking because, again, the time factor limited experimentation. We left it at that.

On the whole, then, the production was faithful to the script except for minor matters of directorial license. While I shall not comment here upon the quality of acting and etc., (for this would entail peripheral and subjective judgements), let it suffice to say that the basic character and style concepts were true to my original intentions.

MACEDONIAN RAG

As I commented to Mr. Meinholtz before casting for MACEDONIAN RAG had begun, the central problem in this piece was to promise a play-within-a-play, and then frustrate the very attempt. (His phrase for it was "promise-no-deliver.") I had, in rewriting, attempted to affect
a quality of dramatic ambivalence which the earlier episodic version had lacked.

Mr. Meinholtz brought to this production a strong metaphoric interpretation. He chose to stylize the set after ancient Mayan forms and made half masks for all the characters - mostly after characters and deities in Mayan art.

The setting and the masks seemed to work on the surface, but in performance, as Mr. Meinholtz noted, the audience seemed to lose the conceptual understanding behind the surface events of the plot. If this be a fault in the logic of the writing, I have tried to correct it in re-writing by connecting the disparate scenes in a chain of contiguous acting. I am also inclined to believe that the actors' possibilities for ironic nuance (for which, I think, the middle section calls) were inhibited by the masks and the highly stylized, Uberpuppet blocking.

Although in the first week of rehearsals I instituted rewrites constituting about twenty pages and about five pages of cuts from the original script, I felt there were holes in the script that needed filling. I questioned the actors for their responses to several new ideas and encouraged them to comment on the script; but the great limiting factor that quashed our experimentation, as with PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA, was the brevity of the rehearsal period. The fact is that for this previously untried and admittedly experimental piece, two and a half weeks was simply an insufficient rehearsal period. Therefore, not only was this play subject to more rewrites in rehearsal than PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA, but it also has been re-ordered to a greater extent since the production took place.
CAST FOR THE PRODUCTION:

Prometheus, the Old Man.........................Bill Greenland
Squalor.................................................Richard Beger
Prime Minister-General.........................Glenn Gauer
Pandora.................................................Nancy Nichols
Aides.........................................................Dave Overturf
                              Tom Morris
Prometheus, the Young Man.......................Fred Booth
A Chorus of Workers - #1.............................Jan Fuglevand
                              #2..............................Peggy O'Connell
                              #3..............................Dick Russell
                              #4..............................Dale Haines

Directed by Tom Blair

The thesis production was first presented at the University of Montana's

THE TIME: The present

SCENE: The fantasy land of Stonia
PROLOG:

(At rise the stage is dimly lit, trash-strewn. Among the rubble are: a desk, a chair, a large trash can, a large black book. Upstage is a door. Situated about in the squalor are human forms - the WORKERS - frozen in a scattered tableau depicting various postures of physical labor. PROMETHEUS THE OLD MAN enters through the door. He is old, doddering, and to his eyes senility gives an out-of-focus effect. He searches about in the waste, and after a moment, comes upon the book. He stares at it, an old memory playing vaguely upon his senses, then he clasps the manuscript to him, embracing it as an old friend. Trembling, he opens the cover, and, as he does so, the WORKERS begin slowly to come to life, miming and mouthing, subarticulatly, the physical tasks and tools that constitute their "work". Slowly, softly, almost imperceptably, they begin; and the breadth of their movement and volume of their noise increase together, gradually, as the OLD MAN becomes engrossed in the opening page of the manuscript. Suddenly, he closes the book, immediately the WORKERS freeze; silence. The OLD MAN puts down the book, then slowly recoils from it, a mixture of fear and regret playing upon his aged frame)

SQUALOR (voice from inside the trash can)

Go ahead. Read it. Leaf through it as least. It's allright, go ahead. Take your time. (Casually, SQUALOR rises out of the can) It's allright. I don't mind. To me, the customer is king. I'm good, too. Selling, you know what I mean? It's because I rally care about the individual customer. I'm looking for the comeback business. So...can you blame me? I say, the customer wants to browse, let him browse. He wants to handle, let him handle.

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN

I...I just came to look.

SQUALOR


PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN

Worth something?

SQUALOR

Don't get me wrong, I'm no judge of art, but...who knows...?
PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN

I was only afraid someone might...

SQUALOR

Think you were stealing? Shoplifting? So what's to be afraid? There's nobody around this old junkshop but me...and I trust you. Oh, this collection of old discarded memories, what is it about this junk? The things people hang onto, they're not half so interesting as the things people discard, eh? It's because when you throw something away, you're trying to throw away a bunch of memories with it. You're trying to forget that item ever existed, you know? Somethings you might keep around in the closet for years. Then one day you open the door and this old book falls on your head. You just don't want to think about it any more. Now you take this book, and you throw it away.

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN

Book?

SQUALOR

It's been sitting here a long time, years - just gathering dust. I think it's got poetry. So anyway, how many forgotten thoughts, hours, feelings, do you think that one old book's got in it? Maybe it's an antique; I don't know. Do you ever wonder about that kind if thing? Well, don't mind all my talking, I'll just leave you alone...

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN

Wait. I'd like to take another look.

SQUALOR

Sure. Like I said, make yourself right at home. (starts off, then stops) Listen, it's a cold day. Don't catch cold, you hear? There's some old kindling over there, and a couple of logs. Get yourself a little fire going. Take your time. Make a day of it. I'll be back. (He disappears into the trash can. The OLD MAN approaches the book, opens it. The WORKERS come to life as before. After a moment the OLD MAN leaves the book to build a fire. The WORKERS movement and noise level off at that point. Having made a fire, the OLD MAN sits by it, reading. The WORKERS gain momentum, and then as the OLD MAN begins to read aloud, they quickly rearrange the stage, using the junk pieces to construct a playing area - an office near the door upstage. They carefully clean up the cleared area and then carry on the GENERAL-PRIME MINISTER who is stiff as a statue - from off in the shadows)

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN (reading)

The fire has gone out. I suppose it couldn't be helped. Fire has a way of consuming itself. I don't understand it, altogether, this fantasy; but I will write it down because that is what I must do. There was a girl. (At this point the GENERAL - PRIME MINISTER suddenly gives a loud blast upon his
whistle. During his next speech, the WORKERS stand downstage and below him, reacting vocally, but subarticulately, in agreement with his mercurial flow of motion. The OLD MAN becomes enveloped in shadow as the office area is bathed in a bright, hot light.)
SCENE I:

(A small office with a door upstage and a large trash can by it. The PRIME MINISTER and the GENERAL are one man who keeps changing hats - a military hat for the GENERAL, a top hat for the PRIME MINISTER. On his person he carries a sabre, a whistle, and a pistol. At rise, he is pacing nervously.)

PRIME MINISTER

Aha! The time is right. The time is now. We shall storm the gates as it were. Take the city of prosperity by surprise. Yes, this is the twentieth century. No time for dawdling. Duty calls. Industrialize!

GENERAL

Industrialize?

PRIME MINISTER

Yes, of course, that is the way to affluence. The people want prosperity.

GENERAL

The people, what do they know?

PRIME MINISTER

Ah, my dear general, the people know plenty. They look around them. They see poverty, filth, ignorance, starvation. What they see, my good fellow, is total squalor.

GENERAL

Quite.

PRIME MINISTER

Squalor I say, and it is not a term to be taken lightly. Squalor is the all and the everything in this land, the land of Stonia. Squalor is the king and the ruler of their lives, and therefore, General...

GENERAL

Yes?

PRIME MINISTER

And therefore squalor is the enemy of the peoples government. Squalor and freedom cannot live hand in hand. It is forbidden.
I see.

What do you see, General?

Mr. Prime Minister, when the people raised you up as their leader, who was at the fore shouting your name with the utmost exhuberation?

Why, you were.

And when the parliment, those spineless worms, refused to head the people's call, who was your mainstay, your support, in short, your only ally?

You, of course.

And when the tide had turned against you, when all seemed lost - in short - when the air force went over to the opposition, who squashed the heretics with the mighty fist of the army? Yes it was I, and now I, who have been your powerful right arm for years, am going to give you a little advice. Now then, follow my logic. You will agree with me, will you not, Mr. Prime Minister, that we Stonians are the finest, most upstanding, right-living race in the world?

Yes, of course.

Our religion is embodiment of truth for all mankind?

Yes.

We are - in short - superior in every way to every race that ever dwelt upon the earth.
GENERAL

Does it not follow then - listen closely now - does it not then follow that the - er - problems which confront us can not possibly be due to any inherent weakness in us?

PRIME MINISTER

Aha! There, you've put your finger on it. The problem is exactly that it is not our problems that are plaguing us! Then they must be somebody else's. Poor devils, I'd like to find out who they are so we can help them.

GENERAL

Help them? Ah, you are missing the point.

PRIME MINISTER

The point?

GENERAL

The point! The point! Why should we want to help them, when they are giving us such trouble. I tell you, sir, they are scoundrels, villains, conspirators of the worst sort!

PRIME MINISTER

Why, God? Why should they be doing this to us? We, who are peaceful, gentle, good people!

GENERAL

Yes, why! That is exactly it; why! I'll tell you why. It's because they are the victims of a rotten environment.

PRIME MINISTER

Social dregs.

GENERAL

Products of a twisted cultural upbringing and insideous economic system which has moulded them into unthinking allies, machines of destruction.

PRIME MINISTER

Oh, the poor fools. Who are they? Tell me! Tell me! We shall race to the rescue!

GENERAL

Wait! Shh. We must be very cautious, very wiley. They are dangerous.
PRIME MINISTER

Shh. Do you think they're spying on us?

GENERAL

Undoubtedly. Now listen. For their own good, for the protection of their freedom, and for the betterment of mankind - in short - for our own defenses - we must conquer them.

PRIME MINISTER (mopping his brow)

Conquer them, yes. I understand. But - General, I have one question.

GENERAL

Ah, hold your tongue. Hold your tongue with your intellectualist objections. This is war, I say. War! Are we going to let these people overrun us with their population plot? Are we going to stand by with our eyes closed while they insideously infest us like a cancer?

BOTH

No!!

PRIME MINISTER

But - one question.

GENERAL

No, I don't think so.

PRIME MINISTER

No?

GENERAL

I don't think we will stand by like that. We as a people have demonstrated in the past that we will not content ourselves with idle talk while they, the sunken eyed fiends - while they, the plotting monsters - while they...

PRIME MINISTER

Who are they?

GENERAL

What?
PRIME MINISTER

It is your duty, General, as my trusted advisor - as my closest confidant, to keep me informed in these critical matters of national security. So tell me, quickly before it's too late, tell me who they are!

GENERAL

Shhh! We're working on it.

PRIME MINISTER

You mean...?

GENERAL (nodding)

We're working on it.

PRIME MINISTER

But...this is terrible!

GENERAL

It's worse than that. We must strengthen the army, Mr. Prime Minister. We must call the civilian population to readiness. We must prepare for war!

PRIME MINISTER

For war?

GENERAL (waving his sabre)

On, to another one!

PRIME MINISTER

But wait! General, if we don't know who they are, how do we know their strength? We don't even know the number of their army. Why, here they've been spying on us all this time, and we know next to nothing about them.

GENERAL

That is exactly why we must prepare to the fullest. Develop our full potential. Ready ourselves for any eventuality.

PRIME MINISTER

But General, we cannot make war with these spineless undisciplined wrecks. We cannot make war without guns, missiles, planes, bombs. No, General, in order to eat our cake we first must have it. (he hides the GENERAL's hat) Therefore it is indisputable - we must industrialize! (calling off) Aides! Aides! The economy is our first priority.
An important decision has been reached. A decision of greatest magnitude. (Pounding is heard at the door, upstage. The PRIME MINISTER whispers at the door) Wait. Wait a little. In a moment. In a moment. Now then, gentlemen, duty calls, duty calls, I say and cannot be ignored. A grave danger threatens us. Threatens us from within. As everyone knows, the duty and business of government is not always a pleasant task. Well then, gentlemen, what I have now to say is not pleasant. Not pleasant indeed. No one knows more than I... (again the knocking is heard. again the GENERAL speaks through the door) Wait, I say. Don't be impatient. This is top secret. (to the AIDES) Where was I?

FIRST AIDE

Unpleasant business...

PRIME MINISTER

Bah! That's no help. All business is unpleasant. If it weren't it wouldn't be worthy of the title, 'work'.

SECOND AIDE

No one knows better than you...

PRIME MINISTER

Ah, yes. I suffer so for the sake of my job. I sweat and clench my teeth, pacing the floor night after night, wondering what to say, what to do. Business is lousy; and the lousiest business of all, the dirtiest, nastiest business of all, is this business of governing the greatest, freest, most noble and democratic nation in the world. Frankly, gentlemen, thanks to our forefathers who founded this nation on great humanitarian principles, we have been handed down a sacred and inviolable trust which weighs heavily on our shoulders. But...the opposition, the enemy, has taken advantage of our moral and humanitarian preoccupations to encroach upon our economic sanctity. In other words, gentlemen, the poverty and starvation we see around us is in utter disharmony with the humane principles in which we are so firmly rooted. We must consider it, therefore, an act of aggression. Aggression, I say, and it is not a word to be taken lightly! The people of Stonia have been hoodwinked into believing that they are in a state of economic depression, but that is not the case. No, indeed it is not. It is only a hideous delusion brought about by our enemies, the enemies of all humanitarian principles. We must therefore crush them. Crush them, I say, before we ourselves are crushed and the light of hope is forever extinguished from mankind. (the knocking is heard again)

PANDORA's voice (from behind the door)

Father. Father, let me out. You promised, Father. Let me out.
PRIME MINISTER

Not now, Pandora! Wait, I'm in the middle of something. Now - where was I? Ah yes! There are those who would have us believe that humanism is dead, but no, I say, and no again! It is quite as alive as we are; and anyone who disputes it is a traitor and a heretic - in short, I say. But the people - and here is the crux of the problem - the people have become lax in their vigil. What I propose is a return to the principles that made us great. We must carry out a program of massive re-education to put the people on their guard against these madmen. Let there be an end, I say, to this laxity of virtue. We must ferret out the enemies of democracy wherever they hide. Sniff them out and destroy them! An end, I say, to putting up with their drivel! We must organize, we must industrialize, we must fortify and order our ranks with a precise discipline - in the name of humanity! (he is exhausted, out of breath, perspiring furiously) Go then. Go - I implore you, I beseech you, I command you - go and tell the people that we are entering a new period of greatness. Form them, mold them, engineer them into a great machine. Now is the time. History is ours for the making! In the name of the people - here is our decree. (he hands a large scroll to the FIRST AIDE) Have it read throughout the land. Organize them, purge them, unify them - and as for those who question our manifest destiny - they are traitors. Have them shot. Is that clear?

BOTH AIDES

Yessir!

PRIME MINISTER

Go! Dismissed! Out! Begone with you! (THE AIDES exit. PANDORA pounds upon the door again)

PANDORA

Father, please! You promised!

PRIME MINISTER

Yes, of course. Of course, my darling.

(From his hatband he produces a key, goes to the door, unlocks it. PANDORA steps out - a lovely, petite young creature. She is blind)

There, you see? I always keep my promises.

PANDORA

Oh, Father, I hate it in there. Why must you keep me locked in there all the time?

PRIME MINISTER

Hate it? But why should you hate it? My darling, my dear, haven't I
supplied you with all the - er - conveniences?

PANDORA

Yes, you have - I guess.

PRIME MINISTER

You guess? Ha ha! My dear, your life is idyllic. You have butlers, maids, footmen, clothes galore, luxury at every hand.

PANDORA

Yes, but - somehow it seems so...empty. What do I know of the real world? How can I appreciate my life if I have nothing to compare it with? All these eighteen years I've been locked up in that closet...

PRIME MINISTER

But it is a roomy closet...

PANDORA

Nevertheless, sometimes I feel that - well - that I would like to go down into the street...to find out how the common people live. (The PRIME MINISTER laughs, dismisses her with a gesture) Oh, Daddy, I'm really perfectly serious. What do I ever get to do but wander from room to room in my little closet contemplating what it must be like to work, to feel the sunshine and breezes and dress in something other than velvet and diamonds and pearls! To smell something besides sandalwood and myrrh for a change!

PRIME MINISTER

I assure you, daughter, there is nothing in the outside of great interest. The people are petty - they grub along like so many insects. Believe me, I've seen them. They are only silly fools, preoccupied with the most simple-minded and mundane affairs. They dress in filthy rags and have nothing more important in their minds than tomorrow's supper. And the smell! Pugh! It's terrible. The odors of rotting garbage and - er - wastes. It's terrible. What is more, the whole place is clouded over by a thick mist. No, you can take my word for it, the common people are not a very interesting lot. And besides, I let you out whenever you like, don't I?

PANDORA

Yes, but this office is as far as I ever get.

PRIME MINISTER

And what, ungrateful child, is wrong with my office? It's a wonderful office. It's neat, orderly, polished like a brass button. The telephones are shiny. The buttons are shiny. The floor is immaculate. It's a fine
office. It's my office. It is the epitomy of immaculateness. It is the quintescence of all that is worthwhile in life; and I, the elected leader of this wonderful land, occupy it. I am the Prime Minister, you are my daughter, and this is my office. There, you see, everything's in perfect order. It's just as it should be. So why complain? (PANDORA suddenly bursts into tears) There, there, my darling. What's the matter? Why, you're actually crying. Come, you can tell daddy about it.

PANDORA

Oh, father, I don't know what to make of it. Last night I had a strange dream. I don't remember a thing about it, but it left me feeling cold and...terrified.

PRIME MINISTER

Surely you know those dreams are only in your head?

PANDORA

And then this morning, when I sat down to my eggs, one of the butlers was tying my bib around my neck when...his hand brushed against my ear, and it gave me the oddest sensation. I began to tingle all over. I felt something like a little explosion inside me, here, (she touches her belly) and I couldn't eat a thing. I felt I had to run, to run away. Why, I actually imagined that if I could see the sky, my feet would be lifted off the floor and I would fly! Fly - up into the burning sun! I---I didn't know what to do. I sent you that little note...

PRIME MINISTER

Oh yes, the note.

PANDORA

My hand was shaking so badly I could hardly write. I just had to get away from those rooms. I don't know what to make of it. Oh, Father.

PRIME MINISTER

My child! My poor little angel!

PANDORA

This is really silly. I'm so upset - and over nothing. Nothing! Father, maybe it's magic. Maybe someone is working spell on me. Maybe...the butler?

PRIME MINISTER

Be sensible, my dearest. Magic indeed! Why, there's no such thing as magic.
PANDORA

But when I was a little girl, you used to say...

PRIME MINISTER

Now, those were only fairy tales, mere gobbledygook for children. We're eighteen years old and grown out of all that nonsense, aren't we?

PANDORA

Yes...yes, of course.

PRIME MINISTER

It's all just a silly coincidence. There's no more magic in life than what an overripe fig or an undercooked veal cutlet works, once it's inside you.

PANDORA

You think it's something I ate?

PRIME MINISTER

Naturally, naturally. It's always something we ate.

PANDORA

And this longing I have to get away, to fly out among the common people...?

PRIME MINISTER

Too much sugar in your tea.

PANDORA

Oh, nevertheless, Father, I still feel it. It's like a little tremor inside me. Oh, couldn't I just go out for a little? For an hour? For a moment?

PRIME MINISTER

No! Finally and unconditionally, no! Why, child, the world is a terrible place, full of robbers and scoundrels, prosti...-er-people of the worst sort. Think of the awful things that could happen to you out there. You could be hit over the head. You could be defaced, deformed, defiled!

PANDORA

But...
PRIME MINISTER

No backtalking now! How would it look, I ask you, for me, the Prime Minister, if I allowed my very own daughter, my most splendid possession, to be defaced, deformed and...otherwise tampered with...by any common thug that might come along? Why, the very thought is unbearable! It's unthinkable!!

PANDORA

Forther, do forgive me, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you so. Here, have a glass of water. (she pours him a glass) There now, drink it down.

PRIME MINISTER

Thank you. You see what the very idea does to me? You see? I simply couldn't bear for anything nasty to happen to you, my sweet, little princess. You see, I know. I know how cruel the world really is.

PANDORA

Yes, Father.

PRIME MINISTER

So you'll listen to your old father, won't you?

PANDORA

Yes, father.

PRIME MINISTER

And there'll be no more of this nonsense about going out among the people?

PANDORA

Yes, Father...I mean, no, Father.

PRIME MINISTER

Good, I'm glad that's settled. You know, I'm happy we've had this little chat. It's good for the parent to really sit down and discuss things with his child. Now back into your rooms with you...

PANDORA

Wait, Father! Just...a little!

PRIME MINISTER

Pandora, I haven't all day to sit and chat over trifles. I'm a busy man.
I have duties, responsibilities. (looks at his watch) As a matter of fact, I'm expecting a very important visitor back in a few moments.

PANDORA

A visitor? Tell me who it is.

PRIME MINISTER

No, I can't. He's a top-secret associate of mine.

PANDORA

Tell me - oh please, please tell me! It's not as if I actually asked to meet the visitor. I know that affairs of state are always very private, very secret. But I know so little of the world. Oh, Father, I want to learn.

PRIME MINISTER

Yes, of course you do, my dear. It's only natural that you should be curious at your age; but please - you must understand - politics is a very untidy business. Messy is the word for it, and one comes into contact with all manner of sordid creatures. No, it's best that you remain completely removed from such sorts as these. It is absolutely essential that you remain completely pure in mind and body. So come, back into the vault now. That's a good girl. (He locks her in the closet, replaces the key in his hatband)

PANDORA (off)

I'm so bored, Father. Perhaps I'll go change my dress.

PRIME MINISTER

Good. That's a good little girl. You tidy up for supper. (he listens to make sure she is gone, then retrieves the GENERAL's hat) There, General. You see, Daddy is a man of action. My decree will be the cause of widespread prosperity. There will be an unprecedented boom. Business will skyrocket, and I will go down in history as the saviour and redeemer of Stonian economy. In a year or two the people will be massed outside my door, cheering me and hailing me as the grandest Daddy of all time.

GENERAL

Indeed? That is a grandiose plan, sir; but the question is, can we afford to wait that long! In a year or two the enemy will have had time to devise a sneaky stratagem. Their population will have increased by nearly half. They will be breathing down our neck. I warn you, Mr. Prime Minister, we must take advantage of the new social re-organization to bring our entire populace into a state of defense readiness.
PRIME MINISTER

General, General, the people are tired of war. I am tired of war. When I was a young man, I fought valiantly in four campaigns. I rose through the ranks to become a leader, and now that I have attained the position of supreme power, I'm going to leave my mark on the world. I am no longer a military man; I have left all that behind me. Now I am a politician - the top member of a profession equalled in stature only by the priesthood. I am no longer the slave of military thinking. A new me has emerged - a democratic me! You must understand, General, I am - of course - concerned with national security; but I have a higher calling to obey: the will of the people.

GENERAL

Agh! It's as I suspected. You've been brainwashed! You, too, have fallen victim to the enemy's plot!

PRIME MINISTER

I? How absurd!

GENERAL

I have known you for a long time, sir. We went through wars together. We went through political struggles together. No one knows your inherent weaknesses better than I. You have always had a precarious tendency to seek the ephemeral glory of the popular whim. The enemy has used that against you, sir, to turn you into a...a jellyfish! You are a dupe, a puppet! I see it now; you are a traitor!

PRIME MINISTER

Remember your place, General. We share the power.

GENERAL

No longer! I will not stand by and allow your perfidious ego to ruin this nation. (he takes a pistol from his pocket) The time has come, my friend. The time has come for a coup!

PRIME MINISTER

General! General! You cannot do this to me. We depend upon each other. We need each other. We are inseparable in the eyes of the people!

GENERAL

I don't give a hang about the people or their sniveling whimsy. I have always been the real leader, but you - you've kept me hidden away. I am the forceful, decisive one, but you thought you could use me for your johnny-come-lately political ambitions! I am the clear-headed one. I am the dynamic one. My genius has always been the propelling force behind you, and now, when my driving energy has placed the gift of ultimate
power in your hands, you think you can dismiss me, turn your back on me, forget me, just like that?! No, my friend, I won't allow it. It is I who should rule, and I will rule!

(Holding the top-hat at arms length, he fires several shots through it)

Goodbye to you, Mr. fainthearted politician; goodbye to you, weak-willed facade of a man. The real man has come into his own!!

(He throws the top-hat into the trash basket, laughing. PANDORA is heard pounding at the closet door and shouting "Daddy, Daddy, let me out! What was that noise, Father? Daddy, let me out!" etc. The GENERAL waves his sabre in the air, gives a blast on his whistle, and runs off shouting...)

ON, TO ANOTHER ONE!!!

(A moment passes, then slowly - ever so slowly - a little man of outrageously dishevelled appearance and wearing the discarded top-hat emerges from the trash basket. He looks around a bit, chuckles to himself, then extricates himself from the rubbish as he speaks to the audience with a Brooklyn accent.)

SQUALOR

Squalor's the name, Andrew P. Squalor. I deal in second hand hopes and discarded dreams. Rubbish, you say? No one buys those things anymore, you say? Well, my friends, you're wrong. Business is booming. People flock to my establishments by the thousands every day to poke through my stock - to sniff and pick, through the greatest collection of trash the world has ever seen - hoping to come up with...I don't know what. Some carelessly discarded object of faith or some shredded tatter of poetic justice, maybe. Ah, I see that, just like the rest, you're all looking down your noses at me. Well, my friends, you're not fooling me. You've all visited some warehouse of mine at some time or other. "Garbage," they say, and they turn away holding their noses. But as soon as things go a little wrong, they come crawling through my trash-piles like starving dogs, nuzzling around in the rot, and the rust and waste in utter desperation. And they pay - oh how they pay - for the privilege of doing just that! They buy, too. Why? Who knows? Who can guess what kind of treasure they think they've found in some old scraps of paper discarded by some forgotten, mediocre poet - or the ground up, dried up remains of a common weed? But I...come a little closer, friends, and I'll let you in on a little trade secret. I'm basically a very greedy person. That's right, and just because business is good right now, that doesn't mean it's going to last forever. I like to keep the customers coming back for more. So...frankly, I sprinkle a little fools gold here and there around the trash heaps. Dishonest, you say? Well, maybe; but without hope, what've they got anyway? Not that I rely on that alone to keep them
coming. No, in fact I'm always out drumming up trade. As a matter of fact, that's what I'm doing right now. I'm building up a clientele. Well, I have to create a market, don't I? Desperation doesn't happen just like that. People aren't born with it, you know. No, the taste for Squalor's goods is one that has to be carefully cultivated. You take it from me. Besides, I'm always on the look-out for new items to carry in my stock. It takes a sharp eye and keen mind to detect potential selling power. Now you take this hat, for instance. Very interesting. My sharp eye tells me that there are several bullet holes through the crown and that there is a little brass key tucked into the band. My keen mind tells me that keys are usually made for locks, and that this one probably was, too. Now, since there is someone pounding on that door, screaming to get out, I reason that there is maybe some connection between this key and that door. Now, my friends, you may be thinking to yourselves that all this seems so contrived as to resemble a put-up job; and - as a matter of fact - you'd be perfectly right. Well, we all know these things don't just happen by coincidence, don't we? Furthermore, I hate to see a potential customer locked away like that, and so, in the spirit of fair play and free enterprise, I shall now do the expected and unlock yon door thereby freeing yon damsel from her imprisonment.

(He unlocks the door and stands back. It swings open and PANDORA rushes out, embraces him, then backs off in shock. He tips the top-hat)

Greetings.

PANDORA

Who are you? What are you doing in my father's hat?

SQUALOR (horrendously over-acting)

It is my unhappy task to inform you, fair lady, there has been a change of state.

PANDORA

What are you talking about? Where's Daddy? What was that noise?

SQUALOR

Patience, patience, fair maid. The news I bear you is most unpleasant.

PANDORA

My father, the Prime Minister, where is he? Answer me! Daddy? Daddy?

SQUALOR (the hat over his heart)

Alas, Daddy is no more.
PANDORA

What?

squalor

Shot through the hat by a political rival in a quarrel of ambiguous nature.

PANDORA (stunned, she falls to her knees, weeps)

Oh, Daddy! My poor, poor Daddy!

SQUALOR

A sad, sad day. He was twice the man his successor is.

PANDORA

Oh, Daddy! My poor, poor Daddy! Whatever shall I do without you?

SQUALOR

Be brave, my child. Life is hard, but we must go on until the final curtain. For you, now, all that is left is to go out and face the cold, cruel world alone. And for me, now that my sad task is done, I must return to the mundane ritual of attending to my business. Be brave. The world awaits you. Do your stuff, kid.

PANDORA

Oh Daddy! My poor, poor Daddy!

(sudden blackout, a drum roll and flurry of trumpets. A sign is briefly illuminated which reads..."MEANWHILE...")

SCENE II

(The two AIDES appear downstage, goose-stepping; the FIRST AIDE still holding the decree)

SECOND AIDE

March, kick, march...halt!

FIRST AIDE (steps forward, unrolls the scroll, reads)

A decree of, by, and for the people of Stonia! Be it known that: Whereas the populace of this righteous land are firmly resolved in our conviction to find a lasting antidote to squalor and starvation;
SECOND AIDE
And, whereas it has become obvious that the only solution to said poverty conditions is prosperity,

FIRST AIDE
And, whereas prosperity is the main function of our democratic republic;

SECOND AIDE
And, whereas prosperity is a product of industrialization;

FIRST AIDE
And, whereas - therefore - the true measure of our democracy is the degree of industrialization to which it attains;

SECOND AIDE
Be it hereby resolved by order of the Prime Minister that:

FIRST AIDE
One - all arts, crafts, and other manifestations of heretical, non-industrial, backward thinking are hereby dissolved.

SECOND AIDE
Two - All states of euphoria, dreaming, religious ecstasy, belief in magic, and other non-productive emotions are hereby cancelled.

FIRST AIDE
Three - Personal identity is hereby abolished in favor of classification according to productive skills, training, etc. All citizens will be processed, re-educated if necessary, classified, and labeled according to appropriate specializations.

SECOND AIDE
Be it thus enacted in the name of the people, Amen, Haleluja, Glory Glory Glory, etc. and etc.

(He rolls up the scroll, the drum and trumpets are heard again)

BOTH AIDES (screaming)

TO WORK!!!

(They march off. The whirr and clank of great machines fades up in the background)
SCENE III

(PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN, a decrepit old figure, enters carrying an oversized book)

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN

There was a girl...how shall I begin? There was a girl. (pause) It's strange how these ancient, hidden things come creeping out. How they have become disguised and distorted; or have they merely been abstracted? But how distant they seem, glowing across an ocean of years. Somewhere, far away...another place. Another time. Another person...maybe. The images have blended or blurred together and I have long ago forgotten just who they were, or in what order they arrived. The girl...was she a woman? Never in my eyes. Sometimes I imagine that I suckled at her breast. But she had no breasts because she was a little girl, and I saw her in the street as I stood on top of my father's desk to look out the window. Then, later, she disappeared into the future. And the future arrived wearing a thousand different faces; hers was there somewhere...maybe everywhere. One moment her tiny hand clutched a rifle in pictures of a far away war. She became politics and history.

(In silhouette, a group of four WORKERS on a low platform upstage are seen silently hammering, sawing, sanding, and planning a nonsensical structure of billboards, telephone poles, wheels, and television antennae, all mock but recognizable. All performing with awkward, jerky movements. The workers wear signs designating them "carpenters" and etc. PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN appears by an imaginary campfire DL, immobile. PROMETHEUS THE OLD MAN looks around, sighs, places the book in YOUNG MAN's hands. Then OLD MAN goes back into the dark. YOUNG MAN comes to life, reading the book and intermittently writing in it, as the WORKERS vocally imitate the sounds of construction. Their rhythmic and counter rhythmic mouth noises in combination with the mechanical hum underscore most of the following scene)

#1

Hammer the nail!

#2

Saw the board!

#3

Build, build, build!
#4

Build the age from the dirt!

#2

Build the art from the mist!

PANDORA (voice offstage)

Who's in charge here?

(Enter PANDORA at left. She is now dressed as a worker. She bears a sign clearly lettered "VIRGIN")

PANDORA

Can anyone help me? I'm lost. This mist is so thick. (Pause. The workers keep on) You see, I'm new here and I...I...Someone gave me this. (gestures with sign) I don't know what to do with it. Does anyone know where it goes? (She crosses to #3 near UC)

#3 (stops, eyes her up and down a moment in silence)

Yeah.

PANDORA

This sign, what should I do with it?

#3 (after eyeing sign)

No room here. (goes back to work)

PANDORA

But it must go somewhere.

#3

Not here. We're busy. Try the laboratory; through there. (gestures off stage)

PANDORA

I was just there. They said to come here. Please, if you could just...

#3

I told you we're busy. Can't you see we're building?

PANDORA

But the sign, you see, actually I'm not used to the outside world...
#3 (suddenly angry)

Stop pestering. We're building! It's important! Can't you see? It's a monument to democracy.

PANDORA

Yes, of course but...(innocently) What is it?

(The WORKERS gasp, drop their tools, turn, and glare at her. She jumps back, startled)

#1

What did you say?

PANDORA (takes a moment to get her voice back)

I...I said, what is it you're building?

#4

What are we BUILDING?!

#3

That's absurd!

#1

You've got to be kidding!

#3

Isn't it obvious?

#2

It's perfect!

#4

It's beautiful!

#1

It's absolute!

#4

It's the great dream!

#3

It's sound!
It's safe!

It's pure!

It's automatic!

It's DEMOCRATIC!

(As if the final word has been said, all go back to "work" resuming their noise effects.) All through this PANDORA has backed downstage, fearful and confused. PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN has looked up, seen her)

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (warning her)

Hey! Watch out!

PANDORA

What?

PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN

Watch out! The lake. (As she turns and peers out over the audience) Funny, you've never noticed that before? Water. Cold, black, shiny - why, look, it stretches on out there forever. (leaving fire and advancing toward her) The mist settles in by night. In the morning...Did you ever notice how dreary and vague the morning is? It's the mist. You can't see lots of things on account of it. Sometimes you can't even see the lake, huge monster that it is.

PANDORA

All day I've been lost and stumbling around. I felt I could have killed myself a dozen times at least

PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN (with irony)

Yes, I've felt that myself.

PANDORA

What?
Nothing. You're new on the dock, eh? I've been coming here for months. I'm supposed to be working - but I don't. I just sit. I build my fire and stare out over the junkyard...and the lake. How long have you been here? Just assigned?

PANDORA

Too long. I can't take it anymore. I want to leave. (PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN laughs sympathetically) I'm serious. I want to get out of here.

PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN

Sure, sure. (indicating audience) That's the only way out. The only port of entry, the only means of escape. It's not much - a ship or two every few months, and it's impossible to get the right papers - but it is a hope. It's something to dream about.

PANDORA

The lake?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

The lake. Across that water is a different country. No, I've never really been there, but I've seen it a hundred times in my dream.

PANDORA

I don't understand.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

No. But that's the way it is. It's not to be understood. It's only to be endured - and recorded.

PANDORA

This place is no good. They give you a sign to carry around, and they don't give you anything to do with it. So you ask...that's the natural thing to do...you ask for help and it's always the same answer, "Go away. We're busy." (PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN laughs) How can you laugh? It's horrible.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

If you don't laugh it gets to you. Then you're screwed. That's what happens to them. (indicates workers) They forget how to laugh. They forget everything but work. There's no point in it, really.
PANDORA (sudden realization)

You're not like them, are you?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

No, it's not to be understood at all. For centuries life ambles on without hope of escape from misery. Then, one day - without warning...

PANDORA

I mean...you...you're the first one that's talked to me. I mean really talked. Your voice is almost...friendly.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Yours is soft and clear. Without warning, a dream arises...

PANDORA

Mine? But I'm used to it. Who are you, anyway? Why are you different? What are you doing - just sitting here on the dock?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (joking)

I? I am Prometheus, keeper of the fire. I am an historian, an acrobat.

PANDORA

An acrobat?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

A juggler and tight-rope walker to be exact. (Pantomimes walking a tight rope) I bill myself as "The Genius of the High Wire."

PANDORA

But where do you perform?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

On the tight rope.

PANDORA

No, I mean where is your tight rope?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Between the lake and the mist. No...really!
(balances, walking on edge of apron, arms wagging)

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN (from offstage)

Come one, come all. See the Great Prometheus. His expertise at straddling the thin line is an art developed from years of ardent practice. And he has become so adept at it, he can even juggle while doing it.

PANDORA (giggling)

Juggle? What do you juggle?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Oh, fruits. Feathers.

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN (off)

Inevitabilities. Impossibilities.

(PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN pantomimes juggling... begins to lose his balance over the side.)

PANDORA

Be careful! You'll fall!

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (regains his balance, stares out at audience)

Yes. Eventually.

PANDORA

What?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Nothing. Look, I'm sitting here because I'm a worthless person and I haven't anything better to do. I am a poet, and I'm absolutely useless to society.

PANDORA

You're strange. You're very, very...unusual - aren't you?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

I made you laugh, didn't I?

PANDORA

Yes, you did, come to think of it. Can you do it again?
PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

That depends.

PANDORA

Depends? On what?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (advancing toward her playfully)

On whether or not you're ticklish. (jabs at her ribs, lightly. She giggles, squirms away.) You are. (fake villainy) H-hoo. You are!

(He grabs her, begins tickling. She squirms, laughs uncontrollably, finally eluding him. They chase around the stage, she laughing, he cackling a playfully evil cackle. Finally, out of breath, they end up facing each other, he pinning her back against the wall. They are both out of breath and laughing. Their laughter continues for a few seconds, slowly moderates into barely audible moaning. Then after a moment, silence. They stare at each other wide eyed, serious, at a loss for words, for a few seconds. He clears his throat, reluctantly backs away from here, turns. She drops her sign.)

PANDORA

Well, I guess you can, can't you?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (shocked)

I beg your pardon!

PANDORA

Make me laugh again.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (pleased with himself)

Yes, I guess I can, can't I? (They laugh, still at a loss for words) What's your name?

PANDORA

Pandora.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (turning back)

I have a fire, you know.
PANDORA

A fire?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

I keep it burning all the time. I sit by it constantly, while I am supposed to be working my shift. I read, I write, I read...

PANDORA

I don't understand.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

It's warm, and I sit there. No one seems to notice me, and I - I lose myself in my imagination. Sometimes the lake scares me. It's so dark and solemn out there in the mist. The lake is waiting for something.

PANDORA

What makes you think the lake is waiting? Waiting for what?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

It's all in my book. I wrote it down, but - who knows what it can mean?

PANDORA

But just because you wrote it down doesn't mean it's really going to happen.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

It's not a matter of that. It has happened. It keeps happening. I know. I am an historian. It happened all those times before, in all those places, and someone was there to write it down. It'll happen here someday, and I will be a witness. I will record my testament.

PANDORA

What? What's going to happen? I don't understand.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

I don't either. I keep hoping it will begin to make some sense if I only use my head.

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN (off)

If I could only live long enough...

PANDORA

It must be getting late.
PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

That's another thing that bothers me.

PANDORA

What?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Nothing.

PANDORA

It's getting chilly.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

First something happens, then I write it down...or is it the other way around? I'm never sure, so I keep leafing back to find out. But when I find it, it's already written. I can't control it.

PANDORA

Prometheus, I'm cold.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Wait a minute...a girl...I'm sure there's a girl. (goes to book)

PANDORA

Where are you going? I'm freezing. Don't leave me. Where are you?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (returns to her leafing through book)

I'm sure I saw it here somewhere.

PANDORA

Oh, there you are.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Where?

PANDORA

Right there.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Oh.
PANDORA
What's that?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN
My book.

PANDORA
You wrote it?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN
I'm writing it.

PANDORA
Poetry?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN
History.

PANDORA
Can I feel? Let me touch it. (she reaches out, but he jumps away)

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN
It's not finished yet. That's all.

PANDORA
I only wanted to feel it.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN
It's not finished yet. (resumes leafing through pages)

PANDORA
When you finish it, maybe you'll read it to me. I don't understand... but I'd like to hear it. I've never known much about history. (fake sophistication) It's always bored me so much. It's all the same.

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN (off)

There were people killing each other and people being born and it really was all just the same thing packaged into an endless chain of dates and figures.
PANDORA

So I lost interest. But I bet your book isn't like that. Do you sit by the fire when you write?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Here it is. I dreamed I would meet a girl. I knew it.

PANDORA

What? Who? I'm cold.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

There's something about the fire. Something happened to her.

PANDORA

Fire? That's right, you have a fire. Could we maybe sit by the fire?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Here's something about the lake. (adjusting the book to catch the light) It's very hard to read here.

PANDORA

Prometheus, I'm freezing to death.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

I can make out the words..."quiet, calm, impassive." (He closes his eyes, exhales audibly) Oh, my God.

PANDORA

Prometheus, Help me. I'll catch pneumonia.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Listen to this.

PANDORA

But it's cold.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (angry, urgent)

LISTEN! Don't you understand? A terrible storm is coming. A great holocaust...and I shall be a witness. I shall have the honor of recording it for all future mankind.
PANDORA

I can feel my bones freezing. I can't move.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (frustrated)

I must get back to my fire. It will die out. That mustn't happen. Not now. Not while history is brewing on the horizon.

PANDORA

That's it. The fire. Prometheus, just since I've met you here I've felt the chill of the mist. This cold is killing me and you have a fire. Take me there. Take me to your fire, or...or...I don't know.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (stares at her for a second in silence, puts his hand to his forehead, turns away from her, thinking, turns back to her, looks at her in wonder)

I will take you. I mean, I must take you. I mean...I mean...I don't know. (he takes a deep breath, grabs her hand and violently pulls her over to the fire and seats himself beside her.)

PANDORA (in luxury)

Ah, the sand is so warm. It's soft. (she lies back in the sand)

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (buries his head in his hands, then looks up at her, smiles weakly)

Yes, it is warm here. (He scoops up a handful of imaginary sand and sprinkles it over her body. In ecstasy, she giggles. Bending over her, the YOUNG MAN continues to scoop up sand and pour it over her body. Her ecstasy grows. She writhes and squeals happily. His action of scooping and pouring becomes faster and faster. He begins to giggle. Their moans and movements grow in intensity and speed to fever pitch. At the height of intensity her squealing changes into a cry of protest. Her protesting grows into panic. She screams, rolls away from him, and stand up facing him in one quick motion. He is still on his knees. For a moment they are still, eyes locked together, both panting. They are both amazed by her action.)

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN (enters, retrieves book)

Other faces... grotesque, hard faces... begin to appear, or rather, I turned around and there they were. Now they come back to me as intruders into my soft, delicate world. Yet I sense they were there long before I was, and remained long after. There is a man who smiles at me, and offers me a nickel, and then I am filled with terror because when I reach to grasp it, he slaps me hard across the face. Sometimes I think he is my father, but he is as foreign to me as all the others. In a dream, I see them all
standing around me, entreating me to take the shiny coins they hold in their hands. But when I move toward them their hands all close into fists that come crashing down on my helpless body. And somewhere, among the painful blows, I feel the hands of the girl touching me, shaking me, trying to awaken me, or something inside me. I want to look at her and tell her I understand, because I sense an urgency, a trembling in her touch. But I cannot speak; I cannot move. The others are upon me, pounding and tearing, and soon her touch turns ice cold and more painful than all the beating fists. The others are laughing.

(replaces book by fire, walks back to his area, in the dark. PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN breaks into uproarious laughter, sits back, propped up on his arms. He laughs to the sky. She catches the mood, laughs also. He rises, still facing her, still laughing. He begins to exit right, halts, stops laughing. He turns and faces her. Her laughter dies away as she looks at him. He shakes sand out of his hair, brushes it off his elbows and back and picks up the book. She dusts herself off. He looks at her seriously, then exits right. She stares after him a moment, then she too exits right, as simultaneously the loud blast of a policeman's whistle is heard from far off. Again the sign, "MEANWHILE" is briefly illuminated. All during this time the workers have been hammering, sawing, planing in their mechanical, slow manner. Enter the GENERAL and the two AIDES)

SCENE IV:

(GENERAL carries binoculars around his neck on a string. FIRST AIDE carries a tattered bandana on a stick which he waves vigorously in the air. SECOND AIDE carries a wooden rifle. They are marching)

GENERAL

Carry that flag high and carry it proud.

FIRST AIDE

March, kick, march.

SECOND AIDE (stumbles over his feet and falls, dropping the wooden rifle. The other two halt abruptly, turn, and glare at him as he sheepishly gets to his feet, throws his shoulders back, then screams like a sargeant barking commands...)

I'm sorry, Sir!
GENERAL

You could have scattered the mist!

FIRST AIDE

Then where would we be?

SECOND AIDE (Screams as before)

Up Shit Creek, Sir!

GENERAL

Fine boy!

FIRST AIDE

he'll make a good soldier some day!

GENERAL

But we've a job at hand!

FIRST AIDE

Yes, a job!

GENERAL

Recruit, recruit, recruit!

FIRST AIDE

For the great one of all time!

GENERAL

For the Holy One.

FIRST AIDE

It's justifiable!

GENERAL

It's beneficial!

FIRST AIDE

Just think of the benefits!

GENERAL

Economy boost!
FIRST AIDE

Population control!

GENERAL

Movie rights!

FIRST AIDE

Hooray for our side!

SECOND AIDE (Screaming)

Ditto, Sir!

FIRST AIDE (gesturing towards workers)

Ah...look!

GENERAL

Ah...A fine lot of impressionable young lads!

FIRST AIDE

Let's impress them!

GENERAL (approaching workers)

Gentlemen, a word if you will!

(The WORKERS drop their tools and stare at him blankly. Whenever they answer him, the answer comes in automatic chorus)

Gentlemen, I am your new leader. Yes, a great and noble revolution has taken place. The revolution the world has been waiting for, the revolution of the People! And it is in the name of the People that I come before you today. You DO believe in the People, don't you?

WORKERS

Yes.

GENERAL

And in the religion of the People!

WORKERS

Yes!

GENERAL

In the will of the People!
WORKERS

Yes!

GENERAL

In the Democracy of the People!

WORKERS

YES!

GENERAL

In the television of the People!

WORKERS

Amen!

GENERAL

In the Purity of the People!

WORKERS (singing)

Hallelujah!

GENERAL

In the finality of the People!

WORKERS

Hallelujah!

GENERAL

In the love of the People!

WORKERS

Amen!

GENERAL

In the hate of the People!

WORKERS

Lord be praised!
GENERAL
In the popularity of the People!

WORKERS
Yes!

GENERAL
In the Manifest Destiny of the People!

WORKERS
Yes!

GENERAL
In the Self Sacrifice of the People!

WORKERS
Yes!

GENERAL
In sickness and in health, the People!

WORKERS
We do!

GENERAL
For richer or poorer, the People!

WORKERS
We do!

GENERAL
Til the cows come home, the People!

WORKERS
Yes!

GENERAL
Til Hell freezes over, the People!

WORKERS
Yes!
GENERAL
Til the last man is downed, the People!

WORKERS
Huzzah! Huzzah!

GENERAL (gives blast on whistle)
Gentlemen, in the name of the People, you are DRAFTED! (Loud cheer from the workers exactly three seconds long.)

WORKERS
We are impressed!

GENERAL
Come let us fight together!

FIRST AIDE
Let us live together!

FIRST AIDE
Let us die together!

#1
Let us eat together and be comrades!

#2
Let us drink together and be drunk!

#3
Let us hate together and be hated!

#4
Let us march together and be shiny!

#2 (at the top of his lungs)
ON...TO ANOTHER ONE!

(All rush downstage, join hands, and dance in a frenzied circle, chanting...)
ALL

ANOTHER ONE
ANOTHER ONE
CHOP THE CHICKEN
COOK THE CHICKEN
COOK THE GOOSE
KILL THE DOVE
ANOTHER ONE
ANOTHER ONE
ANOTHER ONE
ANOTHER ONE
ANOTHER ONE (etc...)

(They all exit through the audience running. There is a brief blackout.)

SCENE V:

(PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN lights a match in the dark at center stage)

PANDORA (loud, excited)

Fire!

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (blows out match. Lights another match at DR, bending over "fire" to relight it. As he does so, the lights come up. PANDORA is at center stage, lost)

We should not have let the fire go out.

PANDORA

No.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Suppose something had happened.

PANDORA

Something did happen.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

I suppose we couldn't help it. The fire has a way of consuming itself.

PANDORA

Fires do not die, Prometheus, only people.
PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

They die and are reborn. It's a shame we let it go out. We should never let that happen.

PANDORA

And what happens in the darkness, is that a shame?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Now the fire is full again. I have some writing to do. (sits by the fire with open book and a pencil which he produces from his pocket, starts writing)

PANDORA

How can you do that now?

PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN

Business as usual.

PANDORA

Business as usual? Business? I have touched the flame for the first time. I can almost see. The joy inside my body screams to explore all the new visions you have awakened. I have touched the flame and now I am on fire. Will you not guide me?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

I must write. I am not a guide. I am an historian. I must write.

PANDORA

What will you say, Prometheus?

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN (Off)

That I met a girl. That we made love together.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

That the fire went out and I rekindled it. I must write down what happened.

PANDORA

And why must you do that? Why keep the fire only to sit by it and write what has happened in the darkness? All the world could burn, Prometheus. I see that now. You have made me see it. The earth and the water could be the bright flame if we want. Must we sit here and write out the history of our lives?
PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Yes, I must.

PANDORA

But why? It has already happened. It was all before.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

It was now.

PANDORA

Now only happens once, Prometheus.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Now keeps happening. It was yesterday when I forgot to record it, or didn't notice it. It is tomorrow when I shall discover what it is that I forgot and forget something else, or it will continue, unnoticed.

PANDORA

You baffle me. I'm bored. I can't stay here. I'm going off to build my own fire. Did you hear me?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

I heard you.

PANDORA

I'm going now. (hesitating)

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

I heard you.

PANDORA

I'm going! Good-bye. (goes to DR. Sits on apron dangling legs in the water. PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN continues to write. She pouts for a moment, becomes visibly angry. Sudden inspiration. She gets up, pantomimes gathering wood for a fire. She carries the wood back to DR and pantomimes building a fire. After stacking the wood, she contemplates a moment, angrily stands, kicks wood, frustrated. She glances at PROMETHEUS who is still writing. She thinks a moment, glances toward him again, opens her mouth as if to speak to him. Before she can utter a word, a loud blast of a policeman's whistle is heard from the back of the house. She looks up surprised, freezes. The YOUNG MAN continues to write.)

SCENE VI:

(the WORKERS and the leaders enter through the
house singing "Row, Row, Row, Your Boat." They are in single file formation. First is the GENERAL who is peering around through his binoculars. The FIRST AIDE is pantomiming rowing to his left with his flag. The SECOND AIDE is pantomiming rowing with his rifle to his right. Then come the four WORKERS. They make their "landing" at Down Center with much cheering and laughing. PANDORA is frozen; PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN continues to write)

GENERAL

Ten-shun!

FIRST AIDE

Ten-shun!

SECOND AIDE

Ten-shun!

(The WORKERS snap to attention)

GENERAL

Well, Gentlemen, at last we are here! (loud cheer from WORKERS exactly three seconds long) And before we begin this one, I have a few words to say. (during the next speech he paces up and down in front of the WORKERS. AIDES follow. He clears his throat to begin) Of course, you Gentlemen know, I never mess with politics. As a good soldier, I just do what I'm told. (#2 hiccups. GENERAL stops and stares at him) You are on report. (AIDES stick out their tongues at #2) Now, where was I?

FIRST AIDE

Doing what you were told.

GENERAL

Nobody tells me what to do.

SECOND AIDE.

Policy speech, sir. "Our mission today..."

GENERAL

Oh, yes...our mission today is to...Our mission today is...I have forgotten.

SECOND AIDE (turning to FIRST AIDE)

He has forgotten.
FIRST AIDE (turning to GENERAL)

He has forgotten.

GENERAL

Oh yes...He has forgotten... (suddenly realizes what he is saying) What?!?!? Am I surrounded by imbeciles? (to AIDES) Can you not remember a simple speech? That is the speech that has made military history. Every good soldier should know it by heart. Well, what are you standing around for? Make camp, send out scouts. Do something military for chrissakes!

FIRST AIDE

Volunteers!

SECOND AIDE

Let's have some volunteers!

FIRST AIDE

You. (points to #2)

SECOND AIDE

You. (Points to #3)

FIRST AIDE

Go find the enemy. (points left)

SECOND AIDE

Seek him out. (points right)

FIRST AIDE

Destroy!

SECOND AIDE

Kill! (#2 and #3 nod dumbly)

GENERAL

Well, dig in there. (Points to construction upstage. All move upstage except #2 and #3. #1, #4, FIRST AIDE and SECOND AIDE pick up the tools dropped there previously and go to "work" reducing the construction upstage to a pile of rubble. GENERAL sits UC surveying the stage through his binoculars. #2 crawls left sniffing the ground, bumps into PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN, looks up)

#2
PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN (not looking up)

That's quite all right.

(#2 exits left, crawling and sniffing. #3 crawls right simultaneously, also sniffing. He bumps into PANDORA's leg and looks up)

#3

Oh, sorry...

(PANDORA is still frozen. No answer. #3 begins to exit right, stops, thinks for a moment, then turns around, crawls back to PANDORA, looks up between her legs, chuckles dumbly)

It's a girl! (He gets up, circles her, eyeing her suggestively) Hey... Hey, girl! (she remains frozen) Hey you. What'sa matter, no speaky English? (#3 pokes her; she does not move. He stares in wonder a moment, then chuckles. He approaches her gingerly, pokes her arm, then jumps back. She does not move. He approaches her again, more bravely, takes her left hand and holds it up, then releases it. The hand stays suspended in air. He stands back, looks at her, laughs delightedly, approaches her again. He lifts her other hand, turns her head, moves one of her legs, opens her mouth. He is becoming engrossed like a sculptor in the act of creation. He stands back, looking at his creation, begins to chuckle, then to laugh loudly. He goes back to her, looks about suspiciously, then wraps his arms about her and kisses her on the mouth; kisses trail down and around her entire body. He is becoming ardent, panting. She does not move. She says the following line with great difficulty and pain)

PANDORA

Prometheus...I...Fire...Fire!

#3 (looks up)

What? You say something?

(She remains still. He picks her up, laughing, throws her over his shoulder. She has begun to sob slightly. He carries her off right. A moment of silence. Then, off stage, she screams loudly. PROMETHEUS continues to write. #2 rushes in left, looking around, alert, fearful)

#2

Who's there? Who is it? (his gaze swings from right to left where he sees PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN, who is still writing. #2 advances toward him) You hear anything? (PROMETHEUS does not look up) Hey, you... (#2 pokes him. PROMETHEUS looks up)
PROMETHEUS THE YOUNG MAN

What?

#2

You hear anything, just now?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Me? No.

#2

What you doing here anyway?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

I'm writing, if you don't mind. (resumes writing)

#2

Hey, I'm talking to you. What you writing? Huh? What is it?

(He tries to get a peek over PROMETHEUS' shoulder as, simultaneously, PROMETHEUS looks up, sees #2, and rapidly closes the book)

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

It's not finished, yet.

#2

What are you hiding there?

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

Nothing. It's just not finished.

#2

Give it here.

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

No!

#2

GIVE IT HERE I SAID!

PROMETHEUS, THE YOUNG MAN

NO!
(PANDORA screams loudly, off stage. PROMETHEUS starts left. #2 grabs his arm, holds him back)

Let me go!

#2

Give me that!

(They struggle a moment, #2 smashes his fist against PROMETHEUS' head. PROMETHEUS falls, unconscious. #2 picks up book, sits by fire, and begins to read. PANDORA staggers in from left, confused, disheveled)

PANDORA

Help me. Someone please help me. I...Prometheus...Please... (no one looks up or notices her) I'm lost. I'm afraid. I remember...something...a fire...something died...I forget...Help me!

(No one looks up. #3 enters left, disheveled and laughing. PANDORA falls to her knees, weeping. #3 studies her a moment, straightens his uniform, sits on the ground, polishing his shoe with his cuff. PANDORA continues to weep aloud. GENERAL gives a loud blast on the whistle. PANDORA Freezes. #2 and #3 freeze. PROMETHEUS is still unconscious. The rest keep on as before. GENERAL rises)

GENERAL (Proclaiming)

Let it be known that we are willing to talk peace...if and when the proper time arises. You may ask yourselves, my friends, "How do we know the proper time when it gets here?" My answer is that we shall know by taking careful stock of the situation, by observing the facts. I shall now take stock. (He comes downstage to #3) Now, here we have a boy...an honest, industrious, hard-working boy. You can tell he is honest, industrious, and hard-working by observing the fact that he is conscientiously cleaning his shoes. (Moves to PANDORA) And here we have a girl. Don't I recognize you from somewhere? Strange...Well, no matter. See the sad expression on her face; she is frightened and confused, but basically a good girl. She needs help and guidance, that's all. (He moves to #2, stumbling over PROMETHEUS on the way) Now this is obviously a scholar. Observe the open book, the careful, studied look. This is a man of deep thought, perhaps a poet. He is harmless. And now, (turning to PROMETHEUS) the enemy. In the pain and confusion of his time, what does he do? Does he pitch in with a helping hand? Does he work? Does he struggle? No. Look at him. He's sleeping. (Kicks PROMETHEUS) Lazy bastard! Well?...Are you ready to talk peace or not?...Won't talk, eh? Well...We'll see about that. (Gives a long blast on the whistle. There is suddenly the noise and confusion of a great battle. The WORKERS mime combat with imaginary foes. Suddenly the GENERAL gives another whistle blast. The WORKERS and leaders converge around him. #2 still carries
PROMETHEUS' book. Gentlemen, the moment has arrived. The enemy sleeps, and while he sleeps we shall take action. Ah, the glory of it! The ecstasy of mortal combat on this distant shore, between the water and the fire! For such a poetic battle we can settle for nothing less than absolute victory, the poetic end.

#2

Pardon, sir, this book...

GENERAL

Book? What are you talking about?

#2

This book. I thought maybe you'd like to read it. See it says here...

GENERAL

I'm not interested in poetry.

#2

It's not poetry, sir; it's history.

GENERAL

That's a matter of opinion.

#2

It talks about the girl. She...

GENERAL

Ah, yes, the girl, of course.

#2

See, there's this fire...They make love...

GENERAL

What are we running here? A book review or a war? Are we here to read poetry or make history?

#2

That's a matter of opinion.

GENERAL

Get the girl!
Now then, miss. We have come to free you. No! Don't bother to thank me. It's our duty. Our obligation. What do we ask for the hardship we suffer for you? Very little. Only your undying gratitude and reverence. Now, when you think of it, that's a very small price for the new freedom you will have gained. Well...what do you say? (she remains still)

#2

I don't think you're getting through to her.

GENERAL

What do you mean? I'm offering her a priceless gift: Freedom. Freedom to struggle. Freedom to die as she pleases. Freedom from the tyranny of this man she hates.

#2

That's just it. That's what I've been trying to tell you. She doesn't hate him. They suffer together, but they endure.

GENERAL

Of course she hates him. He's the enemy. Everybody hates the enemy. What do you know?

#2

I'm beginning to wonder... (PANDORA moans)

GENERAL

She's coming around.

PANDORA (with anguish)

Prometheus...Prometheus. I have a burning pain inside me. I'm blind.

GENERAL

She is blind. (PANDORA begins to crawl with difficulty UC)

PANDORA (Almost crying)

I am blind. I am blind.

GENERAL (gleefully)

She is blind. She is blind.
(GENERAL gives a short blast on the whistle. PANDORA turns abruptly, begins to crawl DR. She is sobbing helplessly. GENERAL gives another short blast. She turns abruptly and begins to crawl DL. GENERAL gives another short blast. She turns abruptly and begins to crawl toward center as simultaneously #4 begins to march downstage. GENERAL gives another short blast. PANDORA and #4 change direction abruptly as simultaneously #2 begins to march downstage. GENERAL gives another short blast. PANDORA, #4 and #2 all change direction abruptly as simultaneously #2 begins to march downstage. GENERAL gives another short blast. All change direction as simultaneously #1 begins to march downstage. GENERAL gives another short blast. All change direction as simultaneously #3 begins to march downstage. GENERAL gives four more short blasts. Each time he does so all change direction, abruptly, like electric bumper cars. Throughout this last, GENERAL begins to laugh loudly. PANDORA, intermittently screaming and sobbing, begins to slash the air with her knife. All but PANDORA halt abruptly. She crawls, inadvertently, to PROMETHEUS. GENERAL gives another blast on the whistle. All the WORKERS and leaders converge around PROMETHEUS and PANDORA. All frozen. GENERAL steps forth, surveying the scene)

GENERAL

This is very interesting! (he gives another short blast on the whistle as simultaneously PANDORA emits a shatteringly loud moan of despair)

PANDORA

Confusion! I am trapped here. I have become a shadow again where the mist does not fall.

GENERAL

You are deluding yourself. You're no shadow. You are very real, I can assure you. Don't be troubled. We are here. We have come to save the day!

PANDORA

A negative thing. An empty boundary. A bubble in a senseless cloud.

GENERAL

A part of the whole. A number in the holy set of numbers, each with a mission.
PANDORA

My light is taken away. Daddy was right. The world is hard, cold. They take everything you have and they leave you alone in the cold.

GENERAL

Listen to me. You are suffering from a delusion, the hypnotic spell of an evil mind.

PANDORA

Give me relief or I will go insane.

GENERAL

You have a duty.

PANDORA

I need the fire in my eyes.

GENERAL

You have a debt.

PANDORA

Inside me.

GENERAL

You have a responsibility.

PANDORA

To burn away this cold.

GENERAL

Yes yes, of course. We are here to help you. But how do we know that you are cured of your dementia? You must prove your loyalty.

PANDORA

Will you...give me a fire?

GENERAL

Fire? Certainly, but remember, compassion must be earned. You will pay the price?

PANDORA (Screaming)

Yes!
GENERAL (Placing his sabre in her hand)

Then kill him. (All but PANDORA chant, "Kill him. Kill him. Kill him. Kill him. Kill him." She slowly raises the sabre, then plunges it into PROMETHEUS' body. All but PANDORA break into an uproarious cheer. PANDORA freezes a moment, horrified, then flings her arms around the body)

PANDORA

Oh no. God, no!

(She remains there, weeping, caressing the body as the workers and leaders prepare to "disembark". GENERAL goes to her, snatches the sabre from her, gives a loud blast on the whistle, and the workers and leaders exit as they entered singing Row Row Row" and laughing. PANDORA remains, shaking her head, bewildered, rises, stumbles around a moment, confused, goes to construction upstage, begins to tear it apart and fling the pieces toward the audience. She goes to PROMETHEUS, falls beside him, touches him gently, collapses against his body a moment then looks up as if awakening from a dream. She rubs her forehead, takes a deep breath, searches around on the floor for a moment, finds the sign she has dropped there previously, picks it up, dusts it off, fondles it, holds it against her cheek, looks around as if expecting to see someone)

PANDORA

Isn't there anyone here? Who's running this place? Hello...Hello? I'm new here. Can't someone help me?

(She stumbles about the stage, sobbing. PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN enters, picks up book, wistfully studies the body of the YOUNG MAN, reaches down as if to touch it but stops short. Goes to fire, stares down at it.)

PROMETHEUS, THE OLD MAN

The fire has gone out. I suppose it couldn't be helped. Fire has a way of consuming itself. I don't understand it, altogether, this fantasy. But I will write it down because that is what I must do. (sits by fire and begins to rekindle it.) Sometimes I wonder why I spend my life musing over this senseless drama. I don't know...(He opens the book) There was a girl. How shall I begin? (begins to write) There...was...a...girl... (SQUALOR rises slowly out of the rubble upstage)
SQUALOR

Squalor's the name. Andrew P. Squalor. I deal in second hand hopes and discarded dreams. Can I be of any assistance to you folks? Just take your time, look around. We're open day and night. If you find anything you like, just let me know. Our prices are the lowest anywhere. Everything is dirt cheap. And if you don't happen to see what you're looking for, we've got plenty more items in stock. You interested in that book, my good fellow? Plenty of unusual stories in there. You like that old sign, young lady? It's yours practically for the asking. Take your time. No need to hurry. The world won't end tomorrow - ha ha!

(a slow fade to black. Offstage we hear the WORKERS singing, "Merrily, Merrily, Merrily, Merrily, LIFE!")

THE END
MACEDONIAN RAG

A play in one act

By G. Ciss
CAST FOR THE THESIS PRODUCTION:

Dionysus........................................Vladimir Velasco
Apollo..............................................John Juneiman
Cerberus.........................................Iraj Sami
The Keeper.......................................Harry Gadbow
Archelaus........................................Don Torgerson
Euripides, the Poet..............................Peter Mangels
Chorus.............................................Tom Morris
                                          Bill Greenland
                                          David Overturf
                                          Dave Smail
                                          Robert Burns

Directed by Rolland Meinholtz

This play was first presented as a thesis production at the University of Montana Drama Department's Masquer Theater, May 27, 1971.

TIME: The present

SCENE: The staging area, then the first level of hell.
SCENE I:

(Before rise, DIONYSUS enters. He is a glittering, bejeweled dandy in sequined tuxedo and top hat, numerous rings upon his fingers, and patent leather dancing shoes. In love with his own voice and body, he moves with feminine grace, speaks with immaculate and rather over-dramatic articulation. He prances about holding high an elegant brandy snifter from which he tipples now and then. He is a bit tipsy, just enough to evoke that alcoholic glow of synthetic cheer.)

DIONYSUS

Where is my magenta? Is this what they call magenta? This is not magenta, oh, no, no no no no. But this is only some diddling pink, or, closer perhaps to a faded salmon. I recall specifically stipulating magenta, and magenta it shall be, or else the show stops here. If I am to be bathed in this half-hearted wash, well, I simply cannot command the attention my part requires. Oh, one cannot, simply cannot, trust these vague-minded technical people to carry out even the most ordinary instructions. And, anyway, my complexion's so damned fair, well, magenta's the only light that shows me to my best advantage. Ah, but I suppose the art muddles along despite these distractions from within; and since you, darling patrons, have sacrificed your grubby pennies for the privilege of witnessing our meagre drama, it is not for me to stand in your way, I suppose. Alright, then, salmon it is, and on with the prologue.

I am the god Dionysus, otherwise known as Bacchus. If you should have any difficulty recognizing my face, you can always tell me apart from the lesser players by these. (He removes his topper revealing two stubby horns affixed to the top of his head) Oh, I know, well I know, how this trademark has been usurped in the popular mind by some miscreant upstart of an archangel in a different mythology. But, believe me, the prior claim is mine. I tell you, my friends, what a sad state of affairs it is when gods are deprived of their most personal symbols by the clamoring onrush of confused souls, trampling the old religions tried and true, arms outstretched to embrace any new theology - no matter how hair-brained. What can I tell you about myself you can't observe with your own eyes. Tall, suave, serene, lithe and sensuous me, the very darling of the heady Olympian set, having forsaken just now my absolutely heavenly little lair just crawling with lovely little naked boys and girls, am come before you in this dull, earthy atmosphere. Whisked from the bubbly pleasures of my absolutely marvelous new champagne fountain - Just had it installed today - I have only just arrived here, in answer to the most pitiful supplication on the part of some of my most ardent admirers. Theatricals you know, a director and some very sensitive and talented actors. That's Bacchus for you. Well, just ask any of the gods. Never too busy with pleasure to hear the bleating of the common man in the wilderness. Mmmm, but before we get to that I must tell you
this perfectly glorious story that was passing around in St. Tropez last summer. You've heard, of course, about that positively riotous bash on the beach? Well, it seems...

(There is suddenly a great flash and billowing of smoke and APOLLO appears, "ex machina". He is a stony-looking, hard-muscled fellow, resembling in every respect a "Kuros" figure from the Archaic period. He moves stiffly and speaks in formal commanding tones.)

APOLLO

Oh, I Apollo, fabled god of luminary realms, commander of

DIONYSUS

My stars! Must you create such a fuss?

APOLLO

Do you mind! (clears his throat) commander of the regions Helios roam in heat, am come...

DIONYSUS

Must you speak in iambic? What on earth are you doing here? Come down from there. That flying about is terribly distracting. Can't you tell I'm trying to deliver a prologue?

APOLLO (raising his voice)

am come to earth to shine with reason's light on mortal men.

DIONYSUS

You pompous stiff! What do you mean interrupting me like that?

APOLLO

It was Athena's gentle speech, protectress of her own and ancient namesake city, Athens by the sea, a town--

DIONYSUS (Scoffing)

Athens by the sea!

APOLLO

--which prospered once on Hellas' Aegean shore in sheltered peace.
DIONYSUS (in a burst of bubbling laughter)

Really, old boy. "Hellas' Aegean shore in sheltered peace." ---That sounds like one of those horrid travelogue featurettes.

APOLLO

She called with all her sweetest tones prevailing on my role as keeper of the heatless flame - illuminating truth, to shine its all-revealing glow through Academe's haze,

I must insure here these false events portrayed to pass herein be not mistaken for the very antiquary tales. (turns front) Know ye that a slandering mind doth lie behind the scenes, and all these words are planned deceptions, scoffing at the plights and histories of present times and ancient ones alike!

DIONYSUS

So, that's what's behind this positively bald display of effrontery. Well, you can just tell Athena and the rest of her archaic clique that any alteration in these, my revels, is simply out of the question. Besides, do you honestly imagine these good people are really here to oblige your stuffy obsessions? In very truth, Polly, I have never understood why you always disrupt my favorite festal happenings to bring up minute technicalities. Zeus knows, you bluster about as though a good romp in the grass with history were some sort of sacrilege. Why, you practically ruined the old dramas with your stiff-neck attitude about the myths. Now you come barging in here trying to deny me even my last little fling. Well, I won't have it. Do you here, Polly? I won't! I won't! I won't!

APOLLO (cool, smug)

Then rifle not the grains of truth that balance out the scale of justice, weighted one to one with poets' grains of spice; And let the grains of salt be sprinkled 'twixt them evenly; And that's a word of warning that I bear you from on high, spoken most judiciously by Zeus himself, whose hand, I may remind you, thunders strong against apostacy.

DIONYSUS

Rats! So he's in on it too, is he?

APOLLO

Necessity, still plunging her stout prow into the wind, still crashes always breaking through the waves adrift with men, and pulling mortals down in her swift undertow, at last; but we, the gods, are hale and constant swimmers, never lost.

We are suspended, changeless forms in times eternal toss. We rise and fall and mingle in the drift of temporal things.
and therefore are the stories of the dead of no concern to us, but that they give us pleasure in their sport of pain and death.

DIONYSUS (Starts to reply angrily, then a sudden idea hits him and he turns patronizing)

Very well, Polly, since you are here, you may accompany me.

APOLLO

Accompany you? What can you mean?

DIONYSUS

As I was about to tell the good people here, I'm on my way to hell.

APOLLO

To hell! Well, what scheming plot are you up to now?

DIONYSUS

Oh Polly, please! Have patience for goodness sake. Do you want me to get the exposition out or not?

APOLLO

Of course, of course, but can't you hurry it up a bit? Why in hell have you come to earth, and what on earth are you going to hell for?

DIONYSUS

You should know, Apollo, that tonight's a big night for me. Don't you remember? Tonight marks the start of the Festival of Dionysus - my revels.

APOLLO

Well, what of it? Nobody's thought to celebrate it in years.

DIONYSUS

Yes, Polly, that's just the point. Nobody on earth these days even gives a thought to poor old Donny-doo. All of my favorite worshipers have become - er - subterranean tenants.

APOLLO

And so?
DIONYSUS

And so I'm arranging a little celebration in my own honor.
(sings) "Fooor I'm a jolly good fellow
For I'm a jolly good fellow..."

APOLLO

Dionysus, I find this consumately preposterous.

DIONYSUS

Oh, come Polly, where's your sense of humor?

APOLLO

And where's your common sense. You ought to know that this modern arena for trendy theatricals is no place for any self-respecting god to be carousing.

DIONYSUS

Ah, but Polly, I do object. I do I do I do I do! It is, after all, quite customary and proper that my name-day be celebrated with a dramatic event.

APOLLO

Don't let me put you off, but I've a secret for you. These flaccid-faced personages did not, I assure you, come here to celebrate your name-day.

DIONYSUS

Why of course they did, only they just don't know it, that's all.

APOLLO

You are a dolt.

DIONYSUS

And you are a prig.

APOLLO

Tibbler!

DIONYSUS

Quibbler!

APOLLO

Snip!
Snoot!

Fop!

Flunkie!

Fucker!

Freudian.

Very. Fairy!

Your moral preconceptions are astounding anachronistic.

Thank you.

Now then, where was I.

Duping the public.

Oh, if you insist upon moralizing, just think of it this way: I am holding a surprise party. Only in this case, the guest of honor has surprised his hosts. Think of it as poetic justice.

Now that appeals to me.

And as a little peace offering, Polly, I, the guest of honor, hereby invite you to my celebration.
APOLLO (flattered)

Oh...well, thank you. Er, Bacchus, there is just one little thing, though.

DIONYSUS

Why, Polly, whatever can that be?

APOLLO (secretively, out of the corner of his mouth)

I wish you wouldn't call me that.

DIONYSUS

What?

APOLLO

You know, that. (whispering) Polly.

DIONYSUS

But Polly, what's a nickname between friends!

APOLLO

Yes, but word gets around. People talk. You know how it is. I myself am very open-minded about that sort of thing, but I've got a reputation to protect.

DIONYSUS

I do wish I knew what you're talking about.

APOLLO

I'm talking about my image, that's all. I don't want these gossiping moderns to think I'm...well, queer.

DIONYSUS

But in the old days they loved you for it! (suggestively) We all did.

APOLLO

Shh! The old days have nothing to do with it. They're gone by the boards - and forgotten!

DIONYSUS

Polly, you can't mean it! (tracing patterns on APOLLO's chest) How can you simply forget...
APOLLO (Awkwardly)

Er...stop that!

DIONYSUS (hurt, spiteful)

Well, Apollo, I can assure you your reputation is perfectly safe with me. (aside) If there's one thing in the world I wouldn't want to blow, it's his reputation.

APOLLO

Thank you. I feel much better about it, and I proudly accept your invitation. Now then, what kind of show have you got planned? Do you think you might work me into your business? Perhaps you can insert me ex-machina in the end.

DIONYSUS (coy)

Oh, perhaps I might work you into it sooner or later - if you promise you won't be too blunt.

APOLLO

I give you my word. I shall fit my part in as smoothly as I can. I shall act so naturally and move with such grace that it will touch you to the very heart.

DIONYSUS

I know it's true. You had such an immense talent!

APOLLO

Of course I shouldn't brag, but I do have a longstanding reputation in art, and - well, my artistic energies have been frustrated by long disuse. Pent up, if you know what I mean. (APOLLO looks sheepish, DIONYSUS pats him on the cheek, patronizing)

DIONYSUS

Very well then, you go off and prime yourself for the role while I finish setting the scene. I'll joining you in a second and reveal to you all my exposition.

APOLLO

Wonderful, wonderful. I can hardly wait for my entrance! (goes off)
DIONYSUS

Ah, what a delightful and penetrating performance this promises to be. Up to now the poor god's been totally confused by the Calvinist fad in morality. I think I shall enjoy watching him...unwind. And so, patrons, to hell with you, now. To hell with us all! Hell upon the earth! Hell upon the stage! Hell!

(Starts for his exit. Lights play eerily upon the stage. Barking and baying of dogs is heard as if from far away. The gate of hell appears, and through it lumbers CEREBERUS, a grisly, sneering figure with two heads...a double mask will suffice...and a long tale looped like a whip at his side.)

CEREBERUS

Wait up there, you god! Aren't you going to finish?

DIONYSUS

Finish? Finish what? Whoever in hell are you?

CEREBERUS

After all these years - all these years - and you still don't even know me. Well, I'm Cerberus. I'm your keeper of hell. I'm your stageman. It's me has to make up all the arrangements. And here you've become so involved with that other god you've forgotten to finish the prologue.

DIONYSUS

The prologue?

CEREBERUS

The very last detail. (Pause, sotto, impatient) The setting! The set!

DIONYSUS

Yes, yes. Of course. Well, then good patrons, I am only fulfilling my obligation when I tell you that we are now in hell!

CERBERUS

Not quite.

DIONYSUS

What?

CERBERUS

You're only at the gate.
DIONYSUS

Oh yes, at the gate - and aren't the techniques of eclectic staging a marvel!

APOLLO (from the wings, roaring)

What kind of staging?!

DIONYSUS

My, I forgot - to him eclectic is a dirty word.

APOLLO (threatening, off)

Remember, Dionysus, I am watching from the wings! If you don't know the prologue kindly join me before your dawdling commentary gets out of hand.

DIONYSUS (begging off)

Cerberus, you see what a huff he's in. Be a good fellow and finish up for me, will you?

CERBERUS

But you...

DIONYSUS

Thank you, you're a dear. The next hour is yours.

CERBERUS

But you...the next hour?

DIONYSUS

I'll make it up to you, if you give us a good show. A jar of my finest absinthe.

CERBERUS

But...

DIONYSUS

A case, the real thing. In one hour, the show! (exits)

CERBERUS

But you didn't even say what kind of play it's to be...oh, well. A case of absinthe, eh? That fellow's totally irresponsible. Still, old Morpheus, our director, couldn't object to it. Makes the stuff himself. And the show must go on. (suddenly laughs) A play in hell, how preposterous;
and these gods, what ridiculous creatures they are! A show - ah well, if
that's what they want that's what I'll give 'em. I'm obliged to do it,
of course, it's part of my contract. I think I know just how to do it,
but what a lot of nerve these Olympians have coming down here and invading
my territory. Well, old reliable Cerberus does what he's told. Matter
of fact, it might relieve the boredom. Well, what kind of show shall we
have? I could bore you with some static comedy like the one Aristophanes
once arranged. I could drill you with a morbid tradedy, but the essence
of my property - in my imagination, the only redeeming fault - is that
it is a farce with no serious substance. That, you see, is the reality
you can expect from me. Here's what I'll do: instead of setting up
dummy scenes or dramatic ping-pong conversation, I'll give you an ordinary
street scene. I won't ask you in, but I will open up the gate and give
you a little peek inside.

(opens the gate)

There you have it, the first street on the first level of the first
plateau in hell. (It is narrow alley strewn with refuse and overturned
trash barrels that look like fallen columns. The alley is walled on
both sides, curving off U.L. The wall on the right is broken by a
series of close set arches leading off R. On the left is a single, larger
arched entranceway supported by protruding posts and lintels and hung
with a heavy wooden door. The alley is lighted a musty amber by oil-
lamps suspended between the tops of the arches at right, and directly
above the entranceway at left.) Here on the high ground some of the
ancients hang out, and right here at the gate is a neighborhood that
should provide plenty of excitement - to novices like you. It's a
ghetto, of course; but the population changes according to pressures
from the outside. Right after World War II the Jews moved out and the
neighborhood was completely overrun by the current population. The Jews
moved down to the middle level. Some even got to the bottom. Isn't
that always the way? Some say there's a great apocalypse coming up above
and that's why things are getting turned upside down here. (shrugs)
I wouldn't exactly say it's impossible. The Calvinists just below us
have been screaming about a judgement day for some time.

Anyway this level closest to the stratum of the living is now populated
by a few wild artists and degenerates from the middle of the first
millenium - B.C. that is. They reflect the temperament of the time; and
if you've been paying close attention to what I've said, you'll see there's
very little relevance between their age and yours. Still they should make
a pleasing sight for both those silly gods. Apollo will appreciate their
unchanged "view of history;", for since their age they've been fossilized
between the walls of a dilemma. Dionysus, who dotes on decay, will love
the time from which they came, which - unlike today - hangs at the unraveled end of a long and intricate age. (He opens the great door at L.
From inside raucous laughter, groans, vomiting, and drunken celebration
can be heard. Above it all the gruff voice of ARCHELAUS of Macedonia
rants on)
ARCHELAUS (from within)
You country bitches, you stupid servants are going to learn some established manners yet, or my name isn't Archelaus of Macedonia!...which it is.

(A body suddenly comes flying through the door which CERBERUS holds ajar. It is a grimly amaciated old man, the KEEPER)

KEEPER (rises wheezing)
Guess he still don't reckonize me. (looks at CERBERUS) Don't I know you?

CERBERUS (produces an invisible watch)
Not yet. It's not time for the show yet.

KEEPER
What're you looking at? There's nothing in yer hand.

ARCHELAUS (bellowing from within)
You country bitches, you slobs! Where's your manners!

CERBERUS
Just a few seconds more.

KEEPER
Ain't you old Cerbery?

(CERBERUS' watch strikes twelve in a clarion voice)
KEEPER (guarding his ears from the deafening bell)
Is it midnight or noon?

CERBERUS
Now we can begin at the beginning.

KEEPER
The beginning of what? Is you or ain't you old Cerbery?

CERBERUS (disclaiming)
This is the hour the entertainment begins! (he steps through the open
door into a bathhouse-cum-bar which now becomes visible as the alley fades into darkness. The Keeper follows. Strewn about the place in various positions of debauch are the chorus of Macedonian peasants and slaves. In the middle of it all stands ARCHELAUS, an awkward, paunchy, middle aged king who is vainly trying to proceed with his declamations over the hubbub of the rabble)

ARCHELAUS

Silence here! Shut up! I'm warning you. That's better. And so, my loyal subjects, ever thinking of the official affairs that weigh so heavy on his shoulders, your king has prepared for tonight's New Year's celebration - prepared for the company of a learned man by undergoing a most unpleasant, but necessary, ordeal. Never let it be said the Archelaus was slack in his duty, but that for the poet's sake - and for the sake of his people - he marched forthrightly...to the bath. And, what I ask you, could be finer than the sweet smells of the civilized custom of bathing to lend the man the dignity his high office deserves. You may applaud. (a few half-hearted claps) Ah, thank you, thank you, your adulation does not pass unnoticed. Because the time is drawing near, I go now to the theatre; (almost in tears) but remember dear friends, the sacrifice your king has made for you.

CERBERUS

Why, if it isn't my old friend Archie!

KEEPER (fawning disgustedly)

You don't recognize me, your crownliness?

ARCHELAUS (to CERBERUS)

Don't call me Archie. (to KEEPER) Get away from me. Who is this creature?

KEEPER

Har-har he don't recollect my mug. (nose to nose with ARCHELAUS) No?

ARCHELAUS (with arched eyebrow)

Should I? (turns out, disgusted)

KEEPER (shrugs, turns away slightly disappointed)

I only thought p'raps ye might recollect...(sits, drinking from a wineskin)

CERBERUS

Archie...? Is it really you?

ARCHELAUS

Don't call me that.
CERBERUS

Archie?

ARCHELAUS

Cerberus! Shh! I'm working on a new image. Solid, respectable; you know. Times change and we must change with them. Besides, now that I've hit the big-time this gross familiarity toward me on the part of my underlings won't do. It'll just have to stop.

CERBERUS

Well, I am no subject of yours, and I never was. (sarcastically, with a little bow) But whatever pleases you...Mr. Archelaus.

ARCHELAUS (correcting)

Your highness!

CERBERUS

My ass! (The KEEPER burps)

ARCHELAUS (miffed)

I won't stand for crudity in my royal presence. Besides, if you're going to speak an elevated Greek name you might at least learn to pronounce it properly. You should follow my example. My grammar is impeccable.

CERBERUS (laughing it off)

Archelaus, what's Greek to you is not necessarily Greek to me. Never mind, though, I'll try to be a little more considerate of your...er, new image.

ARCHELAUS

Good. Well, after all, it's only what I deserve.

CERBERUS (raising his voice)

But remember, you've no power over me. You've no power over anyone any more. You are a dead man, a nothing constituted in bodily form - just like all the other citizens in hell - for the purpose of fulfilling a mythological creed!

ARCHELAUS (paranoidally looking about to see if anyone had overheard)

Cerberus, please!
CERBERUS

You're afraid aren't you? Afraid they'll find out that your magnificence is just as illusory as everything else in this place.

ARCHELAUS (haughtily)

Stop it. I command you to stop.

CERBERUS

Oh, very well, let's not talk about it any more. We've no time for arguing. (the KEEPER has fallen asleep, begins to snore) Besides, you and I both know you're not a king any more. There are no kings here. Hell is a democracy!

ARCHELAUS

Why Cerberus, that's unfair of you. I only consented to this little ordeal for the sake of the longstanding friendship and patronage of the Olympian gods, whose cosmology I stand by heart and soul.

CERBERUS

No more speeches! Whether you consented or whether you were ordered is of no importance. You'll go through with it. You'll do exactly as your told. It's fated you know.

ARCHELAUS

Fated is it? Do you think I'd let myself be pushed around by your outworn mythological trivialities? Suppose I had refused? Suppose I decided not to have died!

CERBERUS

It doesn't matter what you decide. God has spoken. He will have his show. And you will carry your part as you're obliged to. I am glad to see one of the dead standing up for his personal dignity, though. I must confess I've been judging you all wrongly. I thought you'd find this chance for glory irresistible.

ARCHELAUS

Glory...?

CERBERUS

I thought by appealing to your love of adulation I could talk you into this. But no, I see I was all wrong.
ARCHELAUS

No indeed, you won't trick me into doing your bidding. I'm much too smart for that. Don't forget, I spent my life maneuvering about in some pretty tricky political circles. Talk me into what?

CERBERUS (feigning defeat)

No, it really won't work. I thought you such a vain man that the chance to justify your life upon the stage, to show yourself a bold and cunning hero - in contrast to the way you're generally thought of - I thought this chance to stand forth and display your declamatory skill before all the dead of history would be too much for your overblown ambition to resist.

ARCHELAUS

Er, you did?

CERBERUS

Yes, but I see now, like all the others, I judged you wrong. You are a humble king and perfectly willing to let history go its course, undisturbed in your enlightened tranquility by being remembered as a murderer.

KEEPER (mumbling in his sleep)

Get back, get away you filthy beasties or I'll beat your bloody balls off. Balls...beat yer bloody balls...

ARCHELAUS (to the KEEPER)

What...what's that? What did you say? (the KEEPER resumes snoring)

CERBERUS

Ah well, I suppose Phillip will have to do it.

ARCHELAUS

Phillip!

CERBERUS

You remember Phillip, your son. The one who conquered the world. He always did cut a dashing figure as a hero.

ARCHELAUS

Phillip? That snivelling little bastard?

CERBERUS

A bastard, maybe, but then that sort of thing seems to be traditional in your family. And he is quite well known. He'll make a dandy attraction
as a special guest star, in the part of Archelaus of Macedonia.

ARCHELAUS

Phillip, playing me? Why, that's disgraceful! That little snot nose never did anything great. He wouldn't know what true greatness is.

CERBERUS

He was a conqueror.

ARCHELAUS

Baloney! All he ever did was to take advantage of my legacy. I set it up for him. I did all the work! It was my plan. And then, when I...er, passed out of the picture, it fell into his lap and he got all the credit! Luck, that's all it was. Luck!

CERBERUS

Nevertheless, he is well remembered, and he is a natural choice for the part of Archelaus. He looks rather like you, after all.

ARCHELAUS

Like me? With that weak chin? With that beak!

CERBERUS

Of course he might not play it exactly the way you would...

ARCHELAUS

Are you joking? He'd bungle it. He'd make me look like a buffoon.

CERBERUS

And he might be a little less than delighted at making you a hero - seeing as how he never was too fond of you.

ARCHELAUS

The bugger! Just because I executed his mother...

CERBERUS

But then we can easily change the script to suit him.

ARCHELAUS

What! No, I won't stand for it. He'd love to portray me as a fool! He'd make me a laughingstock and relish every snicker, every guffaw from the groundlings. He always was a ham.
CERBERUS

Nevertheless...

ARCHELAUS

I won't stand for it! I won't allow it! The part is mine; promise me!

CERBERUS

But you've renigged beforehand. You say Olympian mythology is trivial.

ARCHELAUS

Yes...?

CERBERUS

And since we're presenting our play before the very gods, well that's too trivial for such a lively king.

ARCHELAUS

I renig my renig! (a brief silence. ARCHELAUS pleading frantically) Please Cerberus, not Phillip! Please for old times' sake, for friendship's sake, me! Me!

CERBERUS (after considering a moment)

Wel-l-l-l-l - alright then for friendship's sake.

KEEPER (unconciously verbalizing through his dream)

Shi-i-i-i-i-i-i-it.....

CERBERUS (barking, suddenly angry and quite ferocious)

Wake up you fool! (ARCHELAUS flinches)

KEEPER (snaps awake)

What...sure..I guess...sure...

ARCHELAUS

Must you do that? Shout like that?

CERBERUS (speaks commandingly to all in the room)

I'm Cerberus, the head dog in hell. I want to be and the only reason I even want that is to show the dead I can do what I want.
(A silence. He has gained the attention of the entire crowd)

KEEPER (to ARCHELAUS)

What does he want?

ARCHELAUS

Ugh, keep away from me, you. You look diseased. (recoils)

KEEPER (backing ARCHELAUS downstage)

What's the matter, your kingship?

CERBERUS (slapping his own thigh)

Keeper! Here! (KEEPER immediately rushes to CERBERUS' side, eyes wide, mouth open, tongue hanging out. The crowd mutters in amazement.) Stay! (KEEPER freezes)

ARCHELAUS

It's disgusting.

CHORUS

Look at him.

ARCHELAUS

No!

CHORUS

Did you see? Who is the ugly one?

CERBERUS

Look at him. (all stare, transfixed) Who is he? Archelaus knows him.

ARCHELAUS

No, I've never seen him.

CERBERUS

He's the keeper of your dogs.

ARCHELAUS (turns away, avoiding CERBERUS' glance)

My dogs? Well, what's the matter with him?
CERBERUS

He's become just like them. Just like the dogs. The animals always master the man, in the end.

ARCHELAUS (feigning disbelief)

Is this...no, it can't be, my keeper...no! He's strapping, healthy, why he's...This is not my keeper. He was beautiful - more beautiful than Apollo.

CERBERUS (shrugs)

He lived on a long time before he came underground. A long time after you. He got old. He got stale. He got sour. He began to rot because he was overdue for the grave. His body knew it, but his spirit refused to acknowledge it. He took to drinking dark wine. That did him in. (the chorus laughs) Besides, Apollo isn't really all that beautiful, you know.

ARCHELAUS (staring at the KEEPER; absently)

What. He was never like that.

CERBERUS

That's just something out of your own imagination. But one is apt to idealize about one's lovers, I suppose.

ARCHELAUS

What! What do you mean? Are you suggesting that I...That he...? Stop this nonsense!

CERBERUS

Don't bother making a hypocrite of yourself, Archelaus, there's no keeping any secrets from Cerberus. (to the crowd) None of you has any secrets from me. Remember that. That's why I have power over you all.

ARCHELAUS

Alright...well sure, I had lots of lovers.

CERBERUS

You had six wives, nine concubines, thirty-six slaves, a brother a half sister, a sheep, a goat, five soldiers, and three (tone of easy finality) ...gentlemen.

ARCHELAUS (laughs thinly)

Heh! And I don't mind admitting, I liked that sheep the best of all. (the chorus laughs. ARCHELAUS takes a little bow, pleased with his joke.)
CERBERUS

You were rather free with your seed, but it came back to you in the end.  
(CERBERUS laughs alone)

ARCHELAUS

I suppose there's no harm in admitting I never wanted for much in that line.  What of it?

CERBERUS

Who are you now?  Nobody.  What do you do to pass away your eternity in hell?  Nothing.  Look, can't you see what I'm saying?  I'm not trying to cheat you or trick you into some joke, and I'm asking no favor from you.  It's I who am doing the favor.  What is death like for you?  You are given the chance - just once in an entire eternity mind you - a chance to try to be something again, for say an hour.  Take advantage, Archelaus, I give you this as a gift.  Fulfill your dreams, all of you, if you can do it.  Do what you've always wanted.  Live!

ARCHELAUS

Live?

CERBERUS

Yes, you can call it that.  What is life but to be alive in other mortal eyes?

ARCHELAUS

In hell?

CERBERUS

Yes!

ARCHELAUS

I...don't understand.

CERBERUS

I leave it to you, Archelaus.  We are commanded by the gods to give a play for mortals tonight.  What it's to be is up to you.  What did you want in life, really want, and never could attain?

ARCHELAUS (he starts to laugh, then suddenly breaks it off)

Do you really mean it?
CERBERUS

Think of the possibilities. One last dream of life for you. Yours, Achelaus, yours for the taking. How would you choose to spend it.

ARCHELAUS (he seems lost in a vision, but the sudden noise of dogs barking close by snaps him back to the present. the KEEPER, still frozen, begins to tremble and make little animal noises in the back of his throat. The dogs are getting louder)

What's he...Is he saying...something?

CERBERUS

Your dogs are hungry, Keeper. Does that disturb you? Of course it does. You're very attached to them aren't you? You worry about them when you're away from them. They're your only friends, aren't they? Go and feed them, Keeper. Go and keep your friends quiet. Guard this entrance, Keeper. Guard it with your dogs. Let no one come or go from here excepting I tell you otherwise. Go on, Keeper, go on. (the KEEPER hobbles off, dazed)

KEEPER

Sure! I understand. Sure.

(After a moment of silence ARCHELAUS runs out also. CERBERUS follows him calmly. The two become visible in the dim alley as the bathhouse scene fades into darkness)

ARCHELAUS

Why did you do that to me?

CERBERUS

Do what?

ARCHELAUS

Show them that...wreck. Humiliate me in front of my subjects.

CERBERUS

Did I invent the truth? No, I just claim the remains.

ARCHELAUS

Why? What's the point?
CERBERUS

The point is that he's necessary. The dogs are necessary. But I'm sure you know that already.

ARCHELAUS

The sacrifice!

CERBERUS

What?

ARCHELAUS

The poet. Euripides!

CERBERUS

He is in there. (indicating one of the archways at R.) What of it?

ARCHELAUS (in the ecstasy of a sudden invention)

The sacrifice.

CERBERUS

What sacrifice? What are you talking about that morbid fellow for?

ARCHELAUS

Eyeless, I remember, ragged trenches dug out of his flesh! I say him afterward. I couldn't eat for days.

CERBERUS

Ah, so he's still on your mind, is he?

ARCHELAUS (suddenly growing paranoidal)

I see through you, Cerberus. Yes, I see why you taunt me with life. You're enjoying the spectacle - watching the ruptured fish drown in the sudden air. Blind in the sudden light. Eyes, unprotected. You need victims. It's funny really. When I was alive I ran screaming every time death touched me. In hell I am tortured by life.

CERBERUS (offhandedly)

Yes, exactly. I need victims - but then I'm a victim, too. I am condemned to hell. We all have different tormentors according to our stations, according to our fears.

ARCHELAUS (weeping, as a child)

Why is that? Why is that? (the barking of dogs is heard again)
CERBERUS

Why? No reason. (Suddenly amused, he laughs raucously) No reason! No reason! (He walks off a bit, turns, speaks softly, commandingly) Stay here, Archelaus. Don't you move. Don't you move. I think we have quite a little show in the making. (Cerberus exits through an arch. Beyond he appears in a monastic-like cell in which the stately Euripides sits at a writing table. Behind him Cerberus stands silently)

POET (in a cracked, asthmatic voice)

Time passes, rhythms, ages breathing shallow
Hours, years. What differences does it make?
Minutes, centuries;
I'll be here.

ARCHELAUS

I had just turned the courtyard gate, coming out of my door when I first heard their barking.

CERBERUS

Was it warm that day? (The POET stirs from his musing)

ARCHELAUS

It was hot. It was sweet. The smell, the taste of the air.

CERBERUS

In a cart they hauled you up the hill road to my gate.

ARCHELAUS

Rocks, chuckholes. Broken flesh shook. It flopped. Part of a hand and a forearm...swinging like a pendulum. Struck the wheel, kept striking, knocking.

POET

Dead. I am dead.

ARCHELAUS

Behind him rocking improbably. The wheeled cage. (The DOGS are heard now)

POET (holding his ears)

the dogs!
ARCHELAUS

Beautiful in the morning. Clean morning. Beautiful animals. I didn't ask his love. I only asked his help.

CERBERUS (barking has grown very loud)

Here we have a memory - or two - worth playing. Poet, we are giving a play tonight - in front of us, living eyes, rapt. Mortals are among the dead tonight. We could employ your talents to entertain them, eh?

ARCHELAUS

Alive! (suddenly rushes about, looking for CERBERUS) Cerberus, where are you? You gave me my freedom to make a play. I have made up my mind. I have come to a decision.

POET

Is it some sort of devine plague?

ARCHELAUS

Clean, clean, beautiful dogs. Tonight we shall play a great drama, a sacrifice to Dionysus. Tonight we order the re-enactment of the death of the Poet! Cerberus! (CERBERUS suddenly appears in an archway before ARCHELAUS)

CERBERUS (with irony)

I'm so glad to see you've come up with something befitting the occasion. We have the original cast at hand, too. (smiling, he motions toward the POET. After an instant of hesitation, ARCHELAUS rushes in. CERBERUS laughs suddenly, coming downstage to speak with the audience.)

CHORUS(entering through the alley, U., dressed as musicians and sensuous dancers. They serpentine about chanting in ominous mode, underscorng CERBERUS' next monolog.)

Poet! Poet! Poet! Life, life, life upon the stage sounding through the underground. Free...bounding, alive again at last with a real, real hunger for justice. Justice, where have you been hiding? Justice, justice, how long can we defend you and how can we define you. Very much like his thirst, that flays from within!

CERBERUS (enjoying his own sense of irony)

Don't be bashful, don't be shy. Step right up and buy your chance to see the show of a lifetime - the all new, all subterranean, circus of the underworld. Never a show like it in the annals of theatrical history. Yes, we've got it all. Is it violence and bloodshed you like? Is it the dramatic play that leaves you gripping the edge of your seat with beads of perspiration clinging to your brow? Is it comedy and clowns or
dazzling feats of an acrobatic nature? Yessir, yes ma'am we've got it all. Now you may have thought you saw it all, but until you see this, my friends, you ain't seen nothing. You say you like to see the tart little dancing tangerines? Well, we've got 'em and they'll pop your eye out, knock your wig right off your head. Every seat in the house is a first rate seat for a dizzying, dazzling eyeful, and it's all yours, my friends for just a nominal fee. (the CHORUS exit into the bathhouse, in serpentine, with the noise and ado of drunken revelry) You say you're still not convinced? Well, let me tell you about our special feature, the death of a poet. Yes my friends, you won't want to miss this historic re-enactment of the event that shook the ancient world. See the legendary poet played by himself, ripped to pieces by the royal hounds of Macedonia. See for yourself the bloody punishment of the gods upon a defiant man. Yes, you citizens of hell, it's a show for the entire family. So don't be bashful, don't be shy. Step right up and let yourself be entertained.

(DIONYSUS and APOLLO enter through the alley, U. They are drunk and making a poor attempt at harmonizing.)

DIONYSUS

"I'm forever blowing bubbles..." You see, Polly, it's just as I told you. The celebration is getting under way. We're just on time.

APOLLO

Please don't call me that. Now then you still haven't shown me where my part comes in.

DIONYSUS

Please, please, my dear god, don't be so impatient.

CERBERUS

Hey, you fellows, do you want to miss the opening? The show is starting this very minute.

APOLLO

Who's he?

DIONYSUS

Cerberus! My old friend, well - well- well, have a sip of brandy.

CERBERUS

No thanks. You're missing the chorus girls.

DIONYSUS

Oh that's just folderol for the public.
APOLLO

Chorus girls?

CERBERUS

That's right. (he does a little dance) Angel Agave and her Musical Maenids. They wiggle and giggle and dance around bare as you're born. Enticing enough little chorines to make any man lose his head. He he. (goes off L. dancing)

APOLLO (almost boyish)

Gee, I'd like to see that!

DIONYSUS

Oh Polly, don't be pedestrian. These little peep performances are simply concessions to the dull conventional mortal taste.

APOLLO (crestfallen)

Oh.

DIONYSUS

We gods aren't interested in such things.

APOLLO

We aren't?

DIONYSUS

No.

APOLLO

Why not?

DIONYSUS

Because, Polly, that kind of ludicrous lasciviousness is a trait that is confined to those who are hemmed in by insipid human morality. But we, the gods, are above such gross forms of pleasure, aren't we.

APOLLO

Why...er...yes. I guess.

DIONYSUS

You guess? Why Apollo, I'm hurt. I really am. You don't mean to tell me that you are actually excited by the possibility of the decadent spectacle of a bunch of fat naked women flapping around on a stage.
APOLLO

No, of course not. Just...well, a little curious, that's all.

DIONYSUS

I mean, it's alright with me, Polly, if you want to immerse yourself in such womanish delights.

APOLLO

Womanish?

DIONYSUS

Why of course. That sort of thing is designed for women - as a way of sneering at males who fall for such kinds of feminine trickery. Displaying their flabby breasts and wriggling their rumps! Really!

APOLLO

I don't get it.

DIONYSUS

Why, Polly, it's simple. By flaunting these anatomical appendages and pretending that they are objects for admiration, the female human being actually fools the male, into believing that she is a desirable possession, when actually she knows she is quite an uninviting accident of creation. Men may fall for that sort of thing, but of course, we, the gods, can't be duped like that.

APOLLO

No. I see your point. You are right. They can't fool us.

DIONYSUS

That's the spirit, Polly. Don't be a sap for feminine trickery. Show them that we male gods will not be pulled down into their pit of deception! That we men can take care of each other, (with a wry smile, in sotto voice) and we can, too, if we pull together. So resist temptation, Polly - and come with me instead.

APOLLO

Come with you? Why should I come with you? Where are we going? I thought you wanted to see the show?

DIONYSUS

Now Polly, don't be so stubborn. They're just going through the preliminaries, the cheesecake stuff.
APOLLO
But you promised me a chance to employ my talents, to be an actor.

DIONYSUS
You shall have it, Polly, you shall have it. That's why I want you to come with me. So that we can get together over it in private!

APOLLO
That's a grand idea. Off we go then, an actor must prepare! (they go off)

POET (enters, followed by ARCHELAUS)
It is too close in there.

ARCHELAUS
Why are you so anxious? What can they do to you now?

POET
That's the question I keep putting to myself.

ARCHELAUS
The moment approaches when the centuries will be wiped away, and we will come face to face with life again.

POET
With the politics, the pain, the maddening futility...Even in hell one does not lose the capacity for revolt! (He begins to exit but ARCHELAUS blocks his way)

ARCHELAUS
Poet!

POET (looking off R.)

Dogs! Look at the dogs! What is this?

DOGS (the Chorus, off R.)

Poet! Poet! Poet!

POET (clutching his head)

What a racket!

ARCHELAUS
Poet! Poet! Poet!
POET (laughs)

Are you calling my name, dogs? That's what it sounds like. Are you trying to feed on me again? But I am already dead. (laughs)

ARCHELAUS (shouting toward the racket)

Oh, you stupid beasts! Be quiet!

POET

Monsters! Why can I never escape your noise? Escape? Ha ha! Not unless in a careless moment the gateman chanced to leave his gate ajar!

DOGS

Poet! Poet!

KEEPER (off)

Quiet now, you stupid cock suckers, or I'll let you have it good. (the dog barking abates) Yousee? I have 'em under control. Nothing to worry about, Sir. I hope they didn't scare the shit out of you.

ARCHELAUS (shaken)

Frighten me? No, of course not. Only...

KEEPER

Yes?

ARCHELAUS

Can't you take them away from here? We've got business to discuss.

KEEPER

Oh no, I'm sorry, Sir.

ARCHELAUS (infuriated)

What?

KEEPER

I'm fearful sorry sir. That can't be did. You see, old Cerbery hisself ordered me to keep 'em here. He said so most specifically.

ARCHELAUS

I heard every word, you fool; but they're interfering with important preparations. Listen, Keeper, tonight there's a play in honor of the gods. Do you understand?
KEEPER (entering)

Oh? What's that?

ARCHELAUS (with a glance at the POET)

Why, "The Bacchae" by Euripides, perhaps.

KEEPER (laughs and scratches his chin)

Is that so...Is that so...Never heard of it myself. Of course, me, I ain't exactly the cultured type, but I seen some plays once.

POET (to ARCHELAUS)

Let me pass. (ARCHELAUS steps aside. POET makes toward the audience, the KEEPER grabs his arm)

KEEPER

No, can't do that, sir. Most regretful, but no one is to enter or leave, by order of Cerberus hisself, and then of course, orders is orders as they say. (to the DOGS) Behave yerselfs my little sweeties.

DOGS

Poet! Poet! Poet!

ARCHELAUS

You see my hounds are guarding the gate of hell tonight. It would be wise to heed the Keeper's warning. Poet, they love the taste of flesh. Yes, Poet, they do love flesh.

POET

But I am a ghost. So are all of us. There's no threat of pain or death for one ghost to hold over another, is there?

ARCHELAUS

Yes, we are, Poet. Ghosts. Images of ourselves. Then why don't you try it. Go on, escape. Perhaps a ghost can pass into the living world; but if you can cross the border, so can I. (POET suddenly laughs to the sky)

POET

So I'd be the bait to test for your escape, and if I succeed in breaking my own exile here, insure you safe passage to the other side? Shall I do it? Break for the crack in hell's battlements and risk a swim on the Styx? For what? To come up breathing the life-infested air with you snapping close at my heels? That would be a wretched kind of escape, wouldn't it? Wherever you are, Archelaus, there is death with it's overpowering stench. No, I don't think so, but I gladly reverse the dare and invite your highness into the same trap.
ARCHELAUS (to the KEEPER)

Get out of here. This discussion's private. (the KEEPER goes, mumbling to himself)

POET

Well, King Archelaus, you're as much a ghost as I; why don't you try it?

ARCHELAUS

And why should I benefit you, you coward? Why should I risk God knows what manner of punishment to prove it's safe for you to follow?

POET

A coward, am I? Are you afraid of your own filthy beasts?

ARCHELAUS

Afraid? No, but I don't need to go to any such lengths. I've just told you what's stirring in hell tonight. I've already gained all the reprieve I need. Why should I go to all that trouble when life has come to me with no effort?

POET

For only an hour.

ARCHELAUS

An hour's all I need to fulfill my ambition.

POET

What ambition?

ARCHELAUS (after a pause)

I want to be a hero in their eyes.

POET

What eyes?

ARCHELAUS

The living ones that watch us from the dark tonight.

POET (laughing)

Now I can add madness to revolt, for feelings that persist after death.
ARCHELAUS

Laugh if you like, but all I've said is true.

POET

Supposing it is? Even so, how does the murderer plan to acquire his glorius status? Nothing forgives your previous corruption. There's not enough pardon in the world to redeem you as a hero, no matter what ridiculous spectacle you've contrived. Come, Archelaus, you always professed your love of life. Why don't you prove it now? Run, Archelaus. Life is tempting you, brave Archelaus. I can see it in your eyes.

ARCHELAUS

Why should I care about any of that? I haven't lost anything, I've gained. Yes, death has given me a great opportunity. I can correct the mistakes history made with my reputation. We can recapture the glory I've been robbed of. Tonight I am going to be the hero of a drama. I am going to dance and sing and rejoice in the honor of a god. Don't you see the superb irony in that. There's life in hell!

CERBERUS (entering in a huff)

Gentlemen, gentlemen, what's keeping you? Everythings set. The audience is waiting for the main attraction. They're getting restless, I can't stall them much longer. Come on!

POET

I can't. I can't.

CERBERUS

What's he mean? What is he talking about?

ARCHELAUS

Hey, poet, come and help me change history tonight.

POET

Don't be a fool. There can be no glory for any of us now.

ARCHELAUS

Oh, but there can be!

CERBERUS

Listen, I haven't got time to stand here prattling. I still have to round up the Keeper. (aside to ARCHELAUS) You get him in there. I don't care how you do it. We're running late already. (hurries off)
(A long silence. ARCHELAUS stares at POET in cold, slow-creeping horror)

POET (laughs metalically)

This is thorough absurdity. I can't stand it. I'm going. I'm going to retreat to the deepest, darkest corner of hell. (starts to leave)

ARCHELAUS

You always run away, don't you...Poet. You always choose exile over action. You are a coward and a heretic, are you...Poet?

POET (having stopped in his tracks)

How can you dare to speak to me like that?

ARCHELAUS

Turn around. Look at me. Face me and say it again. I'm not afraid. Face me, and remember who it was that saved you when the Athenians threw you away like dung. Are you indeed made of dung.

POET

Athens is a holy name. Athens is holy. Holy!

ARCHELAUS

Athens, (laughs) the golden pig that pissed on you!

POET

Athens was my home, my mistress, my mother. My memory.

ARCHELAUS (as to a child)

Athens, whose solemn gods demanded a war that you could not abide. And so, you came to me. It was you wasn't it? You came to Aegea where I ruled by the grace of a newer god, a god named Dionysus, a self-sufficient god who did not need, would not abide, the heresy of other gods. Do you remember what I told you then? Stick with me, I said. With me. You will help to change the world. Sit with me in Macedonia, I said, and we will quietly watch the Athenian League strangle itself to death in the web of their stupid little war. And was I right? Was I right? (a silence) And yet you still wouldn't serve me.

POET (wheels on ARCHELAUS)

I served you well. (sarcastically) I wrote a great work in your honor. I made you a hero. I lent your name the profound esteem of legitimacy, even though all the world knew you were a bastard. You're almost cowering. Look at you. Have you brought your fear underground with you, too?
And...and when we learned that the coffers at Delos were empty, when we knew the Athenians were dead, there was rejoicing in the streets. (the barking of the Macedonian hounds is heard from off stage) There were offerings and dancing dedicated to our patron god, who set us free from the Athenian pigs with their tribute and their swaggering posture of superiority. Do you hear me?

POET (screaming)
We are dead! It's all forgotten!

ARCHELAUS (the words suddenly tumbling out)
And then, as the hour of my glory was imminent, I came to you again. I told you: Poet, our god has blessed us. Our god has given us a sign. We will be the conquering messengers of his faith. We will rule all of Greece in his name.

POET (a lament - a wail)
The jackals always wait to claim the rotting waste.

ARCHELAUS
You spat in my face. You turned on me and my god. You villified him - a cold, sarcastic heresy. You turned your back on me. You laughed at me!

You robbed me of everything!

POET (laughing madly)
I wrote one last, great play.

ARCHELAUS
And so I did what I had to do. I punished apostacy as apostacy must always be punished; but do you think I enjoyed it?

POET
I had to make an apology, the grandest apology the world had ever seen.

ARCHELAUS
Do you think I like being known as a murderer? Do you think it pleases me now, being known as the man who killed...(almost spitting the words) the great Poet!

POET (almost sympathetically)
I expect not. I...expect not.
ARCHELAUS (pleading)

Give me my chance. Redeem me...Save me.

POET

It's all over. Our lives are past. What we have done is frozen in time.

ARCHELAUS

But tonight - before the eyes of the gods and all the dead of history, there can be at least an imitation of life. Oh, it's not real, I know. It's only a dream, too fluid and too far away for the real world to grasp; but listen, Poet, unbelievable as it sounds, the mortal world is watching tonight. Let us at least try to make our peace for their sake. (a silence) We shall go upon the stage. You needn't prepare. There's no need to wear the cothurnae or the buskin any more. We shall go in front of the multitude of the dead and the living alike, and we shall make a startling revelation; that you, Euripides, the ancient honored poet, renounce your apostacy; that you bless the god, Dionysus; that you praise him and all who have lived and died in his name. (a silence. ARCHELAUS is pleading pitifully) Poet, I want to be a hero in their eyes.

(The gods enter downstage. APOLLO is angrily pursuing DIONYSUS, who is not a little shaken)

APOLLO

Now I know. Now I know what kind of a god you are!

DIONYSUS

Now Polly, don't be angry.

APOLLO

You're afraid of my pull with the boss, are you. With all your fancy talk and your fru-fru manners, trying to bedevil me into...an unnatural act!

DIONYSUS

I don't see anything unnatural about it at all.

APOLLO

You, with your brandy and your honeyed tones! Your false promises about putting me on stage! I ought to fix your wagon right now.

DIONYSUS

Now, my dear fellow, let's not resort to violence.

APOLLO

I am not your dear fellow and don't you forget it!
ARCHELAUS

You there, you strangers, what are you doing here? This is a private conversation.

APOLLO

You faggot!

DIONYSUS

Shhh, Polly, there are mortals present. They shouldn't see us arguing.

APOLLO (whispering)

Then stop calling me that ridiculous name!

ARCHELAUS

Get out of here, you two!

APOLLO

How dare you use that tone on me, you insignificant ghost! I am the god, Apollo, and I'll have you transferred to Calvinist hell!

POET

You are...?

APOLLO

That's right. Apollo, the keeper of the light of truth and common sense. And this...this bedraped pervert here is Dionysus, your erstwhile stage entrepreneur of hell.

DIONYSUS

Polly, please!

(CERBERUS enters with the KEEPER. CHORUS of dogs are making a great deal of racket.)

CERBERUS

Come on, Keeper, hurry. You're probably late for your entrance already.

KEEPER

Sorry sir, I only went around back so's I could catch the girlies doing their number. Mighty fine, too.

CERBERUS

What's going on here? You gods, why aren't you inside, watching the show?
APOLLO

What show? There's no show. This pretender was only trying to hustle me behind the theatre.

(The DOGS begin to bark anew)

ARCHELAUS

Ah, but I assure you, divine sirs, there is indeed going to be a show. And most glorious a one, too.

CERBERUS

Archelaus! Why aren't you in there performing? Oh, this is terrible!

KEEPER

Hey, is them guys really divinitaries?

DIONYSUS

Can't someone keep those hideous beasts quiet?

CERBERUS

Keeper, please! Try to shut them up.

KEEPER

Stop yowling, you canine carcases, or I'll shove this stick up yer gazoo! Stop it I said!

CERBERUS

That's better. Now maybe we can figure out what's happening here.

APOLLO

It's very simple, Cerberus. We are all the victims of a gigantic hoax perpetrated by this horny humbug here.

DIONYSUS

That's not true!

APOLLO

No? Then what about the part you promised me?

DIONYSUS

Well...er...I meant every word of it!
CERBERUS (scratching his head)

What! You mean to tell me he's been written in?

DIONYSUS (frantically motioning for CERBERUS to go along with it)

Yes, exactly! You see, Polly? I'm keeping my word. Now don't be angry with me.

ARCHELAUS

Splendid! This is wonderful. The honor of a lifetime - may I say the honor of a life time for me. To appear as the hero of a drama on the stage with an actual god!

DIONYSUS

Wait a minute, aren't you Archelaus, the fellow that used to worship me in Macedonia a few years back?

ARCHELAUS

He remembers. He remembers me!

CERBERUS (confidentially to ARCHELAUS)

What about the poet here?

ARCHELAUS

It's all settled.

APOLLO

Euripides! Now there's a mortal I've always wanted to meet!

DIONYSUS

Oh, Polly, how can you even bother with him? He's a mere juggler of words, a piddling playwright with a propensity for popping off at the mouth.

APOLLO (wiping his eye)

Nevertheless, he is just the man to write in my part.

DIONYSUS

Why Polly - I mean Apollo - what a brilliant idea!

CERBERUS

Yes, yes, of course. That's it. You all work it out while I go and announce the beginning of the main attraction, the death of the Poet.
ARCHELAUS

Cerberus wait! There's...uh...just one catch.

CERBERUS

Catch?

ARCHELAUS

Yes. He won't go on unless we change the script.

CERBERUS

Change the script?

ARCHELAUS

Exactly! So, instead of announcing the death of the Poet, you must proclaim the salvation of the Poet (a pause, CERBERUS searches ARCHELAUS' eyes confused) This one ripe season in an eternity of isolation, I shall reach out. I shall grasp it. The sweetest fruit in the garden. Freedom from guilt, grace, peace at last. Peace finally. A millenium of peace to the end of the world.

CERBERUS (transfixed by ARCHELAUS' eyes)

Alright, anything, only hurry up and get ready, for heaven's sake. (starts to go off, turns back to ARCHELAUS a second, then wheels and exits)

ARCHELAUS

Fine, fine, now we must get to work quickly. Time is short.

DIONYSUS

Yes, do get started and break a leg! (tries to escape APOLLO's grasp)

APOLLO

Where are you going?

DIONYSUS

Why, out front to see the show. It is in my honor, after all.

APOLLO (menacingly)

In your honor indeed!
DIONYSUS (mops his brow, smiling weakly)

Now now, old fellow, you mustn't break concentration. You must save yourself for your part. Remember, all those eyes will be on you, star of the show! (APOLLO releases him, turns away pondering the proposition delightedly) I'll be watching. Tah-tah! (he exits hurriedly, with a sigh of relief.)

APOLLO (after a moment)

Well, then, Mr. Playwright, what have you got up your sleeve? Something worthy of a divine, I trust. A part that will show off my considerable talents to good advantage. Oh, I understand it's hard to come up with a masterpiece on such short notice, but perhaps you could just throw in a good ex-machina ending, an epilogue. (the POET, who all this time has been staring off blankly, only stares at the god strangely, silently.) What's the matter with him?

ARCHELAUS

Oh, it's nothing - nothing, sacred sir. Why, you know these temperamental artists. The wheels of his mind are turning. For you, he is creating a piece-de-resistance epilogue, a role of staggering intensity.

APOLLO

Well, what is it, Poet? What do you say? Speak man, time is pressing. I, Apollo, god of the ancients, command you to speak.

ARCHELAUS

Tell him! Tell him! (his words are echoed by the CHORUS off)

POET (after a pause, haltingly)

Of the Poet, you will say that in life he was a coward. That when he saw the hounds of hell released upon the earth, he was horrified, and he ran from them.

ARCHELAUS

Splendid. Powerful.

POET

That he ran away from war, as some men run away from life, grasping at an ephemerical notion of the gods, but that he was mistaken. Tell them he was wrong to think that there is anything to live for, least of all an art that is, by it's nature, apostacy. That I had not the right...

APOLLO

Go on.
ARCHELAUS

You're doing fine.

POET

...had not the right to protect my life. That I lived in ignorance and shame. That when I died I was not consumed by Archelaus' dogs, but like a whore, consumed by black diseases of the mind. And lastly tell them... that I died before I ever set foot upon his precious Macedonia's shore.

ARCHELAUS

No, wait. That's not right. Tell him you came to me. You were mine. You believed in me, you loved me. That you renounced the god Dionysus, but now in death you repent. Tell him! Tell him!

APOLLO (knits his eyebrows suddenly as if pondering a difficult puzzle whose solution is imminent)

No, wait. Do you say that the art of the stage is an apostacy? Do you mean to tell me that I have consented to participate in an unholy affair? That I have to say that speaking through the very art that I'm condemning? It's a trick! A trick, a trick of words by God! That's what it is and Apollo will not be tricked.

ARCHELAUS

That's not what he meant to say. That's not what he meant at all.

POET

That is what I meant. (He laughs) That is exactly what I meant!

ARCHELAUS

No, Poet, it's a lie!

APOLLO

A lie? Well, that settles it. Can a god of my repute go around telling lies in front of the public?

ARCHELAUS (shaking the POET by the shoulders)

It's a lie! It's a lie!

APOLLO

Hmph! I see it all clearly, now. And to think I was almost duped by that cad Dionysus again!
CERBERUS (entering)

Come on! What's keeping you? The people are beginning to walk out!

APOLLO

Well, you can just let them go.

CERBERUS

But... all that work, all that time, all that trouble - for nothing?

POET

That's right, for nothing. The voices of the dead are silent. We have nothing to say, nothing to believe, nothing to doubt. Those things are the plague of the living.

DIONYSUS (entering)

Polly, why aren't you going on? People are leaving. The whole theatre is emptying out!

APOLLO

There is not going to be any performance, Dionysus.

DIONYSUS

But Polly, how shall we ever be reinstated in the modern favor of mortals unless we show them? Unless we demonstrate our power?

CERBERUS (exits moping)

Something is happening in the worlds. Something's out of tilt in the universes.

APOLLO

Dionysus, come with me. I want to have a little talk with you! (APOLLO exits, towing DIONYSUS by the ear)

ARCHELAUS (Losing his co-ordination, moving like a marionette he dances about absurdly. Half sings, nonsensically)

Poet, your king would be the hero of a drama. (silence) The hero is the happy man of Aegea, the king whose kindness saved the Poet's life. And here in Aegea, Bacchus, our god, and all his worshippers approve, and dance for joy at Archelaus' invitation. POET! I want to be a hero! But not one of your tragiv kind with their insidious faults of self-righteousness. No, it must be a melodrama, the kind you do so well. The happy ending, that's the important thing. Poet! (heavily) Do you love your king?
POET

Love you? If I do then the feeling is washed by the strong disgust you bring out.

ARCHELAUS (whimsical again. We get the feeling that his reason is fast evaporating)

The Athenian League loves us. Also they love our timber and our mines.

POET

Too bad, though, isn't it, that the Athenian League is dead?

ARCHELAUS (dashed to the ground as if by a wind. Disparing)

It's not true!

POET

It's true! It's true! The coffers at Delos are down to nothing. There was to be a chaos down the Aegean coast.

ARCHELAUS (sits up, rocks to and fro like a child)

Well then, I will sit here in my fortified city; I, Archelaus, will sit here in Aegea until the gates of hell are opened up for the pleasure of watching them struggle it out; rather like watching an ant war at the bottom of a ravine. That is my ambition. Isn't that a hero's ambition, Poet? Isn't that a hero's ambition if you ever heard one? Why won't you play the play, Poet? (a short silence)

POET

I have made my last play to show the world your Bacchae and your comely rituals.

ARCHELAUS (an odd gleam in his eye. His voice becomes at the same time naive and seductive)

I know, and they were fine pieces of work. The cold is still closing in tonight. I think I would like to sleep. Maybe I will dream about my second wife that died. Maybe I will dream about life, about an empire. Isn't it a night for living, for forgetting death? Listen, you can almost hear the singing of the people in the streets on this merry mad night. And the dogs, they are still and sleeping. The waters around Aegea running more hushed than before. Is it not a perfect night? The future, full of lovely dawn, is suspended above us, waiting for our energies to bring the beautiful dance to its fitting end...whatever end we choose. For we are men, are we not, of higher stature than the rest, men of energy and vital moving force?
POET

Archelaus, I am growing weary, I must confess, and I want to go back to my rooms. (the dogs' baying has modulated into silence)

ARCHELAUS

No, wait, poet, and listen to my entertaining speech. (recites like a schoolboy) It's a little before the fall of Troy, whom you have eulogized so well. The years of seige have rushed by like rolling thunder, because as everyone knows, time is short when one looks into the poet. In any case, the victory is near when two beloved warrior generals, tenting together, Greeks of course, fall into a tragic situation. I recite you now from Homer...

POET (gentler, almost with compassion)

Please, my sovereign, anything but that! You see, I simply am not up to lessons in the classics at this hour of the night.

ARCHELAUS (after a silence. His voice low.)

I see. (a silence) Who is that behind you, there in the shadow?

CERBERUS (stepping forth boldly)

It is me.

ARCHELAUS

Are you there? Yes of course, it is you, isn't it? Well, and do you know the gift I have offered this man tonight? The gift of life, of salvation.

CERBERUS

Yes, I know.

ARCHELAUS

And, of course, you knew how it would work out from the first.

CERBERUS

Yes, that's true. I always knew.

ARCHELAUS (extremely angry - a childish anger)

And how did I let you persuade me into this?!

CERBERUS

You persuaded yourself, didn't you?

ARCHELAUS (genuinely confused for a moment)

see that he thinks of my plan, old Cerberus. Do you see?
CERBERUS

Yes, I see.

ARCHELAUS (paranoid raving, a tone of righteous indignation)

Then, why don't you instruct the exile in a point of fact for me.

CERBERUS

Instruct him?

POET

What is your point?

ARCHELAUS

Tell him that a tide, a murderous tide is hiding below calm water in Macedonia. Tell him that a god has spoken among the revelers tonight and pointed their lusts toward some seemingly perverse end. A man will be slain, torn to shreds in the heat of the frenzy. (ARCHELAUS who has been edging toward an exit during this last speech, turns and is suddenly gone)

POET (glides, soars, his voice a mixture of fatalism and indignation)

Tell the king that I am sure I'm not amiss. Tell him that I know this god well and he does not frighten me. Lastly, return his instruction in proper behavior - in proper Greek, with the errors omitted.

CERBERUS

I can't. He's gone, and I'm going too. Into the darkness. The hour is nearly up. It's just as well. We are safe in the dark. We are safely dead. Life is a curse in hell. I guess - I guess it doesn't belong. (he pauses a moment, then disappears into shadows. The gods enter)

DIONYSUS

Faggots of the world unite! Throw off the bondage of narrow masculinity! Embrace the fuller, happier life!

APOLLO

Your participle's dangling...or something.

DIONYSUS

Well, but after all my dear fellow, what is there to public persuasion but to follow the most generally popular fads of syntax?
APOLLO

Still it doesn't make any sense. Fuller than what? That what happier?

DIONYSUS

Why, than being bound by those insipid man-made traditions.

APOLLO (stiffening)

Now Dionysus, we've already come to some agreement. Let us leave it at that and not go picking quarrels or....Perhaps you do not know what you are saying.

DIONYSUS

And perhaps I do.

APOLLO

These traditions are not to be tampered with.

DIONYSUS

How is it I never saw so clearly before what a dullard you really are! Polly, Look! (pointing to POET)

APOLLO

Don't call me that!

DIONYSUS

Why is he just standing there?

APOLLO

What are you doing there? Have you anything to say? Then out with it if you have.

DIONYSUS

He doesn't seem to hear.

APOLLO

Of course he hears. He's only an actor, after all. He's only making a pretense of existence. He's not really there; there's nothing really there but a liquid art. Too soft and fluid to capture, ever.

DIONYSUS

Or else too hard and stable to be organic. But either way, it is definitely not real, only a shadow of hell.
APOLLO

But we have brought it to life before these mortal eyes. Yes, and that was a mistake. What do you say, you dull earth-bound creatures? Answer me. Aren't you impressed by the power of the gods? We have showed you how we punish the faithless. Olympian justice is complete. Ah! You dull, silent, stupid, modern people. Listen to the words of Apollo, the justice bearer! (the dogs' baying can be heard again growing steadily louder)

DIONYSUS

Tell them, Polly, tell them

APOLLO

Tell them what?

DIONYSUS

The arrangement. Tell them what we've decided.

APOLLO

I'm coming to it. Be still. People who dwell on the earth, people who grub through your lives, inevitably bound to death, you are all the perpetrators of a grave apostacy.

DIONYSUS

Yes, you have forsaken the gods in favor of your own stupid rituals.

APOLLO

You have forsaken the old, the meaningful myths in favor of your modern idolatry; you are conspirators as pernicious as the conspirators in hell.

DIONYSUS

And for you we have designed a punishment that is equal in justice to theirs. Tell them. Tell them.

APOLLO

Olympian justice is quick and final. Our decision is without appeal. Now, as for Cerberus, the Keeper of Hell, we grant his fondest wish. The celebration is henceforth ended. No more joy. No more forgetting. Everlasting darkness.

DIONYSUS

From Archelaus, the ambitious politician, all hope, all chance of salvation, banished.
APOLLO

For all the remainder of human history, let his memory be anathema.
Let his deed stand as the gateway that brought hell upon the earth...

DIONYSUS

Yes, hell upon the earth - and this is the best part...

(as the hounds' baying grows eminently close,
the gods react with visible uneasiness. We
get the feeling they are cutting short their
parts in order to make a quick exit)

APOLLO

...for upon you, you cowering fools who by your silent watching have
given your consent to this apostacy - this play - we bring a curse that
is everlasting out of the gate of hell. We release upon the earth the
royal hounds to torment you. Now necessity is clear. I turn my back
on these proceedings. I turn my back and away to stately Olympia.

DIONYSUS

And I'm afraid I've had my fill of all this. It turned out so mundane
after all. The glades are calling me, alive with singing and magical
celebration. Away I fly as light as clouds in summer. But, oh Polly,
couldn't we do it again? Couldn't we do it again sometime? (exuent
the two gods)

CHORUS (entering as dogs from R., they dance,
chant and growl in an ominous rythem)

We are the hounds of Macedonian justice.
Our drool is mixed with blood and sinewy strings
of flesh from living thighs and pulsing entrails.
We hunger for meat, we howl for blood, we lust for flesh,
and we'd love to find you in our jaws sometime.
If you go into hiding or exile to escape us,
we'll track you down and bring you down with snapping, jagged jaws.
You cannot call it war, what we are doing.
We only kill to take what's due our race.
The vengeance we rehearse today is ancient.
It harkens back to times when men were brutes
who stumbled 'round a fire below an altar,
in worship of some violent god of hate.
They offered up a dog in sacrifice
and licked the sticky guilt from off their hands.
But the flood that mankind tasted that first time
caused a strange delusion in their brains:
That their children were the victims of their frenzy;
and in a guilty rage they ran about
dividing into camps who placed the blame
onto their brothers' heads for what had passed.
So none atoned for that poor stricken beast,
and the guilt that flowed upon that ancient stone
runs in their children's veins this very day.

KEEPER (off)

Hey, you dogs, what are you doing?

CHORUS

But we are the dogs of Macedonian justice;
we've come to purge the world of the plague of man.
You cannot call it war, what we are doing.
You cannot call it anything but fate.

(They exit, bounding and tearing through the audience with deafening growls, and the KEEPER runs out after them shouting. As their noise disappears into the distance, the lights fade out so that only the spectre of the POET is visible, slowly pulling shut the gate of hell)

THE END