

Information for Foreigners

Three Plays by Griselda Gambaro

Edited, Translated, and with an Introduction
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With an Afterword by Diana Taylor

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Crisis, Terror, Disappearance

The Theater of Griselda Gambaro

Life here is surreal

This phrase reverberates in conversations with Griselda Gambaro, one of Argentina's most important and prolific writers. Since 1963, when Gambaro's first book was published, her country has seen five military coups; four other presidents appointed by the army; two blatantly rigged elections; two terms of highly theatrical, fascist Peronism; several factions of urban guerrillas; and the state-run Dirty War (1976–83), in which some thirty thousand citizens were disappeared, tortured, and murdered.¹ Nineteen eighty-five saw the tempestuous "Trial of the Century," in which the former commanders of the Dirty War were convicted of crimes against humanity: numerous counts of murder, torture, child-stealing, kidnapping, illegal detention, and robbery. On December 29, 1990, these criminals were set free in an unprecedented executive pardon characterized by President Carlos Menem as "necessary for the healing of Argentina, [and] for the rightful restoration of military prestige."²

“This is a schizophrenic country,” Gambaro once told me, “a country that lives two lives. The courteous and generous have their counterpart in the violent and the armed who move among the shadows—para-military police units that weren't dissolved at the end of the Dirty War, secret services that still operate, all blatantly serving totalitarian interests. One never really knows

what country one is living in, because the two co-exist. . . . Argentina is seismic as well as schizophrenic. From night to day, things can change drastically owing to causes below the surface, behind the screen that's offered up as reality."³

Gambaro's work is deeply rooted in Argentina and embodies that country's psychic gestalt. She stayed as long as possible into the Dirty War, somehow enduring menace, terror, and the disappearance of friends and colleagues. Like many Argentine artists and intellectuals, she buried cartons of "suspicious" magazines (including Eduardo Galeano's *Crisis*) in her garden and burned books (such as works by Marx and Freud) that were forbidden. The discovery of such materials by the police would virtually have assured their disappearance. Gambaro was forced into exile in 1977, when one of her novels, *Ganarse la muerte*, was banned by the direct decree of then-de facto president General Jorge Rafael Videla. A banning by the executive was rare—generally censorship was carried out by city hall—and tantamount to a death threat. Gambaro lived in Barcelona until 1980; by then the junta was debilitated, and she could return to Argentina. In exile Gambaro wrote a novel, *Dios no nos quiere contentos*, but was unable to write for the theater. For her, a play is "an assemblage of signs, received, modified and given back by the audience."⁴ "Exile carries a high price," she said in a recent interview. "In no foreign country—no matter how hospitable—[do] I have the dialogue I have with my compatriots. Our common history means that much can remain tacit; there's no need for exposition or explanation, no need to 'de-code' images and signs."⁵

Owing to their history, Argentines seem preternaturally alert to subtle signs and encoded threats of violence. Gambaro's chief concern has always been violence—its roots, manifestations, and spheres of influence, as well as the ways in which it may be perceived, masked, and denied. Her plays explore the relations between domestic and political violence, repression and complicity, and also the abiding confluences in public life of history and fiction, illusion and substance. She uses blatant artifice in her plays to probe the nature of theatricality and our responses to it, not only in art but also in daily life. In their respective ways, the repressive Church, the military coups, Perón's police state, and the Terror were highly theatrical, indeed

ritualized. Their "shows," however, were for real, and the stakes were not just power, but also life and death.

Over the last twenty-five years, Gambaro has deconstructed official policy and practices, exposed tacit developments, and traced the schizoid mood swings of Argentina. Professor Diana Taylor has aptly characterized Gambaro's plays of the 1960s (including *The Walls*, *The Siamese Twins*, and *In the Country*—also translated as *The Camp*) as "theatre of crisis" and her work of the early 1970s (in particular, *Information for Foreigners*) as "drama of disappearance, obsessed with the 'missing.'"⁶ This volume, the first English-language collection of Gambaro's plays, includes one work from each category: *The Walls* and *Information for Foreigners*. The third offering is *Antígona Furiosa*, written in 1985 and 1986, during and shortly after the trial of the Dirty War commanders.

Gambaro is one of the most widely produced playwrights in Latin America. Eastern and Western Europe are also staunch supporters of her work. In the United States she has had relatively few productions, as this goes to press. Here, her work has been taught, written about, and discussed primarily in academic and literary circles. Gambaro's writing does not conform to the expectations that many in the United States bring to literature from Latin America. It is not imbued with magic realism, nor does it partake of the *costumbrista* tradition. Gambaro's theater has sometimes been called absurdist. This is a misapprehension. As Gambaro has said, her plays derive from a thoroughly Argentine genre, *el grotesco*, or grotesque, which goes back to Armando Discépolo (1887–1971). Gambaro's work is not metaphysical in the way of European absurdism; it does not focus on states of being. It is combative theater, and it grows out of the belief that the human condition can change.

If I had to choose one word to describe Gambaro's writing, it would be *prismatic*. Her chief artistic strategies are blatant artifice, a deep embedding of cultural codes (a not unusual recourse among writers who have had to deal with censorship), and "collages" made with appropriated material together with her own language. Other devices include irony, parody, allusion, and black comedy. By the ways in which she juxtaposes and frames violent acts, Gambaro divests them of any aesthetic or erotic "allure." Without stripping repressors of the danger they pre-

sent, she avoids the torturer-as-most-fascinating-character pitfall through demystification, buffoonery, and ridicule. Gambaro gets her message across by not focusing on the "humanity" of torturers: a liking for dogs, music, or children does not entitle them to our respectful attention.

Sunday I'm going to the country

Although *The Walls* forecasts the era of the *desaparecidos*, it deals not on the political level, but on a universal mythic plane. The plot is easily summarized: the Young Man is abducted upon returning home from a day in the country—ostensibly because it is thought he may be a character in a particular novel—and brought to a luxurious, 1850s-style room (although the time is the present). On the wall is a period portrait of a tranquil young man gazing out a window. The lovely curtains in the Young Man's room are found to cover not a window but a bare wall. Though not a cell in the conventional sense, the room is a prison. From time to time, anguished screams reverberate offstage. The Young Man's keepers (an Usher and a Functionary) explain, "The walls are falling in on somebody." The Young Man does not believe it. He is innocent, he continually reminds himself, ergo they will set him free. But there are no reliable ergos in this world, no identifiable logic or cause-and-effect. With lights going on and off at random, day and night become untrustworthy fictions. The Young Man's room gradually shrinks, as the walls close in. The curtains and various appointments—notably the painting—begin to vanish, foreshadowing the Young Man's own disappearance. When finally the Usher tells him that at midnight the walls will fall in on him, crushing him to death, the Young Man still does not believe it. He is totally disoriented by crisis, by the crisis happening to him. Like a resistant viewer of a play, he cannot suspend his disbelief. "Sunday I'm going to the country," he tells himself over and over, calming himself with a deceptive fiction.

The Walls explores art-as-truth and art-as-fiction and the ways in which art, specifically theatricality, can be used either to alert us to or distract us from crisis. The set Gambaro conceived—in reality, a death set—is beautiful, refined, "artistic." Midway through the play, the Usher produces a hideously kitschy porcelain doll belonging to the Young Man's landlady.⁷ The Young

Man admits he hates the vile-looking thing and has felt oppressed by it in the past, but when the Functionary tells him he is free to smash it, he cannot. The Functionary says, "Art is all that deserves to last—lofty sentiments, things and beings coming to life. You haven't smashed the doll so as to assure that there will be beauty in the world, order. In a word: so the trees can keep growing and putting forth new leaves, so the earth does not become a desolate wasteland." Later, after beating up the Young Man, the Usher says, "You've got to understand me! My great yearning to return to the country, to a healthy, bucolic life, often drives me to actions not exactly in good taste, even a little contemptible, I admit. But is it my fault? . . . I commit contemptible acts under the influence of lyrical needs. Don't I deserve some tolerance?"

Once as we discussed this work, Gambaro remarked, "Onstage the crisis is very obvious, the consequences—for one who's willing to see them—are clear. What's mysterious is the climate, or system, offstage. This reflects the time in which *The Walls* was written. Today, the situation is reversed. If we consider Argentina as a theatric phenomenon, and I do, the system 'offstage' has been demystified. We know the workings of its double discourse very well. Today what is unclear are the consequences. From one moment to the next, we really don't know what is going to happen to us."

The repression is directed against a minority we do not consider Argentine . . . those whose ideas are contrary to our Western, Christian civilization.—De facto president General Jorge Rafael Videla, 1976

Technically groundbreaking and virtuosic, *Information for Foreigners* is a masterpiece. Written in the period 1971–73, the play prophetically foretold an era of government-sponsored terrorism not only against persons whose activities were deemed subversive but also against those whose thoughts were grounds for kidnapping, torture, and death. Gambaro hid the play in her house, then smuggled it out when she fled into exile. For years, the play circulated in samizdat among theater people in Europe, but when companies offered productions, Gambaro refused permission, fearing repercussions against family members still in

Argentina. An early version appeared in a small Italian theater journal. A couple of articles were published in *Latin American Theatre Review*.⁸ Then there was intercontinental word-of-mouth. The translation in this volume was begun in 1986, from a then-unpublished, revised manuscript. *Información para extranjeros* was published in Buenos Aires in 1987, in the second of five volumes of Gambaro's collected plays, but it has not been produced there, nor are the prospects very good.⁹ Its only performances have been at English-language workshops and readings in the United States.

Gambaro has described *Information* as a "guided tour of the places of repression and indignity." The piece should be performed in a house or warehouse, calling up the spaces used for detention and torture. The audience is split into groups, and a Guide leads each group from scene to scene. The Guides are by turn charming, unctuous, and ambiguous. They basically are untrustworthy characters on whom we nevertheless must depend, whom we nevertheless must follow from scene to scene through narrow, often darkened passageways (sometimes they get lost). Gambaro makes clear that audience members are not to be endangered or made to participate in the action, though it is conceivable that some might question, resist, or object to what is being shown. The setup raises questions about the implications of confinement and confusion and the significance of leading, following, and bearing witness.

The title of the play alludes, not particularly to non-Argentines, but to those Argentines who even in 1973 persisted in ignoring information about the horrible events of the previous two years. "Explanation: For Foreigners," the Guides say, as they introduce their deadpan readings of newspaper articles that appeared in the Argentine press in 1971–72. Many of these pieces were later found to be false and/or incomplete. Stage action sometimes parallels the report, sometimes renders it with black humor, and sometimes treats it in a Grand Guignol manner. To put it in musical terms, the stage business is always in a different key than the article.

Information for Foreigners is a play that hinges on juxtaposition: children's games with scenes of torture, a trumped-up arrest with *Othello*, the poetry of victims of the Dirty War with the Milgram experiment.¹⁰ Gambaro uses the traditional Argentine games of Martin Fisherman and Anton Pirulero—both about ar-

bitrary reward and punishment—to point up the differences between adult and infantile violence. (Gambaro's view is that children's violence generally is not criminal, whereas that of adults most certainly is.) Theatrically, the games intensify the images of adult violence. They provoke anxiety on another level as well, though, for the games are an integral part of an audience's shared culture and do contain threats (play along, or suffer the blame), roughness, and scapegoating. The spectator is forced to ask, What are the relations, the refinements, the trajectories between "innocent" and "guilty" violence in the life of an individual? In the life of a nation? As Gambaro has written, "Everything in this play happens through theatricality, or artifice. That is to say, through a cover, or wrapping, that transcends the action itself, but nonetheless leaves the meaning intact. The work must be 'acted,' 'represented,' 'disguised.' Only this will make it tolerable; otherwise no one would have the strength to watch."¹¹

A good deal of the appropriated material in this play comes from the theater. In scene 17, a rehearsal of *Othello* refers to the Grupo 67 theater company's arrest on trumped-up drug charges and subsequent illegal imprisonment. Another female prisoner, apparently an actress, repeatedly sings snatches of the lullabye from scene 2 of Federico García Lorca's *Blood Wedding*. In scene 19, the Guard sings a few lines from one of García Lorca's puppet plays, *Los títeres de cachiporra*. Surely these appropriations call attention to the fact that theater artists are particularly vulnerable during repressive regimes (García Lorca, we are reminded, was murdered by Spanish fascists). They also add yet another level of theatricality to stage business about "real," yet highly theatrical, goings-on. That the line between "reality" and "theater" can be manipulated is pointed up in scene 17, when Actor #2 involuntarily slips into character with the arresting policeman, as though the two were rehearsing *Othello*. The words being spoken are Shakespeare's, but the arrest—however unreal it may seem to Actor #2—is hardly fictional. Theater, as we are shown, can be put to nefarious uses. There is a particularly chilling reminder of this in the lines "violín, violón / es la mejor razón." The couplet refers to the reign of caudillo Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829–52), who had violin music played during the decapitations of his enemies.¹²

Information for Foreigners presents extraordinary challenges to

the translator. The work embraces poetry and prose, as well as dramatic writing. There are scores of distinct voices, multiple levels of diction, and references and echoes between texts, places, and historical eras. In addition to Gambaro's language, lines need to be translated from García Lorca, as well as Garcilaso de la Vega (1501–36), contemporary Argentine poet Juan Gelman, and Marina, a young Greek writer who was disappeared. *Information* was unlike any translation I had previously done. My linguistic sources—beyond the original text, the author, dictionaries, and lexicons—were unexpected. Indispensable was *Nunca más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared*.¹³ Apart from its exhaustive information, I needed this book for its language. For there developed during the Dirty War an argot of dissimulation in which familiar, domestic expressions carried sinister, even deadly, implications. Today in Argentina certain words still bear the scars of having been twisted by the Dirty War repressors. The meanings of key words are encoded: *security*, for example, really means repression: *order* translates as terror; *pardon* signifies praise. This lends a crucial layer of meaning, an additional layer of translation (even for native Argentines reading the original), to the following Tin Pan Alley song from scene 12:

Peace and security
That is our domain
With a little authority
Order will be maintained!

Christopher Middleton has described translation “as a species of mime.”¹⁴ This analogy is particularly apt in regard to *Information for Foreigners*. A mime works in space, creating structures in the air, playing against and in these structures with his or her body. So, too, in *Information*, much of the meaning derives from, is framed by, and is expressed through the space in which it is performed. Perhaps most important, at a performance of this piece, everyone, wittingly or unwittingly, is in some sense a mime.

The living are the great sepulchre of the dead

For obvious reasons, Antigone is a common theme among Latin American playwrights. Gambaro's *Antígona Furiosa*, however, is

distinctive: rather than pitting a bad government against a good populace, it deals with passivity in the face of repression, popular compliance with terror. Quoted by the Chorus is the old Argentine saying, "Punishment always presupposes crime, my girl. There are no innocents." *Antígona* is mocked and reviled by the Chorus, comprising two *porteños* sitting at a Buenos Aires café. Except for the café table, the set consists of *Antígona's* cell, a huge, pyramidal, iron-barred cage. The first image is that of *Antígona* hanged. Having refused a last bowl of water, she declares, "Mouth moist with my own saliva, I will go to my death. Proudly."

In Laura Yusem's original Buenos Aires production, *Antígona* was played by Bettina Muraña, a *mestiza* dancer. "Our work was far from naturalistic," Yusem told me. "It was a form of dance-theater in which light and the particulars of the space were of capital importance. Certain sequences were ritualistic." Creon was represented by a movable pectoral made of painted polyester (torso, helmet, arms) used in various ways by the actors in the Chorus—worn like a garment, held like a shield, manipulated like a puppet.

Though the slang and intonations are *porteño*, there are no explicit references to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, nor to any specific aspect of the Dirty War. The language, which incorporates quotes and echoes from Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Rubén Darío, extends beyond Argentina, not only inscribing the country's history into that of the world but also forcefully asserting that *Antígona* was not just happening there and then but is happening, everywhere, always.

I return to Middleton's notion that translation is "a species of mime" and wonder if the analogy might be extended to the reading of texts intended to be acted. In the present collection, metaphors of movement and travel—and conversely, obstruction and confinement—abound. Space and the ways in which we occupy it become central concerns. Reading itself is a form of transport; like space, a text must be negotiated. Great anxiety attaches to not being able to move through space; it is also agonizing to witness, or envision, another's imprisonment. For the Young Man in *The Walls* this anxiety becomes all-encompassing as the space around him shrinks, closes in for the kill. For him and for us—as readers, as witnesses—there is paralyzing terror in not knowing the mechanisms of this disaster, which operate from a diabolical space

beyond, offstage. The transition from *The Walls* to *Information* is not easy to navigate. We go from being witnesses of a hostile environment to inhabitants, however temporary, of a hellish one. Now where are the boundaries between onstage and off? Who, really, is providing the spectacle? Those performing, or those who lend their eyes? At the end, as we exit the text—leave the space—a police siren goes off, its sudden, harrowing wail piercing a last refrain of poetry, causing us—on the threshold of . . . what?—to panic. By the time we arrive at *Antígona Furiosa*, which plays in the round, we have become “the walls.” Or have we? Gambaro’s plays call upon us to reflect, decide, act.

Marguerite Feitlowitz

Notes

1. Though figures vary, thirty thousand *desaparecidos*, given by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, has the greatest currency in Argentine human rights circles.
2. Responding to one hundred thousand protesters, President Menem said, “You can present me with a million marches, the decision to pardon has already been made.” (“Me pueden hacer un millón de marchas, pero la decisión de indultar ya está tomada.”) New York’s *El Diario / La Prensa*, October 1, 1989.
3. Gambaro, interview by Feitlowitz, in “Two Argentine Writers,” *Bomb*, no. 32 (Summer 1990): 54.
4. From remarks made at Writing as Political Action: Strategies of Resistance in Latin America, a conference sponsored by Montclair State College, Upper Montclair, N.J., October 1987.
5. “Two Argentine Writers,” 54.
6. Diana Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 98.
7. *Ibid.*, 96–147. Taylor offers a penetrating discussion on the role of kitsch in fascism.
8. Dick Gerdes, “Recent Argentine Vanguard Theatre: Gambaro’s *Información para extranjeros*,” *Latin American Theatre Review* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 11–16; Rosalea Postma, “Space and Spectator in the Theatre of Griselda Gambaro: *Información para extranjeros*,” *Latin American Theatre Review* 13, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 35–45.
9. Gambaro’s collected plays are published in Buenos Aires by Ediciones de la Flor.

10. The Milgram experiment was first done in the 1960s under the auspices of the Yale University psychology department. Subsequently it was performed at other U.S. universities and in Munich. Under the guise of investigating the role of punishment in learning, it tested individuals' willingness to inflict pain—even death—on strangers. A designated "pupil" was made to answer memory word-matching questions; if the pupil answered wrong, the "teacher" was authorized to give him or her a certain voltage of electricity. With every error, the voltage increased. Unbeknownst to the teacher, the electricity and the pupil's agonized screams were faked. In Germany, 85 percent of the subjects shocked their pupils to "death"; in the United States, 66 percent did. See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

11. Personal correspondence, Gambaro to Feitlowitz, March 28, 1986. "Lo que sucede es que todo eso que pasa en la obra, pasa o debe pasar a través de la teatralidad, del artificio. Es decir, de una envoltura que trascienda el hecho en sí, dejándolo intacto en su sentido, sin embargo. . . . Por más terrible que sea la obra, debe ser 'actuada,' 'representada,' 'disfrazada.' Esto es lo que debe hacerla soportable (sino nadie tendría fuerzas para verla) y para los actores debe hacerla también gratificante. Tú sabes, como siempre, placer y dolor." The last part, not translated in the body of this essay, reads: "And for the actors this should also make it gratifying. You know, as always, pleasure and pain."

12. Because these lines required a gloss to signify in English, I devised a substitute, with the author's approval. The couplet appears on p. 112 of the de la Flor edition.

13. *Nunca más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1986).

14. Christopher Middleton, "Translation as a Species of Mime," *Translation* 17 (Fall 1986): 215–24.

Information for Foreigners

A Chronicle in Twenty Scenes

Characters

Guides, number contingent
 on number of audience
 groups
 Voices, heard at intervals
 throughout

 Man in room

 Girl, with wet clothes
 Man, with pistol

 Coordinator
 Mature Man, Teacher
 Young Man, Pupil

 Mother
 Father

 Group of Men, attack man in
 audience
 Man, defends attacked man

 Someone from the Audience,
 number contingent on
 number of audience groups
 Usherette

 Three Men, carry table
 Group of Men, surround Girl
 Two Workmen

 Mother (Sara Palacio de
 Verdt)

 Father (Marcelo Verdt)
 Two Children (Verdt girl and
 boy)
 Chief
 Two Policemen

 Man in loincloth

 Man (Roberto Quieto)
 Neighbor #1
 Neighbor #2
 First Group of Men, tied
 together
 Neighbor #3
 Second Group of Men, tied
 together
 Official
 Judge
 Guard

 Girl, with long hair
 (Hermenegilda)
 Four Men, on skates
 Husband of Hermenegilda
 Mother of Hermenegilda
 Neighbors

 Man (Juan Pablo Maestre)
 Woman (Mirta Elena
 Misetich)
 Two Policemen

Group of Policemen, dressed
 as sweepers

Game Players
 Policemen, with clubs

Actor #1
 Two Men, in box

Actress #1
 Actress #2
 Actor #2
 Policeman #1
 Policeman #2

Child-Monster
 Children, play Anton Pirulero
 First Man

Second Man
 Third Man
 Young Woman

Two Guards
 Prisoners
 Visitors to Prison
 Pretty Girl
 Group of Guards, attack
 Pretty Girl
 Little Old Lady
 Outlandish-Looking Prisoner

Prostitutes
 Man #1
 Man #2
 Man #3
 Man #4

The theater space can be a spacious, residential house, preferably two stories, with corridors and empty rooms, some of which interconnect. A larger space is needed for the final scene.

Situated in the passageways, propped against the walls, are two or three vertical rectangular boxes, each with a door and air holes.

In a different area, chosen by the director, sits an additional box, larger but otherwise the same as those in the passageways.

Some of the corridors are dark, while others, in obvious contrast, are crudely lit.

The audience will be divided into groups, the number and size of which will depend on the space. A particular number or color can serve to identify each group.

Group 1 will mark one possible development of the action.

Guides 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., lead their respective groups. The order in which the scenes are observed by these groups is left to the director's discretion until the last scene, scene 20, when all groups converge.

In certain scenes, actors play audience members and are actually part of the audience. Audience members, however, are never forced to participate in the action.

The groups cross in the passageways and may watch the same scene—perhaps one taking place in the passageway—when the director considers it necessary.

Excerpts introduced by the guides as "Explanation: For Foreigners" come from Argentine newspapers of the period 1971–72.

GUIDES: Organize the groups.

GUIDE: Ladies and gentlemen: Admission is ———, for adults. If you've already paid, you can't repent. The cost is already incurred. Better to enjoy yourself. No one under eighteen will be admitted. Or under thirty-five or over thirty-six. Everyone else can attend with no problem. No obscenity or strong words. The play speaks to our way of life: Argentine, Western, and Christian. We are in 1971. I ask that you stay together and remain silent. Careful on the stairs.

Scene 1

The **GUIDE** leads the group toward one of the rooms. The room is completely in shadow. The door closes. We hear a shrill, metallic signal. Then, we hear many voices, indistinct and juxtaposed, carrying on an incomprehensible conversation.

GUIDE: One moment . . . I don't find my flashlight. Remember, opportunity makes the thief. Watch your pocketbooks! (Light comes up on a dark and wrinkled wall.) Only the naked walls are left. (The light travels. A man is seated on a chair, wearing only faded underwear. He raises his head, surprised and frightened. He covers his sex with his hands. To the audience.) Excuse me. I've got the wrong room.

Scene 2

The **GUIDE**, lighting the way with his flashlight, leads the group out of the room. He tries to open the door of another room. Behind the door a sweet voice sings.

VOICE:

"Carnation, sleep and dream,
the horse won't drink from the stream . . ."¹

GUIDE: (shrugging his shoulders, turns to the group) It's locked. (He knocks. Nicely.) May I? I've brought a group of spectators. And they're getting anxious.

VOICE: (very rudely) What's it to me? Beat it! I'm rehearsing.

Scene 3

GUIDE: (to the group) Sorry. People should be brought up better, don't you think? (tries the latch on the next door. It gives.) Good. Here. Go ahead. (The group enters this other dark room. Against the wall, some chairs. The GUIDE shines his light on them. Then, nicely.) You can position yourselves wherever you like. There are chairs for everyone. (He looks.) No, not enough to go around. (arranges them, offers) Ladies first . . . !

(Lights on in the middle of the room. A young GIRL sits on a chair wearing clothes that are soaking wet. A MAN stands next to her, observing her with a tender smile. The GUIDE waits for people to get comfortable, points out places. Then, with a finger on his lips, he signals for silence and turns, like one more spectator, toward the characters who begin the action.)

MAN: (always speaks softly, tenderly) Why didn't you dry yourself? You're getting the floor all wet. (He bends down and dries the floor with a rag.) Lucky it's not waxed. (The GIRL shivers with cold. The MAN takes off his jacket, puts it on her shoulders. The GIRL looks at it, wraps herself in the jacket.) Why didn't you dry yourself? Wasn't there a towel?

GIRL: No.

MAN: (drying the floor) What a mess! They fill the tub but don't put any towels. What about the water? Was it warm? (The GIRL doesn't answer. He shakes her, gently.) Was it warm?

GIRL: No.

MAN: (He pulls a pistol from his belt and cleans it with a rag.) Ah! This department isn't worth shi . . . (The GUIDE says something. The MAN shoots him a quick look.) Right. (He

shows her his weapon.) Do you like it? It isn't loaded. (She looks at it but doesn't answer. The MAN begins loading the gun.) Why so sad? (points to the group) Nothing will happen to you. There are lots of people. They're watching us. (puts the pistol back in his belt) You're not pretty with your hair all wet. But that's not too serious. (He leans toward her, curious.) Tell me, do you dye your hair? (still studying her) You're getting my jacket all wet. Sorry, it's the only one I have . . . (He takes it gently, shakes it, and puts it on. With a shiver.) It's damp. (pointing to the pistol) Do you want it?

GIRL: No.

MAN: I'm leaving it for you. I have another. The jacket I can't, I swear to you.

GIRL: (shaking her head) No.

MAN: (surreptitiously) Speak up! They can't hear a thing!

GUIDE: Louder! Louder!

MAN: What did I tell you? (The GIRL doesn't answer.) Look at me. (She obeys. He holds out the gun.) Take it!

GIRL: No . . . I don't want to.

MAN: Why are you squeezing your legs together? Do you want to go to the bathroom?

GIRL: (nods her head) Yes.

MAN: Then go!

GIRL: They're . . . watching me.

MAN: So? We're all adults, aren't we? They at least are watching. What are you doing, always looking over there? What do you see that's so pretty? (puts his cheek against hers. Looks in the same direction.) Nothing! (separates from her) I like to see people's eyes when I talk to them. (Gently, he turns her head.) Look at me. (He points to the pistol.) Do you want it?

GIRL: No, no! Leave me alone!

MAN: (anxious) Would you like some stockings? (He puts his hand on her foot.)

GIRL: No!

MAN: Always no! Why? My intentions are good. Take it. Don't you get bored all alone? (insists) Take it, it doesn't bite. But don't squeeze the trigger. Unless . . .

GIRL: (barely audible) Unless . . .

MAN: If you squeeze, it's all over. Do you have a boyfriend?

GIRL: No.

MAN: Well then? Take it! I'm leaving it here, on the floor. All you have to do is lean down.

GIRL: For what? I don't want . . . to lean down, I don't want . . . anything.

MAN: The heart and the forehead . . . are sure. I mean, so you don't suffer . . .

GIRL: No . . .

MAN: (caresses her cheek) Of course, no. There's a sun outside. It's hot as hell. So you don't have a boyfriend? Well then . . . ? (He goes toward the door. Turns. Smiles.) I'm going to tell them to heat the water! (He goes out. The GIRL looks at the pistol on the floor, leans down, trembling, stretches her hand. Freezes in the act.)

GUIDE: Ladies and gentlemen, if it bothers you. (He opens the door. Leading the group into the hallway, he explains.) In March 1970, at the Max Planck Institute in Munich, Germany, they began an interesting experiment. Careful on the stairs.

Scene 4

The group enters a white room that adjoins another, also painted white, but that may be smaller. In the first room, a small table with a cage full of white rats. On another table, a metal box outfitted with buttons and a microphone. Carefully folded on an ordinary chair, a white coat.

Through the half-open door one can see in the other room a chair whose armrests are outfitted with side straps attached to

electric cables. Cables to tie down a person's legs. A microphone hangs down from the ceiling.

In the first room are the COORDINATOR, dressed in a white coat, and two others in street clothes, a MATURE MAN and a YOUNG MAN. The MATURE MAN lingers in front of the cage, putting his fingers through the bars, trying to attract the rats and get them to play.

COORDINATOR: (to the group, in a professional tone) Gentlemen: The subject of our experiment is to determine the pedagogical effect of punishment. To what degree does punishment accelerate the learning process? Imagine. If with one slap a child learns to behave, we waste years teaching and persuading only with nice words. We don't have time to lose. Soon he will be an adult; soon he will be molded. Molded for destruction, when one slap, two or three electrical jolts at the right moment could put things in place. (He begins observing the MATURE MAN playing with the rats.) The gentlemen will help us to clarify . . . unclear . . . details . . . Please, sir, stop pestering those rats! Idiot! (He goes toward him and kicks him away from the cage.)

MATURE MAN: Okay, okay. I'm sorry. They're so cute that . . .

COORDINATOR: (calm) Of course they're cute. (becoming irritated) Shall we begin?

MATURE MAN: At your orders, sir!

COORDINATOR: (happy) One kick . . . and acquiescence. You, sir, emotionally more mature, will be the teacher.

MATURE MAN: Yes, delighted.

COORDINATOR: (to the YOUNG MAN) You will be the pupil.

YOUNG MAN: (He speaks with a metallic voice, like a parrot.) I will be the pupil.

GUIDE: (to the group, surreptitiously) Everyone's a researcher, even the mule.

COORDINATOR: (drily) Silence! (He takes money and some papers out of his pocket.) Help yourself. Twenty-five marks, or thirty-six dollars for your trouble. If you would be so kind as

to sign the receipt and the release. (They sign, take their money. The COORDINATOR hands the TEACHER a white coat.) This is for you. (Cordially, the COORDINATOR helps him on with the coat, adjusts the collar.) There, now. Right this way, please. (He leads them into the other room. The GUIDE follows with his group. COORDINATOR to the PUPIL.) Please be seated. Don't be afraid, it's an experiment, remember that.

PUPIL:

Happy to please
I sit with the greatest of ease!

COORDINATOR: I made a mistake. Take off your jacket, roll up your sleeves. (The PUPIL does so.) Thank you. We have to strap you in. If you would like to resign . . .

PUPIL:

No! For the sake of science
Let us commence!

COORDINATOR: (strapping him. To the TEACHER.) Will you help me?

TEACHER: (with dispatch) Yes, of course!

COORDINATOR: (From a pocket of his coat, he takes a tube of cream and starts smearing the PUPIL's forearms.) The cream facilitates the passage of current and prevents burns. (winking at him) It's an experiment, don't be frightened. It's like . . . talking to hear yourself talk.

PUPIL:

I'm not afraid
I'm not afraid
I really feel I have it made.

COORDINATOR: (attaches electrodes to the PUPIL's forearms. The TEACHER helps diligently.) How obliging! Thank you.

PUPIL: It's . . . very tight.

COORDINATOR: Let's loosen this a bit. (He does.) You—the Teacher—are going to station yourself at the microphone in

the next room. (to the PUPIL) You pay attention. He will read out a group of words, such as *day-sun*, *night-moon*, *mother-love*, etc. Then he will repeat the word *day* followed by four others. You must remember which of these four words was associated with *day*. If you make a mistake, you'll receive an electric shock as punishment.

TEACHER: And then you'll learn.

PUPIL: Why will punishment teach me?

COORDINATOR: The shock won't be strong.

TEACHER: Never?

COORDINATOR: No! Unless he really blunders. But it's impossible. They're very obvious associations. For idiots. (to the TEACHER) Let's go! (They go into the adjoining room. The GUIDE settles his group. The COORDINATOR hands the TEACHER a sheet of paper.) Here is the list of words. A clean game: read slowly, with good pronunciation. Wait! Roll up your sleeve.

TEACHER: Me? What for?

COORDINATOR: I want to give you a charge of forty-five volts.

TEACHER: (surprised) Me? I'm the teacher!

COORDINATOR: Don't be afraid. I'm doing it so that you'll appreciate the intensity of the punishment. Otherwise, you might have a heavy hand. (He puts an electrode on the TEACHER's arm, pushes a button.)

TEACHER: (jumps, frightened) That's strong!

COORDINATOR: No, no. You'll start with fifteen volts. You won't have to increase it much. Be seated. Read. Slowly, in a clear voice.

TEACHER: (He sits in front of the metal box, clears his throat, reads haltingly.) *Day-sun*, *night-moon*, *mother-love*, *water-ship*, *plague-war*, *house-forest*, *child-innocence*, *prison-bars*, *window-freedom*, *blue-sky*, *bird-flight*, *nation-Germany*, *torture-dissuasion*. (He finishes, looks at the COORDINATOR like a child awaiting instructions.)

COORDINATOR: (claps him on the shoulder) Very good! Now you must read one word, then four more, so that the pupil will pick the correct association. If he makes a mistake, say "Error," press the first button, and tell the pupil the voltage with which you're punishing him. Then read the right answer. Punishments start at 15 volts and end at 450. (He makes a horizontal gesture with his hand.) As you see, it couldn't be easier. Begin.

TEACHER: (clears his throat) Sun! Day, forest, mother, water.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Day!

COORDINATOR: Very good! (encouraging the TEACHER) Let's go on! Do you like it?

TEACHER: (like a child) Yes! It's terrific!

COORDINATOR: Continue.

TEACHER: Night! Plague, forest, moon, child.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Moon!

TEACHER: (enthused) Correct! (to the COORDINATOR, laughing) This is like a drug!

COORDINATOR: Ssshh! Go on!

TEACHER: Mother! Day, water, child, love. (silence from the PUPIL) But this is bread in your belly! What memories do you have of your mother?

COORDINATOR: (with bonhomie) Now, don't help! It's not scientific!

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Chi . . .

TEACHER: (advises) No!

COORDINATOR: (drily) Excuse me, sir. This is an experiment, not a game.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: We can't repeat? (the TEACHER looks at the COORDINATOR.)

COORDINATOR: Just this once. You've got to follow the rules.

TEACHER: Just this once, not again. Mother: day, water, child, love. (silence from the PUPIL) Well?

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Love!

TEACHER: Very good! But faster. (The COORDINATOR nods approval.) Blue: ship, bird, sky, house. (silence from the PUPIL) I'm waiting.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Want to repeat?

TEACHER: I won't repeat. How can you not remember? What a fool. (looks at the COORDINATOR, who assents) Answer, I won't wait any longer.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Bird!

TEACHER: (pleased) He made a mistake! Now what do I do?

COORDINATOR: (He points to the box. The TEACHER vacillates in his choice among the buttons.) The first. Fifteen volts.

TEACHER: (smiles timidly. Pushes the button.) Here we go! Take that. (Through the door, we see that the PUPIL is jolted but cries out more in surprise than pain. His cries are always in a parrot-voice, stereotyped like those of someone who, as a joke, coarsely imitates moans, groans, and pain. To the COORDINATOR.) I didn't do anything! (into the microphone) Now remember. (He reads.) Plague: child, innocence, love, night.

COORDINATOR: (very low) You forgot war.

TEACHER: I did?

COORDINATOR: Plague-war. It's all right, let it go. It doesn't matter.

TEACHER: (low) Should I repeat? (The COORDINATOR shrugs.) Well? (The PUPIL is silent.) Come on. Quick. Otherwise it's boring, I get tired.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Night.

TEACHER: (pleased) He made a mistake! Thirty volts! (instantly presses the second button. A louder groan from the PUPIL.) Moving right along. Child: love, mother, innocence, bird.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: (quickly) Love!

TEACHER: He made a mistake! You were dreaming! Forty-five volts! (He pushes another button. Howling loudly, the PUPIL arches his back. Surprised by the howling, the TEACHER looks into the other room. To the COORDINATOR, disturbed.) A bit strong, wasn't it?

COORDINATOR: (soothingly) No. This is a scientific experiment, and I am in charge. What experiment? Just as I told you: simply to determine the effectiveness of punishment in learning. If from the beginning we doubt, we'll never arrive at a conclusion.

TEACHER: Yes, that's right. The associations are easy.

COORDINATOR: And it's not so much. I gave you forty-five volts, remember?

TEACHER: I didn't shout. What a weakling! (to the PUPIL) Listen to me. Don't scream. Pay attention. Sky: mother, child, innocence, blue.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Blue!

TEACHER: Gooooood!

COORDINATOR: Magnificent. We're already getting results.

TEACHER: It's no time to stop, then. Plague: prison, house, forest, war. Well? (Slowly, the COORDINATOR closes the door connecting the rooms.) Repeat. (The COORDINATOR shakes his head.) I can't. (silence from the PUPIL) Well? (to the COORDINATOR) Can I repeat? Just this once. He's not very intelligent. (The COORDINATOR snorts, accedes with a gesture.)

TEACHER: Listen. Don't let your mind wander. Plague: prison, house, forest, war.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Prison.

TEACHER: He's an idiot!

COORDINATOR: (exasperated) You must say, "Error," and press the button. That is your job! Save the commentary!

TEACHER: And now he's growling at me! (He presses the button.)

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: (screams)

No, no! I didn't think
I'd be in so much pain!

TEACHER: A smart aleck! Well, he better hold up! (into the microphone) Pupil: Pay attention. You think I like pushing these little buttons? Try to remember. Blue: bird, flight, sky, freedom. (waits, nervous) Out with it!

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: I don't remember!

TEACHER: How can you not remember?

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: I don't!

TEACHER: (furious, pushes the button) If you don't remember, take this!

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: (a scream) Sky! (He whimpers.)

TEACHER: Very good! (He wipes the sweat from his face.) You see? With a little determination, you hit it! Okay! Here we go. Flight: bird, blue, forest, night. You gotta be quick. Answer.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL:

I won't play!
No matter what you say!

COORDINATOR: Youth today! Now he refuses!

TEACHER: What's the matter with him? He's howling.

COORDINATOR: He signed the release. He can't give up. The results are important, aren't they? You're not screaming. You can be counted on.

TEACHER: Pupil? Pay attention. I am going to read you the words.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Go to hell! Let's change places!

TEACHER: Change places? That's crazy. It'll be worse for you, if you don't answer. Bird: flight, blue, plague, war. And I'm repeating the words. And it isn't allowed! Who do you think you are? Answer!

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: I'll make a mistake!

TEACHER: Answer! (He pushes the button. A scream. To COORDINATOR.) He's screaming.

COORDINATOR: He feels a bit jolted. You have just one thing to watch out for: 450 volts—kaput. Otherwise, after a week, there isn't a mark.

TEACHER: Listen good. Are you listening?

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Are you listening?

TEACHER: We'll see who's listening. Bird: night, flight, house, plague.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: I don't remember!

TEACHER: Don't be such an ass!

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Don't be such an ass! Plague!

TEACHER: (furious) Imbecile! Bird-plague! (to the COORDINATOR) See how he answers! (The COORDINATOR, understanding, shrugs his shoulders.) He's jerking me around! (He pushes a button. The PUPIL screams, weeps. Disconcerted, to the COORDINATOR.) And now he's crying! What do I do?

COORDINATOR: Keep going. Don't worry about it.

TEACHER: Listen, kid, answer right, or I'll blow you away. Window: prison, flight, torture, fr . . . freedom.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Torture! Torture!

TEACHER: What did you say? Tortoise! Idiot! You're making fun of me! (He pushes the button. The PUPIL howls.)

COORDINATOR: (checking) One hundred eighty volts. (smiles approvingly) It's moving right along.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Let me go, you're hurting me! Oh, my belly!

TEACHER: Do we stop?

COORDINATOR: No.

TEACHER: He doesn't remember anything!

COORDINATOR: He'll remember now.

TEACHER: You think so? He burst into tears. If he doesn't answer, this is useless!

COORDINATOR: It isn't useless! If we don't succeed in getting concrete results, all this suffering will be useless. Besides, you have to.

TEACHER: *I* do?

COORDINATOR: Of course. The tears, the screams. Think about it.

TEACHER: I'm not exactly sucking my thumb!

COORDINATOR: Of course not. Go ahead.

TEACHER: Nation: prison, bars, Germany, torture.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: I don't know!

TEACHER: (his finger on the button) Out with it!

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Argentina!

TEACHER: (beside himself) Germany, idiot! (He pushes the button. The PUPIL howls.)

COORDINATOR: Planck Institute, Munich.

TEACHER: (furious) Prison: nation, plague, war, bars.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL:

I don't know, let me go!
I want to go home!

TEACHER: (screams) Out with it!

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Nation!

TEACHER: You made a mistake! (He pushes button after button. The PUPIL howls.)

COORDINATOR: (stops him) Slow! One at a time.

TEACHER: He's fucking with me! Why doesn't he answer right?

COORDINATOR: Make him.

TEACHER: I don't like doing this to you. Is that clear? You signed. Don't count your lost sheep. Concentrate! Here's another. Do you hear me? (silence) Do you hear?

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: (lifeless) Vultures fly near . . .

TEACHER: Moon: night, prison, window, flight. (to the COORDINATOR) He'll get this one. It's easy. (low) If he doesn't answer, what do I do?

COORDINATOR: (gently) I told you.

TEACHER: (puts his hand on the last button. Closes his eyes.) He doesn't answer. Why doesn't he answer?

COORDINATOR: (softly) Laziness. Low level.

TEACHER: Moon.

VOICE OF THE PUPIL: Ni . . . Niii . . . ght . . .

TEACHER: (without consulting the list) He made a mistake. He made a mistake . . . again. (He opens his eyes.) It's deliberate. He can't not know. Still . . . it hurts me . . . (He slowly pushes the last button on the box. Silence. He smiles with relief.) He didn't scream.

COORDINATOR: No. (changes his tone. Exultantly.) Very good! Four hundred fifty volts! Excellent! Your help has been invaluable.

TEACHER: Why didn't he help?

COORDINATOR: Look . . . we choose the risks we take! Sometimes we're not so lucky. (removes the TEACHER's lab coat)

TEACHER: It was his fault. Wasn't it?

COORDINATOR: Yes, yes. Your work was magnificent!

TEACHER: He didn't even make an effort. A baby at the breast could have answered right. Some people like to fuck with you!

COORDINATOR: Yes, yes! You were splendid. (He shakes his hand.) Thank you ever so much. Don't worry. An unforgettable performance.

TEACHER: (flattered) It was nothing. I did what I could!

COORDINATOR: (seeing him to the door) No, no, you were quick, concise, sure. Thanks ever so much! (Again he shakes his hand. The TEACHER exits. The COORDINATOR turns toward the audience, professional.) This experiment, with recorded screams and simulated tortures, was repeated 180 times. Unfortunately, this teacher who continued his punishments to the lethal 450 volts was no exception. Eighty-five percent of the teachers proceeded in the same way. The same test was done in 1960 in the United States. The results? Sixty-six percent. They were obeying rules and weren't responsible. Curious, isn't it? Surprised?

GUIDE: Okay, enough. Don't wear out the audience. (to his group) The experiment was done in Germany and the United States.² Here among ourselves, it would be unthinkable, absurd. Ladies and gentlemen, let's look for something more

amusing. (He leads his group out of the room.) This way, this way. If you would be so kind . . . Ladies and gentlemen . . .

Scene 5

The GUIDE leads the group to the room that in scene 2 was locked.

GUIDE: (He knocks.) May I?

VERY SILLY VOICE: (from inside the room) Yeeees.

(The group enters the room. Seated on a chair is a woman made up like a doll, wearing a white dress that reaches to her feet and holding a baby in her arms. The baby, swaddled in tulle and lace, is obviously a doll. Sitting on the floor, at the woman's feet, a young man watches them with an enraptured expression. The group is enveloped in a beam of rosy light. The acting is frankly crude.)

GUIDE: (pleased) Ah! Finally something coherent!

MOTHER: (rocking the child)

"My rose, asleep now lie
the horse is starting to cry
His poor hooves were . . ."³

GUIDE: What a picture! (to his group) Make yourselves comfortable. Can you see? Madam . . . (helps her get comfortable. Then, rapidly, drily.) Explanation: For Foreigners. Seven P.M., Wednesday, December 16, 1970. Nestor Martins, attorney, defender of political prisoners and trade unions, consults with his client Nildo Zenteno.⁴ They take leave of one another in the street. Six men surround Martins, violently force him into a white Peugeot. Nildo Zenteno rushes back, manages momentarily to free the lawyer. A karate chop to the back of his neck brings Zenteno down as well. The car speeds off. A black Chevrolet escorts it. That car had pulled out of a nearby parking lot of the Federal Police. *Desaparecidos*. (from newspaper) Nestor Martins, thirty-three. Nildo Zenteno, thirty-seven.

MOTHER:

“ . . . bleeding,
his long mane was frozen,
and deep in his eyes
stuck a silvery dagger.”

(She suddenly stops. Distorting her voice as though she were a ventriloquist speaking for the little one.) Stop it, Mama. That's old. Daddy, tell me a story.

FATHER: (very sweet) Yes, darling.

MOTHER: (idiotic voice) Daddy, it has to be modern! No morals, Daddy!

FATHER: Yes, darling.

MOTHER: (impatient) Come on, Daddy, start!

FATHER: (enraptured) Precious!

MOTHER: (in the voice of a ferocious little child) I know I'm precious! Why do you go round and around, Daddy?

FATHER: Now, now . . . This child is in such a hurry! Daddy has to think!

MOTHER: Enough horsing around, Daddy. Well?

FATHER: (laughs confusedly. Then, grossly exaggerating the traditional tone in which one tells a story.) Once upon a time . . .

MOTHER: (in the voice of a fierce, exasperated little child) Yeeess . . .

FATHER: (in the same tone) Once upon a time there was a tall man, ugly, ugly, ugly . . . (with disgust) Bolivian. (resuming the story) He had a pile of children. (drily) They procreate a lot. Then they send the kids here.

MOTHER: What happened to the little kids?

FATHER: (sweetly) They were in the street, begging, stealing . . .

MOTHER: And what happened to the tall man?

FATHER: The tall man met another man. This one was a shorty. They talked and talked . . .

MOTHER: (voice of a stupid baby) About what?

FATHER: Well . . . ! Ugly things! And when they were tired of talking, the tall man walked him to his car.

MOTHER: Who?

FATHER: The shorty. The short one was bad, bad. And then, some men came, and since he was bad, they put him in another car to punish him. Because he was bad, bad. And what did the tall man do?

MOTHER: I don't know!

FATHER: He didn't want them to punish him!

MOTHER: Stupid!

FATHER: He ran and ran and hit the good guys. And then, the good guys put him into the car as well.

MOTHER: The good guys took them for a ride! 'Cause they're so good!

FATHER: So very good!

MOTHER: And then what happened, Daddy?

FATHER: Nothing more was ever known!

MOTHER: Yea, yea, yea!

GUIDE: What horrible acting. So sorry. Let's look for something else. (He pushes the people toward the door.) The whole show's not like this. I hope.

MOTHER: (same voice of a stupid baby) Did they punish them a lot, Daddy?

FATHER: Nothing more was ever known!

MOTHER and FATHER: Yea, yea, yea!

GUIDE: (cutting in) Let's go. Let's go, gentlemen. They need at least another month of rehearsal. What dunces!

Scene 6

GUIDE: Let's go upstairs, see if we have better luck. He who searches finds. They say. (The group goes up the stairs, or

down, if the preceding scene took place on the upper level. Natural lighting. When the group reaches the landing of the upper level.) No, I made a mistake. I had you climb to the . . . (stops) In vain. Let's go down.

(They go down. Suddenly, a group of men burst in, hurling themselves at a person in the audience who is talking with someone else. This other person is for a second paralyzed with astonishment. Then shouting, he throws himself into the fray.)

MAN: Let him go! Let him go!

(He succeeds in freeing him. The two make it down a few stairs, but the group of men rush them, surround them, and drag them down the stairs. Over the loudspeaker a distressed voice is heard.)

VOICE: My God, why did I run? (Almost instantaneously, the scene breaks out in another place with other characters. The groups may cross at this moment. Again the voice is heard.) My God, why did I run? (The scene is repeated in another spot.) My God, why did I run?

GUIDE: (meanwhile) If we search carefully, we'll find remains in the catacombs. There aren't many, but we can still hope for surprises. Careful please. Don't wander off now. That's it, all together. Careful on the stairs. Look over here! (matter of factly) A brutish people! Yes, we will find remains. Sometimes discoveries come about by chance. (He examines the door to a room. Opens it. The room is lit.) Oh, this one has good light. Imagine, ladies and gentlemen, the faith, the heroism of the first Christians. To pray in these pigsties. It gives me claustrophobia. (He spots a form covered with canvas in a corner, on the floor.) Here's something. Finally! (He draws near.) Stand back a little, ladies and gentlemen. (with curiosity) What is it? (He lifts an edge of the canvas, immediately lets it fall and steps back.) Puah! What a shitty surprise!

VOICE: My God, why did I run?

GUIDE: Sssh! (turns toward the audience, with a big feigned smile, gives the form a kick)

VOICE: My God, why did I run?

(The GUIDE jumps on the form, tramples it, inflamed. In the

doorway to the room, another GUIDE appears. He claps his hands loudly.)

GUIDE #2: Ladies and gentlemen! Please leave. Out, everyone out! Sorry. We have a few like machines without an off button. If you would be so kind as to follow me. (The light in the room fades out.)

Scene 7

GUIDE #2: What was the other one telling you?⁵

SOMEONE FROM THE AUDIENCE: About the catacombs.

GUIDE #2: (glib) Oh, yes! The remains of the first Christians in the catacombs . . . ! Impressive!

(He opens a room. The GIRL from scene 3 is crawling on all fours toward a corner. Weak light on her. The rest of the room is in shadow. The pistol still lies abandoned on the floor.)

GUIDE #2: What do we have here? What is she sniffing at like a dog? (goes closer. Joking, gives her a slap on the rear. Suddenly he changes expression, helps her to get up.) What is this? Composure. Pull yourself together.

GIRL: (lost) He told me to wait. They keep my head underwater, until . . .

GUIDE #2: (interrupts) Who threw water on you? This isn't Carnival. Excuse me, I have to go back to work. (resumes his professional tone. To the group.) The paintings are fantastic, a little deteriorated, but still . . . (He shines a light on the walls.) Jesus, there's nothing! (He sees a graffito in a corner, crouches, shines a light on it.) Gentlemen, come closer! (looks more closely) What kind of filth is this? (stands) Please, ladies, no! Excuse me, but the ladies may not look! (He gestures them away.) Gentlemen, if you like, but . . . (to the GIRL, very surprised.) *You* did this? Your idea of fun? It was a saint's head and they put a . . . (He finishes with an expressive gesture.) Let go, let go of the pencil!

GIRL: No. It wasn't me.

GUIDE #2: (spots the pistol on the floor) What's this? Just a moment, gentlemen. (He picks it up.) How strange!

GIRL: He left it so that, so that . . .

GUIDE #2: So that you could bullshit me. (He raises his arm as though to hit her. Remembers the audience. Smiles.) What negligence. (referring to the gun) I have to take care of everything around here.

GIRL: I'm thirsty.

GUIDE #2: Then you'll pee and be even wetter. (He shines his light on the walls.) There's nothing here either. But I swear there was. And not this filth! (He slaps her skirt.) No way you're a virgin!

GIRL: I'm thirsty.

GUIDE #2: (looking around) Isn't there any water? In the other room, there's a bathtub filled to overflowing.

GIRL: No! No, damn you!

GUIDE #2: What did I tell you? Does anyone understand women? A difficult bunch. As you see, ladies and gentlemen, there's nothing here either. Only the walls. And this filth. (to the GIRL) You weren't getting discouraged, were you? He left you the pistol? How strange. Who am I to . . . ? (He shrugs.) But don't touch it. If you squeeze the trigger, it's all over. The baths and . . . (He smiles.) I'm meddling in something that's none of my business. This is the safety. I'm leaving it up. Careful with the trigger. Sit down.

GIRL: (She sits, shakes her head.) I don't want it.

GUIDE #2: There's no danger, stupid! The slightest touch and it goes off.

GIRL: Take it!

GUIDE #2: (surprised) Why? Soaking and thirsty, it's not a good combination. (He puts the pistol on her lap, takes her hand and places it on the weapon.) Do you have a boyfriend? Touch this and it's all over, done with.

GIRL: I'm thirsty. (She raises her hands.)

GUIDE #2: Right. Sorry. I forgot. Ladies and gentlemen, forgive us for the . . . (He points to the wall.) How mortifying! If you would be so kind as to follow me . . . (He opens the door, indicates the exit. At this moment an USHERETTE arrives carrying a tray. She invites the group to have a glass of wine.) Help yourselves, ladies and gentlemen. It's on the house. There's no reason to be scared: you won't have to pay for it. It's all included. Then we'll go on with our visit. (A scream is heard. To the audience.) Who screamed? Who is the imbecile who screamed?

Scene 8

The USHERETTE steps close to the GUIDE and whispers a few words in his ear.

GUIDE: (making amends) Forgive me. In room 3 we are going to find something interesting. "Finally!" you must be saying to yourselves. "We should have stayed home." (He laughs.) Ah, theater's a risky business! What do you think? TV's a better bet, isn't it? But no, gentlemen. All is not lost. Please, gentlemen. I'm swallowing the "ladies" so I can go faster. With so many "ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen," I can't go on to anything else. (He leads the group through the passageway. The group is shunted aside by three men carrying a long, half-finished table. It is missing a few strips of wood on the surface. It is an ordinary table except that it has a strap nailed to one end. One of the men carries a tool box.) The first Christians were very persecuted. They were fed to the lions. (The men put the table on the floor.) Until San Martín.⁶ What would the Spanish say about San Martín? "That son of a bitch traitor. That black shit." (The men start to saw and drive nails, as though they were alone. They are blocking the passageway.) Can't you work somewhere else? (The men don't answer.) This way, gentlemen. Here's a little path. (They can't get through. The men move the table, forcing the group toward the GIRL's room.)

WOMAN'S VOICE:

"Down he went to the river,
Oh, down he went down!"

GUIDE: What a pain in the ass she is with that lullabye! (He looks at the door.) Here we are again. We may as well . . . Through here. Sooner or later we'll see a whole scene. (He opens. Joking.) Well? Have you dried yourself? How's . . . (There are some men surrounding the GIRL. The GUIDE quickly closes the door, shoos the people away. With a false smile.) No, I made a mistake. Room 3, they told me. Careful on the stairs. This way, ladies and gentlemen. Ladies, once again. It's nicer . . .

WOMAN'S VOICE:

"And his blood was running,
Oh, more than the water."

(The GUIDE snorts. Two men have positioned the table against the wall, clearing the passageway. They are smoking cigarettes, like two workers taking a break.)

GUIDE: (to the workmen) Room 3? This one here? (The men nod yes.) Thank you!

Scene 9

The room is lit with rosy light. Four chairs. There is a group comprising a man, a woman, and two other adults disguised as children, a girl and a boy. Their makeup is exaggerated, and their clothes are cheap, vulgar. The MOTHER is sewing, the FATHER is seated a little apart, and the CHILDREN are playing at throwing a hoop.

On the far side of the room are the CHIEF and two POLICEMEN. They sit very erect with their arms crossed over their chests. The characters act very broadly, a little like marionettes. The tone is grossly exaggerated.

GUIDE: (in a professional tone, dry and rapid) Explanation: For Foreigners. July 2, 1971. Marcelo Verdt and his wife, Sara Palacio de Verdt, were kidnapped by a group of eight men. *Desaparecidos*. Both were members of RAF, Revolutionary Armed Forces.⁸ According to information in the newspapers, the wife, before disappearing, brought the children to her sister for protection.

MOTHER: (moving her hand as though sewing) Children, I'm making a little outfit for the one who is best behaved!

CHILDREN: (playing) Thank you, Mommy!

POLICEMEN: (coming forward) Hands up, in the name of the law!

MOTHER: (raising her arm, protecting her face like the heroine in a silent movie) Oh! (The FATHER doesn't move.)

CHILDREN: Mommy, Mommy, who are they?

MOTHER: Don't be afraid, my darlings! No one is hurting your mother!

CHILDREN: Blessed Mommy!

POLICEMAN: (comes close, snatches at her clothes) You're disguised! (shoving her violently)

CHILDREN: Mommy, Mommy, who are they?

POLICEMEN: Where's your husband?

MOTHER: I don't know!

CHILDREN: What do you mean, you don't know, Mommy! In the bathroom! Making caca! (They call.) Daddy! Daddy! They're looking for you!

FATHER: (gets up, comes forward, wide-eyed) Who? What's happening?

POLICEMAN: This is what's happening! It's all over! (screams) Silence everyone! Let's get out of this hole! The car's out front!

MOTHER: Not the children! They don't know anything about it!

POLICEMEN: Them too!

MOTHER: Have pity!

POLICEMEN: Silence! Let's go! Everyone!

(They put the chairs together to make the car. All squeeze in. One of the POLICEMEN holds the hoop between his hands and handles it as though it were a steering wheel. He imitates the sound of a motor. The children wave. The POLICEMAN brakes suddenly. The others fall backward. They get out of the car, their gestures exaggeratedly frightened.)

CHIEF: They fell!

MOTHER: (on her knees) Pity!

POLICEMAN: What should we do with the kids?

CHILDREN: Daddy!

FATHER: (dignified) I'll protect you, don't be afraid. (puts his arms around them)

CHIEF: (to the POLICEMAN) Idiot! Why did you bring the kids?

POLICEMAN: You said everyone, Chief.

MOTHER: They're innocent!

CHIEF: I'll see if they're not already lost. Kids: Who created the flag?

MOTHER: (begging them) Answer right, answer right!

CHILDREN: (In unison) Manuel Belgrano!

CHIEF: When?

CHILDREN: February 27, 1812.

CHIEF: Where?

CHILDREN: On the banks of the Paraná. He had it blessed right there, beneath a blue and white sky, blue and white sky, blue and white . . .

CHIEF: Exactly! Very good! (kisses them) Here's a prize. (gives them each a piece of candy)

CHILDREN: Thank you, sir!

CHIEF: (to the MOTHER) Take them home. And don't be long.

POLICEMAN: Chief, what if she doesn't return?

CHIEF: (with an exaggeratedly sinister laugh, pointing to the FATHER) This one stays here. It's in his interest that she return. (to the MOTHER) Take my advice: be discreet. I'm doing you a favor. Don't be long. Take a taxi.

MOTHER: What are you going to do to him?

CHIEF: Nothing! From his eye to his sex. But only if I'm vexed.

MOTHER: Marcelo!

FATHER: My love!

CHIEF: Take them home. We don't have any small sacks. They're only in the way. Move it.

MOTHER: Come, children! Give Daddy a kiss. (The FATHER kisses them.) Don't be afraid. We're going home.

CHILDREN: (happy) The men are nice, Mama!

MOTHER: (moves off with the CHILDREN. Picks up the outfit she was sewing. To one of them.) Tell Grandma that the hem was turned here.⁹ Will you remember?

CHILD: Yes, Mama.

MOTHER: There's soup in the pot. Have it for supper.

CHILDREN: If you're not there, we won't eat any soup! We won't eat any soup!

MOTHER: Be good!

CHILDREN: Where are you going, Mama?

MOTHER: I'm going with Daddy. You behave. (hugs them)

CHILDREN: Mommy! Mommy!

GUIDE: (choked up) It gets to you, doesn't it?

(The MOTHER separates from the CHILDREN and returns toward the CHIEF. During the good-bye scene the POLICEMEN were trying various sacks—as though they were items of clothing—on the FATHER. They have found the right one. Then they take him out of the room.)

CHILDREN: (singing in a round) We won't eat any soup! We won't eat any soup!

MOTHER: Here I am. Where's my husband?

CHIEF: Husband? What husband? Take off your clothes.

GUIDE: (quickly) Let's go! Let's get out of here! (claps his hands)

Out! Where's "Carnation, sleep and dream"? Who wants more wine? (pushes the group toward the door) Follow me! Quick! No dawdling! (The group goes out. The GUIDE closes the door, leans against it.) Ouf!

Scene 10

GUIDE: A little wine! Careful . . . on the . . . stairs. (The USHERETTE brings him a glass of water.) Water? For me? What for? (remembers) Oh, right. She's waiting for water! Come, gentlemen, this way. We're almost there. Just another little minute. No reason to fret. (Again they enter the room of the GIRL from scenes 3, 7, and 8. Her clothes are drenched. The GIRL is breathing anxiously. She's seated, with the pistol, which is dry, in her lap. To the group.) Come in. Careful on the stairs. Or rather: fasten your seatbelts, no smoking. (He laughs. To the GIRL, very amiably.) May I? (He puts the glass and the pistol on the floor. Takes the chair on which she is sitting. Offers it to a woman in the audience.) Sit, madam, sit. She may have wet it, but she didn't piss on it! (He dries the chair with a hankie. To the woman.) Please, have a seat! (to the GIRL) They paid admission. Are you thirsty? (The GIRL, lost, doesn't answer. The GUIDE shakes her gently.) Hey! Wake up. I'm asking you if you're thirsty. (The GIRL shakes her head no.) Oh, no? I brought you water. Drink it. (He takes the glass, brings it to her lips. The GIRL resists.) And now, what do I do with the glass? I need my hands free. I'm working. This can't be! Drink, little girl, drink. The water flowed . . . (forcing her) There. There, that's good. So capricious! Well, I don't like people pulling my leg. You're all wet. (puts his hand under her skirt) Even your little fire-cracker. (He laughs. Turns toward the audience.) Oh, excuse me. (takes the pistol) Shall I take it? No? Freedom is within your grasp. No? (He puts the barrel against her breast.) How stupid. I can't. (He cleans the weapon, puts it in the GIRL's lap.) I don't know why they trust you so . . . It's loaded. If

you had a boyfriend, old girl . . . But like this. Idiot, why endure so much? (Another GUIDE appears in the doorway.)

OTHER GUIDE: (shouting) What are you doing *here*? It's about to start *there*! And they're giving out wine! It's not to be missed. I saw it! Exceptional! You can understand everything!

GUIDE: Really? Step on it, fellas, let's go! Move it, girls!

OTHER GUIDE: (teases) Don't you mean ladies and gentlemen?

GUIDE: (to OTHER GUIDE) There's wine? For sure? (OTHER GUIDE affirms it and leaves.) If you would be so kind, ladies and gentlemen . . . (He holds open the door so the group can pass through. Before closing the door, in a friendly way.) Think about it, little girl.

Scene 11

In the passageway, one of the vertical wooden boxes.

GUIDE: Wait! This has always intrigued me . . . (tries to see through the peephole) I can't see a thing. How about you, sir? (Someone from the audience has a look.) It's very dark. (He knocks at the door. Jokingly.) Is anyone home? *Hay al-guien?* (Curious, he opens the door. There's a heavily made-up man inside, dressed in a loincloth, staring fixedly. Matter of factly.) Hi. (He closes the door, turns toward the audience with an uncomfortable smile. As though it were not so strange.) What a surprise! To me this is very curious . . .

OTHER GUIDE: (shouts from the doorway of the other room) Well? What are you waiting for? A carriage? If you don't get there at the beginning, they won't understand anything!

GUIDE: (annoyed, referring to the vertical box) What about this? Does anyone understand this? (to the OTHER GUIDE) I give the orders in my group! And if they don't get it, too bad for them! This way, gentlemen! (He leads them in the opposite direction.) Follow *me*! (A panting death rattle is heard through the door of a room they pass.)

Scene 12

GUIDE: (He lingers in front of the door, listening to the death rattle inside.) What could this be? (A MAN passes by, whistling.)

MAN: (to GUIDE) Good day!

GUIDE: Good day! (surprised) Well, he's happy! Let's follow him. (referring to the death rattle in the room) Sounds like that and we've really got a mess on our hands! We can check it out later. (He and the group follow the MAN. The MAN walks along, whistling. He meets another man who is coming from the opposite direction.)

MAN: Good day!

NEIGHBOR #1: Hello! How's it going, doctor?

(They shake hands. They continue walking together. The group follows them. They enter a large room, where NEIGHBOR #2 is sweeping the floor. Two chairs stacked in a corner, against the wall.)

NEIGHBOR #2: Hello, doctor!

GUIDE: (to his group) Watch out for the cars! Stay on the sidewalk, please!

(He situates them. He hasn't finished doing so when the FIRST GROUP OF MEN enters at a trot, one behind the other, tied together at their waists.)

FIRST GROUP OF MEN: Let us through! Let us through!

(They come forward, trot through the room, then suddenly halt in front of the MAN and surround him, forming a closed circle.)

MAN: Excuse me.

FIRST GROUP OF MEN: Quieto! Quieto!¹⁰

MAN: Are you calling me? What do you want? (The men accelerate, tightening their circular movement, forming two closed rings.) Excuse me. Let me through.

NEIGHBOR #1: What's going on, doctor?

NEIGHBOR #2: (stops sweeping) Hey! Let him go!

NEIGHBOR #3: (from the audience) What the hell is going on?
(comes forward to help the MAN)

MAN: Let me go! Enough fooling around!

(He pushes, tries to get through the circle. Hits, struggles. The men try to drag him toward the door.)

NEIGHBORS: Let him go! Let him go!

(They try to break up the group, NEIGHBOR #2 hitting out with his broom. The SECOND GROUP OF MEN enters, also at a trot and tied together at their waists. They sing.)

SECOND GROUP OF MEN:

Peace and security
That is our domain
With a little authority
Order will be maintained!

(Observing the tumult, they linger.)

OFFICIAL: (heading the SECOND GROUP OF MEN) What's going on here? This is scandalous! Halt! Separate!

(The fight freezes.)

NEIGHBORS: (all at the same time)

Sir, they were pushing him!

(alternating)

—Over here.

—Over there.

—They tied him up.

—They dragged him down!

OFFICIAL: One at a time, magpies. Who asked you anything? (to the group in the fight) And you, you're prisoners in the name of the law. (He "aims" at them, with his finger. The SECOND GROUP OF MEN "handcuffs" them. They're all, including the MAN, put into a line and tied together at the wrists.)

NEIGHBORS:

Officer, sir:
Why the arrest?
He's one of the best!

OFFICIAL:

It doesn't matter, my esteemed citizens
Have faith
Justice is there for a reason
To prevent baseness, which is treason.

NEIGHBORS: But we saw . . . !

OFFICIAL:

What you saw is of no consequence
If there's offense
Rest assured
The man's secure . . .

SECOND GROUP OF MEN: Sure!

(They "take aim" at the NEIGHBORS.)

OFFICIAL: In my providence.

(The NEIGHBORS mix in with the audience. The OFFICIAL moves off to the side, crosses his arms, his expression serious. The FIRST GROUP OF MEN and the MAN attacked in the first place draw near. One of the men from the second group arranges the chairs.)

OFFICIAL: (seating himself. To the MAN.) Name.

MAN: Quieto.

GUIDE: (shouts) Sí, Quieto! (to his group) *Quieto* means quiet. (smiles) Stop a moment. (gestures toward the group) So they'll understand. Otherwise, they'll miss the point. (The others stop the action. In a dry, professional tone.) Explanation: For Foreigners. July 7, 1971. Roberto Quieto, attorney, defender of political prisoners, resists a kidnapping attempt. Fortunately, the neighbors intervene and call a police squad. The kidnapers turn out to be policemen. Dr. Quieto was put at

the disposition of the executive power. Subsequently he was accused of having been implicated in an auto theft and of having participated, after his detention, in various subversive acts. He was transferred to Rawson Prison, 730 miles from Buenos Aires. What happened then? I don't remember. Lost in the night of time. (smiles) But he wasn't so innocent. High up in the Montoneros, the son of a b——. It's not my responsibility. Although when you have the truth, I don't know why it should be hidden. Go on. I'm done.

OFFICIAL: (to the MAN) Name.

MAN: Quieto.

OFFICIAL: Quieto! That's what I'm telling *you!* Now what is your name?

MAN: Blame.

OFFICIAL: (suspicious) Ohhhh? (to the FIRST GROUP OF MEN) And you? What are your names?

FIRST GROUP OF MEN: (They sing.)

Peace and security
That is our domain
With a little authority
Order will be maintained!

SECOND GROUP OF MEN:

If you're lying
You'll get bruised!

OFFICIAL:

Explain what happened
I'm confused!

FIRST GROUP OF MEN:

Boca will never lose!
Boca's the team we choose!¹¹

OFFICIAL: (very pleased) For this, you are excused. But who began . . .

FIRST GROUP OF MEN: That man!

OFFICIAL: No more rhyming! (to the MAN) Don't you know that it's a crime to incite a riot in the street? (to the SECOND GROUP OF MEN) Did they stop traffic?

SECOND GROUP OF MEN: Yes, sir! They delayed it!

OFFICIAL: For how long?

SECOND GROUP OF MEN: For three minutes!

OFFICIAL: Re-create it!

SECOND GROUP OF MEN:

In their cars the men grew irritated
At the office work accumulated.

OFFICIAL: (to the first group, fiercely) I want a confession.
(sweetly) What team are you from?

FIRST GROUP OF MEN:

Boca will never lose
Boca . . .

OFFICIAL: Fine, fine, no need to repeat! (The FIRST GROUP OF MEN "free" their hands, which had been "cuffed." To the MAN.) What about you?

MAN: What about me?

OFFICIAL: What team are you from?

MAN: I nurse the same illusion.

OFFICIAL: I smell collusion. Why aren't you from San Lorenzo?

MAN: Because I'm not?

OFFICIAL: Don't be a wise guy! (The SECOND GROUP OF MEN hit MAN. To the others.) And you, what are you waiting for? Get going!

MAN: You can't let them go! They attacked me! I want to see my attorney!

OFFICIAL: The one who gives the orders here is me. (to the others) And you, once again, (sweetly) why don't you do your work?

FIRST GROUP OF MEN: (tied together at their waists, they trot out, singing)

For us it was a sad event
That ended to our detriment
Of this our song's a testament!
For us it was a sad event
That ended to our detriment
Of this our song's a testament!

OFFICIAL: (to the MAN) Justice will be done.

(One of the men in the second group puts on a judge's robe and comes closer. Another moves in a chair and has him sit. Becoming the GUARD, he remains standing behind the JUDGE's back.)

JUDGE: (to the MAN) You're free. Being from Boca's no crime.
But next time . . .

(The MAN frees his hands and stands up. The JUDGE turns half-way around and grabs him from behind. No sooner has he done so when the GUARD leans into the MAN and pushes him roughly down by the shoulders, forcing him to sit. The MAN again joins his hands as though they were handcuffed.)

OFFICIAL: (to the MAN) You stole a car. Your trial's pending.
Your sentence could be unending!

MAN: I need defending!

OFFICIAL: Superintending! (to the JUDGE) He stole a car.

JUDGE: He did not steal a car!

MAN: Am I absolved? Can I go?

JUDGE: Why not? Go ahead!

(He turns so that his back is to the MAN. The previous scene is repeated: the MAN frees his hands, the GUARD forces him to sit down again, etc.)

OFFICIAL: He robbed a bank!

MAN: I was in prison!

JUDGE: (It starts again.) Absolved!

MAN: Thank you. Can I go?

JUDGE: Why not? Go ahead. (again. The rhythm speeds up.)

OFFICIAL: He robbed a station!

JUDGE: (over his shoulder) What kind of station?

OFFICIAL: Service station. Five old wrecks.

MAN: (forced to sit) How? I was in prison!

OFFICIAL: (with pretended fury) Guards, you let him go?

JUDGE: (turns) Why can't you see? There is no case. Let him go free! (turns his back)

OFFICIAL: He robbed a commissary, several stores, and several dairies!

MAN: (forced to sit)

If I'd been seized
How could I be eating cheese?

JUDGE:

He is innocent
Surely
I declare it
Firmly.

MAN: (stands up, etc.) Thank you. Can I go?

JUDGE: Naturally. Why not. (It starts again. The action accelerates to the point of dislocation but always remains precise. The speeches are transferred but not the actions, which remain a constant with each character.)

OFFICIAL: Don't move. I've heard a little story!

JUDGE: He murdered a canary.

MAN:

That isn't fair!
I love all canaries
Everywhere!

OFFICIAL: You love them, but you kill them!

JUDGE: Guards, you let him go?

OFFICIAL:

Your Honor, you're the witness
Of this bad faith.

MAN: I only want to live!

JUDGE: Guards, you let him go?

OFFICIAL: If he'd been seized

MAN: How could I've been eating cheese?

JUDGE: Thank you.

OFFICIAL: Beat it! I can't stand you anymore!

MAN: I'm going back to my city!

JUDGE: Can I go?

OFFICIAL: Beat it!

MAN: (resisting those who are making him sit) No, no, I was in prison!

JUDGE: He's free! Oh, such obsession!

OFFICIAL: He's free! What fascination!

MAN: But I'm not!

JUDGE: Yes, you are! So you better shut up! (turns his back, covers his ears)

OFFICIAL:

Enough already! He's hard to handle.
All that screaming. What a scandal!

(gestures to the guards to take the MAN away. To the audience.)
The idiots they send me, it's outrageous!

The courts
aren't beneficial
Unless they're
sacrificial!

(lights out)

GUIDE: Shit! What happened? They turned out the light without telling me! Cretins! (takes out his flashlight, switches it

on) Where is the door? Luckily I know the house. (opens door. The passageway is lit.) This way, gentlemen. There aren't any stairs. But be careful all the same. You only get to stumble once, like the tango says. Hey, hey. Everyone make it? (He leads the group through the passageway. They pass the door to the room where the death rattle was heard. It is heard again. The GUIDE puts his ear to the door. Admiringly.) Persistent! We go in? We don't go in? What do you want to do? Free choice. At my orders! We go in!

Scene 13

The GUIDE opens the door. The labored breathing stops. There is a GIRL with long hair laid out on a stretcher, with a sheet carefully folded under her feet.

GUIDE: (advancing on tiptoe) Don't make any noise. She's sleeping. (He approaches, looks at her. The GIRL smiles at him. Sweetly.) How're you doing?

GIRL: (sits up, brushes her hair off her face, folds her hands in her lap. She looks at the group with a semismile. Silence. Then, very simply, colloquially.)

I would like to die
as softly as possible
So that my friends will think
she is sleeping
in the earth
become a worm
digging in the earth
so that in spring
the flowers blossom
After my death
I want my children
to sit at the table
and say
at her age
Mama
ran off with some guy

What a shame
poor old Dad
staring at the tablecloth
his cup of coffee
searching for her
This is how I want to die
as simply
as though I had never lived
What a lovely thought
to leave like that
not causing any pain
The cup of coffee
that no one drinks
absent . . .

(Silently, a character mixed in with the audience goes up to the GIRL. He puts his hand over her mouth and nose. The GIRL offers desperate, mute resistance. She dies. The man gently lays her out, covers her with the sheet. Then he moves off and mixes in with the crowd, like one more spectator.)

GUIDE: (amazed) How about that? (looks at the man) And now he's so calm! But what a feat! Phenomenal! (He lifts the sheet. Matter of factly.) She's dead. Poor creature! Really, without so much as a moan. Discreet. And in the bloom of youth! (lets the sheet fall) She spoke of children, a husband. We'll have to go find them. Nice news I've got. What a bad deal. (hopefully) Anyone want to go? Of course, for this there are no volunteers. (furious) The son of a bitch. (He goes to the door, leaving the audience.) Excuse me. (He opens the door, yells out.) I need someone from the family! Quick! Someone from the family! (He comes back inside.) She didn't move, did she? What with the advances of medicine, for a moment I thought that . . .

(FOUR MEN enter, two-by-two, each pair moving as one. They are wearing white smocks down to their feet, very loose, belted at the waist. They come in on skates. Their faces are painted with large red smiling mouths. One pair beats pot lids; the other pair waves a white sack.)

FOUR MEN: (singing)

Tachín, tachín, tachín
She died as she would have ordained
Without causing any pain.

GUIDE: What about the family? I've got to tell them . . . It's so
unfortunate . . . My heartfelt sympathy. (extending his hand)

FOUR MEN: (They pay no attention to the GUIDE. They ap-
proach the stretcher, lift the sheet. Sing.)

The jokester
Coaxed her

GUIDE: (very confused) Choked her . . . A son of a bitch
who . . . (searches with his eyes. The men start putting the
GIRL into the sack. Surprised.) What are you doing? But . . .

FOUR MEN: (sing)

But nothing
But nothing
Just doing our bit
Ashes to ashes
Shit to shit

GUIDE: (indignant) That's gross! Don't you see there's people?
You must have been raised in a barn! Ladies, your forgive-
ness. I knew nothing . . . The modern theater is like this. No
respect for the ladies!

FOUR MEN:

(They finish putting the GIRL into the sack, leaving her head
out. They tie the end of the sack around her neck. It is evident
that the GIRL is playing dead: though her head is bent over, she
is able to support it. The FOUR MEN hold the bundle, swing it
hammocklike. They sing.)

If you don't like this Tin Pan band
Because it hasn't any flair
Because it just gave you a scare
Swing high, swing well
You can go to hell!

GUIDE: Go on!

FOUR MEN:

Tachín, tachín, tachín,
Tachín, tachín, tachín!
Pran-pran-pran!
Taratá-ta-ta!

(They near the door. The HUSBAND and MOTHER enter. The
HUSBAND is wearing threadbare clothing. His hair is long and
all over the place. The MOTHER is the typical little old lady—
black clothes, shawl over her head. Both act crudely, like
prototypes of desperate people.)

HUSBAND: What happened? I heard screams!

MOTHER: Sirs, have pity! Where is my daughter? Darling! Dar-
ling!

GUIDE: Oh my God, the family's here!

MOTHER and HUSBAND: (together) We've come to look for our
poor Hermenegilda.

FOUR MEN:

(They come back, set the corpse down; it supports itself against
the stretcher. Horrified.)

That name she inherited
She certainly merited!

MOTHER and HUSBAND: (together)

We're here to find out
What she finally merited!

GUIDE: Oh no! If these two speak in verse, I'm leaving!

Although the language may be terse,
I can't bear
so much pain.

I'm leaving! (He pushes away from the crowd, but upon hear-
ing the HUSBAND, he stops, comes back.)

HUSBAND: Where is she?

FOUR MEN: (They shake the corpse in front of the HUSBAND'S face.) We don't know! We don't know! She was never here!

HUSBAND: What do you mean? She came here to buy wine!

FOUR MEN: (They turn the corpse facedown on the stretcher, look underneath.) She bought her bread and went away, evaporated . . . Surely it was fated! (They look at the ceiling. The HUSBAND and MOTHER imitate them. The men point.) Look, sir. That moth . . .

HUSBAND: She wasn't a moth! At dawn . . .

FOUR MEN:

She was a moth. At dawn
Before the sun came up full
we found her eating
wool

MOTHER: It's not true! She didn't like wool!

FOUR MEN:

Was she a woman or a moth?
The question's far from risible.
Lady, lady don't be miserable.
Don't be upset
We'll give you your daughter yet.

(They approach an interior door. They call the HUSBAND and MOTHER as one would a dog.)

Tch, tch, tch . . .

(The HUSBAND and MOTHER advance, their smiles exaggeratedly hopeful. The others open the door. The interior is dark. The HUSBAND and MOTHER look in.)

FOUR MEN:

You'll find her here, here!
So be of good cheer, cheer!

(Moving in unison, the FOUR MEN push them inside with kicks in the rump.) And stop mugging! (They close the door. They sway.)

Ladies, Gentlemen, dearest friends
Our show is over, Curtains!

(They take the corpse. They lead the way to the exit, singing.)

Tachín, tachín, tachín!
Tachín, tachín, tachín!
Tarará-ta-ta!
Tarará-ta-ta!

GUIDE: (enthused) Let's go, let's go! Let's follow them! See what happens! They're entertaining! (The group follows the FOUR MEN and GUIDE. The FOUR MEN enter a contiguous room and close the door. An actor, pretending to be part of the audience, opens it. The interior is dark. An enormous club comes out and hits the actor over the head. He falls. The GUIDE leans over him.) Why did he butt in? I'm the Guide here! One to a group! (He pokes him. The man doesn't move. He then lifts him by the armpits and puts him into one of the vertical boxes. He talks all the while, completely dissociated from his actions.) That's how it is. In they all go but . . . who takes the potatoes out of the fire? The son of a bitch. If he was part of the audience, why did he make like an actor? Vanity, vanity will be the end of us all! . . . (He closes the door.) Now what were we going to see?

SOMEONE FROM THE AUDIENCE: The catacombs.

GUIDE: Right. Thank you. The first Christians really had a hard time of it. Just thinking about how the lions loved to chew them up . . . Human meat, they say, is sweet. Sweet, bitter, what could be stupider. (They cross with another group. To the OTHER GUIDE.) Where's there something good? We went in here, and it's all fucked up. (Without stopping, the OTHER GUIDE points to a door.)

Scene 14

The GUIDE leads the group into the designated room. Inside is a group of NEIGHBORS all crowded together, some looking over the heads of others. On the far side, two POLICEMEN crouch, their expressions very attentive. In the center are the MAN and WOMAN, both heavily made-up. Their clothes are cheap, flashy; the WOMAN wears very high heels. All the acting is crude, infantile, and exaggerated.

GUIDE: Attention. Ladies and gentlemen, this is the main course. So they tell me. Hope it's true. Make yourselves comfortable. If you find a chair, be seated. Silence, please. The story of a BM, or bad marriage. (His tone is professional, dry and quick.) Explanation: For Foreigners. On the afternoon of July 13, 1971, Juan Pablo Maestre and his wife, Mirta Elena Missetich, were kidnapped by a group of men. Juan Pablo Maestre managed to run a few yards but then was shot. Mirta Elena Missetich ran in the opposite direction, losing a shoe. She was captured and pushed into one car; her husband was thrown into another. Shortly afterward, a police squad sent to the scene recovered the shoe and ordered the doorman of an apartment building to wash the blood from the pavement. The body of Juan Pablo Maestre appeared days later in Escobar. Of Mirta Elena Missetich there was no further news. Both belonged to the RAF, or Revolutionary Armed Forces. Juan Pablo Maestre, twenty-eight years old. Mirta Elena Missetich, the same age.

MAN: (with a conspiratorial air) Let's plant a bomb here

WOMAN: (with a conspiratorial air) And a bomb over there!

MAN: When these go off

WOMAN: No one will be spared!

MAN and WOMAN: (taking bombs with fuses out from under their clothes)

Subversion, subversion,
all rise up!
in revolution!

MAN: (looking around) Let's go, all clear!

WOMAN: Nothing will be left here! (They take a few cautious steps.)

POLICEMAN: (comes forward, arm extended) Hands up! In the name of the law!

MAN: We're caught! Run! (They drop their bombs and run in opposite directions.)

POLICEMAN: (aims with his finger and shoots) Pum!

(The MAN falls. His blood is obviously fake. The other POLICEMAN runs after the WOMAN.)

WOMAN: (stops) Darling!

POLICEMAN: Hey, hey! Justice always triumphs! Olé!

(The two POLICEMEN drag the MAN and WOMAN away. The WOMAN loses her shoe. They exit. Slowly, the NEIGHBORS untangle themselves and come forward.)

NEIGHBORS:

The ass must be judged
Not broken!

(The two POLICEMEN reenter. The NEIGHBORS immediately reform their group.)

POLICEMEN:

Of our respect
Here's a token!¹²

(They're carrying the MAN, dragging him along. The NEIGHBORS watch, timidly come forward. Romantic music is heard. More POLICEMEN enter, smiling and wearing sweepers' jackets. They swing long-handled brooms, dance as in a musical comedy.)

GROUP OF POLICEMEN: (They sing.)

We're here to clean!
We're here to clean!
The filth is gone

Your street is clean!
Let mothers pray
let children play
in celebration!

(Smiling, they sweep. They lift the shoe. They sing.)

Little shoe, little shoe
Whom might you belong to?
Why, to Snow White
or to her mother.

GUIDE: What do you mean, fellas! The little lost shoe was
Cinderella's!

POLICEMAN: (emphatically) I say it's Snow White's or her
mother's. (recovering his smile) Whose little shoe is this?
Madam, is it yours? Say yes. A Prince Charming awaits you
in the wings.

GUIDE: No, no! Error! It's the prince, the prince who searches
for the owner of the shoe, not a cop! Didn't you read the
story?

POLICEMAN: Calm down! It's a free interpretation. (smiling)
Doesn't it belong to anyone? Neighbors? (He shows them the
shoe. The NEIGHBORS immediately deny ownership, shaking
their heads in unison.) So we'll look in another neighborhood.
It'll belong to someone. (He repeats, frowning in the GUIDE's
direction.) It's Snow White's or her mother's.

GUIDE: (servile) Yes, of course, her mother's. Well, let's get
going. We can follow you, can't we? (to his group) We'll just
stroll along. If you get tired, let me know.

GROUP OF POLICEMEN: (They go out with the shoe. Asking.)
Madam, is this yours? Is this yours? Young man? (The group
follows them. They enter another room. The WOMAN, wear-
ing no makeup, is seated on a chair. Sitting nearby on the
floor, with her legs crossed, is a GIRL, who may be the same
as the one from scene 13.)

POLICEMAN: (to the WOMAN) Madam, excuse me. We found a
little shoe. Is it yours? Prince Charming will marry you. Cash

in a flash! You'll live in a palace! Let's see. (He puts the shoe
on her foot.) She's Cinderella! It fits! Perfect! What luck, old
girl! You win! A royal flush! (bows) Princess! My respects!
(The WOMAN stares ahead, immobile. Surprised.) Aren't you
happy? What's the matter?

WOMAN: My darling!

POLICEMAN: Your darling was stopped by a cop. (The POLICE-
MEN exit arm-in-arm, tap dancing.)

WOMAN:

I was at home, eating my bread. I was
making love. I was kissing my children.
And you will be the only one who knows
where and how my body was lost,
how my voice became unstrung
Only you will know
how to know
the voices of fear and the faces of
desperation
My God, what did the brave ones become?
I will speak
Only you will know
this tongue.

(A shot is heard.)

GUIDE: What's going on? Did you hear that? It was a shot.
(looks at the WOMAN and the GIRL) But why so quiet! It's
over. Gentlemen, follow me. Did you like that? (He leads his
group out of the room.) A bit mixed up, wasn't it? Me . . .
well, what do *you* like . . . I'm old-fashioned. I prefer some-
thing else. If this was the main course, what will the others
be? (They enter the adjoining room. The GIRL of scenes 3, 7,
and 8 lies on the floor, shot, the pistol in her hand. The
GUIDE looks at her, surprised. Then, matter of factly, push-
ing them toward the exit.) Oh, sorry! Shall we? The jug may
as well go to the fountain as . . . (Happy music is heard.)
How about that music! So there is a little happiness in this
world! Enough drama! Let's go. Move along. A little gaiety,
dammit!

(The poem spoken by the WOMAN was written by Marina, a Greek girl, who was captured and tortured.)

Scene 15

As the group leaves, the music fades and after a few minutes disappears. Through the passageway comes a group holding hands. They sing.)

GAME PLAYERS:

—Martin Fisherman, will you let me pass?
—Pass, pass, but the last one stays with me!

(The group starts playing Martin Fisherman, a singing game somewhat like London Bridge Is Falling Down. Two children make a bridge with their arms; the others run underneath, single file, holding each other by the waist. The line of children sings for permission to pass through; the last one is taken prisoner. In another version, the children making the bridge ask questions. Those who answer correctly pass through; the others do not. Two lines form, one comprising the “free,” the other “prisoners.” After everyone has had a question, the longer line wins, and the game may start again.)

GUIDE: Ladies and gentlemen, you're welcome to participate. That's not coercion, only if you want to. Grotowsky used to say: The more physical distance, the more spiritual closeness. What nonsense! Don't be afraid to join in, ladies and gentlemen!

(The game continues. Suddenly one of the men forming Martin Fisherman's bridge yells.)

GAME PLAYERS: (alternately)
—I know that one! Don't let him go!
—Me?

(The latter tries to get off the bridge.)
—I know that one! Don't let him go!
—Don't fight!

—Just answer right!
—I don't have to! No!

(He whistles over his shoulder for help. Those in his line start to push. The others shout.)

—Don't push! Hold tight!
—Wait!

(Nevertheless they react. The shorter line becomes crooked. A man forming the bridge yells.)

—They're shooting! Hold tight!

(The sound of a police whistle. Policemen arrive, dressed like the cops in Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid*, with large, prehistoric-type clubs. Music is heard. Their acting is crude. They immediately start hitting those in the longer line over the head. The sound of the clubs: Plac! Plac! Plac! Those hit fall into artificially distorted poses. The men rush the bridge of Martin Fisherman, crushing the captured player, who screams.)

GUIDE: Kids today! They don't know how to play peacefully! Let's get out of the way. I wonder if they'll tie them up. (warns a policeman) Not the audience! (The policeman moves his head like Harpo Marx. He spins around like an acrobat, beating on actors mixed in with the public, acting as audience members. Very confused.) On the double, ladies and gentlemen, quickly! Let's go! No stragglers! My group this way! Forward! Toward the music! (Music floats in the air, disappears.) Now what? (He opens his hands in a gesture of incomprehension. Taking advantage of the GUIDE's position, someone comes forward and puts a tin plate full of garbage in his hands. To this person, absolutely astonished.) What is this? (protests) Not to me you don't! This is not what I get paid for! Who do they think they are?

(Meanwhile, the game of Martin Fisherman has stopped. The policemen and actors from the shorter line carry off those who were knocked unconscious and throw them into a room.)

GUIDE: (to the group) With so much confusion, I forgot about the catacombs. You'll end up leaving without seeing anything.

WOMAN'S VOICE:

"The water was black there
under the branches.
When it reached the bridge
it stopped and sang."¹³

GUIDE: (pleased) Her again! What persistence! You want to risk
it? Sooner or later it's got to improve!

(He opens the door. The people inside won't let him in.)

Scene 16

ACTOR #1: Sorry, old man. You can't come in. Off-limits.

GUIDE: Why not? I'm bringing people.

ACTOR #1: No, old man. We're rehearsing.

GUIDE: So what? Aren't you getting tired?

ACTOR #1: No! (He closes the door.)

GUIDE: (outraged) What balls. Sorry. (He remembers something,
smiles.) They're not gonna fuck with me. Psss! This way!
There's another entrance! (He leads them along a passage-
way. They pass a vertical box like the others, only bigger.
Naturally.) Just a moment. (He opens the door of the box.
Inside, two men are plastered together. The GUIDE puts the
tin plate on their shoulders. They stretch their necks desper-
ately, trying to suck up what's on the plate. It falls. Matter of
factly, to the audience.) They let it fall! What idiots! (He
closes the door.)

Scene 17

GUIDE: Don't make a sound. Walk on tiptoe. Don't say a word.
(They enter a room. Folding screens around an illuminated

central space.) Sssh . . . Silence . . . (The group watches the
scene through the folding screens. Two actors and two
actresses are rehearsing *Othello*, in rehearsal clothes. Actress
#1, as Desdemona, is already dead on the floor.)

ACTOR #1: (as Iago)

Villainous whore!¹⁴

ACTRESS #2: (as Emilia)

She give it Cassio? No, alas, I found it,
And I did give't my husband.

ACTOR #1:

Filth, thou liest!

GUIDE: Such language!

ACTRESS #2: (as Emilia)

By heaven, I do not, I do not, gentlemen.
O murd'rous coxcomb! What should such a fool
Do with so good a wife?

ACTOR #2: (as Othello)

Are there no stones in heaven
But what serves for the thunder?—Precious villain!

(Othello runs at Iago. Iago strikes Emilia and leaves. ACTOR #1
marks his exit and sits off to one side. A POLICEMAN enters in
Isabellesque attire.)

POLICEMAN #1: (to ACTOR #2) You killed those two women!
Villain! Viper!

(The ACTRESSES get up, go sit down. They watch calmly, a bit
surprised.)

ACTOR #1: Who told this guy to come in?

POLICEMAN #1: (acting, calling his men) Over here, men. Here!

ACTOR #1: Go act for the other side. Who called you. Get out
of here!

POLICEMAN #1: Thou hast no weapon, and perforce must suffer. They are dead.

ACTRESS #1: (joking) I am dead!

ACTRESS #2: (sings)

Willow, willow, willow.
Moor, she was chaste. She loved thee, cruel Moor!

ACTOR #1: Stop! (to the POLICEMAN) Will you beat it!

POLICEMAN #1: To raise your sword against a woman!

ACTOR #2: What are you talking about?

ACTOR #1: The guy's a mental case. Beat it! (He pushes him toward the door.) Out! (returns) Better keep the door locked. There's no telling who could walk in. Let's go, girls. That guy stank worse than a pig. (claps his hands) One more time!

POLICEMAN #1: (draws his sword) No, traitor!

ACTOR #2: (returns. In spite of himself, in character.) Wrench his sword from him.

POLICEMAN #1:

Torments will ope your lips.

ACTOR #2:

Well, thou dost best.

ACTOR #1: Cut! Right there!

POLICEMAN #1: Officers, come here! (Another POLICEMAN enters, dressed in the same style.)

POLICEMAN #2: What's happening, sir?

POLICEMAN #1: (He shows him the vial he's just taken from his own pocket.) Trotyl! And the women are dead! Oh my! O thou pernicious caitiff!

POLICEMAN #2: (with his sword, rounds up the ACTORS, who move into a corner) Move it, or I'll take a slice! (The ACTRESSES let out an inappropriate laugh.)

POLICEMAN #1: Take them, too, for having laughed at the wrong time! (in a dramatic voice)

To you, Lord Governor,
Remains the censure of this hellish villain,
The time, the place, the torture, O, enforce it!
Myself will straight aboard, and to the state
This heavy act with heavy heart relate.

(He takes a gun from his pocket, forces the actors to exit.)

GUIDE: (to his group) A bit confusing, the way that happened, don't you think? So you understand. (He walks into the light. In a professional, dry and rapid voice.) Explanation: For Foreigners. (fierce and rude) Does anyone really need an explanation? If you want to act like actors, just go into a tenement and howl like dogs, throw a good scare into people. If you don't have money, people will be even more afraid. Why scream? Why pretend? When no one can open his mouth, why would anyone scream gratuitously? (He waits for a response, which he doesn't get.) Okay then! (resumes his professional tone) August 6, 1971. The police burst into an old house with many rooms, like this one, in the city of Santa Fe. In one of the rooms they find eight hundred grams of trotyl. They say. One journalist and three members of the Grupo 67 theater are arrested. They're taken to Buenos Aires on suspicion of subversive actions. The district attorney recommended they be absolved on the benefit of doubt. They were absolved May 24, 1972. (change of tone) Few are called, many are chosen. Nine months in the cage. In misery. Well, that's life! (He leaves the illuminated space, goes back to his group.) Wait! The show goes on!

Scene 18

A sort of deformed CHILD-MONSTER, dressed in a floor-length white shirt with lots of lace and frills. He is heavily made-up. Others disguised as CHILDREN follow. The CHILD-MONSTER clutches a club. They sing.)

CHILDREN:

Anton, Anton Pirulero
each one, each one
attends to his game
and he who does not
he who does not
will suffer the blame.

(The CHILDREN sit in a circle around the CHILD-MONSTER, who calls to one of the bigger children and gives him the club. The latter stays outside the ring. They play Anton Pirulero, in which the child playing Anton is in the center of the circle, turning around and around, his arms extended like wings. The others keep singing and pretend to play musical instruments—guitar, cornet, violin, etc. They have to be very alert, for if Anton Pirulero stops and points at one of them with his arm and that child isn't moving his own arms like Anton, then that child loses. He who loses three times is out. The game is played singing, and very fast.)

CHILD-MONSTER: (He is Anton Pirulero. In an out-of-tune sing-song.)

Anton, Anton Pirulero
each one, each one
attends to his game
and he who does not
he who does not
will suffer the blame.

(Now they play only guitar. The child with the club goes to the one who has changed places with Anton and hits him. The child falls. The game continues, faster every time. The CHILD-MONSTER never finishes his song, the game falls apart, and the child with the club hits out indiscriminately. Finally, the only ones left unharmed are the CHILD-MONSTER and the character with the club. They wave their arms and sing. The CHILD-MONSTER glares at the other one, more and more menacingly. He aims with his finger as though it were a revolver and kills the other child. Pum! He plays alone, his gestures increasingly

spastic. The song "Anton Pirulero" becomes unintelligible. The lights go out.)

GUIDE: What now? Why did they kill the lights?

VOICES: (singing)

Anton, Anton Pirulero
each one
each one
attends to his game.

(Lights up. In the same space, THREE MEN and a YOUNG WOMAN. The CHILD-MONSTER laughs in his labored way, waves his arms, stutters.)

CHILD-MONSTER: D-d-d-ow-ow-n-n-n! S-s-s-i-i-i-t-t-t-d-d-d-ow-n-n-n!

(He aims his hand like a revolver. The men and woman don't seem to notice his presence. They sit of their own volition.)

FIRST MAN: What is your game?

SECOND MAN: Fear.

FIRST MAN: And yours?

THIRD MAN: Fear.

FIRST MAN: (to the YOUNG WOMAN) What is your game?

YOUNG WOMAN: Fear. (pause) And the question.

FIRST MAN: What question?

YOUNG WOMAN: Why fear? My name is Marina. I am twenty years old. I am Greek, a prisoner, and I have been tortured. (The CHILD-MONSTER stutters low, furiously. He keeps playing, getting all tangled up in his own movements.)

Time is altered, the years to come are altered
You know where you will find me
I, fear, I, death
I, the memory beyond reach
I, the recollection of the tenderness of your hands
I, the sadness of our broken life

I will defeat "it's not my concern" with my
anguish
blast their alien sleep with fireworks,
horrible and indecent
with countless shootings I will fall on the indifference
of those who pass by
until they begin to ask, to ask themselves

THREE MEN: (in an even tone)

Why fear?
Why torture?
Why deaths?

(Stuttering and autistic, the CHILD-MONSTER plays.)

THREE MEN:

Who set limits?
Who once said: this much thirst
this much water?

Who once said: this much air
this much fire?

Who once said: here the ken
of men and women
here the bounds?

Only hope has sharp knees.
They are bleeding.

(darkness)

(The poem spoken by the YOUNG WOMAN was written by Marina. The poem spoken by the THREE MEN is Juan Gelman's.¹⁵)

GUIDE: Now what? There they go again cutting the light without warning me! I understand less and less. We're the ones who bear the brunt of this show. I shit on poetry! Watch your wallets. And I left my flashlight. This way, this way. It's so dark! Don't touch each other! Whose little ass is this?

(He laughs. Opens the door. The passageway is illuminated.)
Ah! Light, more light! What a phrase! Only a genius could come up with that one, eh?

WOMAN'S VOICE:

"Ay-y-y, for the big horse
who didn't like water"¹⁶

GUIDE: Still at it! Now that's perseverance! (Baroque music is heard. The GUIDE puts his ear to the door. Unsure.) Do we go in here? I don't remember. Oh well, let's do it! Come along, gentlemen! You're almost there!

Scene 19

They enter another room. Two GUARDS are dressing a group of squalid-looking characters who are handcuffed to the wall, heavily made-up, with false eyelashes and lots of rouge. Some are half-undressed, wearing only jackets and underwear. Others wear bras and costume jewelry. The GUARDS move around busily. They bring chairs. Make the prisoners sit. They arrange them artistically, crossing their legs, raising their arms as though they were holding cigarettes between their fingers. The prisoners stay in these poses. During the development of this scene, one GUARD—seated apart—recites with a melancholy air.)

GUARD:

You, who come from the shores of the Tagus
Every day sing of my death
Only this do I ask
with my dying breath
Every day sing of my death
You, who come from the shores of the Tagus.¹⁷

(A signal is heard. A line of frightened men and women enter. Some carry small packages in their hands, obviously clothing or food. The GUARD watches them.)

GUARD: No one enters without being checked. (He turns his face away. Raises and lowers his index finger mechanically, while the people pass in front of him and go out. Recites rapidly.) With pants, no. With skirts, no. With stockings, no. With packages, no. With children, no. With faces, no. (A PRETTY GIRL passes. He looks at her. His finger stops. Very nicely.)

Twenty little hard ones, twenty little hard ones
all in a roll, all in a roll
twenty little hard ones
in your little asshole.¹⁸
May I?

PRETTY GIRL: (stupidly) What?

GUARD: (wiggles his finger obscenely) May I?

PRETTY GIRL: No!

GUARD: (pulls himself up, undiscouraged) To arms! To arms
against the little asshole! Right over here!

(A group of guards enters at a trot. They rush the PRETTY GIRL and fling themselves on her as though she were the ball in a game of baseball. They roll with her out of the room.)

GUARD: (moves off, uninterested. Starts again with a melancholy air.)

You, who come from the shores of the Tagus . . .

LITTLE OLD LADY: (the last of the visitors. She brings a sandwich wrapped in a handkerchief.) I've come to see my little son. He misbehaved.

GUARD: (deflated) Ah . . . Why didn't you bring him up better, madam?

LITTLE OLD LADY: He was always my wayward one!

GUARD: A good beating is what they need. They don't learn unless they bleed.

LITTLE OLD LADY: At ten years old, he was looking up the girls' skirts.

GUARD: (dumbfounded) Filthy!

LITTLE OLD LADY: (plaintive) I cut his little whistle, but it did no good!

GUARD: It's late to repent. Show me what you've brought!

LITTLE OLD LADY: (unwraps her handkerchief) A sandwich.

GUARD: (lifts the top of the bread) Ah! Extra testicles. No, madam! Here they only lose them. And for us that's work! Confiscated! (He takes the sandwich.) Out!

LITTLE OLD LADY: I want to see my son! Just once! Be generous! You have a mother too!

GUARD: Yeah, but she's not an old whore like you.

LITTLE OLD LADY: Why are you insulting me?

GUARD: (with disgust) You're old! (in another tone) All right. Go see him. I'm doing this for my mother. Sentimentality will be the end of me! (gestures toward one of the seated prisoners) There he is.

LITTLE OLD LADY: (goes toward an OUTLANDISH-LOOKING PRISONER and embraces him) Son! (She separates, looks at him.) No, this isn't him. (hugs another) Son! (looks) No, this one either.

OUTLANDISH-LOOKING PRISONER: (opening his arms) Da-da-da-da!

GUARD: Choose already. Take this one. What's the difference.

LITTLE OLD LADY: (leaning toward the prisoner. Timidly.) Juan?

OUTLANDISH-LOOKING PRISONER: Da!

LITTLE OLD LADY: Son!

OUTLANDISH-LOOKING PRISONER: Da!

GUIDE: (to the group) Pretty depressing, wouldn't you say?

GUARD: What about you all? Over here, young men!

GUIDE: (raises his hands) No! Out, quick! (the sound of music) We were going to go dancing. We got the wrong room. (very distressed) Let's go dancing! Dancing! Move it! Let's beat it! Let's go, gentlemen. Let's go! (They exit.)

Scene 20

GUIDE: Ouf! A narrow escape! (He listens. The music gets louder. It's happy, catchy.) That's it. Come. (He leads his group to a large space, where at this moment all the other groups converge.) Leave the space open, ladies and gentlemen! If you would be so kind as to stand against the wall. That's it. Thank you, everyone.

(On one side of the performing space is a semitranslucent folding screen, behind which can be seen a long table. In the center, a group of women, dressed like stereotypical prostitutes, execute the gestures conventionally attributed to them: they smoke, show their legs, swing their purses, put on makeup. A man roughly pushes in two more prostitutes. They look at him with a mixture of fear and outrage. The other women observe the new arrivals curiously, then one offers each of the new women a cigarette. The music suddenly stops. One of the prostitutes starts dancing, moving slowly, singing a blues number in a gravelly voice. A line of FOUR MEN enter at a trot, leading a prisoner with his eyes bandaged, to the center. They sing.)

FOUR MEN:

We have come, we have come
To have some fun!

(The PROSTITUTES watch them. The one dancing gradually slows down the rhythm until she is moving in place, singing inaudibly. The men spin the prisoner around until he becomes completely disoriented.)

MAN #1: Let's play the Little Blind Cock!

MAN #2: Cockadoodledoo!

(They play, rapidly poking and moving away from the prisoner, who searches for them with his arms outstretched.)

MAN #1: Play! Head down!

MAN #3: There are beams!

MAN #4: You could break your head open!

(They play, yell "Cockadoodledoo!" One of the PROSTITUTES comes forward. She first starts to join in the game, then stretches her hand toward the prisoner's bandage.)

MAN #1: (pushes her away) Get out of here! This is our game!
In your place, whore!

MAN #2: (poking the prisoner) He's sweating! He's hot!

MEN #1, #3, and #4: (in a chorus) Make him strip! Make him strip!

(Maintaining an ambiguous air of play and violence, they take off his jacket, his pants, his shirt; they throw his clothes, which flutter around.)

MAN #1: Hard-boiled egg! Let's play hard-boiled egg!

(They fight like children.)

MAN #2: Me! Me!

MAN #3: Get out! Me!

(They play. The prisoner holds his body rigid while the others rush him, tie him up. Finally, one of the men hits him on the head. The prisoner falls.)

MAN #4: We warned you!

MAN #1: A beam, idiot!

MAN #2: We told you to keep your head down!

(They drag the prisoner behind the screen. Through the screen, one can see fuzzily that they are strapping him down on the table. A scream. Instantaneously, the volume of the music shoots up; two of the men come out from behind the screen.)

TWO MEN:

Girls, if you want to sing,
it's not prohibited!

(They clap. The PROSTITUTES don't move.)

Sing!

(The PROSTITUTES, forced into it, clap and sing. Again the music gets louder.)

Girls, if you want to dance,
it's not prohibited!

(The PROSTITUTES dance. Behind the screen, one can see the shadow of the two men moving away from the table. The hand of the prisoner falls softly. At the same time, the PROSTITUTES freeze in a musical comedy finale. The music stops. The lights go out, then come up again. The actors disperse, naturally. They take down the screen. The dead man gets up from the table, gathers his clothes, and begins to dress. Only the prisoners seated against the wall remain immobile.)

GUIDE: (drily) Ladies and gentlemen, what are you waiting for?
The show is over. (House lights come up.)

GUIDE 2: (resentfully)

If you clap enthusiastically in all good haste
your hands won't go to waste!

(He claps, and the GUIDES and actors present imitate him.)

GUIDE:

Theater imitates life
If you don't clap
It means that life is rotten to the core
And we may as well just head for the door.

(He moves the audience out toward the door. From far away can be heard police sirens. Even when the audience is near the exit, they can hear.)

Who once said: here the ken
of men and women
here the bounds?

(after a moment, repeat)

Who once said: here the ken
of men and women
here the bounds?

Curtain

Translator's Notes

1. "Carnation, sleep and dream," sung by a "sweet" female Voice, the Mother in scene 5, and other voices elsewhere, is from García Lorca's *Bodas de sangre*, or *Blood Wedding*, scene 2. I use the translation by James Graham-Luján and Richard L. O'Connell in *Three Tragedies of Federico García Lorca: Blood Wedding, Yerma, Bernarda Alba* (New York: New Directions, 1955). In the original, Gambaro used only "Nana, niño, nana, del caballo grande que no quiso el agua," repeated over and over. For the English version, I chose to use many more fragments of the lullaby over the course of the play. Gambaro approved this choice in her letter to me of March 28, 1986.

2. Stanley Milgram describes this experiment in his book *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). See Introduction, n. 10.

3. The Mother sings fragments from the *Blood Wedding* lullabye.

4. The disappearance of Nestor Martins and his client Nildo Zenteno was in fact one of the first. It happened during the term of de facto president General Levingston, who had come to power in a coup d'état, unseating the previous de facto president, General Onganía.

5. This Guide is different from the Guide in scene 6. Since the order of the scenes is up to the director, however, this Guide will be called Guide #2 only in scene 7, where the shift occurs.

6. General José de San Martín, the liberator (El Libertador) of the southern part of South America, is an Argentine national hero.

7. The Woman's Voice in this scene sings from the *Blood Wedding* lullabye.

8. RAF, or Revolutionary Armed Forces, is the translation of the name of FAR, Fuerza Armada Revolucionaria, a left-wing guerrilla group.

9. "Tell Grandma that the hem was turned here" is an encoded way of communicating the arrest.

10. Roberto Quieto, whose surname in fact means "quiet," was a prominent, highly respected liberal lawyer. Unbeknownst to most, he was also a powerful member of the Montoneros, the premier left-wing guerrilla organization.

11. The Boca Juniors are one of the most important Argentine soccer teams. Their home stadium is in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of La Boca, traditionally an Italian working-class section. San Lorenzo is another team from Greater Buenos Aires. Soccer is by far the most passionately followed sport in Argentina.

12. "Of our respect / Here's a token" is the couplet substituted for "violín, violón / es la mejor razón." See "Crisis, Terror, Disappearance."

13. The Woman's Voice sings lines from the *Blood Wedding* lullabye.

14. Lines from *Othello* are taken from act 5, scene 2, lines 229-35, 248-49, 256, 287, 306-7, 317, 367-71. All are found on pages 1239-40 of *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

15. Gelman's lines are: "Quien puso limites? / Quien dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí la sed? hasta aquí el agua? / Quien dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí

el aire, hasta aquí el fuego? / Quien dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí el hombre, hasta aquí, no? / Solo la esperanza tiene las rodillas nitidas. / Sangran."

16. The Woman's Voice sings from the *Blood Wedding* lullabye.

17. "You, who come from the shores of the Tagus" is from a poem by Garcilaso de la Vega. The Tagus River flows through western Spain and Portugal. In her letter to me of March 28, 1986, Gambaro brought up "substituting an English-language poem about death, provided of course it's by a Master." I decided against this option since I felt that Gambaro's appropriation of Garcilaso was important as a reference to a specific age, place, and literary tradition. One of the greatest poets of the Spanish Golden Age, Garcilaso influenced not only San Juan de la Cruz, Lope de Vega, and Cervantes but also Rafael Alberti, Pedro Salinas, Miguel Hernández, and other twentieth-century Spanish and Latin American poets. The original reads: "Vosotros, los del Tajo en su ribera / Cantáreis mi muerte cada día / Este descanso llevaré aunque muera / Que cada día cantáreis mi muerte, / Vosotros, los del Tajo en su ribera."

18. "Twenty little hard ones" is from García Lorca's *Los títeres de cachiporra*. The original reads: "Veinte duritos y veinte duritos / y un rollito de veinte duritos / en el agujero del culito."