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## Night (Thyestes 2.0)

by CHARLES L. MEE

A companion piece to *Day (Daphnis and Chloe 2.0)*.  
This, *Thyestes 2.0* is night, *Daphnis and Chloe 2.0* is day.  
The pieces can be done individually—or together,  
under the title *Night and Day*.

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A woman in a full length black evening dress comes out  
to a microphone that stands downstage center.  
She speaks into the microphone.

### THE WOMAN

Act one, scene one.

Tantalus, a mortal friend of the gods,  
decides to test their omniscience.  
He kills his own son, Pelops,  
chops him up and boils him,  
and plans to feed him to the gods as animal meat.

Scene two.

The gods realize the truth and are horrified;  
they put the pieces of the boy back together-  
and send Tantalus to Hades.

Scene three.

Tortured by thirst,  
Tantalus stands in water that reaches only to his chin.

Food just out of his reach.  
Tantalized forever.

Act two, scene one.

Pelops grows up and falls in love with Hippodamia.  
But the father of Hippodamia,  
in order to test potential suitors,  
has declared that anyone who wants to marry his daughter  
must first beat him in a chariot race.

Scene two.

The crafty Pelops strikes a secret bargain  
with the father's personal charioteer:  
if the charioteer will sabotage the father's chariot,  
Pelops will let the charioteer sleep with Hippodamia on the wedding night. The  
charioteer agrees,  
Hippodamia's father is killed during the race,  
and Pelops marries Hippodamia.

Scene three.

But on the wedding night,  
Pelops changes his mind  
and refuses to give his bride to the charioteer.  
The charioteer tries to rape Hippodamia  
and so Pelops throws him off a cliff.  
As he falls to his death,  
the charioteer curses Pelops  
and all his descendants-  
as though they needed another curse.

Act three, scene one.

Pelops has two sons,  
Atreus and Thyestes,  
and, the two sons fight  
over who will inherit the throne of Mycenae.  
Atreus wins the kingdom-  
but Thyestes revenges himself by sleeping with Atreus's wife.

Scene two.

Atreus exiles Thyestes.

But then, under the pretense of making up,  
Atreus invites his brother Thyestes home for dinner.

For the menu that night,

Atreus kills the sons of Thyestes,  
cooks them,

and serves them to their father with a robust red wine.

After dinner, he asks Thyestes if he knows what he has eaten-  
and the servants present Thyestes  
with the heads and hands of his own sons.

Scene three.

Thyestes runs out of the house.

He asks the Delphic Oracle how he can be revenged.

The oracle tells him the only way is he must have a child  
by his own daughter Pelopia.

That night, Thyestes sees his daughter going into a nearby stream.  
He rapes her and abandons her.

Scene four.

Atreus, searching for Thyestes, finds Pelopia,  
and takes the pregnant Pelopia as his new wife.

She bears a son,

and Atreus thinks that the boy is his.

Atreus names the boy Aegisthus.

Are you still following this?

Scene five.

Aegisthus kills Atreus

and restores Thyestes to the throne of Mycenae.

Act Four, scene one.

Meanwhile, Atreus's real sons,

Agamemnon and Menelaus,

have escaped.

They come back later when they are grown up.

With the help of Tyndareus, the king of Sparta,  
they throw Thyestes out of Mycenae at last.  
Agamemnon rules Mycenae.  
Menelaus rules Sparta.

Scene two.

But then, the Trojan prince Paris carries Menelaus's wife Helen off to Troy, and so  
the Trojan War begins.

Scene three.

To get the favor of the gods to begin the war,  
Agamemnon sacrifices his own daughter Iphigenia.

Scene four.

While he is gone, Clytemnestra takes up with Aegisthus-  
remember him? Thyestes' only surviving son?

Act five, scene one.

When Agamemnon (Atreus's son) returns,  
Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (Thyestes's son)  
murder Agamemnon.  
This is how tradition is passed down in families  
from generation to generation.

Scene two.

And so the children of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra-  
Orestes and Electra-  
murder Clytemnestra.

So it is that we see revealed  
the dreadful nature of what it is  
to be human  
that nature that we try always to rise above.

...and here the opera begins.

[She turns and goes to the piano,  
leans against it.  
Her accompanist plays,  
and she sings.

Possibly she sings the Crystal Gale song:]

I can clearly see nothing as clear  
I keep falling apart every year  
Let's take a hammer to it  
There's no glamour in it  
Is there any way out of this dream

I'm as blue as I can possibly be  
Is there someone else out there for me  
Summer is dragging its feet  
I feel so incomplete  
Is there any way out of this dream  
Summer is dragging its feet  
I feel so incomplete  
Is there any way out of this dream

[And, after a few moments,  
a solo female dancer comes out  
and dances to the song, to its end.

And, the moment the song ends,  
six people come out carrying a dinner table  
laden with food

and one, low-voiced, woman  
steps out from the crowd of dinner table preparers  
to step downstage  
and directly address the audience  
with deliberate emphasis.]

THE LOW VOICED WOMAN

For dinner I always have the steak frites  
well done

this is how it is for me  
I need my protein  
sometimes I will have the salmon  
or the codfish  
but, to me,  
the steak frites is just what I need.  
And sometimes  
I will have the ground steak  
raw  
because, in this way,  
you don't lose any nutrient at all....

[a second person steps forward]

#### THE SECOND PERSON

I like a ravioli  
with a little lamb in it  
a little soft lamb  
I always cut the piece of ravioli in half  
and eat half at a time  
this way you can dip the lamb in the sauce  
with each bite  
and it's very tasty this way

#### A THIRD PERSON

I like  
fresh Dungeness crab  
(rolled with cilantro and shredded red cabbage  
in translucent, Vietnamese-style rice-paper rolls)  
in tamarind-peanut sauce  
and then, if it's possible  
a dessert lagniappe of four chocolates  
(meyer lemon, hazelnut, blueberry in white chocolate  
and meyer lemon again).  
Or,  
if there is a Turbodog special,  
then I will have that:  
spoon-soft short ribs braised in brawny Abita Turbodog ale,  
served over a rutabaga-potato mash with Long Island baby carrots

and a dusting of horseradish.  
And, for dessert,  
a thick Mexican hot chocolate  
with freshly made,  
feathery light  
cinnamon-sugar churros.

#### A FOURTH PERSON

I...

I am a vegan,  
because  
I can't stand to eat meat  
I think of the little chickens  
and the little cows  
and I would rather eat cabbage.

[A cell phone begins to ring,  
which brings the food conversation to a close  
as everyone looks around at the person whose phone is ringing,  
and that person answers the phone call and begins talking]

hello? amanda? hello?

[looks around, a little sheepishly,  
and then  
everyone else's cell phones begin to ring,  
and the others all answer]

hello?

kate?

who is this?

bobby?

hello?

hello, harold. no. no. no. no.

no. harold.  
why do you say that?  
what did I do?  
but  
but  
to break up  
do you mean to break up?  
I don't think you mean to break up.  
harold.  
harold.  
how can we break up?  
I don't think you mean it.  
I don't think you can mean it.  
did you forget how we are?  
you don't remember how it is for us to be together?  
of course there are bad days  
of course there are  
but, harold  
harold  
harold  
but, harold

[etc.

and finally everyone is on cell phones having the same conversation  
about a love affair  
and a breakup  
each taking different lines of the same conversation  
sometimes repeating the same lines  
or of archtypical lines and conversations around this event

music comes in  
and  
one by one  
the cell phone conversations end



and everyone sits in a semi circle, dejected  
and, after a while, each one dejectedly joins in singing to the music]

the song

[finally one woman's harsh almost screaming singing  
dominates the room  
and people stop singing and start to leave one by one  
going toward the margins  
several leave entirely, a few are left  
the last guy tries to stop her  
and she kicks the shit out of him  
gets him down on the ground  
pounding and kicking him  
while she finishes the song  
and leaves.

And, after a moment, the beaten man gets back up  
and leaves, stumbling in pain  
as

an amazingly tall man,  
with some bizarre Butoh-like inability to walk normally,  
comes in naked and caked with charcoal and blood  
and goes awkwardly to the ground and rolls in the dust

a different music comes in  
a piece of way deconstructed music  
that makes John Cage sound nineteenth century  
from the New Music programming of WKCR 89.9 FM NY

and, after a few moments,  
a woman with a giant lightbulb for a head enters;  
in one hand, which she holds out to the side,  
she carries a large pocket watch

and then,  
a clown walks through wearing a clown hat,  
carrying a brief case,  
hurrying to an important meeting

and then,  
at the same time these other things are happening:  
an Asian woman appears in a chinky/junky outfit  
stands looking out into the audience  
and then  
after a few moments,  
she leaves;  
and a few moments later,  
she returns in a red shirt with white undies  
holding a pillow in her arms  
looking for someone  
and turns abruptly and leaves  
and returns in a few moments,  
wearing a white shirt and tie and glasses  
like an office worker  
— as though she is trying out identities that will be acceptable—  
and, again, she leaves

Now,  
3 women enter together, wearing only underpants  
and they are joined immediately  
by 3 naked people at the dinner table  
— including a couple of naked men  
and one woman in evening clothes:  
a snapshot of society

the bloody charcoal guy leaves  
while all the others are coming and going

they are talking about civilization]

FIRST WOMAN  
when you think  
the progress we've made

SECOND WOMAN  
right

FIRST WOMAN  
undeniable

THIRD WOMAN  
well: science

SECOND WOMAN  
physics  
particle physics

FIRST WOMAN  
sanitation alone

SECOND WOMAN  
when you think, too,  
it's been said  
we have fewer diseases today  
not so much because of advances in medicine  
although, of course,  
there have been advances in medicine

FIRST WOMAN  
for sure

SECOND WOMAN  
but what has really reduced disease is simply better sanitation

FIRST WOMAN  
sewers

SECOND WOMAN  
street cleaning

FIRST WOMAN  
clean water

SECOND WOMAN

clean water

FIRST WOMAN

if there was once a time that we were animals  
before we had evolved from amoebas and tree slugs  
into human beings  
we lived in the wild without central heating or plumbing  
we have made progress

SECOND WOMAN

there are imperfections, of course,

THIRD WOMAN

or even still, dreadful things

SECOND WOMAN

things we want to change

FIRST WOMAN

but in general I think it's undeniable  
there've been immense improvements

SECOND WOMAN

and even human beings themselves

FIRST WOMAN

human nature itself evolves

SECOND WOMAN

the sense of social responsibility

FIRST WOMAN

tolerance, openness to others

SECOND WOMAN

human rights

FIRST WOMAN

women

SECOND WOMAN

compassion

FIRST WOMAN

of a sort there never was before....

SECOND WOMAN

we're just

really

far more advanced than people used to be

FIRST WOMAN

I think you can't argue with that

SECOND WOMAN

better

FIRST WOMAN

better

SECOND WOMAN

of course sometimes people behave badly

FIRST WOMAN

we know this

SECOND WOMAN

but, in general,

FIRST WOMAN

there is progress-

SECOND WOMAN

and beautiful things

FIRST WOMAN

things human beings are capable of

SECOND WOMAN

music

FIRST WOMAN

beautiful music

THIRD WOMAN

buildings

SECOND WOMAN

I don't even mention the novel!

[silence

while everyone eats for a few minutes]

A MAN AT THE DINNER TABLE, speaking to one of the other men

We came one time, my squad,

into the house of a prominent community leader,

and shot him

and shot his wife

shot his married son

his daughter-in-law,

a male and female servant and their baby.

The family dog was clubbed to death,

the family cat was strangled,

the goldfish was scooped out of his fishbowl and tossed on the floor.

When our squad left,

no life remained in the house—

a "family unit" had been eliminated.

SECOND MAN

the time a car came toward us,

when, just five minutes before, another car had come

and there were four Palestinians in it with RPGs

and they killed three of my friends.

So this new Peugeot comes towards us,

and we shoot.  
And there was a family there—  
three children.  
And I cried,  
but I couldn't take the chance.  
Children, father, mother.  
All the family was killed,  
but we couldn't take the chance.

#### THIRD MAN

When we cleaned out a terrorist prison camp  
we took a woman prisoner.  
I'd already told my men we took no prisoners,  
but I'd never killed a woman.  
"She has to die fast," my sergeant said.  
I was sweating.  
The woman said to me,  
what's the matter? you're sweating.  
"Not for you," I said, "It's a malaria recurrence."  
I gave my pistol to my sergeant,  
but he couldn't do it.  
None of them would do it,  
and I knew if I didn't do it,  
I'd never be able to control that unit again  
"You're sweating," she said again.  
"Not for you," I said.  
And I blew her fucking head off.

#### SECOND MAN

Another time  
charging into the trenches  
shouting and yelling  
horses neighing  
I saw Corporal Bolte run his lance  
right through a dismounted German  
who had his hands up, surrendering  
and we poured into the trenches  
they all had their hands up  
yelling "Camerad, Camerad,"

which means "I give up" in their language  
but they had to have it that's all  
they had to have it  
no one can change his feelings during that last rush  
the veil of blood before his eyes.  
He doesn't want to take prisoners,  
he wants to kill.

### THIRD MAN

We came into a church  
there were two naked men torturing a young woman  
a nun as it turned out  
stripped naked and stretched out in the aisle of the church  
holding her down  
burning her with cigarettes  
another woman to one side  
already raped I guessed  
and dead, bleeding  
I yelled at the guys holding down the woman  
I told them to stand up  
hands above their heads  
the one who had been holding down the woman  
was shaking from fear  
his eyes flying uncontrollably around the room  
the woman had rolled onto her stomach, rocking from side to side,  
moaning  
I saw him see the rifle lying in the church aisle  
I told him not to be a fool  
but suddenly he screamed and dove for the rifle  
grabbing it, turning to look at me.  
My first burst caught him in the face,  
the second full in the chest.  
He was dead before he fell over,  
a body missing most of its head.  
The second guy began to wave his arms up and down,  
and he was looking at me  
and looking as his own rifle leaned up against the pew  
I said don't do it, don't do it,  
but he went for his rifle



and he started to swing the muzzle in my direction  
KILL HIM, GODDAMMIT  
one of my guys yelled at me  
KILL HIM NOW!  
This guy was facing me now  
trying to swing the long barrel rifle across his body  
to align it with my chest  
his eyes locked on mine.  
His eyes never left mine,  
not even when the rounds from my Sterling  
tore into his stomach  
walked up his chest,  
and cut the carotid artery on the left side of his neck.  
When his body hit the floor,  
his eyes were still fixed on mine,  
and then his body relaxed,  
and his eyes dilated and went blind.

#### FOURTH MAN

Where there were houses  
we left rubble,  
smoldering woodpiles.  
We smashed our way into crowds  
of men and women;  
we drove them across the fields  
like frightened horses;  
we set fire to their houses;  
we hurled their corpses into wells;  
everything that came to hand  
we ruined;  
we burned whatever we could.

In the aftermath,  
you could feel the chill in the countryside,  
the low-lying white mist,  
shards of farmhouses in the haze,  
shattered stones,  
no grass,  
no ruins,

empty streets,  
and silence  
no living thing  
no bird, no animal broke the silence  
no dogs,  
no children,  
not one stone left standing on another.

No one knew what was happening  
or why—  
or who had a chance to survive and who didn't  
where the safe places were  
who was born under a lucky star

And then the light ash  
covering the fields  
precious dust  
One had the impression  
of having passed out of the modern world  
back into a vanished civilization.

BIBBY

You have to wonder  
if there has ever been a civilization as advanced as our own  
because, you know, there could have been  
and we would never know  
because after they have brought themselves down to ruin  
and  
after the records have disintegrated  
after the clothes have turned to dust  
after the bones have turned to ashes  
after the buildings have fallen back to earth  
what lasts longer than anything else is red pottery  
it is the only evidence we have of the very oldest civilizations  
and red pottery lasts only 30,000 years  
so you have to ask yourself  
do we, today, have anything that lasts as long as red pottery?  
and the only thing we have that would last that long is:  
styrofoam

whether anyone would think  
30,000 years from now  
looking at the little bits of styrofoam  
that there had once been a civilization as advanced as their own  
is anybody's guess  
it could be we would vanish from memory  
the way others have before us.  
We don't know.

[While he was talking  
everyone else-bored—just turned and left,  
so that, when he concludes his remarks,  
no one is still there.  
He looks around,  
then he leaves.

The Asian woman returns,  
this time only in white underpants.

Music.

She dances,  
a lovely sweet solo.

while

a guy breaks a dozen wine bottles  
by throwing them into a wooden box  
one after another,  
and then, finally,  
he puts his face down into the pile of broken glass in the box,  
and he has another guy stand on his neck  
to press his face down into the glass-  
and, while we were all expecting some miraculous trick to avoid being cut,  
he stands up with a lacerated forehead-  
while a teen age girl hands out fliers to the audience for some other show

[note for the actor:  
there is a trick to this to avoid real injury-  
an invisible brace inside the box to support the forehead above the glass]  
and, at the same time:

a woman puts a soft cello case over her back  
so she looks like a cockroach  
and does a cockroach dance on the floor on her hands and knees

a man comes out with an axe  
and a window frame,  
and he smashes the window frame to bits  
[is there something else like this you can do  
that won't leave splinters all over the stage?]

a guy,  
let's call him Friedrich,  
wearing knee-high black leather boots  
and a black leather jock strap  
comes out and jumps up and down  
and maybe sings something in a falsetto voice  
while others watch

and eventually, they join him in the dancing  
jumping up and down

and finally ten or twelve people are entering from every direction  
wild music comes in  
and a frenzy of dancing  
and then, finally,  
everyone is making the same gesture together,  
scattered over the stage,  
but dancing the same gestures and moves

And then, suddenly, the dancers all just stop dead  
and, without any further ceremony  
turn to the table  
and gather for a HUGE dinner party  
where they just feast and feast

and, after a while,  
a man at the dinner table  
stands up and speaks  
—an outburst.

#### TANTALUS

Who hales me  
from my miserable rest  
among the dead below?  
Is there some punishment in store for me  
worse than to stand dry-mouthed in running water,  
worse than the everlasting yawn of hunger?  
O, thou unknown dispenser  
of torments to the dead,  
if there can be yet more intolerable penalties  
find one for me!  
From my loins is sprung a generation  
whose iniquities, whose crimes of horror  
never known till now  
make all their predecessors' sins look small  
and me an innocent.  
Does any place in hell still lack a tenant?  
I can furnish one from my posterity.

[a second man stands up and replies]

#### FURY

On with your task, abominable ghost!  
Let loose the Furies on your impious house.  
Let evil vie with evil  
Let anger be unchecked, repentance dumb.  
Let fathers' hate live on  
and the long heritage of sin  
descend to their posterity.  
Let crimes be born ever anew,  
and, in their punishment,  
each single sin give birth to more than one.  
Brother shall flee from brother,  
sire from son, and son from sire.

Children shall die in shames  
more shameful than their birth;  
revengeful wives shall menace husbands,  
armies sail to war in lands across the sea,  
and every soil be soaked with blood.  
Nor shall the heavens be unaffected by your evil deeds.  
What right have stars to twinkle in the sky?  
Why need their lights still ornament the world?  
Let night be black,  
let there be no more day.  
Let havoc rule this house;  
call blood and strife and death;  
let every corner of this place  
be filled with the revenge of Tantalus!

silence

sudden deafening music slams in  
all the men pick up their chairs in their hands  
and do a violent, violent chair dance  
slamming their chairs down to the floor,  
sitting in them,  
dancing with their stomping feet only,  
getting up again  
and picking up the chairs again,  
slamming them to the floor,  
dancing around them,  
etc.

possibly they dance to some violent current music  
or maybe they dance to Henry Purcell's Overture to St. Cecilia's Day

while we also watch  
the suicide bomb video of a woman blowing herself up  
[this video exists as an art piece by Mathilde ter Heijne,  
called Suicide Bomb, done in 2000]

And then, as the video approaches its end  
and the violent music ends  
Antony and the Johnsons come in singing Rapture

Rapture  
Eyes are falling  
Lips are falling  
Hair is falling to the ground  
Slowly, softly  
Falling, falling  
Down in silence to the ground  
All the world is falling, falling  
All the blue  
From me and you  
Teardrops falling to the ground  
Teardrops  
I'm talkin' 'bout your teardrops  
For instance  
Oh my mama  
She's been falling  
Falling down for quite some time  
And oh my papa  
He's been falling  
Falling down for quite some time  
Oh my friends  
I've watched them falling  
Falling softly to the ground  
Like the leaves  
The Leaves are falling  
Down in silence to the ground  
Is this the rapture  
Is this the rapture  
Why don't you tell me  
Is this the rapture  
Is this the rapture  
Our father who art in heaven  
For the kingdom, the power, the glory, yours  
Now and forever

and after a while  
as they continue to sing  
a grown man is wheeled out in a baby carriage  
and dumped out onto the ground,  
and he gets back in the baby carriage  
and he is dumped out again  
and this happens over and over again  
just one long cross of dumping him out, he climbs back in, dumped out

and, while this is going on,  
someone gets up from the table  
and throws himself to the ground  
as though in sympathy or solidarity  
with the man being dumped from the baby carriage

and then another man joins in  
throwing himself to the ground

and a woman joins in

and then people throw other people to the ground  
over and over

and  
men throw women against the wall  
and/or women throw men against the wall

and now loud deafening discordant music  
takes over again

video of woman w/foot in concrete bucket, hammering it  
[this video was done by Kate Gilmore,  
in a piece called My Love is an Anchor,  
done in 2004]



someone rolls out a bathtub and drowns someone else in it

the sleek old Mafioso in the chair puts on dark sunglasses

a dozen random youtube videos

[on five screens that descend from the flies to different heights]

of cats falling from shelves

kids pulling chairs out from under their grandmothers

jackass movies

the baby that falls down again and again purpose and cries

a woman walks among the brutes, yelling about something,

but the deafening music drowns her out

she is yelling about a dustpan,

how someone has lost the dustpan

where did they put the dustpan

why don't they put the dustpan back where she keeps it

and now 6 people are enraged, yelling, looking for the dustpan

one of them yelling for chrissake

they will go out to the market and get a new dustpan

people drink vodka out of a bottle

and spit it out

drink and spit

drink and spit

a guy cooks scrambled eggs-

and 4 people eat plates of eggs-

spit them out, and throw the remainder on the floor

a woman cries hysterically for ten minutes, curled in a fetal ball

a guy wearing moon boots nailed to the floor

rocks slowly back and forth

back and forth

and, finally,

he is the only guy left on stage

and his rocking is quiet and beautiful  
as we slip out of the mode of violence into dreaminess  
and we hear the singing of

Albert Kuvezin and Yat-kha:

When routine bites hard, and ambitions are low  
And resentment rides high, but emotions won't grow  
And we're changing our ways, taking different roads  
Then love, love will tear us apart again -

Why is the bedroom so cold?  
You've turned away on your side  
Is my timing that flawed - our respect run so dry?  
Yet there's still this appeal that we've kept through our lives  
Love, love will tear us apart again -

You cry out in your sleep - all my failings expose  
There's a taste in my mouth, as desperation takes hold  
Just that something so good just can't function no more  
When love, love will tear us apart again -

and, as we hear the song,  
a woman is rolled in  
seated in the middle of a ten foot tall birdcage  
with a ten foot diameter  
with six immense spider's legs made of tree branches

[to see just what this can be,  
see the installation piece entitled Spider by Louise Bourgeois]

she speaks [her voice is miked]

If any god loves us still  
may such a god, we pray,  
regard us with an eye of peace  
and turn all harm away.  
Forbid the ever-repeated alternation  
of crime with crime, spare us a new succession

of young blood baser than older generations,  
of children apter in sin than were their fathers.  
Grant that at last the impious brood descended  
from thirsting Tantalus may tire of outrage.

After all these butcheries, what next?  
Think of the tawny lion  
crouching amid the vanquished carcasses  
of a whole herd of oxen,  
jaws agape, wet with blood,  
his hunger satisfied  
but not his fury.

[now we hear music from the Catholic mass  
a choir singing with the organ music  
that rises in crescendo to hope  
to the hope of transcendence and salvation  
and the longing for heaven

and while the organ music goes on:

A naked woman is lowered from the sky.  
In one hand, she has a glove,  
and in the other hand, carrots.

or

a bright interior-lit polyhedron is lowered from the sky  
like a visitation from god,  
and a naked man, woman, and child  
come out and stand mute before it

a woman comes out with a green picket fence,  
sets it standing up by itself  
stands in front of it, to one side, for a minute,  
then, after a while,  
still smiling and happy and pleased with herself,  
picks up the fence and leaves

a guy comes out with a rattan chair  
smiling  
puts it down  
smiling  
sits in it  
just smiling  
just sitting in the yard on a summer afternoon  
and having a perfect right to do it

several naked bathers come out  
and put down a plastic wading pool on the ground  
and all get in and lounge in it  
is one of them brushing her hair  
the other just standing in her corset  
the third naked in the water?

or is it one woman  
who pushes out a bathtub on wheels  
gets in  
and luxuriates?

another woman  
pushes out a large couch on wheels  
takes off all her clothes  
and lies down on the couch naked  
stomach down  
like those nineteenth century paintings of odalisques

The spider woman is gone,  
but we hear her miked voice:

O Father of all earth and all that lives  
whose rising banishes the lesser lights  
that make the dark night beautiful:  
why hast thou turned aside  
from thy appointed path?  
Why has thou blotted out the day  
and fled from heaven's center?  
Why, O Phoebus,

hast thou turned thy face from us?  
Is all the order of the universe plunged into chaos?  
The Sun himself is like a stranger lost in a strange land,  
meeting the morning as he goes to rest,  
calling for darkness when no light has come,  
the stars have not appeared,  
there is no light in all the sky,  
no moon to break the darkness.  
This is the fear, the fear that knocks at the heart,  
that the whole world is now to fall in the ruin.

What more?  
What more stupendous, more atrocious crimes  
can man conceive?

big loud deafening music again  
and we hear artaud screaming over the music  
[there is a sound archive on ubuweb  
<http://www.ubu.com/>  
with Artaud screaming, Artaud screaming with Roger Blin,  
some Kurt Schwitters sound poetry,  
a video of Joseph Beuys singing Sonne Statt Reagan,  
some Seth Price music,  
a piece by Doug Rosenberg, such as  
Ursus or Cryptocracy or Widow's Walk—  
any number of these would work well at this point]

as a man enters, hesitantly,  
and takes his place at the dinner table

he sits there, weeping and weeping  
and writing in a journal

and, in time, the others all gather around him  
and the music and cacaphony of sound come to an end

what are you doing?

I am writing stories

stories?

to console myself

how do you mean?

because

this is what nietzsche said

we make up stories

to conceal from ourselves

the fact that beneath our feet

lies an abyss of utter chaos

and meaninglessness....

so

I am making up stories

to see if it will help

ah....

I see

[now the beautiful dinner table scene comes into focus

with everyone around the table

very civilized

considerate, thoughtful, passing things nicely

the family around the table

and they turn their attention to consoling the man weeping]

perhaps you'll have something to eat?

will you have a glass of wine?

or tea?

or tea....

and do you like some fish?  
or perhaps a little, just some bread and butter....

[as they settle down at the table  
and pass dishes to one another  
we hear beautiful music  
Handel or Lully  
and we just listen to the beautiful music  
as the man continues to write in his journal

a large wooden or metal toy car comes out on stage,  
a red convertible  
with two twelve-year-old boys in it  
[for cost saving, the boys can be made of cardboard];  
they park the car facing upstage  
and they watch a movie of a girl putting on a dress

and two men at the table begin to speak]

#### FIRST MAN

No state of life endures;  
pleasure and pain take each their turn;  
and pleasure's turn is shorter.  
Time swiftly changes highest into lowest.  
Time  
and swift chance  
can make all things change.  
No man should put his trust in the smile of fortune,  
no man abandon hope in a time of trouble.  
The Spinner of Fate twines good and bad together,  
never lets fortune rest, keeps all things moving.  
Life's circle is ever revolving,  
the swift wheel turning.

#### SECOND MAN

Are we chosen out of all earth's children  
to perish in the last catastrophe  
of a disjointed universe?  
Are we to see the world's end come?

A cruel fate brought us to birth,  
if we have lived to lose the sun,  
or if our sins have driven him away.  
But we must not complain, or fear;  
too fond of life is he who would not die  
when all the world dies with him.

[by now, the whole cast has come back to take their places  
at the dinner table  
nicely  
quietly  
and they eat quietly, politely  
and listen to the music at the end  
beautiful, heartbreaking

It could be Lully's Chaconne  
or  
Handel's Ombra mai fu from the opera Xerxes  
or  
Handel's Lascia ch'io pianga from his opera Rinaldo  
or,  
for something triumphant  
in the face of pain and suffering and adversity,  
there is Henry Purcell's Overture to the Fairy Queen.

THE END.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT:

*Night (Thyestes 2.0)* was inspired by Seneca's *Thyestes* and includes several pieces of text from Seneca's play. A good many translations were consulted: Jasper Heywood's translation of 1560, the translation by Frank Justus Miller published in 1907, the translation by E.F. Watling published in 1966, the translation by David R. Slavitt published in 1992, the translation by John G. Fitch published in 2004, but I have relied for appropriated pieces of text on the translation by E.F. Watling.

Charles Mee's work has been made possible by the support of Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.



Some theatre companies may like to use a different translation for the Thyestes texts—for example the Slavitt translation below. If they prefer the Slavitt translation, they will need to get permission for its use from Johns Hopkins University Press:

I.

#### TANTALUS

Who calls me from the infernal regions  
who drags me back, plucks at my tortured spirit,  
to grab at me as I have been grabbing at empty air?  
What worse ordeals have the judges of hell  
devised for Tantalus' ghost?  
Hunger in plenty,  
and thirst in the midst of running water  
are hard  
as my parched lips can testify.  
But I've learned, barely, to bear these torments.  
Whatever new comes to me now cannot be better!  
A heart of stone would melt  
at the thought of anything further  
heaped on the burden I already carry.  
The light dazzles my dimmed eyes;  
I tremble with dread to return to the world again,  
where my clan is swarming,  
a multitude,  
each of whom bids fair to make those crimes  
for which I suffer forever  
trivial,  
almost innocent compared with what they do and dare.  
Whatever space is not yet filled in the land of the damned,  
whatever cell is unassigned by the terrible judges,  
my children and their children shall lay claim to  
with the right  
of terrible wrongs.

#### FURY

That's it, villain.  
Goad your heirs to madness!

Let there be competition among your issue  
to exceed one another in guilt....  
Your house will be an asylum for madmen,  
violent,  
blustering,  
bragging,  
and then, in a moment,  
cringing,  
crooning,  
and desolate-  
power and wretchedness changing madly  
as in a lunatic's wavering fancies.  
Chance, stone blind, will lead on a treacherous path  
as your heirs are exiled for vile misdeeds  
and return to worse crimes.  
But no onlooker will pity  
or feel for them anything other than sheer disgust,  
while in that arrogant house,  
in hatred and fear,  
brother will mistrust brother,  
as father will fear his sons,  
who will quail at the sight of their father.  
Born in disgrace, they will die in earned vileness.  
A wife will strike the blow to dispatch her husband,  
and blood will flood the land  
to bring forth lusts like vermin,  
corrupting every virtue....  
You say you are hungry?  
Feast on the gory banquet we have prepared,  
and drink deep of the bloodied wine  
till your belly is full!

II.

What kind of world do we live in?  
How does a man bear the brutal blows a life entails?  
These evils await us like adders,  
sunning themselves on the rocks.  
The sun should flee from the sky,

and sky shrink from the foul earth beneath it  
before permitting such profanation to poison the landscape.  
Close your eyes,  
but the terrible images still persist  
as if the gates of Hades had opened  
and rotting bodies strolled in the streets,  
their cerements streaming foulness behind them.

They say a lion that falls on a herd  
will kill even after its hunger is sated.  
The blood acts like a drug  
to put the beast in a frenzy to kill,  
crazy with gore,  
and eager for more and more.

To the high gods I cry out  
to set some limit to what mankind may suffer.

In Rome, someone had his own half-brother  
poisoned at dinner.  
Everyone sees but says nothing and does nothing.  
Then he murders his own mother,  
and nothing happens, nothing at all.  
The sun continues to rise in the east  
and travel its usual course across a clear baby-blue heaven,  
but how?  
Is there no justice?  
Are there no gods to keep such foulness away from the world?

A man's soul,  
sickened to death from what he has seen,  
cries out to whatever power he still believes in,  
protesting that nature continues its usual course.

The walls of houses crack,  
and the people run in the streets, crying in panic....  
as well they should.  
As they ought to have done from the very first moment  
when madness seized the world.

III.

If any god has ever regarded this place with love,  
or affection,  
or even attention,  
if any spirit has found some respite here in these gentle streams,  
let him come back here now, for pity's sake,  
to prevent a crime beyond imagination  
from happening here.

There ought to be limits to wickedness.  
Bonds of affection that animals recognize,  
we, human beings, ought to acknowledge.  
Tantalus' dreadful spirit infects not only the Argive plain  
but the whole earth,  
and all of us suffer.

Some in the audience may find  
that their thoughts wander away from the horrors before them on stage  
to others they have not seen,  
but know about,  
as one knows of a dead body,  
malodorous,  
rotting somewhere nearby.

Although we may dream of justice,  
we cannot believe it-  
except as a children's story our grandparents may have told us,  
who could not bear that we should learn too soon  
the unpleasant truths-  
prime among which  
is that even one's own grandparents cannot be trusted.

What emotion endures?  
Pain fades, thank heaven,  
but also pleasure.  
Time turns fortunes topsy-turvy,  
and he whose head is crowned with laurel,  
he whose hand is clasped on a scepter,

he will bend his knee and grovel down in the dust  
before the man he'd thought of before as beneath his notice.

Let us therefore try to maintain our balance,  
remembering modesty's lesson.  
Success and prosperity come unbidden and undeserved,  
as their opposites also happen at random.  
No one should preen in self-congratulation,  
and no one ought to despair.  
Whom the rising sun shines on in triumph  
the setting sun may wash in the long shadows of woe.

...we live like leaves on the whim of the fickle winds  
that any moment may bear us up or dash us down  
from whatever height we have clung to  
having persuaded ourselves it is home,  
where we belong and what we have earned....  
No man, therefore,  
ought to rely on tomorrow  
or even this afternoon  
as the swift wheel of fortune continues its dizzying whirl.

IV.

The only true kingdom  
is that a man can bestow on himself,  
from which he never can be deposed.  
The world may beckon,  
offering pride of power,  
but he knows better.  
The heights are steep  
and the views may be fine,  
but down at the bottom are mangled bodies  
to make us aware of what the costs can be.  
I pray only for clear judgment to see how,  
in humble station,  
I may enjoy untroubled and sweet repose.

Men's lives have been likened to rivers.  
Let mine flow in untroubled currents that keep to the grassy banks.  
In the showy rapids and towering falls of the great  
disasters lurk.  
Their ride is exciting  
but how many come in the end to grief.  
Better to paddle in quiet waters  
dappled by sunlight  
that drifts through the leaves of the overhanging trees  
and enjoy the talk of our friends  
and the laughter of children.  
Until in the lengthening shadows,  
we drift into a doze.  
Happiness' secret is easy enough for a man to grasp,  
provided only he holds it lightly-  
to live simply and then, full of years,  
learn to let go.  
It is not death we fear  
but the leaving of what we've loved.  
The lesson is simple enough for children  
who learn, each day, to go to their beds  
and endure without any fear  
the dying that signals the end of a day  
that wasn't given, but only lent.

Charles Mee's work has been made possible by the support  
of Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.