

**KONSTANTINOS BOURAS**

**THE DEATH OF EURIPIDES  
and META-TRAGEDY**

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(Text for the back cover)

This volume is comprised of three units with texts relating to the tragic and the ancient tragedy:

- a. **The Death of Euripides:** Euripides passed the last few months of his life in the court of king Archelaus from Macedonia. According to the legend surviving to our days he died lacerated by dogs. We're observing his agony in the effort to complete his last play, "Bacchantes" while his enemies are on the look out, constantly setting traps for him. An imaginative journey to a distant tumultuous epoch. A dramatic monologue in twenty-four scenes-episodes adorned with comic elements.
- b. **Sophocles on the World's Roof-top,** a dramatic monologue about the author of "Oedipus".
- c. **Aeschylus Lexourgos at Tartarus,** where the protagonist and winner of the poetic competition of the "The Frogs" by Aristophanes, talks about his work and language-forming ingenuity.
- d. **Thespis:** the "father of tragedy" denies to accept his myth in order to create his own story.

## The Death of Euripides

### Alpha

Loaded on the coach I am, amongst other things heading towards Macedonia. The coachman has dozed off. Fortunately, a few clouds are balancing the unbearable heat. I'm counting the Hermaes at the edge of the road. The phallus averts the enemy from invading the city. It's a matter of time. Athens now is a decadence city. It's old glory a bitter memory for the old, it means nothing to the young who pass their time in the arena. I haven't been there for years. In my nostrils still lingers on, the stink of Arabic oil rubbed on their bodies. The sand sticks on them and creating a glitter. Being in love means so little to me. My cave in Salamina, the jar in which I perched to sleep, the black cat with the golden eyes. This is my world! The last souvenir I keep from Athens. My cat curled on my feet, restless. He detests moving around. He's too old to escape. He has no other choice but to follow me. What shall we encounter in the court of Archelaos? I wonder. My old heart tightens at the prospect of forcefully becoming a king's jester!

There's no denying that he has filled me with gifts and promises through his ambassadors. Tragedy has become fashionable in the North, now that the ancient theatre of Dionysus is slowly dying in its cradle ... So much bitterness and so much joy. Disillusions shall not evade the memory of sunrise over Hymettus and the gathering crowds cheering – some squabbling or punching – and exchanging heated discussions on what their heretic writer of tragedies has installed for them.

Amongst my enemies Aristophanes. The first one to keep notes for his next comedy. The copyist, the plagiarist. The author who's using the work of others. Half of his plays are parodies of my tragedies. And people laugh either from ignorance or malevolence or calculation. The peasants! In the past the comedians would throw figs at them, chic-peas and broad-beans in order to get their applause and influence the critics. Now that popular taste –we might say- has been refined, it's fashionable to mock Euripides and the sophists. What a confusion! I have nothing in common with the sophists. Some amongst them admire me I hear. Socrates is a fanatic reader of my work and he often sends me word through his handsome pupils to arrange a meeting. I am a loner and life is much too sort for such indulgences. I must devote myself totally to work. My play...it drills me for so many years now, I shall titled it "Pentheus". We'll see...that's if I manage to complete it before I die. Most probably Archelaus shall request from me to write a tragedy glorifying himself and his ancestors and by the lows of hospitality I shall induce to succumb. One offers what One has and the surplus overflows in the funnel of time amongst other useless things. Ah! How much I'd wish not to be given this gift of clear vision. At times, days pass in a painful solitude, not exchanging a word with another living soul. During that period my hearing becomes more acute and that's not all I'm able to see and hear things beyond reality. Enchanted cities of the past or the future. My plays are staged in a language I don't understand. Some times I laugh, for I recognize some of my heroines and wonder what all these movements and outbreaks really mean. Why are they acting unmasked? Why in the night and not in day light? The audience is more appreciative. It listens carefully while smoking and at the end applause menacingly. If in my time I had this kind of audience I'd have won all the awards. No matter. That's in the past. The cat digs his nails into my leg and his spine wriggles. He must

be having a nightmare. The poor dear! A refugee in his old age! Poor me! Lets rest perhaps a bit of sleep shall transfers me again to my cave . Where the waves and butterflies shall visit, to eavesdrop through conchs the birth of universal Cosmos and to suffer as no one ever suffered before.

## Beta

The dogs are howling in the night. The cat is shivering. His pupils enlarge in the darkness. The palace of Archelaus is bitterly cold. The air is heavy scented by eastern perfumes and spices. Just a few minutes earlier they've stopped singing and clinking craters. There's a stink in the air of vomiting, wine and sperm. And a stink of stale perspiration that no perfume can cover. Ah! The restless nights of youth when bodies come near. The endless sunsets harrowing another life of the underground, at the port's lanes and in the trenches around the wall of Athens. Bodies mingled blindly in the dark, At times almost without touching only at that tiny stanchion from where sensual pleasure is transferred to another vessel. The poppy-seed dust brought by the merchants who come from the road of silk... Time lost. Wasted hours. Entertainment for idles. I had only one task to complete. One debt to pay. To whom? I choose not to think about it. That's what counts. I must carry on my duty before death comes. The dogs of Archelaos are howling. How odd! To my ears is the same howling sound as when I was working on Inous tragedy, whose son was lacerated by dogs. And the tragedy that I wish to write now shall also have laceration.

But why is she staring into my eyes like a Sphinx ready to foretell many things about my fortune and the destiny of other people if she could only speak the language. Tomorrow most urgently, I must get into the prologue of Dionysus. If Archelaus leaves me in peace which I very much doubt. Already tonight at dinner, he made his gestures: "impatiently I'm waiting for you to write your masterpiece which shall glorify you and my ancestors. For our common good obviously!" The tyrants and the wealthy, particularly the wealthy think that everything can be bought. Unless the wheel of fortune turns and they loose the lot, like my dearest Hecuba. How seducible she is and how enraged! Her wrath could stare up a tempest in the seas, her tears would cause heaven to rain fire and her groan'd make the stones bleed. If I was to rewrite "Troades" and "Hecuba" I'd make concession: The pine trees to follow her and shudder at her groan. A second Chorus, a tree Chorus... I must be mad. I had too much for dinner I fear. Macedonian cooking got to me. All this meat with spicy sauce! And the wine pure, the way they drink it, got into my head. Be an alert guard my cat, so I may sleep peacefully. And don't go anywhere. Macedonian dogs are not joking. And you're not used to fights. They'll swallow you whole by the time you say "when"

## Gama

Archelaus asked me about the kind of erotic company I desire. The simpleton! Imagining that the short play about his ancestors shall be improved this way. And that inspiration springs out of a perspired thigh, or perhaps from a kiss with teeth smelling of mint. I'm too old for all this. At any rate, I asked for a Persian slave, somewhat wild, with lioness's movements to step onto my back the way she only knows, to ease my rheumatic pains. Macedonia's humidity intensified it. There're times that the piercing pane leaves me breathless. Here she comes. Her eyes darker than the night as if they're concealing a menace under their ashes. She throws her chiton and appears naked and freshly bathed. I think that she's not frightened now. She approaches as if she pities me. She's a slave, like I am a slave of the same master. Her with her body, and I with what? Who said that writing is not a bodily act? I write with my whole body. And at times I have to stop breathless, as if I've dug out all the dead of Marathon. The young girl mollifies my chest. Then she goes lower to my belly. I close my eyes and think of Agaue. She moves even lower. Then the image of "Iphigenia in Aulis" when she embraces her father's knees begging him not to slaughter her.

That's what I shall write first: "Iphigenia in Aulis" and then "Pentheus". No, it might be best to title it "Agaue". We'll see... Well, I'm in a rich meadow just before wheat harvest. Here and there, cats are perching waiting to ambush the snakes. Turtles, scorpions. Suddenly, a few chasing dogs appear stumping on wheat-stems. They're white with black spots. The cats draw near me for protection. The sun turns into an enormous shark's mouth. It swallows me before I can say "Apollo", The wheat-field ablaze. The slave moist and I, trapped between her thighs. I make a move to escape. She takes it as an encouragement and becomes more daring. She trots over me and froth comes out of her mouth. With her nails rips off my chest. Three spasms and she stops.

She leaves quietly the way she came in, her chiton gliding on the floor behind her.

The lamp with the scented oil twinkles. It's time to sleep and rest my brain.

Tomorrow I will write "Iphigenia in Aulis" Archelaus play may wait. If my son was here –my eldest- I'd make him write, for exercise. Perhaps I should call him. We'll see.

## Delta

I must have slept more than twelve hours. The hourglasses of this palace give a hissing sound drawing my attention thus obstructing my writing. I feel the same emptiness as when I have an urge to write. All around me seem so ugly as if covered in ashes and as if the whole world is filled with rubbish. And humans like half-eaten beetles walking around and the sun shining blue through its wounds.

I hear Iphigenia's heart. It beats fast just like the bird's. She refuses food and water. Agamemnon approaches her. His scent is masculine. The stink of his perspiration makes her dizzy. In her sleep she dreams of the Goddess and her deer. Sitting next to a spring smiling at her. The other side of the ocean is green and luminous. Iphigenia is ready to be sacrificed.. She wakes up and pleads to her father do it quickly. She refuses to get married and wait for her husband to return from a battle smelling like that field Marshall Agamemnon she met earlier. The Goddess is waiting for her. A cyan mist shall carry her high. In her place on the sacrificial marble a deer. The Greeks cheer. Their clamour reach heaven. A propitious wind has began. The ships swiftly set sail for Troy. The sails are blown up proudly by the forceful wind. Their return shall not be the same...

I was writing all afternoon and all night long till day light. I rushed to the king. He was already awake and exercising with his bow and arrow. He took the script with anticipation and gave it to his grammarian to read while he was peeling oranges with a thin, sharp knife. In his expression I felt his disappointment that the play wasn't about him and the heroic story of his era. It was a mistake not to warn him before reading began. Taken by my enthusiasm I was, for if I complete anything I feel as if I've just touched an apple and turned it into gold. Then I rush to offer it to the first one I meet. That's the way I am.

In spite of all this the king enjoyed the reading. He sowed enthusiasm especially at the parts referring to the glorious expedition to Troy. And also where all omens –after Iphigenia's sacrifice- indicating that Gods and Nature's elements are favoring the Greeks, he got up and began pacing to and fro. Anxiously I turned to Philandros the king's chief grammarian. He calmed me down with a nod. Later, he gave me details on the king's plans for an expedition deep in Asia and from there his plans to concur Persia and to reach even farther at the land of the silk.

It appeared that the king enjoyed the play after all, as he ordered several copies. It was the first play I have written at the Court of Archelaus. But I'm missing the Athenian audience. My enemies would find it over emotional and not one of my best work. However, it'd be a good candidate for winning the first award of the Grand Dionysia for it refers to the good old days when the Greeks united in battle were fighting against danger from the East.

I'll sent it to my son to teach it to the next generations. He should easily find a sponsor for the performance.

## Epsilon

Now that I've completed Iphigenia, I'll start writing the play on Archelaus. As easy as it is for me to write about something that torments me, so is difficult -almost impossible- to write anything under command. I'll be forced to adjoin extracts from my previous work, to plagiarize my own verses... As far as other people's verses are concerned it is quite impossible for me, for I never remember nor do I ever study their work for fear of been influenced... Fortunately, I have with me all my manuscripts. I'll just start stealing a few verses here and there and with a bit of effort the play shall be written. The end result must be good enough for the king to be flattered. The one who holds great plans for his future should be able to convince others that he belongs to a great generation. He might slowly come to believe it himself... Ah, what disgraces the old age brings! If I was younger my cave and the pelagic sound would be enough for me. I might have been a shepherd and instead of writing I'd play with the flute whatever melody I desired to be taken by the breeze, leaving no trace behind it. Only Neiredes, conches and spirits would whisper secretly within their hearts entertaining their boredom.

Be silent and write. You must earn your bread. The tyrant doesn't feed you for free. No tyrant... I shall call the Persian slave-girl. No, today I need a student, quiet and discrete to do most of the work, to be humble not to boasting afterwards. Hmm, it's like seeking for a needle in the haystack... Tonight at the symposium I'll scrutinize closely each one who's under the chief grammarian's protection, to find one that I can trust. I'll recognize him through his eyes. The boys have Erebus-like eyes or rapacious and the poets are like crushed cyclamens.

## Zetta

The boy is very dark and slender. The arteries on his arms protrude like the horse's, even for me that my eye-sight has weakened... His name I can't recall. I'm not even certain if I ever asked about his name. Most likely I was told and have forgotten about it. He moves swiftly and somewhat confused. He bends a little although he's not particularly tall, as if he is trying to hide his private parts. I venture that he hasn't as yet experienced the joys of love making. In spite of all this, his appearance is always neat. His hair smoothed out with oil, his raven-black hair. A wasp-waisted youth. At times when he becomes overwhelmed by the composition, I feel the rhythm rising from his calves to his pelvis and then a metamorphosis begins. The soma stretches like a bow and the melody, the arrow that always finds its target. He's a born poet. There's the sign on his forehead, of the ones who'll suffer and rejoice enormously before their last breath. Therefore, he's not impassioned. I envy him. His impulse has a rhythm different to the columns of Parthenon and another serenity. Only he'll not experience the greatness of Dionysus Theatre packed with audience buzzing like bees, ready to either elevate you to heavens or devour you whole. Times are changing so quickly. After a century of light always follows a century of darkness. And what a light! If Night is so envious, daylight shall delay after such luminosity! The youth selects the verses artfully, after I indicate to him the tragedy, naturally. He's a good composer and memorizes quickly. He familiarizes himself with measures seemingly difficult at first and knows how to delay when he must. When logos does not flow, when the seams are obvious even to the most inexperienced ear, he returns to the same spot infinite times like an ant, till the point the piece is smoothed out and the water flows into the everlasting spring. He has the gift. Whether he'll be glorified as a poet is unknown to me. Many begin but a few persevere. Most of them stop at the beginning of the road and give up. The Sirens are many. And the worst of them all, the low self esteem. I observe him when he recites, his eyes sparkle. His arms become generous like the birds that never knew fear. Suddenly I pity him for what he shall not be. He reads it in my gaze and coils up as if he'd touched something forbidden. With both hands I took his head and let him cry on my chest. My aged heart - who'd believe it!- was flying furiously to plunge with the sun beyond the mountains. That night the cat didn't come near me. He slept with wounded pride out in the open. In spite the fear of dogs that hallowed savagely under the full moon.

## Etta

The play is now developing faster. At times when we complete a chorus part, the author slows down and looks at me. He's aware that after this work is over we'll depart. He gazes at me while I'm absorbed in my other scripts that I carefully hide in the drawer and swiftly taking one by one out making notes of something or other. He wishes to ask me what, but doesn't dare. If I was younger and in Athens of the good old times I wouldn't mind. But here I can't trust any one.

One day I deigned to say a lie for the purpose of diminishing his curiosity: pretending that I was rearranging "Iphigenia in Aulis" for a new production in Athens. The excuse seemed believable and he quickly added:

-The way you've rearranged Hippolytus!

-Yes I replied inattentively. Hippolytus! So much pathos for no reason at all! Humans destroyed like insects on fire thrown by Gods, just to entertain their undying boredom. Yes, I had to rearrange it. It was much too daring for its time. I was accused for been misogynist, and a corrupter of youth's decent morals, that I introduce "novel doctrines", and that I undermine the family institution. I was forced to recant. Perhaps I went through a lot and the fingers of both my hands are not enough to count my enemies but they haven't given me hemlock to drink. Not yet. As for my character and my frankness, it's a wonder how I've lived to this age. Certainly I asked the two Goddesses, Aphrodite and Artemis to clarify the tragic element and the beginning of the insult with such a weak argument, that the most intelligent amongst the audience would catch the allusion and smile as if I, was winking behind the Bacchus mask. Eureka! I shall disguise Dionysus to appear as Bacchus. In other words, as an ambassador to himself. This game is particularly theatrical I feel and there's no risk to be taken as impious.

I dismissed the student to his great disappointment

That evening I wrote the prologue for "Bacchantes" narrated by Dionysus. I find that "Bacchantes" is a more suitable title. These barbarian women from Phrygia are the real protagonists. They've come from the depths of Asia, worshipers of a God who seeks revenge, in a city which caused them no harm, spreading madness and panic. They're the victims and the perpetrators, working bees to a cause they don't apprehend, affecting deeply their innermost part of their existence. Infinite generations of such existences shall pass before the new Day downs.

## Theta

The next day I was absent minded and my student delayed the composition to show me that the sort play on Archelaus was exclusively his. I induce him to continue disregarding his psychological state. This made him envy the more my other play, the one that totally occupied my mind

-I'm also writing a play.

-Is that so? I responded indifferently.

On "Hippolytus". Not like yours. Not like your first nor your second one.

"Hippolytus", he hasten to conclude.

I contemplated for a while. Certainly, this is it. I should have thought of it. It is natural for a talented youth like him to be ambitious. To wish a career as a poet in the courts of powerful kings. His plays to be applauded in all amphitheatres, from Ion to the Herculean Columns. Yes, why not? "Beware, the snake you're hiding in your bosom, may become dangerous and turn its head to pierce you", an Erinys whispered in my ear. That moment his chiton brushed on me and I jumped as if I was stroked by thunder. He was absorbed by the rhythm and didn't notice my reaction.

Fortunately, the sort play was developing nicely. The second episode had finished. In the evening, wanting to please him I took his right hand and let it rest on my chest on the side of the heart, for a long time. He gave me an ambiguous look. I couldn't make out whether the shine in his eyes was from irony or admiration or hatred. Whatever it was, was terrifying. I pushed his hand away from me, violently. He was about to leave as if nothing had happened when he turned back with some pretext, reminding me that in the evening I was invited to a symposium where all intelligentsia of Northern Greece would be there.

-No, I'm unable to attend. There's something I must finish. Are you going?

-Yes, I know, your secret play, your last one, your masterpiece.

- And how do you know it'll be my last one?

-That's what everyone is saying at symposiums. That's all they talk about. They pay dearly to learn even one verse, the title, the theme or something for that matter.

I looked at him wondering. In the solitude of my cell, I felt that my work did not concern anyone, at least not after the last applause.

-Beware of your company I advised in a fatherly tone. You'll destroy your life and Art before you even begin. One morning you'll wake up and your fingers shall not obey you. They'll beat to the rhythm of mimetic dramas of last night's debauchery. He gave me a fierce glance and rushed out to bathe and perfume himself for the night's symposium.

I contemplated for a while, this talented child to be wasted. At least he's not a harlot. Not yet, I hope.

As soon as I opened my manuscripts nothing else mattered. Pentheus accuses Dionysus for been feminine, corrupter of women and threatens to cut off his golden braid. The braid of his golden hair.

## Iota

My student was late and looked as if he was beaten up. His eyes swollen from lack of sleep. I moved my chiton and he unwillingly collapsed onto my feet. His body was bruised.

Not a word was uttered. I allowed him to write whatever he wished and I imagined Dionysus escaping his prison and I show the palace of Pantheus trembling to its foundation bursting in flames and in the place of the prisoner, a Taurus with its legs tied up.

The young poet is most probably working on his own "Hippolytus", for he doesn't use my manuscripts.

The day passed without exchanging a word, in absolute complicity.

In the evening when he was about to leave, he turned around, his eyes thanked me. He tried to speak.

-There's no need, I intervened. Good night and pleasant dreams.

The door shut behind him with a blood chilling squeaking. I knew then that he'd never forgive me for that instant. He'll seek revenge in any way possible, like a crop-tailed snake. Because I was so absorbed by my Pentheus and never took him in my arms to console him. Or even treat him as a harlot, the way perhaps he deserved. I'm certain he'd have accepted it with no arguments. But not this: the distancing, the superiority, the void....

People cannot endure facing substance. Particularly when they're displeased with themselves.

## Kappa

The following day I promised to myself to be courteous towards that wretched child. I had requested honey and walnuts, water thinned wine and figs.

Although he refused to touch any of the delicacies, he did his best to finish the whole episode.

-What are you doing tonight? I asked.

-Have you forgotten? Tonight is the vernal equinox. We must attend to the Assumption of the king's daughter.

-What does it mean? I've never heard of it before.

-You're right, I should have thought of it: You're a stranger in this city. Forgive me. We've spend so much time together that I feel I've been known you for years.

-What kind of festivity is this?

-I'm not in liberty to tell you. We are forbidden to talk about it.

-I'll come. For you . To look after you.

-Only we must finish a bit earlier today.

-The ceremony begins an hour's glass measure before sunset.

He worked with fury and became breathless from the effort. I let him leave much earlier to give him enough time to get ready. After all, I also had to go to the steam baths and let the slaves look after me and change my cloths. Tonight I had to write the episode of the conversion of Pentheus and his metamorphosis to a holy sacrificial animal.

The steam was getting into my nostrils causing me sweet giddiness. Scented of eucalyptus and laurel. I failed to recognize the other scents. Perhaps cedar, thyme and something else which dominated every other scent, was creeping into the blood like oil frozen in heavy winter, or like residue in the cask of old wine.

Skillful hands bathed me, rubbed my back, delouse me and dressed me in a red chiton with golden trimmings, a gift sent to me that afternoon from Archelaus.

"For the development of his play" said the messenger and I was smiling under my beard that was getting long.

## Lamda

I arrived a bit late. The sun was about to decent behind the mountain. The corridor leading to the ceremonial hall appeared threatening as it was lit by torches creating elongated shadows and as the silk was rubbing onto my hands and my whole body. Then I became conscious of the silence. I quickened my pace... but was stopped by an unnaturally large old woman with a finger on her lips, she had died black hair, the colour of the crow, she had a pure white painted face with deep red lipstick. Her cheeks and eye shadows were green. Her abundant eastern cloths slightly worn out held on her left shoulder by a golden broach, butterfly shape its wings ornate with precious stones. Her neck had folds and her arms were puffed up like a baby's. She escorted me to my seat making a comical pantomime. My eyes adjusted to darkness after a long while. Around a sofa there were lit candles. On royal red covers was reclining another woman dressed in white. The hair and eye make up were black.. Her face white like a mask. The lips almost invisible. The eyes shut, hands crossed over her breasts and at the base of her feet a baby's basket with a black ribbon. Passing by I had a quick glimpse and saw with horror a toothless doll with one eye missing...

The king and queen are sited on their elevated thrones on the left. A painter was hurrying to complete a painting before the sand in the hour glass had settled. I went near to have a better look. Someone made an attempt to stop me but I ignored him. As a stranger in the city it was natural not to be aware of Pella's customs. In the painting was depicted the laying woman dead and the baby in the cradle extending its tiny hands towards her breasts.

On the way to my seat I've noticed my student swiftly removing his hand from the knee of Philandrus. They gave me an ambiguous look. I pretended that I didn't understand. There was something in the scene which bothered me. It wasn't the silence or the gathered crowd of possible and real enemies, nor my old agoraphobia. Something was unsettled in the atmosphere. Something stale, decaying. Then I realized that I was smelling the stink of the ephemeral. And my mind attuned to the aroma of immortality could not bare it.

Time was up. The painter quickly signed his work. The woman got up from the sofa slowly, took the icon, lift it high with both hands and with ceremonial pace presented it to her brother, the king. After the king hold it high for every one to see, ordered all the torches to be lit, to create the utmost illumination in the assembly, to emit a blazing flame in the hearth... Then with a sudden movement he broke the painting and tossed it in the flames.

Everyone cheered, the cup-bearer brought wine. The tables were topped with food and the discussions heated.

The king approached me.

-When shall you finish my play?

-Soon.

-I must have it for the vernal equinox. On my birthday.

-It will be ready, I replied firmly.

The chief grammarian and my student exchanged a fierce glance. I shivered. Someone dropped a golden cup and cried out a lengthy "Aaaaa". That moment I conceived the idea of the way Dionyssus hypnotizes Pentheus in order to take advantage of him: with a lengthy "aaaaa", later to be emphasized using the signs for soft breathing and circumflex accent by the Byzantine scribes of my work...

I moved towards my student. Greeted courteously the chief grammarian and attacked without further ado:

-What time are you coming tomorrow?

-I don't know, the usual... replied he awkwardly.

Philandrus pressed his hand on the youth's shoulder, the colour on his cheeks faded and the pupils of his eyes reduced.

"I must conclude the short play of Archelaus soon before more misfortune falls upon me" I thought while the ceremonial lady was bidding farewell, presenting me with a small replica of the baby's cradle in gold. If I had to find a title for the painting I'd be "The Assumption of Sterility".

Eureka! Pentheus resurrects! The lacerated Pentheus becomes Adonis and returns to earth to bring primavera!

The production however, requires, a lot of work. It shouldn't be demagogic or religious. Not loquacious or lachrymatory. There's still something missing! A basic element, a myth, something. It'll come to me.

I worked madly all night long. The dogs were howling savagely. The cat observing me in contemplation. I knew my end was near and I had to conclude my play in time.

## Mi

The next day I forced myself to work on Archelaus's play, in spite the sleepiness weigh-down my eyelids and the exhaustion paralyzing my limbs like poison.

I greeted my collaborator typically and worked with him continuously till dusk. Now and then he'd look at me in amazement. On the cold mask that was his face a faint smile was budding, then again he'd fall in lethargy, the sweet narcotic of labour and learning. The measures alternated famously, logos flowed...

-Two more days and we're done, I thought loudly. My mistake.

-Are you impatient to finish so that you can devote your time to your other play?

Concluded, also loudly my student.

Aren't you impatient to work on your "Hippolytus"?

-I don't quite know... I have become accustomed to your company. And after all there's still a lot to learn, he hesitantly replied.

"To use them against me" I thought.

-Art and talent doesn't make an author, I counseled. It's something else, a way of life. Another way of breathing, to see things *and to visualize through them*. There're times that I stroll through the country side absent-minded and I fear that I might step over a beetle. I dread the curse of small creatures....

I stopped right there, for if I had continued I'd say more things that could be altered and used against me. It's terribly weary to always mind your words in case you stumble over the rock of malice and trickery -not to mention the spitefulness- of others.

I asked my student if he needed a drink of something.

-Wine. Thinned with water, he added.

I changed my mind at once. He made himself comfortable with a cunning expression. How naïve to imagine that he could prompt me to wine-drinking so he could steal the secrets of my soul.

My austere gaze induced him to drink his wine almost in one go and run out as if he was chased.

## Ni

I slept deeply. I was awoken soaked in perspiration by a nightmare. We found ourselves in another dimension where the sun shines peculiarly. On the roof top of a multi-leveled building we were, shaded by a kind of grape-vine bearing transparent amber coloured grapes. There're no walls and the square floor is divided in diagonals. The east part belongs to my student, I have chosen –or was given to me- the west part. My cell was humble: a wooden bed, a table, scribing instruments, a stool and that was all.

My student's dwelling however, was luxurious. But what stood out the most was a golden chamber-pot decorated with precious stones –mainly sapphires- and engravings of Pan and Silenus. I searched under my bed, in each corner... Nothing. My domicile didn't have a chamber pot! "what a pity!" I thought "And I pay for it dearly!"

I woke soaked in perspiration. I attempted to interpret the dream.

"Yes, certainly, this is it! I'm already dead and haven't realized it. I must get time to write..."

Disregarding my habits, without washing my face nor eating anything I sat down and began writing.

By the time my student arrived I had completed the proclamation on the anguish of Pentheus and was about to see Agaue entering the stage, when I heard a knock on the door and the youth who desired to become a poet rushed in. He looked at the scattered pages, my inked fingers, the messy hair and realized... He sat across me in silence.

I couldn't bear it and gazed at him in abhorrence. I envied him for been alive. He realized... and set to work unwillingly. Nonetheless, my obstinacy was such that we made a great progress. We even concluded the last episode. Only the exit had to be worked on, as a God, probably Zeus, foretells the glorious future of the hero's epoch conquering with a sword the depths of Asia!

-Tomorrow we'll finish, I said. Then I'll need some time to work on my own.

-What a pity... he said and left without clarifying what he meant. And I never asked him.

## Ksi

A new nightmare. "It appears that from here on I'll number my nights with nightmares".

I was in this empty house with multiple rooms. Small like sarcophaguses. The walls white and transparent through which one could see on the horizon, flourishing a green future city with mechanical beetles and iron birds. The light more than cyan, was dazzling. And heaven furrowed by thousands of colourful commits. "How lovely!" I thought in my dream. Now finally I have my own house with many shelves to stack my books. At the entrance I was greeted by the king's chief grammarian. Rushing out with a number of papyruses under his arm. "How nice! He's walking to his death, the lucky one!"

I woke up with a feeling of blissfulness. In spite of it I decided not to sleep again unless I concluded my play. Outside I went and looked at the sky. It seemed black to me.

I shut my eyes, I'm not certain for how long. When I reopened them the sky was dazzling. Apollo's chariot was climbing gracefully towards heaven. This is the way I conceived the stichomythia of Cadmus and Agaue. The old father asks her what colour was the sky. "Black" replies the imbecile. "Have a better look" insists the grandfather who sees his grand son's head on top of a thyrsus carried by his daughter. Agaue awakes and begins her lamentation. Again a knock on the door and my student enters. I made no attempt to conceal my manuscripts and he made no attempt to conceal his curiosity. He read for a while silently.

-What is this? Why is he telling her to look at the sky? Their speech is rather odd. Is it perhaps a new theory of the sophists?

Been civil, I allowed him to have a glimpse. After all, It was our last lesson and I wished to sooth out his perfectly reasonable hostility towards me. However, I wished not to discuss things that even I, had difficulty comprehending.

It was far too dangerous for us both. We settled down working. I analyzed for him the "God send" technique. Avoiding to reveille to him the way of undermining this convention and wink an eye to the audience.

We had Zeus glorifying Archelaus's ancestors from grandfather to grandfather and to his descendants who'd pass Euphrates river with their sword.

I was ashamed for my retched state, but I worked constantly as much as I could bear it,. The nice thing about it is that one day, all this shall become real. History is at times more ironical than the most artful poet.

We recited the exodus hymn for the Chorus. The usual distich on human futility. Our eyes met. I knew that I had accomplished one of Hercules labours. But not the last one.

The young one shed a tear.

-Could we...

-No, I said abruptly. There's no time. I was in no mood for explanations. Didn't even know whether he'd understand. I watched him leave. He hesitated at the door-step.

Anticipating to the last moment for an invitation to spent the night with me. But tonight I had to attend a meeting with Agaue and something Else unknown to me.

The black cat was more gallant than me he went to say faire-well to my student. Rubbing himself against him and he responded by caressing him with the same zeal he'd caress my own body. However, my mind was elsewhere and had no time for

such things. And yet again I was afraid that my senses were already dead and I wouldn't feel a thing.

## Omicron

I felt drowsy. And asked my slave to make me some tea out of various herbs to keep me awake. It was bitter like poison and I added plenty of honey to be able to drink it. To the last drops I added some wine.

Hypnos went away but the hand remained slow. I had problems concluding the lamentation. *I had no idea of the way a tragedy dies.*

All night I remained motionless, thoughtless. Feeling that all the hourglasses in the world had stopped.

In the morning I fell asleep on my papers. I dreamed been in another bizarre place. In a future city with sarcophagus-like houses piling up, having the colour of the ashes. The trees were black and dry, not even one leaf on them. Only the grass was green. But if you were to step on it, you'd see rusted bronze swords planted in the soil. Multiple suns were rising everywhere. It was neither day or night. No shadows. I sat under a tree. Some neighbours came near me. Their faces, masks of various colours speaking in languages unknown to me. They were friendly all the same and displayed respect upon my person. Unless it was indifference. If One has lived with so many cunning enemies, to pass by unnoticed, seemed a luxury.

I woke up terrified.

It was almost noon. I informed Archelaus that his play had finished.

He sent twelve scribes to do many copies. One of them took me aside and offered to copy for free my other play, the secret one.

-Thank you very much indeed, It's nothing important.

The scribing lasted seven days. I allowed them to come and go and do as they pleased. Mostly I was dozing off. The nights I kept awake without even writing one line. I was confused. Not certain whether I'd live to see it. But this didn't bother me at all.

My student paid me a visit, curious as he was to see how my other play was progressing.

-Nothing is happening, I confessed... I feel like tearing my manuscripts to shreds and throw them in the fire.

-Please don't do it Master! Let me keep them safe for you!

I looked at him and laughed wholeheartedly! In his childish naivety he had a pathos that enchanted me.

I placed my hand on his shoulder and offered him some wine. Pure wine. He eagerly accepted my invitation as if he was expecting it. The cat abandoned us towering disdainfully his tail. He had an antipathy for wine smells. And the scent of Macedonian wine was much too strong for his nostrils.

## Pe

The rumor circulating that I'm unable to conclude my work gave me some peace during the rehearsals of "Arhelaus". My enemies rested in the belief that I've become a half-witted old man. The task of teaching the actors was undertaken by the chief grammarian with my student as his helper. The fifty-member Chorus were using a wheat storehouse for rehearsals with a tiny and nimble choreographer resembling exotic bird and whenever we met during my strolls he'd greet me with excessive reverence.

I began my lengthy walks. Since I was unable to work, I roamed about the mountains... A message from Athens arrived. My eldest son, my most beloved was preparing to come over for the grand premier of "Archelaus". I bade him -through the king's grammarian- to bring with him a few masks, costumes and cothurnus, hoping to add to the "image" of the show, a bit of the old glory of the performances at Dionysus theatre.

The king responded enthusiastically to my intervention for he believed that I was confronting the matter of the performance conventionally, not displaying the zeal of a father towards his spiritual child. However, my mind was elsewhere. On a writhed body in the middle of the orchestra and I was helpless.

One day during my lengthy walks, when I'd loose my way needing the pageant's assistance to return, I found myself on a threshing floor at harvest time. Right at noon. In the heat and stillness. I stood there, right in the middle, like a spear, I stretched my arms and shut my eyes. Unaware of how long I remained in that position. When I reopened my eyes a silent breeze had piled some hay around my feet. I cautiously inspected the surroundings. The afternoon sun was blinding. The hay was black.. Later, it seemed as if it had caught on fire. I looked closer. It rather resembled a human figure. Writhed and then knitted together again. "This is it! Agave recomposes the body of her writhed son". I jumped in the air singing and crying out. A young ass didn't seem to appreciate my enthusiasm. The dogs were heard again. I knew that I was in the right path. As long as I was unable to write even a line the dogs -*my own dogs*- were deaf. Now I wasn't afraid of dying. It was enough for me to complete my play. The play of my Life.

## Ro

I wrote a few verses for Agaue's speech when she's searching to find one by one the limbs of the dead one and recomposes the form of her son. She found all but the phallus and in its place she nailed her thyrsus. The one that impaled the head of the destitute creature, when that fervent maenad mistook her son to be the lion-cub which she'd killed with her own hands. I stopped there. Something was missing. A spell to resurrect the dead one. I was much too far from Athens's libraries to study the orphic hymns and all variations of Adonis's myth. Although I was never working in that manner. My verses either sprang alone without force... or wouldn't come out at all. Just like now. I had to make a sacrifice. Some deity was upset with me and I had to offer peace.

And because I believed that Nature was the greatest deity, I began my lengthy walks again. On a bald mountain-crest I could see a cypress-tree standing alone. "It can't be, its roots must draw water from somewhere." It took me a day to climb up. And sure enough, at the roots, there was the opening of a daedalian cave with formations of stalactites and stalagmites.

I was creeping on my stomach against the moist stone. The afternoon light passing somewhere over the top like a torch. Huge rectangular shaped crevices like open tombs. On the walls signs were written with candle-flame. I was able to decipher the names of Pan, Aphrodite and Ganymede. My eyes ached from the effort. Somewhere, was running water. The absolute silence made me realized that I was the only living soul in that cave. However, by then I had surpassed the boundary of fear. Now life could only inspire curiosity in me. Till my play is completed. Afterwards, I shall close my eyes and turn my back to life for ever.

## Sigma

I slept at once. It reminded me of my cave at Salamina and I was feeling safe as in my mother's womb, when the mid-wife spent several hours persuading me to come out. I sensed the life-battle awaiting for me and was in no rush to confront the arena. The dream gave me pleasure again. Once more we found ourselves in the same peculiar city. Only this time my neighbours zealously attempted to entertain me. My person, themselves, or someone else, perhaps God, I'm not certain... Let us hypothesize that all this was done for me. It is more flattering this way. They have erected a theatre: Using a very large piece of white cloth between the only tree and the multiple-dwelling. They stretch it and place the torches behind it. On the prop is painted: a palace on the right and a hut on the left. The big surprise however, are the actors: made from wood and dyed leather! I'm not aware how, but I find myself behind the cloth making all kinds of sounds, in a language unknown, from a play seemingly written by me some time ago. The audience was enthusiastic. But in this city didn't applaud. It stood still watching the cloth till the next performance. After all, it was still daylight and didn't need sleep. Unless everyone slept with open eyes. I woke up in the humid cave. A snake was curled up on my feet fast asleep. I remained still, shut my eyes and tried to interpret my dream. If this odd city was the Under-World, it appeared that not even death would save me from the sacred mania of the theatre (first conclusion). Second conclusion and more practical: I must not avoid social manifestations and gatherings. Something or other should come to my ear to help me conclude my play. I dozed off for quite some time. When I got up it was noon and four snakes were drinking water from a small green lake.

## **Taph**

While descending the mountain some dogs run after me. But from a distance. Didn't come near me. When I reached my cell the chief grammarian's messengers were waiting. They were looking for me since yesterday, because tonight he'd have guests at his house, some travelers from Egypt, "highly educated people and my presence would embellish their company!" So gently they expressed his wishes.

I readily agreed, to the great surprise of the messengers who had strict orders not to leave me in peace until they had my consent. I lay down for my afternoon sleep without dreams.

In the evening a slave was waiting patiently for me carrying a costume of an eastern prince with gold ornaments, to escort me to the baths, wash me, comb my hair and dress me.

I felt weightless as if a stone hanging from my neck for a life time was suddenly lifted off me. I was most gracious merrily greeting everyone I met, even strangers. Some looked at me perplexed, others were nodding each other as if I was insane. They thought that since I had my back turned to them, I was unable to see them. But today I was able to view people spherically around my frame. As if my figure was a giant eye, or rather thousands of cellular tiny eyes and each one was signaling its own cipher of the world.

I was aware that the time for me to leave my soma was near and I cared not. Nor did I think of my play. Been aware that someone else was thinking for me. A Universal Mind in which our poor brains swim like fish in the aquarium.

I gazed at the iodine gauges of sunset and suddenly I felt nostalgia for Athens. It was destined that I die far from the dear city.

## Hypsilon

It was an excellent dinner. Abundantly and imaginatively prepared. Some recipes came straight from Egypt. Along with the peculiar travelers, enfolded in their in fragrant perfumes. Much too strong and new for my Athenian nose. My attention was drawn to the perfume worn by an older and more feminine of the three, who was simultaneously hairy and bald. If Aristophanes was to see him he'd most certainly use him in one of his comedies. As long as I wasn't the target of his satire! Poor Aristophanes! He's spend hours memorizing one by one my verses. Then he'd fabricate imaginative –I must admit- parodies of my dramas to present them for the comedy awards. If he wasn't possessed by jealousy, I'd say that his feelings towards me had the force and abhorrence of one hundred love affairs!

But let us return to our exotic company. I asked the bald hairy –or rather the hairy-bald- one for the name of the perfume he was wearing. He swiftly took from under his tunic an ivory perfume case with a silver lid and presented to me with a grand theatrical gesture announcing loudly the name of the perfume: “The desert's secret, worn by Pharaohs when visiting their beloved”.

They said many things that evening but I retained one: the myth of Osiris. It was the grit missing from my mosaic. Now I had the whole play in my mind and all I needed was, a little time to record it. After that, they may do as they please with me. Let them throw my body to the dogs. My play, even clipped and in bad writing, shall bring me many times on the stages of World's theatres in languages unknown to me that no one even heard them been spoken... So until then, forbearance!

Let us then return to our story: Isis “furrows” metaphorically Egypt to collect her brother's limbs, Osiris, of whom the “wicket” God trapped in a sarcophagus where he lacerated him and spread his limbs across the fields around the country that was divided by the Nile. Isis must collect all the pieces in order to resurrect the God and return the ruling light, the spring to earth. She finds all but one the phallus, which was eaten by a fish named oxyringhus. (*How ironic life is! A few of my plays, amongst them “Bucchantes” shall be found on a papyrus in a city of Egypt named Oxyringhus! And from that papyrus shall be missing the piece on Pentheus recreation*). Isis recomposes and recreates Osiris, she insufflates life by flattering her wings and unites ceremoniously with him to conceive their son Horus, and since Osiris now has a successor, he becomes the king of the Under-World.

Another one of the travelers took the fore, very thin he was, with black hair and hooked nose, he informed us that:

Osiris is linked to the chain of fertility Gods, whose death and resurrection symbolizes the seed buried and from it sprouts a new life. The worshipping of these Gods and their sacrifice ensures the euphoria of the fields, fruit barring for the trees and fertility for human beings.

His conclusion was somewhat abrupt, he looked around puzzled as if he was sort sighted and the gathering applauded.

Amongst them the third traveler, a red-chick plumpish youth was laughing continuously if he wasn't discussing food or didn't describe imaginary orgies, or wasn't attempting to explain new erotic poses freshly imported from the East!

I was in no hurry to return to my cell. The tragedy was there waiting for me.

## Fi

The next day I woke light headed with clear mind. I drank cold water from the amphora and began writing. The words were flowing like a river. And the rhythm, the melody, the synthesis of the voices and movement, the “image” were alive in front of my eyes while the ink was running on the paper smudging my thumb. When I finished I knew that I won’t see my play staged at Dionysus theatre. Nor anywhere else for that matter. The day after tomorrow was the grand premier of “Archelaus” and the day after I would be devoured by the dogs.

At noon my ex student came to see me. From my expression he realized that I had completed the work and asked me if he could scribe it. I refused. On his way out he maliciously said:

Archelaus believes that you did not pay the due attention to his play. If the performance is disliked by the experts who’d arrive from Athens you shall suffer a violent death. Each night before he feeds his dogs he makes them smell your sweaty cloths!

I never saw him again. Someone told me that his name –or his nick-name, I am not certain- was Shrewd

All afternoon, till late in the evening I was scribing my play. Just after the moon appeared, which needed two more days to be filled, my ink run-out. I forced myself to eat something and to get some sleep. A long day was awaiting for me.

## He

The moment my son walked in, before he had a chance to say a word, I hung from his neck –you see he was taller than me.

-Listen to me carefully. Things are not right here. You must get safely to Athens with my last play, “Bacchantes”. You’ll also take the cat with you in a wooden box well sealed with holes on the side for him to breath. Tomorrow in the theatre you’ll sit at the first row of the upper zone on the side towards the exit. As soon as the “God sent” appears you shall leave unobserved. You’ll start running and never turn back whatever you might hear. Get some rest now. This afternoon and all night long we’ll be scribbling.

But tonight I’m invited. The Athenian high society has arrived to see the grand premier of your last play. Even those two hetaeras who abhor you and spread rumors about you. Embellished in red and gold. I can’t miss such a rare opportunity for enjoyment.

I shall make excuses for you. I’ll send a slave to inform them that you’re feeling ill. That you have a fever. That perhaps you suffer from a contagious disease. They’ll leave you alone. You as well as myself...Did you say the hetaeras came dressed in red?

They’re probably thinking of moving to Pella now in their declining years. One shall be smashing as a chef. Her recipes circulate in all good homes of Lycabitos. The slaves scribe them with zeal and sell them in agora. As for the other, will excel in gossip and intrigues. Many couples shall be separated, a lot of friendships shall be dissolved and many beloved shall become sworn enemies. After this pleasant interval –I hope that you had enough enjoyment- We’ll settle down to work.

-But you said that I should firstly rest.

-Come now, you shall rest in Athens. We have no time to lose.

## Psi

Every one was there. The theatre was absolutely crammed like a bee-swarm. I entered at the last moment just before the performance began, bridging the protocol. The king was there, seating on his bench and after his entrance it was forbidden for anyone else to enter from side passages, except the Chorus. The crowd applauded warmly and my enemies faces sitting on the first rows, turned sour. The king made room for me to sit next to him. I declined graciously.

-Usually I see the performance sitting on thirteenth row.

The Mistress of ceremonies with the golden brooch in the shape of a butterfly guided me to the seat I indicated, after she shifted the poor woman sitting there, to a lower seat to prevent her from complaining. She undoubtedly possessed the art of equilibrium. It's been said that she has a filling cabinet in which she keeps records of everyone according to friendships and enmities. Only when she wished to amuse herself –at exceptional times when feeling childish- she'd have ex lovers sitting side by side with their new partners. Then she'd laugh like a naughty little girl who has done something she shouldn't or she had thrown an insect in the boiling pot in which the meal was cooking.

The stage director, a blasterous type with a heavy moustache, a well known cheat in dice and smuggler of poppy-seed powder, stroked three times on the gong to signal the start of the performance.

I was composed as if viewing the work of another. Observing – as a humble traveler of a foreign country- a peculiar scene in a language unknown to me.

Images and sounds were alternating fast. And just before Zeus appeared “God-sent” I saw him: a black angel with copper wings descended from the proscenium, passed through the orchestra, ascended the thirteen steps of the central zone, took me by the hand and elevated me high, like a cumulus cloud knitted by wave froth. There were no complains that I was abstracting any ones view and from that I realized that I was invisible, I and my angel. From high above I viewed the exodus of the Chorus, hear the applauds, the flattery, my enemies disputing making hand gestures. Archelaus seemed deliriously happy. He invited the crowd for a grand celebration at the Agora, where set tables with all kinds of delicacies awaited. And the wine poring abundantly. In the morning all were still there with headaches and heavy stomachs.

With the first sun-ray my angel left me saying his name was Horus.

## Omega

All day long I was ascending the mountain. A merciful breeze was misleading the dogs' s sense of smell by diffusing the scent of my perspiration to different directions. Here and there, a cloud would hide the sun and a tiny leaf held enough moisture for me to quench my thirst. The butterflies flattered around me care free. The lizards bid me fair-well. The locusts stood to attention. Only some cantharis seemed indifferent continuously nipping off the over ripen pears.

We reached the top of the bald mountain with the cypress-tree just before the rising of the full moon. The entrance of the cave was lit as if a cyan flame was burning quietly. How long I stood there motionless under a cypress-tree with my arms opened is unknown to me. And when the earth began to cast its shadow over the moon I heard the dogs gasping uphill.

When the moon reappeared four dogs –white with black spots- had lacerated me, four snakes –cyan with green eyes- that had just come out of the cave bit the dogs and killed them with their poison. Four vultures with black crowns descended and grabbed with their nails the snakes alive, took them at the four cardinal points, passing for an instant in front of the all round disc of the moon, which seemed so feeble like a stage prop.

## Sophocles on the World's Roof-Top

For death is only the beginning.  
Living in wild freedom  
secluded  
in stork nests  
enchancing the ineffable

Awoken assembling betrothals  
on dried grass gutters.  
A faked African ring.

...And the oar dry wood  
far from the splattering  
wave.

The evening mass bells ringing. How do I enjoy this hour, been outside the silken layer of time and space a small, flame coloured feeble idol.

My descendants attend the church to hear once more Solomon's cry, seeking to cleanse his sins in a sea of phonemes.

Beyond time I am. Apotheosized by my contemporaries. Elevated on the roof top of Dionysus Theatre's scenic structure only to obliterate me. At nights creatures are walking and the floor boards creak. Orestes, Electra, the frightful Clytemnestra, and Agamemnon swirls in his gory bath like a fish...

It seems that all things are ready to take their course from the start. And Oedipus would again leave Corinth to find his innersole, to confront his destiny.

Oedipus. What does this person means to me and I use his name like a mask? He's not especially intelligent. He solves Sphinx's enigma because it's a simple one, for infants. Nevertheless, he is the only one daring to take his freedom into his own hands, any way he can.

Fear of freedom. Is this the reason why we attend theatre? To witness the fate of the forgotten abandoned on the riff of life drifting on the great ocean. The vast sea robed in cyan mist is usually black. The deepest black in nature although even the most unmerciful night is marked by the slightest impression of light.

Why I wrote "Oedipus in Colonos"?

I was Oedipus. Once a "tyrant", then "in Colonos" and now... nothing. And you're wondering about "meta". Although the images are fading away after the exodus-hymn. Even though the creator does not feel the incense rising from the ancient theatre's alter. Today's mania of "meta" is caused by your agony for the end of the World, that a single dimensional logic glorified by the Middle Age's fires giving food to Cassandra's who haunted your sleep with nightmares about the jaws of Hell. Us Greeks do believe on time cycle, in life and death exchange, Hypnus and Creation, Inertia and Praxis, Power and weakness. Whatever ends begins again and there's no beginning without end.

I am here now, far from the end and you're listening to me wondering: "why I wrote "Oedipus in Colonos"?"

Perhaps to escape the cycle of Attis and Catastrophe. To deceive the vindictive demon of my dwelling, to surpass Time and the cycle of blood and repayment. To look at the Universe once in my life with unclouded gaze, free from desire.

Did I say desire? When at last shall we learn not to desire beyond passion. Or perhaps is more to the point to say: Do not desire beyond passion?

I have been in love but did not deify it. For me the world was created with soil and always beyond the clouds another dawn was flowering. Many a times I've slept at the ditches. Embraced the clay of other bodies. They've stolen all the rings I've had. Even the gold-embroidered chiton with emblems and I entered the city in a humble overcoat. For there was no need for passion to be a lesson to me. It passed through existence to be diluted in human art, capable of penetrating through the vale of Time like a sun-ray. Ashamed I am not to embrace the forms of my desire. For I was Sophocles, and my body out of clay and the sky rains mercifully to cool it down. Name me one who is burning for some time longing to be extinguished by you. And who is concerned in the furnace where lime is melting down, if the chiton falls gently on the perspired shoulder impatient to be moisten in the arms of a woman with the kisses of a foliage that even the oak-tree of Zeus does not outdo in horror. I've traveled through Africa. Laid under the holy shade of the Pyramids in the afternoon. Embraced lifeless bodies and bodies seemingly alive for a second, while uttering a sound like a tiny bird's cry before surrendering its soul. I excepted the engagements of lovely creatures who appeared as if they've just arose from Nile's mud and dried in gold dust. Amongst the rings that I number in prayer I recognize the earrings of a holy whore. Imitations. Mare bronzes. The rest sink into the ashes of time, reflecting now and then a dim light, like a bit of coal from the death-bed of Phoenix. Other times I dream of leeches glued to my body, swampy creatures pleading to take them with me in heaven. It's not possible to save the souls of other creatures. There is just enough time to struggle for your own. And death is only the beginning.

As a general I fought for the benefit of Athenians, the way only a poet can: with my whole existence, night and day, till extinction. The war professionals and all kinds of rodentia in the army's store-houses never forgave me. But our country was bowing its head in gratitude. They accused me for despondency and of having the antiwar fury of "Philoctites". They insulted me for the cowardice and supercilious selfishness of "Aendas" who commits suicide with his sword in the middle of the tragedy! The only thing I can say to such criticism is: the hero is not the core of tragedy but praxis, the tragic, the singular, the censurable, the one arousing envy and punishment. Aendas dies before the audience's condemnation. There's no need. What counts is the mechanism and the surprise.

We're watching an element that will lead to a fusion of energy, that will astonish us, overburden us and exhaust us. That'll force us to applaud frantically out of fear and relief that we were not the ones in the eye of the cyclone, that the volcano's lava didn't freeze us for ever, and the sea didn't draw us in its cold arms and Enceladus didn't engulf us in Tartar. It needs a pharmacist's or a chef's wisdom the coordination of all things in a tragedy so that the scale won't lean towards the comic, something that the neo-tragics will not avoid. There's nothing more hilarious than a healthy person who stumbles on a flat surface and die a dog's death. Or another who cries out

for the weather been bad in a beautiful day. Or someone who is begging the mercy of people who do not possess even a bone from his wealth. The point is not to bring the person next door to the stage. The tragic is, that the person next door to recognize itself on stage through someone, of whom either Luck or circumstances shall not allow him to be. But why must I reveal the secrets of my cooking while the meal is hot waiting for you? It seems that this is the price of immortality. For You and I at this moment are beyond Time viewing ourselves and life from above. Acknowledging our duality.

“Oedipus” shall be loved by the people of the new religion for he is guilty before birth. For he carries an original sin that even the most fervent Hell shall be unable to wash out. Oedipus shall be chosen by the physicians of the soul to speak about the other of whom sometimes we meet in the mirror waging war with our idol.

I love not solitude. Never was I inclined that way. Even here unknown creatures from other planets visit, to study the science of the soul. I feel unease to part of any other Knowledge but life, with the only manner suitable: Uncoiling the clew of a story that each mind delights to coil the hours of boredom.

I don't consider myself unique. However, I was however observant and curious, even when sleep lay heavy on my eyelids. Observing the golden cantharis copulating the pairs. So I've created a bright image of the indescribable and for Erebus I've woven a carpet with silk, for the simple being to fall into oblivion by its iridescence and forgetting the nausea.

I did not follow the company during the tours. I've loved my house, the street with the mulberry-trees and my small habits. Certain hours when the shadows annihilated and the creatures join to exorcise the terror of the incalculable.

Eros? An infinite tenderness. A caress over Erebus. Even up to the last moment before the end, poets shall be born. Alas to the epoch that will hunt them.

I was always a cynic. Two human eyes always assisted me uncoiling my thoughts. Perhaps this is the reason why I got involved in the theatre.

Who is he? I'm not aware with whom I'm conversing, but I'm directed to somebody. Please shut the door on your way out. And blow out the candle. Or rather... let it melt down on its own. Good day-brake.

Paris, 6. 10. 99

## Aeschylus Lexourgos at Tartarus

Death has stroked me like thunder. Suddenly the earth slit and swallowed me whole. The firmament torn in two. And a heavenly vale wrapped my body in a perpetual promptness. Creativity is my fate. There's no end to this torture. Not even to the end of the era. I pass the nights chiseling words and the days abrading their edges. The damned come to order words for their loved ones, spells for nightmares, the psora of the Times and the undesirable encounters. Even the living send their orders through the frogs. Verses with the appropriate weight to endure the siege, the famine and the war.

Never was I erotic. Always viewing the human body through God's mirror elongated leaning towards heaven.

For the "Persian's" dance I've chosen slender youths, dressed them in long bifurcated beards and heavy curls. I taught them how to move with arms firmly attached on their sides and their bodies bending backwards, like a forest racked by the wind.

Europe was born as an idea due to Anatolia's thirst to conquer it. Hordes of Unconceivable ferocity and thirst descended from North's plateau to the Ionian coastline and Greece was always the wave breaker.

Gallantly I fought In battle heartening the brave with my dithyrambus. And if stumbled, the inspiration would clear the way with a sword and arrows. I fought the way others fall in love and spending days and nights in palaestras or at unmerciful hetaera's feet overloaded with gifts and promises. Eros wasn't for me but a spring of which the water was blurred once a day –or night- a chthonian cough of an ill lung.

Father predestinated me for Eleusinian mysteries, to become a priest, perhaps a high priest at Eleusina. But I've chosen the Theatre for greater freedom it was giving me. He'd never forgave me this inclination. He pasted away withered before my triumphant return from the wars and before I began winning the grand Dionyssus prize. Do we after all, write for one or two at the most- and the rest take advantage of the fruit that doesn't belong to them? The race, the frontiers, of the same stable. The peasants and the bourgeoisie. The comedian and the Master of ceremonies go hand in hand in this city that has experienced a golden century of a cast thirsty for control, and the pathos of a race for democracy. When I gaze at the old theatre from above I see a pyramid casting a shadow over the open conch-shell's cavity and its top over the center of the first row, on the throne of the high priest of Dionyssus. This dialectic has enlightened Athens for centuries.

I feel unsettled when I see the hetaeras sitting at the front rows commenting continuously. Exception: one. The poetess who was molding words like others offer oaths and kisses. I've accepted her company for she was taken me to other destinations, to new Pelagus. And my sleep was turning into a bee-hive of unknown galaxies that was hissing like snakes in captivity, ready to escape their body.

I often felt surpassing my body, reassuming in unseen heights, to wash out the marshes of lust in the burning light, the transparent light in which Gods bathe.

Thus, euthanasia became a habit and eternity settled comfortably in my ear like a parasite that made my day to day communication toilsome.

The reason why I was beating the verses onto the drums while teaching the actors was deafness. And hands were not enough I was stamping my feet onto the ground by the orchestra or on the boards of the proscenium. And when my blindness began I was molding with my hands masks and torn the material's heavy folds. I loathed luxury and the senseless exhibitionism, but my productions were expensive. And quite often a sponsor would end up in jail for debts, the day after the awards at Dionysus Theatre. At times acquaintances in high places were not enough and by the time something was done, they spend many nights in their cell, accompanied only by the moon and the grave songs of the prisoners.

Slave! Stir the coal and revive the bellows. Many unfinished orders are waiting for me. Tonight I had a strange dream: a window opened and I was speaking with my ancestors in a past era.

Paris, 7.10. 99

## Thespis

To be a mythical character is both a curse and a blessing. Nothing more than a mask made of “tryge”, crushed grapes scraped from the bottom of a barrel. Under this cover my face vanishes and turns into a hero, a god, a semi-god. The chorus responds to me and, each time, I induce them to a different tone, a higher pitch. There are times when my mind wanders and I fail to react when the spectators show their dissatisfaction by hissing or slinging figs and walnuts.

Munching grass by the roadside, my horse is patiently waiting to be harnessed to the cart. The ovens send the delicious smell of freshly baked bread and I am wondering whether we'll manage to earn our daily bread today, as well. The lentil soup is thickening in the cauldron, which smells of bay leaf and garlic. The dish is supplemented by the addition of sweet-smelling vinegar and pure olive oil; occasionally greens are also cooked in the same vessel. But let us not talk about food yet. It is time for rehearsal. The peasants have gathered and they are trying to memorise their lives. Some are murmuring while gesticulating and one is fastening a kerchief knotted round his head to shelter it from the sun. The strangled sound of a billy-goat suggests that Nature is carrying on with her work, unconcerned. I do not know what Art is. I may be called the father of tragedy but I do not know what that is, nor do I care to be its father, for that matter. I have been preceded by many other men at fairs, religious feasts and rituals. An endless line of mimes who relished acting their passions and tribulations and those of other people until they rid themselves of them. There is no beginning or end to this chain, It will go on even when tragedy has fallen into decline during the hard times of foreign occupation when the great fire has dwindled to a mere taper-flame and the actor-singer, the flute-player and the pantomime performer have given breath to the hybrid called “parakataloghi”. This will give birth to “paraloghi” which in turn will endow, the folk songs (which you choose to call so) with the style and ethos of ancient tragedy. Now it all is still simple and no one will cut joy with a lancet. But what about the Thrill, awe and eerie shivers? About that, I will say nothing. I prefer to arouse them by my deeds. There are surely moments when the divine haunts me. It is then that I feel a horrendous pitcher intended to be filled with the sacred water of knowledge. I know that ours are minor deeds and our arms drop on the sides like logs half burnt by the time of sin and the kiln of lust. Let some angel come down here and tell us that we are forgetting the sex of the celestial bodies and what kind of a crest stars have and how Dawn copulates with Dusk. For we, Greeks personify everything; even the depths of our thoughts from which mythical monsters spring up that man's imagination can endure. Let the imitators of tragedy take notice of this for the aeons to come. We are still human even in our nightmares and Apollo's light always shines brightly upon the subterranean deities.

Later on the roles will be shared with a second actor then with another and finally silent persons and children will be added. For difficult performances, they can afford the luxury of a second chorus known as “parachoregema”. I am not sure if all that will enhance tragedy, however.

Here I am now on the cart surrounded by the chorus. I am reciting Pentheus' Bacchus prologue. “Ioh! Ioh! Bacchus evoi evan!”. The rhythm intoxicates me. I breathe in the pollen of hidden stems. I can savour occult gardens. That is my reward. Let the table that is set, the fragrant body and fireworks come later to turn darkness into light. I will drink pure, unadulterated wine and will lead Orion to the Pleiades

holding tight between my thighs the helm of the Galaxy. There will come a time when I will be only a name and life, the life which I love and hanker after, will have flown to other bodies with luxuriant gardens.

Here I am standing on the “eleós” – a butcher’s block-waiting either to be cheered or have my head decapitated. Centuries later, Aristotle will speak of “éleos” on the carcass of tragedy.

All the glory of the world will be incapable of awakening the volcanoes to render the shadows of Hades a purple colour where I am now to-ing and fro-ing overhearing the groaning of the Furies.

5.9.2000

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