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Ugo Betti: On the Edge of the Wells

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a research paper in support of the production of Ugo Betti's Crime on Goat Island under the auspices of the Department of Drama at the Reeve Theatre of the University of Calgary, November 25th to December 5th, 1998.

The first part of the thesis summarizes the work on the new translation of the play, and the preparatory directorial analysis of the text - both based on a research conducted during the summer of 1998, in Rome, Italy, at *Istituto di Studi Pirandelliani e sul Teatro Italiano Contemporaneo* and *Biblioteca e Raccolta Teatrale del Burcardo*.

The second part examines the application of the prefatory theory to the various aspects of the creative process involved in the staging of the play, and offers an evaluation of the total impact of the two-week run.

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Finally, I wish to thank my parents and both of their families for believing even when I doubted.

To Maša, for giving purpose to my solitude.

Table of Contents

Approval Page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Epigraph.....	vii
CHAPTER ONE: THE SEARCH FOR A STIMULUS.....	1
Disclaimer.....	1
Why <u>Crime on Goat Island?</u> (The Invocation).....	2
The Playwright (The Four Corners of the Building).....	4
The Play (Inside the Four Corners of the Building).....	14
Notes.....	25
CHAPTER TWO: FROM PAGE TO STAGE.....	29
The Translation: <i>Tradurre o tradire?</i>	30
The Cuts and Alterations.....	34
The Set Design.....	39
The Costume Design.....	43
The Light Design.....	47
The Sound Design.....	52
The Players (The Work With the Actors).....	56
The Aftermath.....	69
Notes.....	72
Bibliography.....	79
APPENDIX (The Translation of the Play).....	83

Sul tacente orlo dei pozzi
sempre un incanto mi conduce!
Mi perdo a rimirare
se nel profondo nasce una luce...
Mi perdo ad ascoltare
un riso di stille o un pianto,
e gli occhi non so più levare
da quel tenebroso incanto...

Ugo Betti, Gli specchi

[A magic wonder always drives me
To the silent edge of the wells!
And I gaze for hours
If the depths conceal some luminous spells...
And I listen for hours
For the laughter of the drops, or for their moan,
And I am unable to lift my eyes from that dark and gloomy stone...

Ugo Betti, The Mirrors]¹

CHAPTER ONE: THE SEARCH FOR A STIMULUS

Disclaimer: In an effort to describe a process of creation in the theatre - a process that is in reality much more intuitive and, usually, less organized than it might appear when attempting to be captured in writing - the author must observe the similarity between this process and its final result: they both resist recording.

It is as hard to capture the essence of a theatre performance, as it is to faithfully describe the creative process that leads to it. Even the best photographs or careful video-taping always miss the totality and immediateness of the live performance. Similarly, the most interesting theatre essays are not "recipes" ready to be followed by theatre practitioners, covering the "few easy steps" that lead to the perfect production - they seem more like a narrow trail marked on a vast unknown territory of a text.

This "curse" of inconstancy that accompanies theatre since its earliest days, may be at the same time the source of its utmost beauty. However, it does not alter the fact that the elusive nature of theatre remains completely dependent upon the souls of those it wishes to speak to: for as long as the last viewer is willing to remember it, a performance can fully continue to exist in her/his memory - sometimes decades after the final curtain-call. Conversely, in less fortunate cases, it can be forgotten while the courteous applause still lasts.

In both instances the memory of the viewers persists without a real need to know much about the intricate work that lay behind the performance.

Having the above limitations in mind, the following can only strive to transpose in a linear form the hidden and mostly unknown process of a performance creation, a process that rarely observes any chronological or sequential line, a process that freely jumps from one lateral inspiration to the next, and one that - similarly to its creation - lives fully only in the fragile memory of the creators.

Why Crime on Goat Island? (The Invocation)

Our predecessors had no trouble pointing to the north. The little needle always turned in the right direction, no matter on which continent they stood on. With the "help" of Christian doctrine, they knew that "what makes wrong acts wrong is that they are contrary to God's will".² Therefore, to measure their deviations from the set standards, it was enough to apply a circular definition such as:

Things are more bad or less bad [...] according to their distance from the good (Aquinas, *SCG* III ch9; *ST* IIaIIae q. 79 a4). Less metaphorically, we can say that what is worse is worse in that it is somehow more opposed to the good.³

Yet, the world they lived in was much more partitioned than ours. Today, most of the human race is sharing a dangerously unified world, but the compass appears to be broken. Standards, or any units of moral measure are impossible to define. Our *fin de siècle* has brought a loss of unanimous moral direction, and the apocalyptic announcement that God is dead.

The death of God is a symbol of collapse of ultimate authority, especially in the ethical and religious spheres. The death of God is not something that has happened to God. It has happened to us. (Rubenstein 10)

Whether we accept such statements or not, the truth is that the "north" of our times is constantly shifting - the needle follows some unpredictable fashion(s) and does not concordantly turn any more towards a meaningful point of reference.

It will probably be decades before we can understand with any degree of adequacy what has really happened to us. Any current attempt to comprehend the cultural transformations of our time must remain tentative. Nevertheless, we cannot delay consideration of the meaning of our transformed world for the religious and

ethical values by which we live. The decisive transformations include the pill, the communications revolution, the collapse of authority, and the arrival of a moment in human history which I propose to identify as *the last days*. Each of these transformations is related to the others. Each reflects vast alterations in religious beliefs and personal behavior. Each poses in its own way the question of the extent to which the contemporary technological revolution involves significant alterations in our religious and ethical sensibilities. (Rubenstein 3)

In such circumstances, many contemporary performance texts are just colorful maps that merely depict the current ever-changing surroundings in which the unreliable compass can run wild. Others are more daring and may be written to try to set a new fashion themselves, a fashion which will be followed until some new alteration comes along on our journey through our 'last days'. Others still might not be concerned about the surrounding time/space at all: their purpose could be different, for example - to simply entertain...

Thus, the hazard of choosing today to direct a text like Crime on Goat Island, a text that belongs to the more distant past (not so much chronologically, but definitely spiritually), that is part of the times in which the "north" used to be in the opposite direction of the "south"⁴, may be like putting a magnet in the vicinity of an already broken compass. To a director, such a text could mean the unique opportunity to create an artificial north in her/his theatrical space, and a chance to probe, and maybe even seriously question, the "spatial orientation" of the audience she/he presents the work to. Right from the start, the fact that it belongs to the tragic *genre*, promises a strong impact on the viewers who face the wake of 'the death of God', because the:

[...] The topic (*tópos*, trope) of God's absence, after his Nietzschean, Darwinian or Freudian burial, is, together with the kabbalistic conceit of His abstention from a flawed creation, one of utmost abstraction. The word 'abstraction' means just that: a withdrawal from, an emptying.

[...] The tragic absolute can address or metaphorize a receding, an exhausted, a lamed deity.⁵

On the conceptual level, a text like Crime on Goat Island promises an exciting and provocative artistic encounter: it guarantees to force its viewers to take sides and stands, to define for themselves what is "right" and what is "wrong"; where is *their* "north" and *their* "south" in this day and age.

On the pragmatic level, it grants to its theatrical creators a rare possibility to lose the sight of the moral horizons of their known world(s) and permits them to live for a while in an illusion they might discover some new ones - just like the brave explorers of the past, using a *not-too-reliable*, but certainly very *personal* compass and an *incomplete*, fifty years old map left by the playwright.

If at the end of this risky journey into the desert, the travellers find themselves in the same theatre, and if their horizons have not moved an inch, well - the stage was there to *play*. Even if the world refuses to change in that one evening, just for the sake of the voyage, let us, people from the "other" side of the curtain, be mediators in this encounter: let us help the apparently disoriented viewers meet the seemingly moralist playwright.

The Playwright (The Four Corners of the Building)

On June 13, 1953, four days after the death of Ugo Betti, an eminent clergyman, Monsignor Giuseppe De Luca, was quoted in a local Italian newspaper:

Although he was not a practicing Roman Catholic, he has never been at war with, and, what is more, he has never denied the faith. His works have never been false, and, even where he does not indicate God, he draws near to God, moreover, he leads to God. ("L'Appenino Camerte" 2)

Monsignor De Luca was instructing Betti during the last few months of his life. This religious instruction was, apparently, Betti's request - made shortly after he learned in February, 1953, that he had been struck with cancer.

It would hardly be true to say that all of Betti's work 'leads to God', but in his endeavor to summarize a rich and prolific career, Monsignor De Luca probably condensed a development in Betti's thought, a progress from doubt and questioning as to the meaning and purpose of life, to a belief in God and His love.

Definitely, Betti's fascination with God and religion was visible long before his horrible and torturous encounter with death.

My starting point is a dictate of theology! According to that dictate, it seems so true that the grace (that is, the gift of belief; that is, the faith) is a gift of God, a gift that God can grant or deny; but it is also true that the man, in order to have that grace, in order to be granted, must *want it*, must *want to believe*. This may seem as a contradiction, but it really isn't. (As you well know it, whole religion is based on the reconciliation of the two apparently contradicting principles: omnipotence of the Lord and the free will of a man.)⁶

Even in this intimate confession to his wife, there is an echo of Isaiah (7:9): "Unless you believe, you will not understand".

In fact, for most of his writing career, critics were persistently looking for religious resonance, until finally, they considered Betti to be an implicitly religious writer. This reputation followed him until the 1980's, when a more open and much deserved (second) view of Betti's work was taken.

The main reason for such a generalizing attitude was in the fact that religious dimensions were easily attributed to all of the evidently controversial themes he loved. Whether he focused on purgation, blood sacrifice, original sin, earthly paradise, responsibility or predeterminism, the critics recognized in each one of them profoundly Christian themes. But for Betti, religion was a moral necessity - not a dogma.

There is a stream of conceptual critics that have a tendency to define Betti's playwriting through ideological parameters, the stream that has already labeled his work as

'poetically-crepuscular', 'ethically-processual', or even simply, 'catholic'.⁷

Betti's work was comprised of many dimensions, and quick summaries cannot do him justice. A specific richness of his writing derives not from the part of his life that had earned him fame, but from the one that earned him living. In fact, the above mentioned 'ethically-processual' obviously refers to that other aspect of his career, the one that he made his living off: although Ugo Betti was a writer at heart, he was a judge by profession.

The early critics enjoyed to point out how his legal career must have forced him to constantly define not only the abstract *divine justice*, that remained just a literary contemplation, but, throughout his daily judicial work, the lesser *human justice* as well.

Both of these two different aspects of justice compelled the critics to delimit the common denominator of his opus as 'morality and men'. It seemed as if Betti's place in the history of dramatic literature was specified with a simple phrase, and an easy explanation:

His flinty moral integrity, his constant search for justice (which is also a search for God), his incisive, subtle, idiosyncratic style, his carefully meditated emblematicism, his concern for the individual [...were...] the salient characteristics of his literary career...⁸

Then, a 'complete silence'⁹ fell onto the ill-starred playwright, and, in spite of his huge popularity in the 1950's (especially outside of his native Italy), his fame began to decline. With fewer stagings, the critical writings about Betti became less abundant as well. It took almost three decades after his death to re-discover - only in terms of criticism, not the stagings - an unjustifiably forgotten author. The perspective of those articles that were published in early 1980's, is finally all but homogenous: as the years passed, the critics became less unanimous in judging the work Betti left behind, opening the space for new, daring interpretations.

Profound gaps were visible in Betti's art [...] gaps that were generating entanglements in the world of readers and viewers, leaving behind a mixture of consent and dissent, of attraction and revulsion, of success and failure.¹⁰

The provoking, uneasy nature of his writing was rebelling against simplistic classifications. The critics had considerable trouble responding to Betti's challenges through the looking-glass of their different era. The times that followed were far from the existentialist despair in which best of Betti's works were written. They were all of a sudden filled with easy optimism; the catchy myths of promised lands and better futures were appearing on the horizon, and the world was becoming a more idealistic place, filled with people who embraced some new hedonism. For that world, Ugo Betti was dangerously "black" in his fatalism, embarrassingly impolite with the direct, merciless questions he asked. He was 'digging' unpleasantly deep.

It seems so natural to find in Betti the *profound digging* into the winding paths of human soul that will never give origin (Betti is perfectly aware of that) to a futuristic re-ordering of the reality or the social aspects of life, but will only be there to confirm the certainty of the existence of *evil* in man, evil that Betti introduces in a religious sense, in which, through a dialectic conflict with the existential pain, that evil becomes re-valued as a proof of the existence of the contrary principle, of the existence of *good*, and, therefore, of *divine*.¹¹

There is no doubt that Betti found himself bound into drawing the line that differentiates good from evil, right from wrong, rarely coming across the divine. His profession was forcing him to deal with both morality and men, just as the critics claimed he did in his writing. But he was an intelligent and sensitive writer and he never tried to hide his awareness of the numerous limits of the lower, negligible human justice. As a judge, he had to cope day after day with the inability (of an ordinary man) to penetrate the depths of another man's soul and reward him according to his merits. The most that he could do was to extend compassion to his fellow sufferers in their struggle through life,

and, once out of the court-room and back to his first love, to give to his fictional characters the *illusion* of the power to fight. The divine justice was always just a distant (literary) ideal.

With his feet firmly on the ground, he knew the immense difference between the atavistic, *retributive justice* that was surviving among his people, and the more modern, *corrective justice* that was just an utopian design in the law books, meant for some different humans. At the same time, he also sensed the existence of a third, often ignored, *purgatory justice* - the justice that doesn't really follow neither primitive, nor modern laws. As he demonstrates in Crime on Goat Island, he knew that the indispensable balance and healing could come without the righteous, impulsive revenge, or approved and comprehensive laws. This new justice was like a red, flaming steel prescribed to be placed against an infected wound. Only, the cure was so strong that it would painfully burn the wound *and* the wounded - making the purging purposeless.

In such irrational and destructive histories, which were far from the simple and comprehensible *quid pro quo* cases, the proper mind of a judge must have violently collided with the raw instincts of the artist: the artist had to be brutal, and dark, and not rightful. Just like Agata's (**Goat Island, 101**), Betti's faith in *judicious* humanity was shaken. Even if such humanity existed somewhere, he knew that for the sake of the dramatic conflict, and for the literary power of his work, he had to look for the *other* humanity. Indeed, for Betti, the playwright, the pretty concept of good *was* in existence somewhere out there - again, out of the boundaries of his dramas - just because there was a strong presence of evil within those boundaries. His canvas was ready for the dark oil.

[...] faith is exceedingly difficult to maintain. The biblical Lord of history is a redeemer God. He promises that the sorrows of the present age will ultimately be vindicated by the triumph of his kingdom. This view implies that human history has a meaning and a goal - the coming of God's kingdom. Unfortunately, nothing in our anthropological, biological, or psychological knowledge of man offers the slightest justification for this belief. Admittedly, human beings could conceivably be miraculously transformed, but

they would then be so totally different from man as we know him as to constitute an entirely different species. Man is the most cunning and predatory of all animals. He hardly seems a fit candidate for citizenship in the divine commonwealth. The Judaeo-Christian belief in the redeemer God is in reality the collective dream of Western man. It is a projection into the distant future of the child's yearning for a world relieved of the strife, tension, and anxiety which pervade the actual world. (Rubenstein, 184)

Betti, the playwright, never made an attempt to justify with reason, or deny, the existence of God, in spite of the legitimate doubts, and the strong opposition of the ratio of Betti, the intellectual. In his writing, he always made sure there was enough "space" for the inexplicable and the mystic. For he knew that where there is thirst, there must be water: humans were too weak and too imperfect. Strangely, although he was open just to the *possibility* of the presence of divine (not the actual demonstration of it), he gained the aforementioned reputation of a moralist and religious playwright.

In maintaining this openness to the spiritual, Betti's work was far from dry theology. Even when the flagrantly religious topics, and the controversial moral issues were addressed, he never shouted them from the rooftops. Therefore, none of his works ever acquired the outward appearance of a "holy" play.

Since his texts did not have saints and heavenly creatures, their *possibility* for the divine was heavily dependent on the 'free will of man' - the apparently 'contradicting principle' to the 'omnipotence of God'.

Betti was aware of the miraculous potential of an individual and his *intentional actions*, and he knew only too well how much *responsibility* was linked to it.

It is not a very well favored idea nowadays to attribute responsibility to oneself; the general tendency is to blame others, history, laws, parents etc... But no; that vast picture of a man's life has an author, it carries a signature: our own. We are responsible for it...
[...] the lives of men are constructions of which men themselves can be the architects...¹²

According to his own words, Betti did not introduce the contradiction to deny God the sovereignty. On the contrary, he was simply determined to indicate one of the strongest potential mechanisms through which man's liberty should try to override the predeterminism and fate. For that reason, his plays remain as complex as the life itself - encompassing many diverse, but not discordant themes.

Betti's theatre is not a monolithic block that insists monotonously only on one theme; it is rather an exhibition of seemingly disharmonious themes, features, sections, in a constant process of spiritual elucidation...¹³

In such a complexity that leaves many options open to his characters, the word 'responsibility' gained even more frightening implications: people in his plays had to make uncomfortable choices, forcing at the same time the audiences to be the "judges" in their seats.

His characters are set in unusual and ambiguous situations and are accountable for choosing their "north" or their "south". Their world, in spite of their attempts of mutiny that may be taken as illusions of freedom, appears to be an actually very ordained world. The lack of true, authentic freedom that is the core of their unfavorable destinies is crucial in understanding the lines of action and options of Betti's characters.

The basic judicial preoccupation from his doctoral dissertation, entitled Il diritto e la rivoluzone (1914; The Law and the Revolution)¹⁴, found its way into his theatre work. The *young law student* (he was 22, and unhappy with his career at the time, because he dreamt of becoming a poet instead of being a judge) was examining the role of the violence and revolution as possible sources of law and human rights, and, at the same time, he was successfully shocking his conservative university professors; the *mature dramatist* was conscious of the difference between his youthful ideals and the cruel reality - he learned that justice was just a distant concept. The laws and human rights, no matter if we pursue them through violence or patient faith in the system, had little to do with the *life*. The numerous distressing experiences, the two wars he lived through, the

imprisonment, and an altered Europe, not resembling the one he grew up in, had tempered considerably the flames of the adolescence.

Still, in spite the bitter experiences, Betti preserved an almost sadistic desire to "play" in his literature even at the older age. Therefore, he granted his characters the naïve energy of deception: he let them try to follow the rules of responsible, intentional conduct, remaining viciously reluctant to build in the fictional creatures his accumulated personal wisdom. Paradoxically then, his heroes were "free" to do whatever they *had* to do within the given plot.¹⁵ At the same time, he made sure they were constantly aware of the consequences of their "free" actions. He, as the playwright (the privileged position that endowed him *some* divine powers), was creating on his pages numerous little variations of Sisyphus, enjoying the eternal repetitions of their wrong choices and the troubles they had in coping with them.

In Crime on Goat Island, Agata overcomes the difficult incongruousness between freedom and predetermination by accepting her future victim's (Angelo's) condemnations for her crime, and by taking the responsibility for her decisions. At the end of the play she has the courage and the sagacity to show that she is *willing* (like Sisyphus) to accept to be 'damned and cursed for all eternity':

That's precisely what gives me peace: to get what I deserve.
[...] I love my burden. (Goat Island 144)

This statement creates pity at the end of the Third Act, because, at this point, the readers/viewers are aware - as much as the character is - of how inexistent Agata's freedom of choice really is. This illusion of having the control over one's own destiny is the essence of Betti's use of tragic irony in his writing. Giovanni Sinicropi observes that "it seems that Betti establishes the problem of responsibility almost entirely on the question of liberty"¹⁶ which raises the irony to an even higher level. The nonexistent freedom, and, especially, its consequences for which one must be held accountable, thus become something to be afraid of. In other words, his characters could be better off if there was no choice, and they could say: "there was *nothing else* I could have done". Of

course, such a constraining thought is quite alien in most societies in the second half of the twentieth century, and therefore Betti does not allow Agata (or any other character in Goat Island) to perceive their circumstances as totally helpless.

Betti defines this unique ambiguity of having/not having any input in the true course of our lives as:

...the dangerous freedom at the departing point and the mysterious necessity, the fatality of the arrival.¹⁷

Needless to mention, at the moment that he introduces the responsibility for the freedom of choice into the moral structure of his characters, he has to introduce the concept that is intertwined with it: the concept of *guilt*. In a predominantly Catholic world to which Betti's protagonists belong, the responsibility for one's actions, and especially the guilt inscribed in it, are integral parts of the set of values by which the society runs. These two concepts are submissively honored by the 'bigots and fanatics'¹⁸ for the last two millennia, and have proven themselves (particularly guilt) to be very powerful and efficient tools of total control over social behavior.

Why are the innocent ones punished for the faults they never did? ...Because strange and cruel circumstances made our guilt emerge bigger than it really was.¹⁹

Guilt remains in religious, Catholic societies a regulating constituent in all the human manipulation. Guilt can be used as a token for the trade (one always has to pay for the sins one is guilty of), or even as an efficient way of blackmailing (if one does not repent, one can not be guaranteed the 'kingdom of heaven').

Elena F. Lo Cicero further expands the concept of guilt as a driving force of Betti's characters. In her criticism on Betti, she articulates yet another element integral to it, the element of Christian *redemption*. In fact, she summarizes all of Betti's work by defining it as the "theatre of guilt and *redemption*".²⁰ With this simple and catchy phrase, she invariably remains on the ground of morality and theology, but, at the same time, she

successfully determines the missing piece for the complete religious image. With this last addition (of hope that one's sacrifices will be paid off in the end), Lo Cicero appoints the final important dimension to the theatre of Ugo Betti. However, she cynically concludes that this hope is (sadly) *futile*.

Of course, there is also a laic complement to all the aforementioned religious aspects that critics found in Betti's plays. Betti brings into his work a considerable amount of worldly, Latin passion. For that reason, he does not look just with a cold, theological eye on his heroes. Instead, he offers them some encouraging radiance, some author's mercy. The Italian word that comes into mind to describe Betti's weakness for his heroes, could be the often used, melodramatic cry: "*Pietà!*". Surprisingly, although perfectly aware of the iron religious rules, Betti calls for a *pietà* for his sinners, rather than for a plain Christian "redenzione". In Crime on Goat Island, he knows that with the stubbornness of the main characters and with their unwillingness to repent, there is very little room for Christian redemption. Yet, although he wants his audience to see clearly that Angelo deserves the cruel end in the well (an example of the *atavistic, retributive justice*), and that all his promiscuity and lies cannot be redeemed, and although he wants the spectators to have no doubts that Agata is committing a punishable crime - he still cries for a pardon between the spoken lines. In the highly emotional finale of the play, the two condemnable characters are placed in a *context* that indirectly - very subtly - makes both of them appear as victims. The animal aspects that overcame both Agata's and Angelo's human nature, are about to be sanctioned in a rationally proper way. Nevertheless - since Betti allows no room for the winners on the stage - this ultimate defeat of humanity can be seen as the playwright's plea for mercy. In this light, Betti seems to wish to be able to provide a mercy higher than the sentence, an alteration of all unjust rulings. But this grand, much sought compassion, a compassion which should transcend the justice, must remain an unfulfilled desire. Only then the author can assure the ambiguity of interpretation: one that sees the impossibility to bend the religious dogmas, and the other that recognizes a powerful dramaturgical tool that unflinchingly provokes pity.

Now, stretched between the secular and religious extremes of Betti's writing, a "rectangular" structure for an exciting theatrical adventure can be established. The four corners present in the Crime on Goat Island: the *intentional actions* of the protagonists (along with the responsibility for those actions), the *guilt* that casts a shadow even on the best intended deeds, the *justice* (both human and divine) that the protagonists hope should follow all their acts, and the *redemption* that they expect will in a due time balance the injustice of the world - they all form the elements of the future "magnet" that should cause the compass needles of Betti's audiences to spin hard in the search for *their* "north".

The Play (Inside the Four Corners of the Building)

Betti spent a lot of time finding the proper titles for his plays. In extreme cases it took him years to decide upon the right one. He believed that the titles were supposed to be both symbolic and reflect the true nature of his work. Many of them embodied the moral dilemma of a play already in the choice of the words that he decided to use: *ispezione* (investigation, inquiry), *corruzione* (corruption), *lotta* (struggle), or, in the case examined, *delitto* (crime).²¹ With equal or greater care, Betti also filtered the content of the likely moral conflicts in his plays:

His work was at the same time conveying a wonderful creative richness, and a very rigid discipline with a refined power to select and synthesize, because the 80-90 pages of the typed manuscript of his play were distilled from hundreds and hundreds of pages of dense handwriting full of annotations and developments that for a less "difficult" playwright might have been sufficient for at least three different plays.²²

For Betti, writing was serious work, and he did not seem to show any mercy for unnecessary tirades. This distillation of his dramas is clearly visible in every line of Crime on Goat Island. The pages that are left for print are the essence of an upsetting

story that one cannot be "ordered" to love. It seems, at first, that it is hard enough to simply understand it the way it is.

Again, the aforementioned complexity of presumably contradicting themes, displays itself in its fullest in Goat Island. Page after page, Betti is attracting the reader/viewer with the intricate moral dilemmas, and, at the same time, driving her/him away with the overall morbidity of those same dilemmas ("righteous" murder, incestuous affairs). Moreover, he makes the protagonists of the play appear before the readers'/viewers' moral judgment as "annoyingly" dual - condemnable and commendable at the same time. At any given point in the play, they display an eternal and troubling absence of clearly marked morally right and wrong positions (or actions), constantly balancing between what Alfredo Luzi calls "the hermeneutic knots". Those knots are actually forcing the characters to display such a confusing duality, instead of having one clear, official and didactic, morally (or religiously) "correct" stand. In these hard-to-undo knots:

[...] human circumstances seem to be entangled, unable to find any kind of freedom in the dense net of oppositions that constitute the socio-ethical system: the judge/the guilty; the individual/the collective; the legal responsibility/the moral responsibility; the norm/the transgression; the sin/the redemption; the human/the divine; the sentiment/the reason.²³

Obviously, Crime on Goat Island speaks with great passion and precision about the most turbid ferments that decay in human souls and flesh in their struggle to bridge the gap between the mentioned oppositions. Unable to take sides and final stands, the characters of Goat Island are torn by the discouraging forces that drag people into conducting their lives following the primal impulses. With a complexity in writing that perfectly matches the complexity of the themes of the play, Betti is not simply seeking complacency for those torn characters, nor is he purely sadistic in his scope. On the contrary, he is honestly putting to trial the dark side of our humanity that is yearning for emancipation.

Of the two abysses which can rob a man of his humanity - becoming machine-like (modern and Marxian) or regressing to an animal-like status (classical and Hegelian) - Betti feared the second. [...] Goat Island [...] portrays man in his finite animality. (Licastro 83)

Once knowing that Crime on Goat Island will eventually be more than the telling of a "story", some level of responsibility for the probable uncomfortable questions, and a feeling of guilt for bringing them up, should be placed on the shoulders of creators. The everlasting dispute hanging over every director's head is "why should we care about your choice?" Yes, will the future audience care about the moral dilemmas of the play, about the parables of Betti's thoughts, about the 'regression towards animality'? The response is, ultimately, on the viewers, because - if it does not want to be didactic - the theatre has to continually offer an abundance of questions, and only exceptionally should provide the answers.

The choosing of Crime on Goat Island contains some degree of "self-defense" already inscribed in the play itself, even before any effort of staging has begun. This "self-defense" lies in its impressive and large theatrical scope. The questions that Crime on Goat Island poses to its future audiences are hard to - if not impossible to - avoid, and, what is even more important, they have potentially amazing answers. Answers of that kind are seldom sought for in contemporary dramas; they are likely to be articulated only in extreme circumstances (when facing 'the abysses'), and they seem to belong to the "bigger", nobler dramatic forms - tragedies. Given the fact that for the major part of his life Betti was living very close to 'the abyss', he evidently could not let his heroes live in an "easy" world either. Without any doubt, the "literature does not reflect life, but it doesn't escape or withdraw from life either: it swallows it".²⁴ Consequently, Betti was not able to escape from strongly linking the two. Franco Mussara takes this thought further and argues that the bitter deceptions of Betti's real world, even caused him to divide his protagonists in two distinct groups, none of which could ever blend into the big "official lie" of the times:

The "mortified" and the "mediocre" [...characters...] of Betti are the result of his deliberate taking of a stand against the dreams and the myths of grandeur of the official fascist culture.²⁵

Although completed in 1948, Crime on Goat Island deals with Italy that is mentally still in World War II, remembering the long fascist era. The play focuses on a "marginal" group of three women who, as numerous others on the exhausted and martyred continent, do not feel as a part of the glorious winners, and who are not yet ready to start building a better future. They are 'the mortified', the ones who did not ask for the war and for the shame it brought, the ones who did not fight in that war, and who are now equally remote from the newly created order of things, as they were from the old one. All the other people from the two-hours-walk distant village, represented in the play by the old Edoardo, are Betti's 'the mediocre' - the people never able to live up to the expectations of the old 'dreams', and who are now struggling to comprehend the newly imposed ones. Such polarization of the "outcasts" in Crime on Goat Island is much out of the proportion in favor of 'the mortified'; the presence of 'the mediocre' on the stage is very brief, and there is little reference to them when they are not present. This indicates that the estate called "Goat Island" (the remote house in the mountains with the surrounding land and the goats), and the three women who inhabit this estate, have very little social or historical importance for Betti. His dissection goes more in the psychological and anthropological, and maybe even mythical aspects of the situation, not exploring its connection to the actual present.²⁶

The Second World War, in spite of being a very present experience in playwright's life, is used in Crime on Goat Island contrary to the common expectations. At first, the 'great conflict' serves as an explanation for some of the initial emotional positions of the three women and of Angelo. Then, throughout the play, the entire experience of that past war remains primarily a circumstance that helps enhance the overall isolation of the place of action and of the characters from the rest of the world. But, as the play unfolds, the military aspects quickly fade away, and the blood-thirsty

premise of war is taken into a different dimension: the focus of the action shifts from the expected global, and thus openly universal perspective, to a very peculiar, private plane. Instead of looking for some planetary truths about the irrationality and madness of mass-killings that occur during the times of war, the most potent of Betti's questions demands taking a stand in relation to a presumably "lesser" topic.

At first, these "lesser" grounds chosen for Crime on Goat Island, appear to be quite disadvantageous from a literary perspective: Betti wants to put on the page a story that sounds much like an anecdote (were it not for the unhappy ending). Thoroughly examined, what really comes into view when the plot of Goat Island is re-told in few words, seems to be far from the proper basis for a future great drama or tragedy. Such outwardly anecdotal air surrounding the central event of Goat Island is revealed in an earlier play of his own, The Inquiry. There (making it really sound like an anecdote), as a brief reference to what will soon become a full-length play, one of the characters, Andrea:

[...] recounts a story he once heard of a mother and two daughters living in an isolated house. A stranger came and possessed all three, but one day fell into a well; the women left him there to die. As many critics have pointed out, this story is the plot of Crime on Goat Island, save now one of the daughters is a sister-in-law. (Licastro 82)

In an *era of crimes* (World War II), Betti strangely decides to focus his play on an *individual crime* of passion that has been committed somewhere in the Appenini Mountains. What at first may appear unimportant on a bigger scale, he skillfully manages to transform into something capital, well worth being called a tragedy.²⁷

In order to accommodate one of the main requests of the most noble of the *genres*, Crime on Goat Island had to procure its audience with a certain level of universality. Betti's solution to reaching that needed universality was through specificity. He, therefore, abandoned the obvious, big and relevant war-related topics, and immersed his pen in an intense, fatal battle of the sexes instead. The specific, concrete invasion of a

stranger became in his play a metaphor of a universal conflict between the ethic and the gain. Then, with a unique technique, Betti stretched the consequence of the battle - the crime of passion - *over an entire act*; in the real time of the characters, the agony of the murder is even longer, it lasts for almost 48 hours!

One cannot think of any other play that is capable of extending the horror of a usually brief, intense and, in most cases, impulsive moment, for a long enough time so that it can be scrutinized. Yet, Betti manages to turn the simple accident of Angelo's falling into the well, into a slow and premeditated murder. Then, he leaves it up to the readers/viewers to judge who is on the "right" and who is on the "wrong" side of the laws or morals. The playwright himself does not want to deliver any moral lessons; he has no desire to preach. Instead, he just skillfully elongates a deed that needs to be morally weighted, and denies the audience the possibility to skip the confrontation with the main question concerning that deed: *what do I think* about it? (if he does not indeed manage to bring them all the way to the "wished for": *what would I do* in that situation?).

The deed in question does not come as a surprise in the plot. In fact, when Angelo ends stuck in the well, at the end of Act II, there is no doubt that the further action of the play will be directed towards his murder. But this apparent clarity of events can be very misleading when it comes to interpretations and conclusions:

It would be too simple to think that the best way to free ourselves from the sin is to physically kill the tempter. This is a wrong conclusion, and it does not resolve the sense of his drama.²⁸

Interestingly, Betti hangs all the weight of moral responsibilities around the necks of 'the mortified' in his drama. 'The mediocre', never taking any risks, never daring to rebel against the rules and taboos, are free of that torment. That is, probably, one of the reasons why they are left out of the frame of Crime on Goat Island.

With 'the mortified' firmly in the center-stage position, Betti does not try to compensate for their individual misery, or for the misery of life in general. On the contrary, his protagonists take their share of the evil in the world, of the pain and

suffering. And, as a result of the temptations they are exposed to, all of 'the mortified' in Goat Island very soon give into their animal instincts. The common theatrical discrepancy between the noble intentions (man's potential) and erroneous actions (man's reality)²⁹ is quickly eliminated - with few deceptions at the beginning of the play, when none of the characters is prone to discover her/his real desires. The floor of the play is now open for an incredible conglomeration of reasons that can take people to sin.

As the readers/viewers witness the numerous human imperfections of the characters of Goat Island, their goodheartedness and vulnerability are surely put under considerable pressure. The verisimilitude of Betti's fiction, unpleasant as it is, decidedly asks for their mercy, or - at least - for their response. Hence, the playwright reserves the privilege of a "neutral" position for himself, and cleverly assigns to the *viewers* the task of thinking about the characters' compensation. Clearly, this compensation will be heavily dependent on the adjectives "right" or "wrong" that the audience has to assign to the protagonists and their actions.

In the Preface to La Padrona (The Mistress)³⁰, an excerpt that Carlo Bo defines as: "not only a beautiful page of writing, maybe the most beautiful that Betti ever wrote, but also a very important page in delimiting the territory singular to Betti, the playwright"³¹, the troubling human imperfections are all identified as the future *sources* for writing. At the time, Betti is already 34, and wants to define the difference of his literary approach, as opposed to that of the other writers/playwrights, whose sole purpose is to 'show their own intelligence' in their works, and 'everything else' is just a pretext. Instead, Betti believes that:

It is all that everything else that should be on our mind and in our hearts [when we write]: our hard labor, our love, our joy, which sometimes spreads in our chest like a comforting sip of a warm drink, and finally, and above all - our pain. All the reality of our pain [should be present in our writing], even the pain that doesn't come from a physical wound, pain that I've felt so vividly, that I thought I could almost squeeze in here with my own hand; and then all our instincts and our needs, all the condemnations that

we carry on our frail shoulders, and this unrelenting shadow of the time that gradually takes the sun away from us, from our labor, from our daily bread and from our dying, which should also be remembered. All of this has one purpose - we need to be able to look upon the things that terrify us, without ever feeling unworthy of this heavy crown that rests on our heads, that crown called conscience.³²

Once again, the life and the fiction have come surprisingly close, and Betti's characters carry the weight of their playwright's cross.

Such a rich content is put into a remarkably simple, almost minimalist form. In aspects other than thematic/philosophic, Goat Island has been seen by many critics as a very traditional, if not truly classical text. Further structural analysis in this direction may prove to be helpful in determining the possible *genre* of the future performance.

Crime on Goat Island is divided in three acts, which are all similar in size, and rather sequential. Moreover, two of the three classical unities are fully respected.³³

The apparently anecdotal story is transformed into convincing action, and 'the plot' (*mythos*) - first in importance for Aristotle in his ranking of the six elements of tragedy (and the only one he really insisted on) - truly becomes the soul of Betti's text. Since it contains neither 'too few' nor 'too many incidents', it appears to be of a 'proper magnitude, not too small, nor vast in size' - just as Aristotle asks for it to be - so that it could be 'seen in its fullness and embraced by the memory'. Furthermore, it includes a 'reversal', a change of fortune to its opposite (Angelo's fall from the "throne"), and could thus be considered 'complex' - a definition wished for in all good tragedies, by Aristotelian standards. Finally, as argued earlier, 'fear and pity' are aroused, *at least in the text, if not in the performance*, in the prescribed way: they are the result of the 'inner structure of the piece', and are not sought for 'by spectacular means'; they come out of the circumstances which could strike the readers/viewers as 'terrible or pitiful', when 'the tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another'. As a result, again, according to Aristotle, *katharsis* might be achieved.

Of the other two unities, which belong more to the neoclassical dictate, Betti fully respects only the one regarding the place of action. The *tópos* of Crime on Goat Island is more than just a background for the plot. It represents an isolated microcosm, ethically quite complicated: it emphasizes the mentioned contrast between the rural-'mediocre' and the urban-'mortified', but with the urban ones placed in a *rural* setting. Clearly, had the action been placed in any other surrounding, many aspects of the plot would have been lost.

The strict unity of time (limited to 24 hours) would have seriously jeopardized the text: for Betti, *chronos* is crucial in the development of the story. As the initial situation ferments, and as the few months go by between the Acts One and Two, the three women allow Angelo to come as far as he does. Then, a considerably shorter amount of time elapses between the Acts Two and Three, sufficient to bring the necessary credibility to the tragic ending. Both in a historical sense (the epoch), and in the simply chronological sense (the hours and days and months that characters spend together), the time becomes the fourth dimension, inseparable from the place of action, forming a very singular *chronotop*. The fusion of the two, according to Bakhtin³⁴, determines the generic distinction of Crime on Goat Island, following the models that are existing in literature since the ancient times. Thus, Betti's text can be seen as a story of 'ordeal' (it contains the '*random contingency*' - the logic of a chance for the '*simultaneity*' [meetings] and of a chance for the '*rupture*' [nonmeetings] of the characters, i.e. Angelo's coming to Goat Island, without which 'there would be no plot at all'), and, at the same time, it could belong to the category of the stories of 'everyday life' (since it contains the '*metamorphosis*', i.e. the characters - all three women and Angelo - become 'others than what they were').

However, besides the language³⁵ that is not heightened, and clearly not in verse, what marks the biggest difference between Crime on Goat Island and the classical tragedy, are its characters. Arguably, the *ethos* of the preferred hero of tragedy should be larger than that of Betti's protagonists. Since his heroes are 'true to life', and 'consistent', but *not* 'good', and *not* 'proper', they fail to fill the image. Moreover, they are not noble by

birth; regarding their social strata, they are closer to the 'lower type', suitable for comedy, according to Aristotle. But they are far from laughter. They might have lost their 'epic distance', but for a good cause:

The destruction of epic distance and the transferal of the image of an individual from the distanced plane to the zone of contact with the inconclusive events of the present (and consequently of the future) result in a radical restructuring of the image of the individual in the novel - and consequently in all literature.

[...] destroyed epic distance began to investigate man freely and familiarly, to turn him inside out, expose the disparity between his surface and his center, between his potential and his reality.³⁶

The reality of Agata, Pia, Silvia, and Angelo is a spiral descent. We don't know how successfully Pia and Silvia will escape their fate once they have left Goat Island. But we do know that Agata's and Angelo's characters, just like in a classical tragedy, *were* their destinies: Angelo departs this world with his burden of sins, and Agata, not repenting, faces the eternal anguish. Their true *hamartia* is missing, there is no real error of judgment, nor mistaken assumption. Instead of a tragic flaw, Betti bestows the "grace" of a simple chain of coincidences and the inevitable guilt; *culpa*. Not *felix culpa*, for there are no "happy evil-doers" among the hermetic and tragic inhabitants of Goat Island.

Betti's dramas are dark and closed, they end with a tragic finale: the destruction, the humiliation, the taking away of all that is human. But the tragedy is always closed, it never goes beyond the *lamma sabactani*.³⁷

The text of Crime on Goat Island absolutely generates the tragic feelings, and with its lack of any possible redemption comes close to what George Steiner calls 'absolute tragedy'.

Absolute tragedy makes implicit or explicit the intuition that there can be, neither through a messianic nor a Christological coming, any reparation. There is no *felix culpa*, only eternity of the fault and the cursed but eminent dignity of man's refusal either to forgive himself or to forgive the pain visited upon him. Each absolute tragedy (there are, we know, few) re-enacts the searing mystery and outrage of innate evil, of a compulsion towards blindness and self-destruction incised irreparably in man and woman. [...] Strictly defined, absolute tragedy is *the performative mode of despair*.³⁸

Although chamber-like in size (just five characters in a single setting), Crime on Goat Island seems tempestuous as a real Greek tragedy, in spite of the fact that it focuses on smaller, outwardly "domestic" issues, and in spite of the fact that it never fully brings a large, social perspective into view. Then, just like a true ancient plot, the play contains a ritual of sacrifice: a dear one (a man, not a daughter, for that matter) is lead to death. Only this time, in Betti's tragic theatre we are not witnessing the waiting for a favorable wind, like the Greeks did in Aulis, 'crazed with a passion to sail to the land of barbarians'.³⁹ The wind in Goat Island is *already* present, taking away whatever little sanity the protagonists have.⁴⁰ The presence of the wind emphasizes the atmosphere of rare sensuality (of course, *tragic* sensuality) which could easily shake our nerves. But its lyricism is - just like Euripides' - without the sweetness, and is constantly interrupted by the terror of the possible return to the primitive chaos: we fear the incestuous implications in it, we tremble over its denial of the possibility of choice.

Crime on Goat Island is a portrait of humanity that after the eons of existence, has not yet come of moral age. Therefore it could meaningfully speak to the audience that feels to be morally "too old" to remember the rules. For such an audience, seeing this play should be like browsing through an album with yellowish photographs of a childhood that everyone wants to forget.

Notes

- 1) All translations from Italian, unless otherwise noted, are mine.
- 2) J. L. A. Garcia, "Love and Absolutes", Christian Philosophy, edited by Thomas P. Flint (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 172.
- 3) *Ibid.*, 178.
- 4) As it will become evident later in this chapter, the text of Crime on Goat Island itself does not necessarily point out where the "north" or "south" might be.
- 5) George Steiner, "Absolute Tragedy", No Passion Spent, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) 140.
- 6) Strangely, Ugo Betti wrote this in a love letter to his wife, Andreina. The letter appears partly reprinted in Andreina Betti, "Sentirsi disperatamente felici...", Istituto di studi Pirandelliani: Quaderni # 4, Ugo Betti. (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1981) 186.
- 7) Federico Doglio's observation in his introduction for Giorgio Fontanelli, Il teatro di Ugo Betti, (Rome: Biblioteca di cultura 330 and Bulzoni Editore, 1985), entitled "Un'interpretazione originale suggerita dai testi", 5.
- 8) G. H. McWilliam's "summary" in an excellent introductory essay to Crime on Goat Island (New York: A Chandler Publishing Company, 1961), X.
- 9) Agata's expression (Goat Island 100), denoting the deterioration of her relationship with the late husband. (*N.B. The page numbers for quotations from the play refer to my own translation - as it appears in the Appendix.*)
- 10) Alfredo Barbina, "Le "difficoltà" di Ugo Betti", Istituto di studi Pirandelliani: Quaderni # 4, Ugo Betti, (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1981), 145.
- 11) Franco Musarra, "Il concetto di impegno nel teatro di Ugo Betti", Ugo Betti, letterato e drammaturgo, Atti del Convegno, (Macerata - Camerino, 1992), 41.
- 12) "Man's Responsibility", Sicilia del Popolo, July 14, 1950, 8.
- 13) The observation is by Carla Appolonio, from "La proposta drammaturgica del teatro di Ugo Betti", Istituto di studi Pirandelliani: Quaderni # 4, Ugo Betti, (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1981), 19.

- 14) The complete text of the dissertation appears in Scritti inediti, edited by Antonio Di Pietro (Bari: "Centro Librario", 1964).
- 15) The terms *plot* and *story* are used in this thesis following the *formalist* distinction between the two; *story* [fabula] being the event that underlies the *plot*, the material for *plot*, an event from life, that took place in real time; *plot* [siuzhet] being "event" that unfolds in the real time of performance or perception, of listening or reading.
- 16) Giovanni Sinicropi, "Il teatro esistenziale di Betti", Ugo Betti, letterato e dramaturgo, Atti del Convegno, (Macerata - Camerino, 1992), 73.
- 17) Ugo Betti wrote this as a part of an "auto-interview" that appeared in Confessioni di scrittori. Interviste con se stessi (Various Authors, Torino: ERI, 1951), 28.
- 18) A phrase borrowed from Northrop Frye, The Educated Imagination, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1964), 77.
- 19) Ugo Betti, Teatro Completo (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1955), 576. The quotation is from Notte in casa del ricco.
- 20) She uses the phrase as a title for her entire collection of essays on Ugo Betti: Teatro de la culpa y el rescate (Buenos Aires: Editorial Plus Ultra, 1976).
- 21) The titles are, respectively, The Investigation/The Inquiry - depending on the English translation - ("Ispezione", 1942), Corruption at the Palace of Justice ("Corruzione nel Palazzo di Giustizia", 1944), Struggle Till Dawn ("Lotta sino all'alba", 1945) and Crime on Goat Island ("Delitto all'Isola delle capre", 1948).
- 22) This is Fiammetta Morenti remembering Betti shortly after his death, in an article called "Colloqui con Betti", Fiera Letteraria (Rome: June 21, 1954), 3-4.
- 23) Alfredo Luzi, "Modernità di Betti", Ugo Betti, letterato e dramaturgo, Atti del Convegno, (Macerata - Camerino, 1992), 10.
- 24) Northrop Frye examines the relationship between the literature and life and the importance of literature in the essay entitled "Giants in Time", The Educated Imagination, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1964), 80.
- 25) Franco Musarra, "Il concetto di impegno nel teatro di Ugo Betti", Ugo Betti, letterato e dramaturgo, Atti del Convegno, (Macerata - Camerino, 1992), 40-41.

- 26) Further reference to the psychological, anthropological, and mythical aspects of the analysis could be found in Chapter Two: The Players (The Work With the Actors), pp. 56-68, related to the work with the actors.
- 27) The outcome regarding the search for the *genre* in the process of staging of Crime on Goat Island, can also be found in Chapter Two: The Players (The Work With the Actors), p. 56-68, related to the work with the actors.
- 28) Silvio D'Amico's conclusion in the manuscript for the radio-critique of Crime on Goat Island as a part of his series "Chi è di scena? - Cronache del teatro drammatico" (Rome: RAI, October 21, 1950), 4.
- 29) The terms *potential* and *reality* are taken from the quotation from Mikhail Bakhtin that appears on page 23 (see note 36).
- 30) In some English essays it is referred to as The Mistress of the House.
- 31) Carlo Bo, "Ugo Betti: vent'anni dopo" Istituto di studi Pirandelliani: Quaderni # 4, Ugo Betti, (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1981), 11.
- 32) Ugo Betti, Preface to The Mistress in Teatro Completo (Bologna: Cappelli, 1971), 26.
- 33) The following uses some relevant terms from Aristotle's Poetics, translated by Samuel Henry Butcher (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997), which all appear in quotation marks ['] throughout the paragraph.
- 34) Further reference is made to the terms (again, in quotation marks) that appear in Bakhtin's essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel", Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422. Although Bakhtin's arguments about "the chronotope having an intrinsic *generic* significance" and "precisely defining the genre and generic distinctions" were made with primarily the *novel* in mind, they have been used as tools in theatre criticism as well.
- 35) More detailed observations regarding the language can be found in Chapter Two: The Translation: Tradurre o tradire?, pp. 30-34, related to the translation of the play.

- 36) Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel" The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 23.
- 37) Emanuele Licastro, "Il dramma di Ugo Betti: tragedia o commedia", Ugo Betti, letterato e drammaturgo. Atti del Convegno, (Macerata - Camerino, 1992), 87.
- 38) George Steiner, "Absolute Tragedy", No Passion Spent, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 139-140.
- 39) Euripides Iphigeneia in Aulis, translated by W. S. Mervinn and George E. Dimock, Jr. (Oxford University Press, 1978), 79; [1697-1699].
- 40) Numerous references to the *wind* are made throughout the play by all the characters; they constantly point out the disturbing effects of its presence.

CHAPTER TWO: FROM PAGE TO STAGE

Theatrical practice has proven that some understanding of the overall context which gave birth to a particular dramatic text is always beneficial, but it does not guarantee the successful outcome of a future staging. Hence, the coordinates given in Chapter One, regarding Betti's life and *oeuvre*, could be taken merely as footnotes which a theatre practitioner may or may not use in assembling the new (and legitimate) artistic form. However, if any responsibility is to be assigned to the artistic choices that will constitute the coming performance, those coordinates must be seriously considered and fully introduced in the creative process.

Given the philosophical and ethical complexity of its plot, the staging of Crime on Goat Island is bound to be *text-based*. Yet, although it has to spring from the written work of its literary author, the staging does not intend a simple resurrection of Betti's words in space and time. In fact, the endeavor of presenting any written work in a text-based performance involves more than just a curious transfer of some meaningful content that belongs to an open and abstract artistic form (literature) into another that is quite concrete and defined (theatre). This intricate maneuver, which lies behind the craft of directing in the verbal theatre, is flagrantly more dangerous because it is destined to involve some *arbitrary interpretation* of the original *open* text by its new creators (both the actors and the entire artistic team). To make the matter even more difficult, this maneuver includes also a *participation* of the viewers, and their immediate and palpable response; that reaction is far more present and determinative than the silent and unseen reaction of a polite reader of the same drama. In such case, the only "consolation" left to the playwright who is facing the many staging incidents (with inevitably variable luck), lies in the fact that his *written* text remains to be permanent poetry, whereas permanent *performance* text (and, consequently, *interpretation*) does not exist.

For those reasons, the production here examined is simply one of the "incidents" (described in first person) based on the written text of Ugo Betti.

The Translation: Tradurre o tradire?¹

Several distinct reasons have brought my translation (included in the Appendix) into existence. First of all, the published English translations of Crime on Goat Island (by Henry Reed, and by Gino Rizzo and David Gullette)² were all from the 1960's. The fact that they were over thirty years old worried me less than the purpose for which they appeared: they were intended to present Betti's work to the English speaking readers, and were not translated with a specific *staging* in mind. Although both accurate, they were lacking the necessary flow of the lines, indispensable for putting Betti on the stage: the language of the original was flowing with a different "feel" than both existing versions were able to supply.

Betti is a "writer of objects"; his words are rigorous, at times even frigid, but through their flux, through the composition and prosody, they gain the lyric force that was missing in Pirandello. [...] Betti's words [...] are involving us, they are penetrating our blood-stream, our brains, our souls like some utterly resistant virus.³

The Reed and Rizzo/Gullette translations, differing already in the titles of the play themselves⁴, were giving clear signs that the mere faithfulness to the original cannot be sufficient for a good English *stage* edition of the text. This reality was initiating a painful and long struggle (over three months of work on the new English version, in addition to a ten-day workshop with the actors on the finished text), in order to find a compromise between the literal and free approach to the translation. The balance was hard to achieve, but, without the liberty of progressing toward the free translation, numerous linguistic overtones⁵ would have been lost. I made every effort to try to capture the precise esthetic flavor of the original, because, as argues Achille Fiocco, in Betti's writing:

[...] the lines substantiate the facts of the play; they declare them, justify them, coordinate them; they give them life. It is the merit of the precision of his lines if the extraordinary

occurrences, portrayed in minute details, appear as credible, and if we end up, in spite of the diffidence that leaps from the whole, unable to turn away from them.⁶

For nearly all of the existing translations my problem was not with *what* has been said, but rather *how* it has been said: sometimes the literal translation of an Italian idiom did not make much sense and clearly *should have been* replaced with the closest English idiom, but for some odd reason that was not the case.

The following are excerpts of some of Agata's most important lines (see Chapter One, 12). They are spoken at the end of Act Three (III, ii) and they may illustrate the fine, but present difference between the first two versions of the English text, and my translation, as well as show the quest for precision that was guiding my choice and order of words:⁷

Reed: But that is the very thing that brings me peace: to receive what is due to me. [...] I do not believe in a divine mercy: I would be bewildered by it, I would be a black stain in the light. I love my burden. (58)

Rizzo/Gullette: But that's exactly what gives me peace. To receive what I deserve. [...] I don't believe in mercy. I would be confused by it. It would be a black stain in the light. I love my burden. (130)

Zappia: That's precisely what gives me peace: to get what I deserve. [...] I don't believe in divine mercy: it would only confuse me, it would turn me into a black stain in the pool of light. I love my burden. (144)

Ranking the overall exactness, the Rizzo/Gullette translation is the closest one to the original, and, of course, at the same time the most literal one. Therefore, it proved to be the one that was the hardest to read, and, consequently, would be difficult to play. Though better in that aspect, the Reed translation was still missing some important aspects of Betti's writing which are hard to establish in English language. These aspects regarded the usage of the formal/informal addressing in Italian. The Reed translation

(same as the Rizzo/Gullette, for that matter) did not incorporate the reality that, depending on the intimacy with the interlocutor, the modern Italian speaker employs either the informal *tu* (second person nominative singular, *m.* and *f.*) or the formal *Lei* (third person nominative singular, *m.* and *f.*). The two make the difference similar to the usage of the first-name-basis or the last-name-basis addressing in contemporary English.⁸ For that reason, the language of Betti's characters denotes *immediately* the exact level of liberty between them. Unfortunately, that is hard to achieve in English. In the most effective example of a transition of that kind, Angelo jumps abruptly from the formal into the informal discourse in his first scene with Pia (I, ii). This jump has its distinct dramaturgic function: he has to do so because the nature of his conversation asks for it (summed up, the essence of his objective in that part of the scene could be "will you go to bed with me, Pia?"). In the Italian original, Angelo's attack is a double one, both in the content, and in the form/language. I tried to capture this double shocking feeling, that is so present for an Italian ear, by deciding to make all the previous Angelo's lines as polite and formal as possible, and by repeatedly inserting *Madam* (a word that does *not* exist in the original, and that I interpolated freely) into his sentences; then, where the original calls for the sudden closeness, I changed Angelo's formal approach in very direct, not refined lines, in which he starts calling the *Madam* by her first name, *Pia*. Similarly, I tried to be consistent with the different levels of closeness that are present throughout the play between the other characters.

Still, many further linguistic aspects of the original simply had to be abandoned in the translation, because they could never find a good equivalent in English language. The original text of the play is incredibly essential, and yet very profound, full of "the excavations into the language typical of Bettian tragedy", as Pasquale Tuscano puts it.⁹ In this impeccable essentialization, Betti often omits the verbs from his sentences; a practice that could not have been adopted directly in the English version. Very frequently, Betti also inverts the colloquial order of words.¹⁰ This emphasizes the lyric tendency in his writing, but the resulting lyricism is nevertheless pessimistic.

In spite of the frustrations with inevitable imperfections, and the knowledge that my translation will be a certain betrayal of the original, there were some great benefits that justified the attempt. For me, as a director, translating the play meant the immediate and thorough contact with text. In the process of finding the closest English equivalents for the original beauty of the language, I unquestionably had to do a great deal of analysis: I had to make sure to completely understand what were the exact intentions and thoughts of the characters, before settling for a certain solution. This, for a director unusual closeness with the text, resulted in a very productive memorization of and familiarization with the play I was about to direct.

In the process of working on the translation, I also had to consider that English was not my native tongue. Therefore, the definite shape of the sentences used for the staging had to be made once the play was already cast. I invited the actors who were going to have to say the lines, to work on their final appearance. During that time, I was trying for as much as I could to avoid any directorial interpretations, and concentrate just on *what* has been said, not *why* or *how*. In the end, it was a pleasant surprise to realize that the changes were not as numerous as I expected them to be. Through those first (innocent) readings, we all came to realize how the text had the necessary "smoothness". The matter was now to make the minor adjustments that native English speakers felt were still needed. After ten days of "workshopping", and with approximately two weeks left before the official beginning of the rehearsals, Crime on Goat Island was ready for the stage.

This period of intensive work on the text was beneficial for solving some of my early doubts, caused by the criticism that I previously encountered. In his essay "La fortuna scenica del teatro di Betti", Giovanni Antonucci states that the scarcity of contemporary stagings of Betti's plays is due to the misconception of his "literarity". He argues that Betti never wrote a single closet drama, and that calling him "un autore da tavolino" was a wrong assumption.¹¹ After months of work on the translation, and after the workshop with the actors, I was absolutely certain that Antonucci was right, and

happy that we were about to try to improve the statistics of so few stagings of Betti's plays.

The Cuts and Alterations

Having heard for a few times during the workshop how the play reads, helped me decide which parts of the text were less important, or did not function at all. This made the cutting of the script much easier. However, what was left out in the end, did not come as a result of a mere desire to make the play shorter, but from the need to make it more to the point and less predictable. Numerous self-references to particular character's distinctions were omitted (Agata's looking for inevitable punishment, Angelo's confessions of his laziness, etc.): I did not want the characters to verbalize the "trademarks" of their personalities if it was at all probable that that could come out from the context, from the progression of the story. In that sense, I trusted the theatre mechanism, rather than the rhetoric of playwright.

Furthermore, the portions of the text that might have seemed didactic to our contemporary, 1998 audience were also left out. Thus, the few direct moral lessons (Angelo's speeches about brotherhood of man kind; various references by all characters to the necessity of the sin, etc.) which were part of the 1948 text, I felt had to be cut fifty years later. Some of the excessive lyricism in the introspective speeches (when characters looked back to how they were in the past) were also trimmed.

Apart from those smaller, cosmetic cuts, only two major cuts were made in the entire play. They both involve storytelling that was not productive and necessary as it was in some other instances of the play (Agata's lengthy, but needed tale of how they came to live at Goat Island, for example). The two stories that we skipped, threatened to stop the action without bringing any new and pertinent information to the plot.

Towards the end of the play, Agata's account of a goat-boy who brought a kid goat to be killed (III, ii), was left out without any replacement. Though itself a metaphor of the violence and its impact on humans, it seemed to me a reiteration of a previously stated

and demonstrated desire by Agata to protect her child and spare her the horrors of life. I believed that Agata had to just carry on in front of our eyes the moving and powerful sacrifice she decides to make for Silvia, rather than talk about it. For that reason, we attempted to incorporate in the character's emotional state and action the *unspoken* 'dirt', 'blood' and 'sweat' that she felt should be her and her only, never tainting her 'baby'.

The second major cut eliminated Angelo's lengthy telling of the anecdote with the wine merchant (II, i). This story had two purposes in the original Betti text: it showed the degree of familiarity established between him and Agata and Pia after a couple of months of their living together, and, it reminded the viewers of the reality of how cunning Angelo was, and how often he used tricks to attain his goals in life. With the cut, I was less worried about the display of undesired characteristics of his personality. I believed that they would be made manifest with his first appearance in the Act One, and I had no perplexity they would be further illustrated over the remaining part of the Act Two. As for the new level of intimacy with Agata and Pia that was originally displayed through the telling of the anecdote, I thought that a valid (maybe even better) equivalent could be found. In the altered version, I still followed Betti's original stage direction and had Agata and Pia mending the late Enrico's clothes and adapting them for Angelo. I felt that such action was needed to clearly show the long-term plans that the two women had for their new man, and I could not avoid the use of the same pile of clothes in the "attempted murder" scene between Angelo and Silvia, later in the act (II, iv and II, v). But the anecdote itself was substituted with a couple of dances. These dances were not just a directorial application on the text: I used an existing reference from the beginning of the play, when Pia asks Angelo whether he dances (**Goat Island 89**). At that point, Angelo replies that he does, but the subject is then completely forgotten in Betti's text. I had a desire to further expand that seemingly unimportant detail, brought up in a conversation about Pia's "better days", because it was potentially very enlivening on the stage. Dance seemed to be a distinct and strong, yet theatrically visible sign of those days Pia was longing for.

According to my directorial interpretation of the text, I chose a precise moment when Pia gives "green light" to Angelo: at that point, with the food that she brings on the table, she accepts the presence of a new man in the household. I wanted her to make that moment a bit more special, and to also bring on the stage a gramophone and to play a happy tune in a house that for years did not hear else but the bleating of the goats, the wind, and the slamming of the broken shutter on the balcony. That could be, I thought, an unequivocal sign of hope (and desire) for something better to come. I decided that Angelo would be too rude to appreciate her gesture - he would acknowledge her civilized attempt, but, drunk and happy as he would be at the moment, he would carry with his "customary"¹² display of joy and he would sing on the top of his lungs a traditional tune over the sounds of Pia's favorite record. Then, at the beginning of Act Two (a few *months* later), Angelo would appear more civilized. I thought that now *he* should bring the gramophone on the stage himself. Then, through the first dance, I could show his closeness to Pia, and through the second, to Agata.¹³ This would allow me to introduce the rivalry between the two women which would then evolve more naturally when it becomes present in Betti's lines later in the act.

In spite of the cut, I decided to still preserve Angelo's interest in where Silvia is and I decided to keep Pia's lines "You are a fraud, Angelo" and "You are a scoundrel" (**Goat Island 110**), though aware that they would be deriving now from a different, more illustrated context.

The staging of the play also included two big alterations. Very early in the rehearsals, I decided to add to the performance a prologue, and then, just a week before the opening, I included an epilogue. The presence of the prologue had three distinct aspects. First of all, it was underscored with an old Italian anti-war song, "O, Gorizia". I knew that most of the English speaking audience would not be able to understand the lyrics, but this emotional piece of music had a powerful female voice singing a sad tune that would, I thought, set the right mood, even if not conveying the exact message. For the few who could understand the lyrics, the strong feelings against the war were, in my opinion, more

important than the absolute historical accuracy of the song.¹⁴ This sound was then combined with the second aspect: the images projected on the huge monolith-like wall set in a downstage left diagonal. The faces of three women in pain, which were the visual logo of the play (on the posters, programs, postcards), were now blended into a short, cyclical video-clip, making the link from the objectivity of the outer world where the faces advertised *some* play, to the subjectivity of the actual world of *the* play in which a story of the pain of three specific women was about to be told.

The third and most important aspect was the actual action of the prologue. As the song began, Angelo appeared on the downstage right side of the stage and took off the shoelaces from an old pair of military boots that was sitting there as a part of the pre-set. He then folded them and put them first in a tin box, and then into one of his bags. After that, he crossed downstage left, in front of the set, looking at the faces of the three women that were projected above, and then exited upstage left. Physically, it was a very simple action, yet it *could* have been ambiguous in its intent. The potential ambiguity was based on my firm belief that Angelo *was*, as Pia puts it, 'a fraud'. In trying to put the pieces of this enigmatic character together, that was the only valid conclusion I could come up with. Betti did not leave any evidence whatsoever that Angelo was indeed who he said he was. In stage directions, Betti described him as "a young, well-built, healthy looking man, with *light complexion* and *light hair*" (**Goat Island 86**). In other words, nothing that vaguely resembles the idea of someone who came from Arabic world. Moreover, Angelo did not speak Arabic either: the "traditional" "Esevi-uttu-sehe" song is sung in a completely invented language, although its content perfectly suits the occasion and Angelo's general intentions at the moment (women as his slaves).¹⁵ Finally, when asked about his whereabouts and his past, his answers were incredibly general: he purposely avoided to be more specific. For all those reasons, the blond "angel"¹⁶ could have invented his entire identity. Maybe the only true fact that he stated in the play was that he is in "this country illegally" (**Goat Island 88**). With little doubt, Angelo was a prisoner of war. But he was not necessarily Enrico's friend. The whole story about Agata, Silvia and Pia could have been overheard in a barrack, without Angelo ever getting even near the

dying man. Then, once set free, Angelo the 'fraud' could have come to the 'house of three women' and abused his friendship with the dead master of the house. But, I opted for a different angle; I wanted to make a deliberate choice and present his story as real. I invented his bringing of the memorabilia¹⁷ (including the shoe-laces) to Agata. Although among the other objects the shoe-laces themselves could have been taken off of any pair of shoes (and we do *not* know whose shoes are there downstage right for the whole duration of the play), the other objects that Agata pulls out, once she has been handed the tin box, seem to be *real* to her. I wanted her to recognize them as true memorabilia that once belonged to the professor - his glasses, his handkerchief, his wrist watch, the wedding ring. I was aware that my amazing discovery of how Angelo really is 'a fraud', could never have been convincingly played on the stage - unless presented to Arab speakers, or totally verbalized by adding some lines. Furthermore, even if I were to cast a blond actor, that could have easily been comprehended as an unhappy casting choice, not as a sign of Angelo's different identity. Therefore, I wanted to go towards the other extreme and back his "friendship" story with lots of fabricated evidence introduced in the performance. The focus had to be anyway on the *essence* of the story, and in the end it really did not make much of a difference whether Angelo was or not Enrico's friend - his actions were still condemnable, as well as was amazing the exploration of the women's willingness to let him go so far in his abuse. It might be, though, that by making him a friend of the professor, the moral implications of his merciless abuse of hospitality were a little deeper than in the case he were not, and that this option of the true friendship was, on the other hand, favoring Angelo's initial progress. Nevertheless, it did bring more density to the performance than it would if the audience were simply to be impressed by the cunningness of a little thief.

Before the epilogue was added, the performance was supposed to end with Agata saying the last lines early in the song that was playing on the gramophone. Then the volume would build up, and she would sit quietly and listen until the end. After the song was over, she would then wait through a few seconds of the sounds of a scratching record, and then both the lights and the scratching sound would slowly fade out. Somehow, in this

"slice" of what eternity might feel, the object of her despair was missing. I felt that the audience would rationally know that she is crying for her dead lover, but the fact was that we last saw him more than half an hour ago in reality of the evening, and two days and two nights ago in theatre time. Finally, I decided to bring Angelo back at the very end in something that now had to become an epilogue (it could no longer belong to the reality of the play). Therefore, Agata was to sit in her solitude, and the walking lover in front of her was just her recollection. Angelo would cross in front of the set (now in the opposite direction of the prologue) unnoticed by Agata, and he would approach the shoes that were in the same place for the entire play. Only when he put on the dead man's shoes without the laces, and when he walked away in them, Agata would raise her head as if hearing something. At that point, her song on the gramophone would come to the end, and the spotlight in which she was left would start to fade out as the scratching of the finished record was heard.

With Angelo's appearance, and with a drastic change in lighting from a realistic, general illumination to an intimate back-lit figure of the woman, the epilogue was in a different reality, and clearly not an integral part of the play any more. Together with the prologue, the frame around the performance was set.

The Set Design

The whole visual aspect (set, costumes and lights) of our production of Crime on Goat Island was created entirely by one talented designer - Lisa Leung. From our first general discussions in early April of 1998, an instinctive and initially unarticulated response to the impulses of the play was gradually evolving into precise images and definite decisions. Interestingly, in those first encounters the themes and the messages of the play were barely ever touched upon: both of us felt at this moment that the philosophy and the morals should not be the constituents of the *perceptive*, but rather of the *cognitive* side of the future performance. This, however changed considerably over the months and even brought some misunderstanding that will be discussed later.

Among the few earliest certainties that we carried through the entire process were the facts that we both wanted to achieve the sense of the *extreme isolation* of Goat Island, a distinct *rural feel* and the substance of a *terrible silence* that engulfed it. We also knew that we wanted to respect the epoch, so all of our characters and all the objects that would be part of the "game", were going to be from the 1940's. At this point we were also convinced that the goats which are present in the title and in so many references in the characters' lines, were not to be visible in our staging. We were thinking of limiting it to the pile of goatskins on stage (as Betti suggests in his directions), and then just introducing the distant bleating as a part of the sound design.

In discussing the epoch, we soon realized that there would not be an effective way to bring the just ended war into the design, so we decided again to rely on the verbalization of the fact rather than an unsuccessful visualization. We agreed that if any parts of the set were to look damaged, they should appear so because they collapsed of their age and neglect, and not because of the destruction due to the war. Lisa also felt that the household of the three women should be showing its *decline* and its overall *misery* in which it was vegetating for the five years prior to the beginning of the play. At this early stage we were both taken by the possibility of having a real balcony (which is mentioned many times in the text, but not required by the action itself, or the playwright). We planned on having it built, and, once visible, on making it an active part of the set. We also considered using some mobile element (a shutter) on it, that could denote the presence of the wind. This would have come in handy in creating the real sound and light effects, and thus, we thought, could emphasize the overall dramatic feel.

Strangely, although not having yet the actual playing space defined, we tried this early to visualize the few functional things we knew that will be needed - the table, the chairs and the well. This quickly brought us to the discussions about whether the action should take place in an interior or an exterior. The answer was not coming quickly and convincingly. Only a couple of months later we finally decided to set our play in an exterior, finding the inspiration in the walled gardens and paved patios of some Italian villas.

The second phase of the work on the design was carried out through the letters, faxes and e-mail, because Lisa went back to Vancouver, and I to Croatia and to Italy to do my research on Betti. This phase proved that, in spite of the lengthy and detailed discussions, we were still not completely on the same "boat". Lisa's exploration on the set design went into a clearly more symbolical direction than was initially discussed. She was looking for the inspiration in the works of two visual artists. The first one was the architect Hassan Fathy. His concept of the country as a darkened paradise (distorted by the flies, the clouds, the mud...), that Lisa shared with me, could, I thought, work very nice in and *for* the future production. But, at the same time, she continued to search for the impulse in Giorgio de Chirico's paintings as well. When she first told me about her fascination during our first meetings, we agreed that some of the elements of his works (askew perspective, palette of colors and his shadows) could be welcome in the design of Goat Island. The problematic part was, I believed, de Chirico's general *urban* feel in the paintings. Lisa became aware of that and soon managed to abandon it. However, the other de Chirico's influence - and her desire of creating the estrangement similar to the painter's through the juxtaposition of surreal objects - remained in our correspondence for quite a lot. My judgment was that it would not work for the play. I tried to explain to her that I would have loved that approach if we were doing the show in Europe, especially in Italy, where Betti's name and work were known to a greater extent. On the other hand, having to present an author for the first time to an audience unfamiliar with Betti's world, we were running the risk of conveying a different message than the one we wished. The estrangement could have been easily mistaken to be an integral part of Betti's *writing* - a real disfavor to an author of a realist background - and it was very likely that it would not be understood at all as our *interpretation* of the play. Since there was an obvious absence of the basis (the disadvantage of not having general and common assumptions about the play, as in the cases of many well-known playwrights, which was - at the same time - the advantage of not having any *prejudices* on Betti's *oeuvre*), any big departure from what was offered by the playwright was in a danger of passing by unrecognized, or worse - totally unnoticed.

Lisa basically agreed on that more "faithful" angle, but in all the faxes that were coming with drawings, a strong need for the symbols on the stage was continuously present. She felt that the set should be like a hovel, which I liked as an idea and even as an image, but was not happy to see it literally recreated on the stage. My laconic first reply was negative, saying that we needed 'more signs, less symbols and no metaphors on the stage'. Since this remark created further confusion in the communication, I tried to straighten the misunderstanding in the next fax.

As for the set, Lisa, the 'symbols and metaphors' were ways of trying to express my fears in the previous letter: I was afraid that the stage could end up to be too opera-like. Now that I've seen your last sketch, I am more confident that that will not be the case. I was pleading for a more documentary approach, leaving the 'symbols and metaphors' to come out of the play, not to be built on the stage. In other words, let's play on the stage a hovel! A feeling of the hovel one could have living in the most spacious palace in the world. Therefore, what for us could mean a perfect house for a vacation, with a beautiful view of the wild countryside, for our characters could be the prison. That's what I'm getting at. I am suggesting that you don't take characters' words too literally, and that at the first glimpse we should not know the themes of the play.¹⁸

This caused even further and more dangerous doubts with Lisa, and she replied that she is about to 're-think her design approach'. Finally, many words later (and words *are* a source of infinite misunderstandings!) I managed to assure her that her approach was more than right and that the terminology I used, although somewhat inhibiting, called only for *minor* adaptations of what was *already in existence*. This encouraged Lisa to persist in looking for a surreal component to include in the design. She finally saw the possibility for that in the landscape behind the 'realistic' set. She thought that including the huge monolithic wall would give her enough of de Chirico *aura* she was looking for.

The final phase of the work on the design occurred in mid-September, when both Lisa and I were back in Calgary. Whatever was not precise enough in the previous

communication, had a chance to be straightened out now. In the meantime, Lisa came up with a wonderful solution for the 'hovel' feel she was looking for: she decided (to my great joy) to *lower the floor* in the Reeve Theatre. Thus, the playing area was not raised above the first rows of seats, but at the same level instead. The exterior impression of the space (our solution after three months) was emphasized with a set of dried-out grapevines, and a floor that looked like packed dirt, just partly paved with few stones. The house wall that was running in diagonal to downstage right area was huge, sumptuous, and torn down. The world outside was visible behind a second, ruined and low brick wall that was running in the opposite diagonal to the downstage left area. The playing space was now both spacious enough, and intimate at the same time. And, most importantly, it was not carrying too many "messages" itself, but was rather neutral in respect to the theme of the play, and thus ready to host the powerful and brutal tale that Betti had in store.

The Costume Design

The decisions regarding the costumes seemed to be somehow easier than the ones concerning the set. Both Lisa and I were entirely aware that the plot of Crime on Goat Island had some limitations which were restricting our creativity, but, at the same time, those limitations were potentially making our task easier. The play had many references to a particular time period, and it could not achieve its full effect if transposed in a different era. Therefore, right from the start we knew that we will have to respect the constraints of a pre-World War II epoch in creating the costumes. Along with that, we also agreed in our early discussions that we will take in consideration how obviously Betti's male characters differed in their approach to clothing from the female characters. We thought that the distinction along those lines was strongly coded in the script, and that it could be beneficial for us to follow it. Besides bringing out the traditional men-women difference - almost a stereotype of men not caring about their clothes and women being obsessed - it was also distinguishing two separate social strata. In our play men (both

Angelo *and* Edoardo) were representing the lower working class, and the three women the upper-middle class of educated intellectuals. Lisa and I were glad that by respecting the indications in the script, the gender demarcation would follow the lines of social demarcation - a fact that could, in our opinion, be welcome in the lethal battle of the sexes that we were about to stage.

Once we agreed on the mentioned general principles, we were determined to try and work on the costumes simultaneously as we worked on the set. To our frustration, the greater artistic freedom we had in determining the scene design, made it hard to meet the deadlines with much conviction that the choices we were making were right. On the other hand, the progress on the costumes was much quicker and contained a comforting degree of certainty over the direction in which we were headed.

Very shortly after the initial talks, Lisa and I were already discussing further details regarding the differences that were addressed in the text itself. We knew that of the two men, Angelo came to Goat Island almost directly from a prison camp. Even if he wished to have some better garments to put on, he could not have provided for them; he has confirmed his lack of funds more than once in the play. In fact, as mentioned earlier, only once he moves into the house, the two women would supply him with some decent clothing.

The other male character, Edoardo, was too old to be expected to follow anything but the dictates of functionality in his choice of clothing. As long as the individual elements of his costume were generally from the pre-war period, we knew that he would not appear unfit. Besides, conscious that a young actor will have to play an older man, we thought of adding a hat and gloves to the costume. With the most of the actor's head and hands covered, we would have to worry about making the illusion of age by only using the facial age make-up, and by spraying gray the portion of the hair that would be visible outside the hat.

Apart from these simple and functional requisites for Angelo and Edoardo - and considering that Betti's text offered little evidence that either of the two men have had

significant contacts with big cities (and civilization in general) - we felt that there was no need to make them reveal any awareness about what was stylish at the time.

With the three women, however, the case was different. Their contact with the fashion and civilization was crucial to their immediate condition: the *lack* of it was at the root of their present misery. All three of them were constantly referring through the text (each one in her own way) to some better surroundings, away from Goat Island. Moreover, in Silvia's example they even tried to retain that touch (her attendance of the university in the city).

The other component that we had to examine were the consequences of the war. We thought that, for as much impact it had on the life stories of the men in the play (especially Angelo), in the case of the women it did not affect their lives as much. Still, the war must have been a determining factor in the way they *looked*. For Lisa, this implied that their costumes had to be dated in respect to the "present time" of the play. Their appearance had to belong to the style of the late 1930's - the time immediately preceding the war, when our three ladies were last able to afford to buy themselves some nice clothing.

This initial supposition prompted Lisa's extensive research of the available sources on the pre-war Italian fashion. But, all the abundant historical references that she found were not self-sufficient. They were there for us just to make a solid departing point in our quest for the final appropriate costumes. We certainly wanted to use the outward documentary semblance to follow our initial agreement and to denote the characters' belonging to the epoch of the play, and to also indicate a distinct social strata (i.e. the three women as a part of the pre-war bourgeoisie...). But, in the other, more creative, aspect of the work, we were looking into ways of charting through the costumes the emotional transformations inside of the characters. We both agreed that from the moment Angelo enters into the lives of the three women in the Act Two, a visible change in their looks should take place: whatever feminine attributes were neglected and pushed aside during the preceding five years, they should all now surface again and become their tools for seducing the man. This change would then, in our opinion, *regress* in the Act Three to

the starting point - this second change showing now their 'tools' not needed for the finale, and, therefore, eliminated - the point at which the seduction turns into a battle. This would, we thought, ironically close the journey of our female characters almost at the same place where it started.

In the weeks of our preliminary work, Angelo's original costume was respectfully following what we thought that playwright's intentions were: we were thinking of him as an exotic foreigner, definitely coming from the Arab world, and almost *tribal* in his looks. At this stage I only objected him having anything that would make him look as a soldier, and so we settled for a civilian, but exotic attire. Only much later, with the discovery that the evidence to prove his Arabic origins was totally nonexistent (and unnecessary for *our* performance), Lisa and I decided to make him into an ordinary, dirty and very poor tramp, who later becomes a bit more respectable with the transformation that love and care of the three women bring to him.

Since the beginning of our collaboration on the costumes for Goat Island, Lisa and I spent very little time on the choice of colors. Our thoughts in that direction were in harmony. Neither of us believed that the colors of the male outfits had to be noticeable in any way. Therefore, to make them less visible, we discussed mostly earthly colors and dirty whites. On the other hand, Lisa was extremely specific from the beginning as to what she felt would be the proper color for each of the three women. Her proposed choice of colors had evident symbolic meanings: the reds for Agata's passion, the whites for Silvia's innocence and the initial greens for Pia's jealousy (which she later abandoned). I liked the idea a lot and encouraged her to develop it further. The only aspect that I objected was the too obvious religious resonance. Lisa's biggest inspiration at that point were the Italian Renaissance paintings, and her first sketches were resembling too much the traditional representations of Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. As our work progressed, this obvious similarity was gradually lost and transformed into a discrete, but important layer in the multiple meanings that her costumes carried through.

Once many hypotheses were examined and some decisions reached, and once the final blueprints for the costumes were set, we knew that we will inevitably have to make

many compromises within the reality of the future production: only *one* costume (Agata's for the Act Two) was going to be built, all the other costumes were to be pulled from the stock. For that reason, the exact decisions on who was going to wear what, had to be left for after the show has been cast. Only then, having the actual actors in mind, Lisa tried to match the best that she could the target colors and shapes of her drawings. Luckily, with the abundance of outfits she prepared for the actors to try, and after (well-worth) long fittings, Lisa was able to come up with the costumes that were remarkably close to the renderings we agreed upon.

Throughout the entire process, we knew very well that we were giving shape to a play that was, as stated earlier, remarkably close to the ancient tragedy. Nevertheless, in all of our creative freedom and in all our compromises, we made a conscious effort to preserve the verisimilitude and simplicity of the outer appearance of Goat Island. We believed that if there were any grandness - it should not be at any time given a physical expression. Our hopes were that this hypothetical grandness would be born, and hopefully remain, in the minds of our viewers. Consequently, in spite of many various possibilities of staging it in a more symbolic or metaphorical way (Lisa herself was, as I mentioned, initially inclined towards such interpretation) we opted for a very *realistic* visual configuration. The set, lights and costumes that we ended up creating were not connoted by the dramatic form itself (if we were to stage Betti's *text* as a tragedy), but rather denoted in it (we merely observed Betti's *stage directions*).

The Light Design

Due to the fact that one person was covering all the visual aspects of the future staging, our work on the light design started fairly late - maybe even later than it would, technologically speaking, come in a regular production schedule with a separate light designer in charge.

With the set and costumes completely defined and well into the shops, Lisa and I divided the task into two parts: we decided to conduct the preliminary work on the

dramaturgy of the lights together, and then I was to leave the remaining technical and visual aspects (actual positioning and type of lights, as well as the colors) to Lisa alone.

Our starting point had to take in consideration that the set and costumes that we were creating for the production would have a strong documentary feel. For that reason, we concluded that we should back that feel with a sense of "naturalness" in the light design. According to the text, the house had no electricity, and the "naturalness" in those circumstances meant illuminating the action with oil-lamps every time the night falls in the plot. Of course, this implied *creating* the night (and day) on the stage in the first place.

The shift from bright daylight into a night setting was one of the first concerns when we commenced plotting the dramaturgy of the lights. Both Acts One and Two were supposed to begin in the full light of a summer afternoon, and end at night that had to gradually fall during the course of the action. Act Three was the exact opposite - it was supposed to begin in the early morning, while it was still dark, and take us through the dawning towards its end in bright daylight. We knew that the change from one extreme (the lower intensity and the shades of blue) into the other would (the high intensity and the yellowish colors) had to be very smooth if we wanted to achieve the desired "naturalness". We planned to set three to four cues between the chosen initial and final situation in each act, and then cross-fade slowly, with time settings expressed in *minutes*, from one cue to the next.

Once in the tech week, we had a chance to actually try that concept on the stage. We were quite satisfied with how it worked, but we were also able to devise a way of improving it. After timing each scene during the few final runs, we decided to shorten the cross-fade itself, and to leave a specific cue unchanged for a while, thus setting precise points in the play (for instance, Agata's slap, Angelo's dance...) to be coupled with a very specific and controlled lighting, rather than leaving it to fluctuate freely from one night to the other. The cross-fades were to continue only once the important part of the scene has been performed in the pre-determined light. With this improvement, we were able maintain the illusion of "naturalness", but we still kept sufficient control over the mood

(lighting) in the most important moments.

The oil-lamps were supposed to be used in all three acts initially, but we ended up using them only in the Acts One and Three. The action in the Act Two called for the lamps to be brought only at the very end of the last scene - when Pia returns with Silvia, whom she had taken into the house to comb her hair, wash her face and change her outfit. Since Betti devised a nice ending to the act, with a good punch-line (Agata's "we should throw him the rope now", **Goat Island 132**), I felt the need for a 'clean cut' there and terminate the act in a black-out. The suspense that Agata's line had to create, could obviously not work with the actress playing Pia having to blow the lamp out at the same moment. Therefore, I made a decision to leave the last portion of the Act Two generally less 'stage-dark' than the end of the Act One. Now with the better visibility, I opted for Pia and Silvia - returning on the stage for the few last seconds of the scene that should have been illuminated - to come without any lamps instead.

In spite of our general search for "naturalness", Lisa and I decided to introduce a few instances of non-realistic lighting in the production. In part, we felt the need to balance the presence of the monolithic wall, which was not a realistic element, with the rest of the set. We decided that the best times to do so were in the pre-set, in both intermissions and in the post-show setting. In those four instances we used basically the same light cue, with minor variations - illuminating with one vertical shaft of light Enrico's shoes and the well downstage right, and with the other the enormous wall on the stage left side. The rest of the scenery was barely visible in those four instances, leaving the visual impact - the contrasting textures and colors of the *warm, but rough and broken* walls surrounding the well and the shoes, and the *cold, but smooth and compact* wall on the opposite side - blend with the meaning that the three lit signs themselves were bearing in relation to the plot.

Once in the theatre and setting the light cues, Lisa and I resolved to use the non-realistic lighting for one instance in the body of the play. It happened before the end of the Act Two (II, viii). At that time, Angelo has already made the decision for Silvia to stay at Goat Island instead of going to the university, and has declared the inauguration of

the new commune with the three women. While preparing for the celebration of this new beginning, and while getting ready to descend into the well and fetch some bottles that were still left there, Angelo was to tell a story about the women and the devil (Goat Island 130-131). Lisa and I, together with the actors, named this scene a "farewell scene" - given the symbolic content of the scene (Angelo as the devil in the story, and Agata as the "women who smells of wind"), and the fact that Angelo were not to be seen again on stage. Therefore, we decided to separate it from the rest of the play: we added some music, we lit it differently, and the actors followed the changes with a slight shift in the way of acting. Respecting the "naturalness" of the sound design¹⁹, Angelo was to put Agata's song on the gramophone, and from that moment the movements and lines of the actors, as well as the lights on the stage, were to be for this one time *stylized*. Agata and Angelo would talk and move to the rhythm of the playing tango (neither the lines, nor the movements were actually choreographed), and the bright vertical surreal light was to illuminate the well in which Angelo had to disappear forever.

In the remaining two instances of non-realistic lighting, our desire was to separate the prologue and the epilogue from the rest of the play. Therefore, in terms of light design, the prologue remained as a link between the pre-set cue (in which, as described, the actual playing area was barely visible) and the cue for the first scene of the production (in which the playing area was brightly lit). As explained earlier, the prologue incorporated the action with the abandoned pair of shoes - which remained unseen by, and invisible to anyone throughout the play, but Angelo - and so we left them in full light. Included in the prologue was also the projection on the big wall behind the set, and Angelo's walk around the empty, fatal house in which he will enter only a couple of scenes later. Respecting that topography, and wishing to leave the actual set intact, we focused all the lighting outside of the Goat Island.

The epilogue had a much more intimate feel in the way we decided to light it. We called it, jokingly, "The *Shoe* Story".²⁰ At this point, after realizing that she has lost her lover, Agata would come to sit close to the well in which he drowned. She would drag a chair across the stage towards an isolated pool of back-light which was all that would

remain after a slow final transition from the bright day that was on stage just a few moments before. The outer world, we thought, did not exist for her anymore, and her despair was gigantic enough to isolate her in this new darkness. Some additional (bright orange in color this time, unlike *any* other color used this far in the show!) back-light was coming through the two huge cracks in the wall behind her. Her house, we thought, was not able to hide the wounds any longer, and so it started to bleed. A pair of shoes - the one that Angelo left when he last descended into the well - was now in her lap. Together with Angelo's hat, it represented all that remained to Agata of her dead lover. Apart from her pool of light, a less bright shaft was aimed on the downstage right - Enrico's, we led our audience to believe - pair of shoes. The third beam of light was pointed at Agata's shoes downstage left, just in front of the main entrance to the house. Although Agata was barefoot for the entire Act Three, and her shoes were at all times visible atop the stairs that lead to the main door, we never accentuated them in any way. Now was, we thought, the time to make them truly visible and part of our *shoe story*.

The *shoe story* itself was simple: we had at this time in the spotlight three pairs of shoes, and our interpretations of their meaning: one pair (Agata's, by the door) that was not wanted and not needed, a second pair (Angelo's, in Agata's lap) that was not needed, but wanted, and a third pair (Enrico's) that was wanted, but not needed any more. Since we liked the theatricality that was created on the stage at the end, and since the visual aspect blended nicely with the final music and the scratching that were to follow it, we decided to leave the image as it was. It became our finale of the play - even at the risk of not conveying all of the aspects that we read into our little *shoe story*.

Our final decision was to eliminate the sense of a clear beginning of the performance by simply cross-fading from a lit house and dim stage to the opposite. In that way, our Crime on Goat Island would gradually take the spectators into its tragic plot: it would not have a precise point at which it started, but it would have a definitive and memorable ending.

The Sound Design

Like in the case of the other three aspects of design, simplicity and "naturalness" were the key words when meditating the sound design of the play. Although tempted, together with my sound designers Leslie Biles and D. J. Kelly, to yield to the melodramatic situations that were calling for a musical underscoring, we resisted the temptation and used a little trick instead. As mentioned before, we decided to introduce a functioning gramophone on the stage. We thought of it not only as a nice and decorative element and a reminder of the epoch, but also as a discrete source of music that was, we felt, needed for the background in some scenes. Therefore, we had to choose the music.

As a part of my research over the summer in Rome, I brought back with me a collection of Italian songs from the 1930's and 1940's. Once we were on the stage (in the third week of rehearsals), I decided to try to introduce some tunes and see if they could blend to the action. In order to do that, I settled for one song to be Pia's ("Soli, soli nella notte") and another to be Agata's ("Un'ora ti vorrei").²¹ Both of the songs had the appropriate lyrics. Pia's song was expressing a desire of two lovers to be finally alone at night, and Agata's was describing the agony and suffering of a man who was longing for at least an hour with his loved one, an hour that would last him *an eternity*. Musically, Pia's tune was a happy, and quick one, very inviting for a lovely dance, and had an unmistakable 1930's air to it. As a contrast, Agata's song was a sad, slower tango, fit for the deeper passion that was underlying her relationship with Angelo, and very suitable for the needs we had at the end of the play as well. Both songs turned out to be inspiring for the actors and myself, and the physical action that was connected to the music did not seem to be distraction in any way.

The first introduction of Pia's song in the performance - described earlier in the chapter - was intended to be (directorially) more like an expression of her general joy, rather than her particular musical taste. It was the first music, we decided, to be heard in the house after five years of silence. However, in the invented "dance scene", we also made the free assumption *for* Angelo that the particular song must have been one of Pia's

favorite. For that reason, when he (not Pia!), of his own initiative and cultural "expansion", brings the gramophone on the stage several months later - at the beginning of Act Two - he plays for Pia the very song she played for him when he first came in the house. Then, for his next dance, our "cultivated" Angelo chooses a different, more melancholy tune, appropriate for Agata and no one else.

In that context, we decided that Angelo's affair with Silvia must remain a secret - to be disclosed only when Betti meant it to become public: in the second half of the Act Two. This eliminated any visible flirtation between them on the stage, and the need for us to come up with a third, Silvia's song. She got the privilege to interrupt the second dance, between Angelo and Agata, and in a way her song became the scattering of other people's songs.

Unlike Pia's song which was going to be played twice, Agata's song was to be heard three times in the play. After the dance, we planned on using it for the mentioned stylized farewell to Angelo (he starts the gramophone and plays for her a reprise of Agata's tune), and, finally, as an accompaniment for her time of mourning of the dead lover. Contrary to our initial doubts, we managed to mount the entire production without any additional music.

The rest of the work on sound design was divided in two areas: one covering the many sound effects required in all three acts, and the other preparing the music for the pre- and post-show, as well as for the two intermissions.

The greatest worry and the biggest relief concerning the sound were all the moments in the play when Angelo was down in the well (about a quarter of the entire show). Fearing that the real sound of the actor under the stage would not be credible enough, we were prepared to install the microphone and a speaker under the floor downstage right, and to modify actor's voice until it would have enough echo and presence to make it believable. To our great joy, once that part of the set was built, we were able to reach a good level of faithfulness to the possible real sounds, without ever using any electronic devices. It took a couple of weeks of continuous experimenting, until we were able to find a truly satisfying solution: a good echo was achieved by carefully

positioning the actor in a specific place and direction in the trap, and by making him speak in a large metal can. During the experiments, we were also able to find a way of creating the live sound effect for the water splashes, using another (this time plastic) can. The combination of the two made the totality of the illusion of a real well. The only instance in which we had to build an effect related to the well, was the moment in which the rope ladder slips accidentally off the hooks and falls into the well. The natural sounds that the actor was able to produce were not very credible, and we therefore opted to record one. At the end, we did have a speaker positioned in the trap, but it was used only once and for a very abrupt and short effect; hopefully short enough to not give the audience the time to think how was the sound made.

Having solved the "well problem", we could concentrate on the other effects that were needed. The easiest of the sound effects to find, was at the same time the most difficult to determine if it should be used at all. Even with the cuts to the original Betti's text, the references to the goats were annoyingly abundant. Although Silvia and Edoardo never mention the goats, the other three characters compensate plentifully for that. Now, with the goats present in the title and all over the text, our dilemma whether to introduce the actual sound of the animals in the background was comprehensible. On one hand, it seemed too obvious and too "cheap" to have it, but it would have been equally as strange and "deaf" to go without it. The compromise we came up with was to have the bleating of the goats just at the beginning of the play, after the prologue, and then to abandon it completely. The total length of the effect was several minutes. It was created as a loop made of three different soundtracks found in the effects libraries. In the process of assembling it, we decided to reduce the density of sounds, so we spread them far apart. Finally, we played them at the very low volume. After the initial introduction of the goats effect in the Act One [I, i], we repeated the same loop approximately half-way into the act [I, iii], just before the action of the play becomes more complex, and when any further distractions could prove counterproductive. Similarly, we believed for the rest of the play's action was intense enough, and that the sound of the goats, though adding to the documentary feel, would divert the focus of the audience.

The other two effects we had to create concerned the two arrivals and three departures of Edoardo's truck. They were probably the hardest to build, given the number of little individual pieces that had to be put together (the opening/closing of the door, the starting/shutting off of the engine, the idle/the run of the motor, the driving on a gravel surface...), but they were easy in the sense of determining exactly what kind of sound was needed. Once built, these sound effects were quickly integrated in the rehearsals. Without much trouble, we were able to find the right timing and volume level to complement the movement of the actor playing Edoardo, either coming onto, or leaving the stage. By using very distant speakers (upstage right, in the Reeve Secondary, to be precise), we felt that the sound was really building the mental image that was physically missing on the stage.

With the exception of the already discussed prologue music, the rest of the music for the pre- and post-show, and for the two intermissions, was the result of another extensive search. My sound designers went painstakingly through dozens of old records with traditional Italian music, narrowing down the choice to about forty different songs. Once they had the selection of the short-listed titles, we made the definite choices together. The final sixteen titles (two of which were medleys) varied in style and mood, and were coming from all parts of Italy. I did not mind the variety, and I knew that most of the audience will anyway hear just the first and the last selection of the both intermissions. Therefore, we took particular care with how we were to end the Acts One and Two, and, consequently, how we were to begin the Acts Two and Three. The rest of the music, chosen to be in between the first and the last song for each intermission, was then put in order by trying to maintain the general atmosphere that a particular *intermezzo* introduced.

Finally, once we decided to close the circle of the play with the epilogue, and once we knew that it will be underscored with Agata's tune, we agreed that we were to take the curtain call in silence. After the actors leave the stage, we planned to have only one song as the post-show: "O, Gorizia" - the anti-war song with which the performance opened.

The Players (The Work With the Actors)

Of all the tasks involved in staging a play, I as a director find working with the actors to be the most important one. Not only do we spend the majority of our hours in their company, but as creators, we are also much indebted by their performances. In my opinion actors are and will be the crux of every piece of good theatre. Collaborating with that "bunch" is a challenging chore, but the reward that comes in return makes it in most cases well worthwhile.

Having come from a different theatre tradition, it took me a while to understand the process of auditions - an obstacle without which much of the theatre on North American continent could seemingly not be done. Well, after a year and a half of training, and in spite of my best efforts, I was still not used to the procedure. However, approximately fifty people who came on the two assigned nights went with me through the ever-present time pressure and frustration of trying to not only establish a contact, but also make an impression that would set them apart from the other aspiring performers and make them look perfect for the part. In few of the cases I have to admit that I was lucky to have seen the performer in a "real action" before - in another play or scene. For my choice of women (who were a majority of auditioners, anyway) this awareness of their previous work was invaluable guidance in reaching the final decision. I am aware that I might have discriminated the others whom I have never seen before perform in any part, but the three roles in Goat Island were too big to simply cast someone after ten or fifteen minutes. A couple of hours was more likely. With the two men I needed for the parts, I did not have the luxury of that couple of hours - given the fact that the few who auditioned did not have much or any previous experience. For that reason, I was looking for some other signs, primarily for a strong stage presence.

With both women and men I was trying to determine how compatible could we be, because some of my previous auditions in which I did not take the compatibility much in consideration proved to be a difficult experience, regardless of the unquestionable

individual talents of the people cast. Therefore, I was first of all trying to find out if there were any promises of an artistically stimulating alliance. I was also examining how the person reacts to the directions, even the contradicting and confusing ones.

After two nights, I knew that having call-backs would not make the matter any easier for me, so I sat down and made my decision about five distinct and very diverse people, who could, I thought, bring with their diversity *life* to Betti's play. Lindsey Hodgson was to play Agata, Danijel Margetic Angelo, Brianna Moench Silvia, Sarah Patterson Pia, and Stephen Waldschmidt Edoardo.

The rest of the thrilling work that is about to be described is revealing my true intentions. However, it does not fully correspond with my *methodology* as a director. As many fellow craftsmen will testify, we do not always share our every plan and purpose with the actors, for creating theatre is a slow journey along a meandering path, not a sprint in a straight line. In my work, the result I seek is seldom openly articulated with the cast - not for the sake of any "conspiracy" or out of malice - but simply because I learned the hard way about a great risk that knowing the purpose, the actors irrecoverably alter their method(s) in an undesired way. I believe that this dose of not-complete-openness was for our mutual good.

The already mentioned workshop on the new translation was a precious opportunity to get to know the cast better. With that experience under our belt, our first official rehearsal did not have the usual awkward feeling of the "first day of school". However, I decided not to utilize the workshop time to shorten the time that we were to spend on the classic table-work, and so we used the full ten scheduled days.

The proposed system was very traditional. We started from a general perspective, with Lisa giving the visual coordinates in a presentation of the set and costume design, and with myself talking about the playwright and his play, and about the themes and ideas that could be reflected on in it. In a little aside, I added a few words regarding the possible style of acting and its implications. During the next few rehearsals, we went into further details. We discussed the historic times we would have to transport ourselves into,

and the overall micro and macro social and political context that was implied. I used those lengthy discussions (that to the actors might have seemed beyond the point) to weight the value of my many contradictory sources. The crucial question at the time was reach a decision which approach could prove to be the most productive? In order to be able to find out the "right", unbiased answer, this question had to - methodologically speaking - remain just a question for *myself*, not for the actors. The two opposed views were as follows:

[Betti's] characters, isolated in their heavy lyricism, [...] in reality do not belong to a specific human society - a society with its customs and its territory in a certain part of the globe, and with some events that could become their history, that is with a chronicle of the days they really lived and suffered through. With their burden of gloomy vices that they complain about or keep repressed, his creatures remain nothing but ghosts.²²

Contrary to that, the other view was closer to the direction Lisa and I started to follow:

[Betti's] theatre, before standing for an eternal and irreversible moment of the human reality, has an enormous value as a historical testimony, not just in the plainly theoretical, but also in the concrete significance of the word.²³

The actors' response on this field was a valid check-point that was to confirm or shake Lisa's and my intentions with the set and costume design. We were both glad that our intuition was in harmony with that of the actors, and that we all found it plausible that the universality could indeed be reached through historic accuracy and, consequently, specificity. By the end of the table work we were confident that the main elements of the future show (the sincerity and passion of the acting style combined with the "naturalness" of the design) would work *for* each other. Therefore, we extended our efforts in that direction.

In many other ways this was, for me as a director, a time of big transitions. I was feeling on my skin what Betti must have meant by the 'dangerous freedom of the departing point and the mysterious necessity, the fatality of the arrival'. All the wealth of information that I gathered in the months prior to rehearsals came now to its ultimate and merciless test. For example, of the "four corners of the building" that I had as a start, my edifice was shakily standing on only two, after the first phase of the rehearsals. The paramount one was, of course, the corner of the *intentional actions*. With each new day I was witnessing the transformation of something that was meant to be only one of the corners into an interesting and very large *plane*, ready to take the load of the entire facility that was growing in front of my eyes. Actors/builders needed some very specific tools to work with on the play, and *actions*, along with the character's (or their own?) responsibility for them, proved to be the most powerful ones.

The second corner in my questionable blueprint was the *guilt*. After being discussed thoroughly as an important psychological dimension of the characters, it remained a generally untouched side-note on a piece of paper. It was naïve of me to expect that our construction work was going to be influenced by the color of the future wall-papers.

On the other hand, the two noble concepts of the *justice* (both human and divine) and *redemption*, were also contemplated in depth, proving to be great digressions from the real work on the text. Unfortunately, they had very little calories to burn on the stage. They were low-fat food for thoughts - philosophical abstractions that the audience had to juggle with, not we as a working-class. The actors and their characters advised me that they had too little maneuvering space, and that the structure of Betti's play was imposing the 'justice' and 'redemption' as pre-fabricated elements that would be in our building with or without special concerns. That must have been 'the *illusion* of the power to fight' that Betti was so generously giving to his fictional characters.

Simultaneously with the analysis of the script itself, its structure and style, and along with the dissection of all the characters in great detail - we kept coming almost regularly to the unavoidable issue of morals. The groundwork on Christian, catholic

morality was helpful in providing some answers to the inquiring minds of the cast, and it gave them a better understanding of what was at the stake for the characters they were to play. But the basic morality of the play did not substantially differ from the contemporary points of view of my actors: what was morally wrong doing fifty years ago, did not seem any more right today. Numerous discussions of the topic just validated my impression that we had to look at things from a Canadian perspective in the year 1998. For that reason all the background in the direction of historic morality did not go far beyond that informative level, and it proved to be of very little use for the stage. Moreover, the facts about Betti's fascination with religion, his thoughts about the reconciliation of the two contradicting principles (the omnipotence of the Lord and the free will of a man), or even the entire spectrum of civilization problems regarding the death (or life, for that matter) of God - all of that was bound to remain a topic for an essay (or a chapter in a thesis) and did not stimulate much "theatre" in our case. As our analytical work progressed in depth, I confirmed even more my belief that if anyone should be concerned about the philosophical implications of our show, it would have to be the audience and not us. Therefore, I gradually stopped feeding the actors with unessential information, and remembered that I was trying to create a magnet to be put by the unreliable compass of the audience, and that I actually wished to cede the responsibility for conclusions regarding the play to the viewers.

Apart from the theoretical abstractions and lively discussions, I used the table-work for another practical task: after hearing the text being read many times by the actors, it was much easier for me to decide upon the final cuts. During our read-throughs, some parts of Goat Island were repeatedly not productive and convincing, and others that I thought would not work were powerful and worth keeping. With that valid feed-back, I adjusted the hypothetical trimmings to correspond to the really needed ones. I introduced the definite cuts before we moved to the stage, and I explained my reasons to the actors.

As we proceeded with rehearsals, and began to block the play, my days remained every bit as much a miraculous combination of premeditation and instinct - not everything went as planned, but what went wrong or did not work, was in most cases

beneficial and eye-opening. All the abundant unused material from the table-work (justice, guilt, redemption) was in the back of the minds of my actors, and I wished to believe that it helped them get through the first difficult steps in the space.²⁴ In that sense the theoretical (and boring for them?) part of the preparations was, I hoped, like Visconti's cigarette-case.²⁵

For the actors, the blocking was a logical continuation of the work started at the table. For a director, after leaving the table, the situation gets more difficult. My task all of a sudden becomes schizophrenically double. As the play starts to acquire its shape, I constantly have to ask myself the same question: whose side am I at? The moment I abandon my awareness about the directorial responsibility (primarily creative, interpretative - but also social, and, in some cases, even political...), a voice in my head reminds me of it, and I regain my necessary distance. Therefore, the days on the stage pass for me as a director in constant jumping between being an audience that never exists (except in my head) and being an actor(s) that is never to perform. This paradox is then further complicated by the duality that director *as audience* has to assume. This duality is well articulated by George Steiner, who states:

[...]the two principal motions of spirit: that of interpretation (hermeneutics) and that of valuation (criticism, aesthetic judgement). The two are strictly inseparable. To interpret is to judge. No decipherment [...] no aesthetic commentary is not, at the same time, interpretative.²⁶ (Steiner 25)

Having that in mind, I guess it would not be fair to say that selecting a realistic approach and looking for "naturalness" as a style was not a 'commentary' itself, or that it was not 'interpretative' while outwardly being neutral. This was yet another bite of food for the mind of a director, not something playable for the actors.

During the first days of blocking, in the *perpetual* order of things, we were initially somewhat lost in space. We had to find specific ground for the characters and we had to encourage them to find their corners and routines in the house that was being created for them.²⁷ In that aspect, all of the actors were very creative and after a few days

the household was born: the characters had *their* usual chairs, *their* corners or sides of the space, *their* favorite objects; Agata and Angelo (Lindsey and Danijel, that is) even chose *their* commemorabilia of the dead professor. They needed not know that in that particular case, the help was coming from Nicholas Wolterstorff.²⁸

About a week later, the play was completely sketched. Now, before refining it any further, I had to fight yet another duel of theory versus theatre practice. I knew that some critical observations contained the questions that could help me understand what should be the style of the final performance. Franco Musarra was pointing out a strong triadic structure of Betti's plays. His comment was applicable to Crime on Goat Island, but raised some doubts in me about the unity of style, suggesting that it should be diverse in every third (or every act) of the future performance:

What I define as the "tridimensionality of Betti's poetic beacon", has its parameters in the *realism* at the beginning, the *psychologism* in the middle, and the *escapism toward the fantastic and metaphysic* in the final part of his plays.²⁹

The three distinct parts were self-evident in the script, and I announced already at the table that we were going to try and include them as three disparate styles in our performance. By the end of our table-work, I had introduced an even more radical concept, based again on the same influence: I suggested to bestow the shifts within the acts, and to combine immediately the 'fantastic' aspects with the 'realistic' - without waiting for them to gradually develop as the action progressed. My idea was to establish some strong cuts in the sequential flow of the plot, and to insert little dream-like diversions that would strongly contrast the instituted factual distinctions of the characters. One of the examples that I gave to the actors as an illustration of my intentions was Pia's attitude towards the violence. I was thinking to oppose her factual non-violent nature by interpolating short invented scenes in which she were to *dream* about the violence and even ask Angelo in a provocative and erotic manner to hit her. Then, I thought, when the *real* slap comes at the end of Act Two, Pia would realize the discrepancy between her day-dreams and the brutal reality, and she would be repelled by the realization of her

fantasy. In a similar manner, I intended to work against the illusions of the other two women.

Although the idea seemed appealing at the time it was announced, we all soon realized how inoperative it was on the stage. After a few honest attempts in the days of the blocking of the play, we decided to abandon it forever. Almost concurrently, in that time prior to the work on refinement of the rough sketch of the play that we had, I came to the conclusion that the diversity of styles that would follow Musarra's analysis were hardly going to work even in the suggested gradual, triadic scheme. Envisioning a different style of acting for every act in an essentially realistic performance, unequivocally revealed that it would not contribute to the future show - it would just confuse the viewers. Once again, the levels that Musarra was noticing in Betti's plays were there *for the viewers* to discover them, not for the actors to play. This notion was making me skeptical about introducing at this point even simpler, dualistic readings of Betti's work, like the one by Emanuele Licastro in which he is pleading primarily for the symbolic aspects. Licastro:

[...] suggest[s] that Betti's realism, that dirty, piquant realism should not be considered to be a conscientious *mimesis* of the reality, but a rather subconscious [...] and concrete expression of it - onyric from the horrors of the boundaries of reality and of the weak and tired flesh. Therefore, even the realistic aspects of his plays must be symbolic, just as much as symbolic are all the onyric and abstract aspects - we find ourselves in a forest of symbols, to use Baudelaire's phrase.³⁰

Instead of following that advice, as the blocking progressed, I was more sure that I had to take us in the opposite direction. I was looking for a "clearance", not the "woods": the rule I then imposed on myself was "stick to the initial impulses (the repeatedly mentioned "realistic" approach) as long as they were giving results". Obviously, the unsuccessful experiments, and the tight schedule that had to be met, were giving some results - whether I wanted it or not.

And as for the non-unity of styles, the failure of the practical checks on the stage made me aware that we urgently needed to find the harmony instead. I returned to Betti once more for an advice, and I found it in a letter that he wrote about ten years before Crime on Goat Island was created. Though it was not strictly related to our play, I felt that Betti's words were giving the so needed direction on how to proceed with his work:

I believe that the acting should be kept in a style of an absolute and real humanity: it should procure an unconditional truthfulness and naturalness. Whatever could be surreal or supernatural in the drama, should come out, if present, from the context [...], without the actors ever giving it a thought. Their only duty is to be truthful and human.³¹

From that moment, the cleaning and polishing of the basic "traffic" outlined in the week of raw blocking, had only *one* route to follow - everything was headed for the 'truthful and human'. Yet I was hoping that the show, once completed, would not lose the possibility of conveying *multiple* readings.

Somewhere along the mid-point of our endeavors, I invited the actors to start looking for *trust* in Betti's words, more than for the understanding of all they could imply. While refining the basics, in the weeks that followed I was trying even more to give the players all that was needed for an appearance of everyday concrete actions. We were all striving towards the *impression of objectivity*, and believing at the same time that the symbolic, or even metaphysic dimensions would spring out as a result of those attempts. Our means were simple again. Ahead of us, there was a story to be told: simple and horrific - an unexpected guest, called *angel* comes to peaceful household of three women and over several months abuses their hospitality. With a "subtle suggestiveness of his words" (Di Pietro 226), the intruder sets a fatal chain of events that destroys the balance and ruins both the women and himself.

Only after being a couple of weeks on their feet, the actors realized the true potential of such an elementary plot, and the *tragic* dimensions of the characters' actions in it. The initial worries about the powerful delineation of Betti's heroes were gone: we

now knew that the actions were able to define the character(s). And so we let them do it till the end.

Than the unforeseen addition of a finished playing space came along as a wonderful surprise - the set was done almost two weeks before the opening, to my great joy and relief. With that, we were able to start bringing all the elements together sooner than planned. In the runs to follow, the playing times got closer to those of a real performance, and the building called Crime on Goat Island was about to reach its full theatrical dimensions. This was the time at which I was less and less on the actors' side, playing more every day the silent role of an imaginary audience. Armed with a pen and paper, I was checking if everything we added was really there. I was making sure that what we decided was true came across as such, just as much as the facts that we felt were false in the stories of our characters. I was glad to see that the hunger for the man was visible in all three women - each one showing it in their own little way. The story seemed to come out as circular as I hoped, and Angelo's strategy was as present as women's willingness to humiliate and be humiliated. The *eros* was intertwined with the *thanatos* as the games of passion were turning into crimes of passion. For those who wished to search for archetypes and myths there was plenty to look at: the war was there with its archetypal situation of a world coming to an end, and, to make it even more complex, that world was a lonely and isolated place - an island; the archetype of gender division and penetration in which a hard and penetrating male was to enter a warm and giving female (or three, in our case) and her/their "cave" was quite obvious and at the core of the plot; the myth of return was our starting point in telling the story, and our Penelope (or three of them?) was waiting for the Ulysses or his replacement to come; finally, Agata appeared nothing short of Pasifaë (Angelo says it himself), and the other three women followed the "naughty" example.³² For the others who wanted a more genuine look, the basic tale was comprehensible. The time that had to elapse between the acts was clearly visible as well as the hysteria that rose as the Act Three came closer. The ending itself seemed inevitable and strong, confirming what Emanuele Licastro defined as "Betti's trademark":

[...] the human impotence in facing the destiny, that yeast of a Greek tragedy, enlivens Betti's dramas. His particular endings - a real trademark of the playwright - do not open a possibility of a redemption; they come in a drama after dreadful physical presentation [...].³³

Precisely that physical presentation was showing the potential of the moral questions behind it. I was hoping that the terms like Angelo's "moral obligation" to the laws of society, or "positional duty" of Agata as the head of the household, or "tacit consent" of the three women to the requests of their 'shepherd' - would come to mind of an observing and knowledgeable spectator, and they proved to be something that could have clearly been played.³⁴ On the other hand, I knew that the play would be nothing less enjoyable to someone who did not perceive the legal and moral aspects.

During the last runs, I was fairly satisfied with the two objects to which some metaphorical meanings could have been attributed. The first one, the well, looked as believable as our budget permitted, and it was becoming more than a metaphor - it was growing into a real *sixth* character. On one level, it was precisely illustrating the eternal game of ascending and descending, but when seen in the interaction with the great passion of the characters, it made me believe that Jean Neveux was right when he said that with Crime on Goat Island "the little magic box did not open on the six intelligent, but on six instinctive characters"; he counted the well, of course.³⁵ The other object I was playing with, the table, was illustrating the rise and destruction of the focal point of the family. Many physical things in my staging were happening on or around it, but in the same methodology of 'not-complete-openness', I did not entirely explain the actors the reasons for particular blocking choices. I basically had two forces in action: centrifugal and centripetal. All the feeding, drinking, seducing, reproaching, beating, slapping, dressing, mourning the dead, running away or simply running over the table denoted the centripetal forces which brought the focal point to life and kept it active. In the Act Three, the table became just an inanimate object on which other objects are put (a lamp, Edoardo's box), and which will never live with the family again. In the blocking of the Act Three, the actors were kept away from the table, denoting a centripetal force, that

only a broom and three chairs lifted off the ground were able to resist. By the time the epilogue came, the time and space became even as immobile as I could present them - more so than ever before in the play.

Once I accepted that the shape of the production was being created from inside, not entirely from my blueprints, or from some precise prompt-book, I knew that the question of genre of the play will be a matter of observation and articulation, and certainly not of conception. A little confusion regarding the genre was associated in my head with Alfred Simon. He was saying that:

The real difficulties begin when a play leaves the level of an anecdote and reaches a deeper existential and universal plane. At this point, in Betti's case, the words cannot be taken as actions any more, and the double imbalance between the dramatic action which sets into the melodrama, and the dialogue which becomes heavy with tediousness of ideology, is coming to life. I believe that the more we take interest in the theatre work of Betti, the more we will continue to ask ourselves whether his greatest success, Crime on Goat Island is a "primitive tragedy" or a "sexual melodrama". Its tragedy begins where the melodrama ends; vice versa, the tragedy ends when its melodrama begins. Even in the greatest Greek or Elizabethan tragedies, or the tragedies of Racine, neither tragedy, nor melodrama have a complete and distinct beginning or ending.³⁶

As I carefully observed the dress-rehearsals, the doubts were eliminated in every aspect - our play had no happy ending, we resisted the temptation to have the music underscore the scenes, there were absolutely no real villains or heroes - no black and white division of characters. I was seeing Crime on Goat Island as a tragedy, regardless of abstention from hurricanes and blood and killings. It was our peaceful, still tragedy, with much tranquillity on the surface. I knew that the set, costumes, lights and sounds did not carry the genre in themselves - it was up to the story and up to my talented actors and their skill

to perform a tragedy in all its simplicity and pureness. At the same time, I knew that Crime on Goat Island was not delivering a lesson, it was simply - theatre.

Theatre for what, therefore? For nothing, for no end [...] It is, like all great arts, for itself alone, and the tragedy is written because it cannot tolerate the strain of silence any more. (Barker 115)

Yet, I was determined to *speak* to the audience with that 'silence'. In the last days prior to the opening, I was encouraging the actors to play the empty time, and everything else that was - just like Visconti's cigarette-case, or a divorce of one's parents - "un-playable". I wanted them to believe in *silence as an action*. I knew that the risks involved were big, and that the audience may not have the patience.

The audience asks to escape. But escape to where? Over the wall is another wall. It is probably no use to know this. The theatre's knowledge is not of the useful kind, however. (Barker 127)

As the show was about to open, and our run were to begin, we were all fairly nervous. We believed in our play. Or we spent just enough time with it. In any case, we were convinced in what we were about to do. That was the strongest tool we had. With the rising of the curtain, we were striving to come closer to the 'one', so *distant*, 'percent' of human race.

We are, on the whole, a cowardly, homicidal bundle of appetites endowed with seemingly limitless instincts of destruction and self-destruction. We are the wasters of the planet and the builders of the death-camps. Ninety-nine per cent of humanity conducts their lives either of severe deprivation - physical, emotional, cerebral - or contributes nothing to the sum of insight, of beauty, of moral trial in our civil condition. (Steiner 274-275)

The Aftermath

The show is over. In a country that does not follow the practice of repertory theatres, that fact means that the show is dead *forever*. Or, as said earlier, it lives as long as the last viewer is willing to remember it. The thoughts that I am now left with, are not mine. As most of our thoughts, anyway.

I am certain that the meanings of a good text are never exhausted with a single interpretation, and I am glad that our production was *just a single interpretation*. The here often quoted George Steiner consoles me further:

Only weak poems can be exhaustively interpreted or understood. Only in trivial or opportunistic texts is the sum of significance that of the parts. (Steiner 34)

This is, I suppose the best excuse to Betti for all my artistic choices that fell short of his genius. That does not mean that I am sorry and that I regret my decisions - I do believe that *others* should fear from my choices. No, this is simply to say that I *respect* Betti. With his help, I have an amazing theatrical experience to look upon. The work with my cast over the two months was passionate, sincere and determined. The collaboration was very harmonious. Almost too harmonious. At times, it was hard for me to tell when they really agreed with some of the choices, and when they were just Canadian-polite. The only exception were Lindsey's objections. I am grateful for her doubts and questions. They made the show sharper.

Throughout the entire run, I was there with my cast. We talked little in the intermissions; we talked much more over a beer after a good or bad night. And many of the "unnecessary" things were coming back in different forms. Some of them were phrased as questions like "did you know that *we* have lost the war?", asked weeks after we talked about the subject. Others were present in forms of many pictures that were hanging on the mirrors of their dressing rooms. Inevitably, the actors *had* to create their worlds and know how often the character cuts her/his toenails. I could tell they were

completely in the show. Even the lack of consistency that was visible in the dress-rehearsals, was now gone. The opening was timed well, and Goat Island was more than ready to be trusted in the hands of competent actors.

For the lack of completely open feed-back, it is hard for me to judge in the post-show period the directorial methods that I used. I realize that they were different from what the actors are normally accustomed to here. I cannot tell if the Slavonic feel-the-guilt-while-you-play-because-you-are-never-good-enough, or the Italian bring-more-passion, and play-it-faster-and-louder, and keep-your-butt-tight-at-all-times really helped. Maybe, in retrospect, I could have brought some more encouragement and positive thinking instead. But then this show would not have been *mine*.

I do not regret any of the aspects of the production. With some space left for desires in terms of the set design (both Lisa and I were dreaming of solid walls like the ones Peter Stein can now afford to build), everything else was exactly in the place I wished for it to be. When that is combined with a lack of audible/visible feed-back from the *audience* - a feed-back common in some other parts of the globe - it remains extremely hard to judge if we discovered some new land, or if we never even lifted the anchor of our boat and ended the journey in the port of origin. In other words, I am unable to answer to myself if the play had any impact on the viewers, and if it did have - what was it. Certainly, as a learning experience, the "prank" with the compass was more than well worth trying.

Maybe the time to stage Ugo Betti in Calgary was not right, after all. But at least I fulfilled my desire. Maybe the audience I addressed had some compasses that were newly tuned. Maybe they already had their strong, too strong "north", and are not fascinated by Steiner and the "wrong" assumptions from which I departed:

It may be the case that nothing more is available to us than the absence of God. Wholly felt and lived, that absence is an agency and *mysterium tremendum* (without which a Racine, a Dostoevski, a Kafka are, indeed, nonsense or food for deconstruction). (Steiner 39)

Maybe I had too big expectations, and I set some goals that transcend the mission of theatre. But it could have hardly been otherwise:

Art does not educate, for to educate is to simplify. Art complicates the world, and the artist is the exemplification of the bad teacher, who in spite of himself, for all his mischief, cannot but tell the truth. (Barker 142)

Well, I know that I have told the truth. And that Betti was my *grano salis*. As for this essay, maybe it needs a *grano salis*, too - a little food for thought at the end. Who else is more appropriate to end it, than George Steiner?

What text, what painting, what symphony could strike the edifice of American politics [or North American, I'd dare to add]? What act of abstract thought really matters at all? Who *cares*?

Today, the question is this: which carries the greater threat to the conception of literature and intellectual argument of the first order - the apparatus of political oppression in Russia and in Latin America (currently the most brilliant ground for the novelist), the sclerosis in the meritocracy and 'classicism' of old Europe *or* a consensus of spiritual-social values in which the television showing of 'Holocaust' is interrupted every fourteen minutes by commercials, in which gas-oven sequences are interspersed and financed by ads for pantyhose and deodorants? (Steiner 303)

Notes

- 1) *Tradurre o tradire?*, in Italian means *To Translate or to Betray?* This is an often cited epigram in discussions on translations. The other version is *traduttore-traditore*, meaning *translator-traitor*. As Louis B. Salomon points out, it "also has the artistic value of illustrating its own point, since no other language is likely to offer a pair of semantic equivalents with such fortuitously close phonetic resemblance". The quote is from Louis B. Salomon, "Translation and Fundamental Semantic Principles", Semantics and Common Sense, (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, Inc., 1966), 143.
- 2) Respectively, Ugo Betti, Crime on Goat Island, transl. Henry Reed, (New York: Chandler Publishing Company, 1961), and Ugo Betti, Goat Island, transl. Gino Rizzo and David Gullette, in Ugo Betti: 3 Plays, ed. Gino Rizzo, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965).
- 3) Alessandro Perrini, "Sopravviverà a Pirandello", Oggi e domani, April, 1974, 19.
- 4) Reed's translation is entitled Crime on Goat Island, and Rizzo/Gullette version is called simply Goat Island (see note 2). To make the matter even more complicated, neither of the two is entirely correct. G. H. McWilliam (*Op. cit.*, xi) precisely points out that "we should perhaps bear in mind that the literal translation of the play's original title is not *Crime on Goat Island* but *Crime at Goat Island*". He then explains that "the distinction is not entirely academic, because the island of the play's title is not an island in the geographical sense, but an isolated region in the mountains".
- 5) This matter is fully expanded in the chapter on translation (especially in the section "Linguistic Overtones") in Louis B. Salomon, Semantics and Common Sense, (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, Inc., 1966), 127-146.
- 6) Achille Fiocco, Ugo Betti (Rome: De Luca Editore, 1954), 48.
- 7) The original reads as follows: "Ma è proprio questo che mi rende tranquilla: avere quel che mi spetta. [...] Non credo in una pietà: ne sarei confusa, sarei una macchia nera nella luce. Amo il mio peso." (Delitto all'isola delle capre, in Ugo Betti: Teatro Completo, Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1955), 1005.

- 8) Actually, Betti's language is even further complicated by the use of a more archaic, and nowadays mostly abandoned form of *voi* (second person nominative plural;), which is today, when utilized in singular, considered to be semi-informal.
- 9) Pasquale Tuscano, "Il senso della vita e della morte nel dramma bettiano 'Delitto all'isola delle capre'", Istituto di studi Pirandelliani: Quaderni # 4, Ugo Betti, (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1981), 105.
- 10) The inversion is visible right from the first untranslatable line of the play, "*Aqua buona*" - literally "*Water good*" (Delitto all'isola delle capre in Ugo Betti: Teatro Completo, Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1955), 961.
- 11) Giovanni Antonucci, "La fortuna scenica del teatro di Betti", Istituto di studi Pirandelliani: Quaderni # 4, Ugo Betti, (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1981), 29.
- 12) I am deliberately putting the term *customary* in quotation marks, because the appearance of what seems customary in Angelo's case is very deceiving. This is further discussed later in the paragraph, in the part regarding the *prologue* to the production (p. 37).
- 13) The paragraph entitled The Sound Design (pp. 52-56) is examining in greater detail both "Pia's" and "Agata's" tunes.
- 14) "O, Gorizia" dates from the First World War, and it curses the town of Gorizia, where one of the most exhausting and bloody trench battles of that war has been fought.
- 15) He "translates" the invented song in Act One, Scene Five (**Goat Island 106**).
- 16) *Angelo* indeed means "the angel" in Italian.
- 17) The term is borrowed from Nicholas Wolterstorff; see note 28.
- 18) Excerpt from my letter to Lisa Leung on August 26, 1998.
- 19) This is further discussed in the next paragraph (The Sound Design pp. 52-56).
- 20) The reference being to Edward Albee's The Zoo Story.
- 21) The two songs are sung, respectively, by Luciano Tajoli and Enzo di Mola, and they are available on the CD "Canzone Italiana, epoca di 30 e 40" (EPM Musique, 1997).
- 22) Sergio Surchi, "Equivoco di Betti", Arena, January 4, 1954, 100.

23) Giovanni Pellecchia, Saggio sul teatro di Ugo Betti, (Napoli: Istituto Editoriale del Mezzogiorno, 1963), 17.

24) In a lecture on the staging of Crime on Goat Island, delivered as a part of Department of Drama *Interludes*, on December 1, 1998, at the University of Calgary, I used a couple of anecdotes to prove the "usefulness" of some seemingly useless thing for an actor. Since this aspect of the work with the performers fascinates me greatly, I shared the first anecdote that was from my personal experience. It addresses the unclear issue about what could be considered *essential* for a performance of an actor and what not. At the same time, it asks if all that is important should be *visible* to the audience.

This anecdote happened more than a decade ago. At the time, I was a directing student at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade. I was staging my first directing exam, an adaptation that I made of a short story entitled Fear, written by the Italian author Alba de Cespedes. The actress, Ivana, who was playing the main role, was coming from a family of actors. More importantly, her father was Russian. He came to Belgrade with the Red Army in 1944, as a young orphan, and stayed ever after. However, he was never able to forget his "motherland", and often used to complain, "What am I doing in this drop of water; I should have stayed in the Slavonic sea" - referring, obviously, to Russia. Needless to say, Ivana was therefore heavily influenced by the Method Acting and the traditions of Moscow Art Theatre. So, while rehearsing Fear, in one of the most difficult moments of the play she had to enter the stage and face her jealous boyfriend and his accusations of infidelity. From that moment she had to struggle to save the relationship that was falling apart. At the dress-rehearsal, she entered the stage, and she interrupted the run (a sacrilege in the theatre!). Completely out of character, and with everything brought to a halt, she asked me if the parents of the character she was playing were divorced or not. I was as rude as I normally am - just a little younger and more impulsive - and I replied, "Try to enter first as someone whose parents are not divorced and lives in a normal family, and then try to enter as someone whose parents are divorced and lives in a dysfunctional family." Ivana did not appreciate my answer and was very upset for my lack of concern over something important enough to interrupt the dress-rehearsal. On the

other hand, I could not believe what a dumb question were she to ask. Shortly afterwards, the word had been spread, and ever since she was regarded as someone extremely difficult to work with. To this very day I carry big part of her label on my conscience.

Only much later, I understood what was the question about the divorce all about. It was the miracle of the small things that, though sometimes invisible, make the magic of theatre. With that lesson learned, I did not mind the unnecessary information that I handed to the actors. I knew that they will sift through it and take along only what they find important for *them*.

25) Supposedly, the great movie director was giving hard time to his property-buyer: he has sent him to an auction to buy an expensive cigarette-case that was then never to be seen on screen. But Visconti believed that just having the "real" object in the pocket, would aid the actor play the role of an aristocrat properly.

26) Although originally written in regards to 'serious reading', Steiner's observation fits perfectly the uneasy task of a theatre director, who is simultaneously - as he works - trying to interpret what seen on the stage for the sake of the actors, and trying to judge the same for the sake of the audience.

27) Methodologically speaking, the double confusion is created because the set is equally an abstraction at this point - just as much as are the characters. Both are something that is in the process of building, with the only difference that the actors/characters need much more the final, not imaginary set - then it is the other way around.

28) In his essay "The Remembrance of Things (Not) Past" (Thomas P. Flint, ed., Christian Philosophy, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 130-138), Nicholas Wolterstorff writes: "*Remembering* is as fundamental as anything in the relation of Christian people to the acts of God [Enrico's death being the one in the case examined]." He then continues: "A commemorative act may incorporate neither words nor rituals; and commemorative object need not be a text [Agata and Angelo need not to actually *talk* about the death of Enrico, and yet it can still be represented on the stage]. [...] commemorations require rituals or any other available *commemorabilia*. [...] to perform commemorations we must find some sort of act or object which *represents* the

commemorandum. These acts or objects function as the translucent (not transparent) media which embody the memorandum, enabling us to remember it through them."

29) Franco Musarra, "Il concetto di impegno nel teatro di Ugo Betti", Ugo Betti, letterato e drammaturgo. Atti del Convegno, (Macerata - Camerino, 1992), 37.

30) Emanuele Licastro, "Il dramma di Ugo Betti: tragedia o commedia", Ugo Betti, letterato e drammaturgo. Atti del Convegno, (Macerata - Camerino, 1992), 87.

31) Ugo Betti in a letter to the actor/director Luigi Almirante, written in Rome on November 9, 1936, and regarding the Almirante's staging of La frana. The letter which was never previously published, appears in Alfredo Babina "Le 'difficoltà' di Ugo Betti", Istituto di studi Pirandelliani: Quaderni # 4, Ugo Betti, (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1981), 151.

32) On the subject of myths and their value, Mircea Eliade was a more inspiring source (and a better read) than Laurence Coupe.

33) Emanuele Licastro, "Il dramma di Ugo Betti: tragedia o commedia", Ugo Betti, letterato e drammaturgo. Atti del Convegno, (Macerata - Camerino, 1992), 88.

34) I will briefly quote the explanations of those terms, as they are defined by John Simmons. Please note that in the staging of the play, although we discussed the concepts extensively and made them part of the show, for our working purposes we used only the *actual definitions*, not the terms themselves. In other words, Danijel was, for instance, aware of all the aspects of "moral obligations", Lindsey was using her "positional duties", etc., and yet the terms as such were never part of the vocabulary of the rehearsals. This is another example of the methodology of 'not-complete-openness':

1. *Moral Obligation*: "Have we a moral obligation to obey the law, or are we merely "obliged" to do so by the threat of legal sanctions?" (**Simmons viii**)

Neither of the two seems to work in Angelo's case, and so he comes across as a person who declares to believe in a few moral principles, but respects none.

2. *Positional Duties*: "To say of a man that he has positional duty to do A, is to say that because he occupies a certain position, role or office within some established scheme or institution, he is required (or at least expected) by the scheme or institution to

do A, as a part of the "job" of a person in that position. Nonperformance of a positional duty may or may not make one vulnerable to coercive sanctions, but it will normally result in no less than strong disapproval from within the scheme. ...it is not necessary that the scheme in question be useful or morally unobjectionable." (Simmons 17)

Agata's positional duty is briefly displayed just before the end of Act One, when she asks the stranger to leave. She then abandons it for the rest of the play. She fully uses it again only at the very end of the play, when she decides to protect the household. At this point, however, it is too late for her role to have a proper effect, because too much damage has already been done.

Besides her positional duty, Agata neglects also her *natural duty* as a mother. After falling in love with the intruder, she "abandons" her daughter until the final moments of the play. Only then, at the same moment in which she resumes her lost positional duty, she acts also out of her natural duty and protects her child along with the household.

Interestingly, Simmons also points out that the expected behavior has its other side, and that "the existence of the positional duties is not sufficient to warrant the ascription of a moral requirement" (Simmons 18-19), and continues by saying that:

"The existence of a positional duty (i.e., someone filling a position tied to certain duties) is a morally neutral fact. If a positional duty is binding on us, it is because there are grounds for a moral requirement to perform that positional duty which are independent of the position and the scheme which defines it. The existence of a positional duty, then, never establishes (by itself) a moral requirement." (Simmons 21)

3. *General Conditions for Consent*: "First, consent must be given intentionally and (perhaps this is redundant) knowingly. As with promising, one can consent insincerely, but not unintentionally. Second, consent must be given voluntarily. [...] "consent" which is given under the direct threat of serious physical violence is, for instance, not really consent according to this condition." (Simmons 77)

The consent of the three women follows totally these rules, and their consent is *sincere*; only much later in the play - after several months of life with Angelo that they actually

consented to - they start to rebel against the abyss of dangers that were not visible when the affair started.

4. *Tacit Consent*: "Consent is called tacit when it is given by remaining silent and inactive; it is not express, explicit, directly and distinctly expressed by action, but rather is expressed by failure to do certain things. But tacit consent is nonetheless given or expressed. Silence after a call for objections can be as much an expression of consent as shouting "aye" after a call for ayes and nays. Calling consent tacit, then, points only to the special mode of its expression." (Simmons 80) Even this could be checked if it works for Agata, Pia and Silvia in Betti's play:

"These three conditions seem jointly guarantee that the potential consentor's silence is significant. For they show that the silence does not result simply from (1) a failure to grasp the nature of the situation, (2) a lack of understanding of proper procedures, or (3) a misunderstanding about how one has to decide whether or not to dissent." (Simmons 81) This is, undoubtedly, the case with the three women. Even when Angelo becomes violent and overtly aggressive at the end of the Act Two, none of the three women denies her consent: they all remain *silent*.

35) Jean Neveux in "Una riscossa dell'istinto dopo i trionfi della dialettica" Teatro-Scenario, (Milano - Rome, a. XVII, n. 10, 16 - 31 May, 1953), addresses something that many critics noticed, but none of them articulated in a form of an epigram. At any rate, the fact remains that Betti was and still is a great Italian playwright who managed to retain his autonomy and did not fall under the influence of Pirandello.

36) Alfred Simon, "Ugo Betti fra Espressionismo e Simbolismo", Atti del Convegno internazionale "Betti drammaturgo", (Rome: Union Printing, 1984), 47.

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APPENDIX**Ugo Betti:****CRIME ON GOAT ISLAND**

A drama in three acts (1948)

Translated and adapted by Lary Zappia

CHARACTERS:**AGATA****SILVIA****PIA****ANGELO****EDOARDO***Present time.*

The action takes place in an isolated house, surrounded by barren land. The scene, which remains the same throughout the play, represents a room on the ground floor, almost a basement, used as a kitchen. A ray of sunlight is coming through the bars of a window. In the back of the room, there is a door that leads to the arid landscape that can be seen behind. The other doors lead to the rest of the house. Against one of the walls, there is a well, set in a recess.

ACT I

SCENE I

EDOARDO, a half-deaf and stupid-looking old man, is drinking a glass of water. PIA is seated a little to the side.

EDOARDO: Good water. It's so cool in here. I wish I didn't have to get up again. I am getting too old to drag that broken-down truck back and forth in this heat. Don't forget to tell your sister-in-law that I'll pass by again on Monday. And from now on, always on Mondays. I'll honk from the road. If you ladies need anything, just come out and wave. Has your sister-in-law gone to the post-office?

PIA: Yes.

EDOARDO: I wanted to ask her if she was satisfied with the things I brought her last week. Was everything all right?

PIA: Yes.

EDOARDO: Has your niece gone to the post-office as well?

PIA: No.

EDOARDO: How is she now, your niece?

PIA: She is fine.

EDOARDO: I'm glad. *(Tapping his glass.)* Can I have some more, please?

PIA: *(Goes to fill his glass from a pitcher.)*

EDOARDO: *(Drinks and gets up.)* You said you won't need any flour?

PIA: I've given you the list, haven't I?

EDOARDO: All right, all right. *(He takes the list out and looks at it.)* All right. Well then, until next Monday... - It's not only the sun, it's this air, this wind that burns right into you. Well then, I should be going. Say hello to your sister-in-law and to your niece.

PIA: Good-bye.

EDOARDO: *(He is at the door; he disappears.)*

SCENE II

PIA: *(Goes idly to the barred window and watches the truck depart. A silence sets in again. PIA now moves over to the well and takes a rope with a little hook at the end. She lowers it into the well and begins to maneuver it patiently. A shadow cuts the ray of sunlight coming through the barred window. There is a man standing outside, looking at her, unnoticed.)*

THE MAN: *(After a while, in a gentle voice.)* Have you dropped something down the well, Madam?

PIA: *(Startled; harshly.)* What do you want?

THE MAN: I wanted to know if this is the right way to Goat Island, Madam?

PIA: This is Goat Island, this place. Where do you have to go? Which way did you come?

THE MAN: *(Vaguely.)* I came from over there, from the road.

PIA: There is nothing else up here, only this house. If you are looking for the post-office, you have to go back.

THE MAN: Ah. Is it far?

PIA: Are you on foot?

THE MAN: Yes.

PIA: Then it's two hours.

THE MAN: *(Seems to think about it.)* Thank you. Good-bye, Madam.

PIA: Good-bye.

THE MAN: *(He disappears.)*

PIA: *(Goes to the window to watch the man go away. She comes back to the well and resumes her work.)*

THE MAN: (*Reappears, this time at the door. He enters without a sound. He is a young, well-built, healthy-looking man, with light complexion and light hair. He stands for a while, looking at the woman, then he knocks on one of the doorposts.*)

PIA: (*Turns around abruptly; with fear, harshly.*) How dare you come in?

THE MAN: (*Ceremoniously.*) Forgive me, Madam, but I was coming here: this is the house I was looking for.

PIA: What do you want? (*Calling.*) Silvia! Silvia!

THE MAN: There is no need to be afraid. I apologize for coming here so dirty: it's because of the dust - I've been on the road. (*His voice is courteous, very pleasant.*) Is this the house of professor Enrico Ishi?

PIA: The professor died quite a while ago.

THE MAN: I know. Are you his widow, Madam?

PIA: No.

THE MAN: Then you must be his sister, Pia.

PIA: Yes.

THE MAN: You are very young. Where is his widow?

PIA: She'll be back shortly.

THE MAN: I will wait for her. And his daughter, Miss Silvia, how is she? How are her studies coming? Is she at home?

PIA: I don't know. I think she is.

THE MAN: May I sit down, madam?

PIA: (*Indicates a chair with a gesture.*)

THE MAN: Thank you. (*He sits down.*) It's very beautiful around here. Lonely, but somehow very attractive.

PIA: You wouldn't say that if you were to live here. We don't come from these parts.

THE MAN: Why does the land look so abandoned?

PIA: Because of the goats. They eat everything up.

THE MAN: Goats? Do you have many of them?

PIA: We live off them.

THE MAN: And who is looking after them?

PIA: We are: myself, my sister-in-law and the girl.

THE MAN: And not a goatherd?

PIA: No.

THE MAN: It's useful to have a goatherd; the animals obey him and they thrive. Have you got any servants?

PIA: There was a woman from the village, but we are alone now.

THE MAN: Will you excuse me for a moment, Madam? I've left some things outside.
(He goes out and returns immediately with a suitcase and a bag. He sits down again.)

Anyway, it's a very nice house. It rises like a tower from a distance.

PIA: Yes, it's a nice shack. Have you noticed the balcony?

THE MAN: What about it?

PIA: You can't use it; it's falling apart. If there is wind at night, the shutter begins to bang. Pim pam. And you can say good-bye to your sleep. It drives my niece crazy.

THE MAN: Pim pam. All you have to do is go up there and tie the shutter back, or take it down. I... could do that for you.

PIA: Yes, you could fall down together with the balcony and everything. If it wasn't dangerous, we would have fixed it ourselves long ago.

THE MAN: Have you and the widow and the girl been here without a man for a long time?

PIA: For five years - ever since my brother left.

THE MAN: Does your sister-in-law think of remarrying, Madam?

PIA: No she doesn't think about those things. What is it that you want?

THE MAN: What do I want? I was a friend of your brother. I was with him when he died; I've heard what must have been his last words. It all happened down there, in a place of misery, in Africa.

PIA: Were you a prisoner too, along with my brother? Were you friends?

THE MAN: Your brother had other friends among the prisoners: men from his country, who spoke his language. Yet, gradually, I became his friend as well, and we talked and stayed together all the time.

PIA: Are you a foreigner?

THE MAN: Yes. I am in this country illegally. I don't have a permit to stay here.

PIA: You speak the language very well.

THE MAN: Yes. I like to talk.

PIA: Where do you come from?

THE MAN: *(He laughs and makes a vague gesture.)* From far away. It's very hot in my country, as hot as it is here, but it's also very cold. In the winter, we wall up our windows with bricks and mortar, and we light huge stoves and then we feel fine. *(He laughs.)*

PIA: And what did you do there?

THE MAN: I used to study. I studied a lot. And I used to think. My name is Angelo. Angelo Useim.

PIA: Why didn't you go back to your country?

ANGELO: Because I didn't want to. *(Still with the same candor and dignity.)* I wanted to come to this country, to come to this house, Madam. *(A silence.)*

PIA: Has my brother asked you to do something for him? Has he? Has he asked you to bring us some message?

ANGELO: Yes, that's why I came.

PIA: Is it a message for me?

THE MAN: *(Vaguely indicates no.)*

PIA: Is it for the girl?

ANGELO: *(Again vaguely indicates no.)*

PIA: Ah, I see. It must be for the widow, then. She'll be back shortly, I believe. You don't know her, do you?

ANGELO: No.

PIA: *(With hostility.)* My sister-in-law is a woman we all admire very much. I have always felt so small by her side. *(She laughs.)* When the shutter bangs at night, it says: "Agata! Agata!"

ANGELO: Your sister-in-law's name?

PIA: Yes. This place is called Agata. It is by her merit that we are left here to rot. And you know what it is? It's the solitude that drives you crazy day by day. Fortunately, I am hoping to leave here soon. Were you an officer?

ANGELO: Yes.

PIA: I am a language teacher. I've traveled a lot. Deutches sprachen? Vous le trouvez joli, cet endroit?

ANGELO: *(Tries to repeat the words, but distorts them. He laughs.)* I don't understand.

PIA: I lived for an entire year in Vienna. Have you ever been there?

ANGELO: No.

PIA: A wonderful city. I used to stay with very high-class people. Every night theater, receptions, evening gowns. A life filled with excitement. Do you dance?

ANGELO: Yes.

PIA: It seems as though I'm not the same woman I was. I became so savage here. I've let myself go, I stopped dressing up. Horrible.

ANGELO: A man's eye can always see beyond. You are not horrible, Madam. How was your love-life in Vienna?

PIA: *(Laughing.)* Oh, my love-life! The same as everywhere. Say, would you like to have some water? Nice and cool? You must be thirsty.

ANGELO: Yes, please. *(He comes to the table.)*

PIA: *(Brings him the water.)*

ANGELO: *(Drinks.)* It's so cozy here.

PIA: It's the only cool spot in the house.

ANGELO: You know, my story is similar to yours in a way. You have been here for a long time without a man. I have been down there for a long time without a woman.

PIA: Oh, that's right - in the prison camp. It must have been very boring.

ANGELO: It wasn't as pleasant as Vienna. A man desires a woman; he needs one.

PIA: (*With malice.*) Well... you have been set free in the end.

ANGELO: Yes, of course. But unfortunately, men are spoiled and picky. That's the way we are, Madam. (*With an almost sad calmness.*) On the other hand, you see, I am driven by my nature to these things, and I am forced to sin. How about you?

PIA: (*With an embarrassed laugh.*) Ah, well. To be honest... all this is much less important for a woman. We don't think about such things very often.

ANGELO: A man remains always a man, and a woman remains always a woman. What should be on their minds when they are alone together?

PIA: (*Laughing.*) I think... that they can find many other things to talk about...

ANGELO: (*Continuing with his affable seriousness.*) Are you married, Pia? Do you have a man?

PIA: Excuse me, Sir...

ANGELO: (*Courteously, and without moving towards her.*) Are we alone in the house, Pia?

PIA: What do you mean, Sir? My niece is in the house and I am going to call her if you continue talking like that. And my sister-in-law will be back any moment.

ANGELO: (*As before.*) If your sister-in-law invites me to stay here tonight, will you be nice to me, Pia?

PIA: Are you crazy, Sir? Well, I don't know whether to be angry or to laugh at you. One can tell that you are... a foreigner. You should know that we westerners treat these things in an entirely different way.

ANGELO: (*As before.*) So, you don't want to be nice to me, Pia?

PIA: I told you that you must stop that. We have known each other only for ten minutes, and you already think you can... Don't you see how ridiculous this is?

ANGELO: I see. (*As if he had completely forgotten the problem.*) Excuse me, Madam, when I entered you were trying to get something out of the well. Have you dropped something?

PIA: Down the well? Yes. (*Coming back to the previous subject.*) You know, I didn't want to offend you. But you must understand that certain ways are not accepted everywhere. Not all women are like the ones you've been with since you were set free. Perhaps that's what's given you the wrong idea.

ANGELO: Yes. And what have you dropped?

PIA: Where?

ANGELO: Down the well.

PIA: A goatskin. We have lots of them. (*She points to a pile of skins which almost form a couch against the wall.*)

ANGELO: And you didn't manage to fish it out, Madam?

PIA: It must have got caught. There are some hooks in the well.

ANGELO: And what will you do now?

PIA: We'll go down. Why do you ask?

ANGELO: Because I'd like to be useful. I am very obliging. Besides, I must make myself welcome, since I don't have any money. You said that someone will have to go down the well?

PIA: Yes.

ANGELO: But how?

PIA: We have a ladder.

ANGELO: And what about the water?

PIA: It's only a few feet deep.

ANGELO: Is it dangerous?

PIA: No.

ANGELO: I could do that for you. I'll go down and get the skin.

PIA: (*Laughing.*) Will you really?

ANGELO: Of course.

PIA: (*Takes a rope ladder from a corner, and lowers it down the well, tying it to a hook.*)

ANGELO: (*Leans over the edge and calls into the well.*) Hey! Hey! I'm coming down. (*He turns toward PIA laughing, then he takes off his shoes and rolls up his trousers.*)

PIA: It's true that you men are so strange. I was thinking about what happened a few moments ago. I don't understand how can one want such a thing from a woman without allowing some time to get acquainted and to see if they like each other, or something... I don't know. That's the way animals behave! *(Laughs.)*

(For several moments now another woman, AGATA, has been standing in the doorway, and continues to watch them unnoticed, though in no way furtively.)

ANGELO: *(Continuing to prepare himself for descent.)* Are you sure that it isn't dangerous?

PIA: No, no, there is no need to worry. I was saying that for you men, all women are the same. You don't mean to tell me that you really like me? Why should you like me, hm? It must be the heat that has gone to your head.

ANGELO: *(He has taken off his jacket and is getting ready to go over the edge.)*

PIA: I am sure you do this with every woman. Just like that - a little act, almost without any intention.

ANGELO: *(Disappears into the well.)*

PIA: *(Leans over the edge.)* It must be cool down there.

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Made hollow by the echo.)* Cool.

PIA: Are you down?

ANGELO: Yes.

PIA: Have you found it?

ANGELO: Not yet.

PIA: You'll see some other stuff down there as well - some clothes. Wait, I'll get you a lamp. *(She runs away from the well, almost bumping into AGATA. The two women whisper for a while and then go off together. The stage remains empty.)*

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Coming from the bottom of the well, singing the following refrain.)*

Esevi - uttu - sehe

Bi - be - ba
 Esevi - uttu - sehe
 Bi - be -ba.
 Agliela cicha
 Falhu manà
 Bibete bibete
 Bibete ba.
 Agliela cicha
 Falhu manà
 Bibete bibete
 Bibete bà.

AGATA: *(Has returned and sits at the table.)*

SCENE III

ANGELO'S VOICE: I am coming up with a pile of things. *(It's evident that he is coming up. He throws a goatskin and some wet rags from the inside. At the end he appears himself and jumps over the edge of the well, carrying a bottle. He sees AGATA instead of PIA in front of himself, but looks at her without surprise.)* Look how many things I've fished out down there. *(Indicating the bottle.)* There is a basket full of these, hanging on a hook. They must be from the professor's times.

AGATA: Yes.

ANGELO: Is it sweet?

AGATA: It's juniper.

ANGELO: Was it made here? By the peasants?

AGATA: Yes.

ANGELO: I guess you'll let me taste it and refresh myself. You must be the professor's widow?

AGATA: Yes.

ANGELO: (*Pointing at SILVIA who is just entering with PIA.*) And this young lady is your daughter, Miss Silvia?

AGATA: Yes.

ANGELO: Very pretty. And very young. I must dry myself now, otherwise I might catch cold.

PIA: (*Already brings him a towel.*)

ANGELO: (*He starts to dry himself.*) I am a strong man, very strong, but I'm delicate as well. If I don't take care of myself - I can easily get ill. (*To PIA, pointing his elbow.*) Here, come and take hold of my elbow, Madam. (*To SILVIA, pointing his other elbow.*) And you take hold here. Come on.

PIA and SILVIA: (*They obey shyly.*)

ANGELO: I'll put my hands together as if I were praying. Now the two of you should try to pull hard from both sides - let's see if you are able to pull my hands apart. Go ahead, try it.

PIA and SILVIA: (*They try to pull, but in vain. After a while they stop, laughing.*)

ANGELO: Four men couldn't do that. That's how strong I am. But I must take care of myself and eat well. Besides, I am very clean man - it's a pleasure to have me in the house.

PIA: (*Teasing him.*) You are so white and puffy, like some woman.

ANGELO: (*Pleased.*) Yes. As if I haven't suffered as much as I did. I have a very sound sleep. And I never do any harm to anyone.

PIA: (*Jokingly.*) And those little curls make you look like a lamb.

ANGELO: From what I can see, the three of you have very soft skins as well. Not like the women from my country - they have freckles and they are big breasted since they are very young; still, they are pretty good for a man and they can give him a lot of satisfaction in bed.

AGATA: Have you come from a prison camp?

ANGELO: Yes. But whatever happens, I always say: patience. This may make me seem frivolous, but I am not. I am really a thoughtful type of man. You'll say that I talk too much about myself, but I have to - you must get a chance to know me. Right? Deep down, I have a great need for affection. That's what we missed most in the prison camp. *(He shakes his head and laughs. Then he shows his hand with the thumb sticking up; he pretends to grab it with the other hand and break it off, but he actually folds it in the palm. He now shows this "thumbless" hand and laughs.)*

AGATA: Have you been free for long?

ANGELO: Yes. *(He continues with dignified simplicity.)* I am coming here a little late, because, unfortunately, I had no money. This had forced me to sometimes use rather unpleasant methods. On the other hand, why should we be given the gift of cunning, if we are never to use it? And certainly, I am cunning enough. I have worked, too.

PIA: *(Making fun of him, without malice.)* That must have been bad.

ANGELO: Yes, I've worked in a large mill: I used to keep books there. But it shortly made me feel sad. The people around me were silly and uneducated, and they were always covered with flour. And then, I had this house too much on my mind.

AGATA: *(Coldly.)* And why was that?

ANGELO: Because I've heard so much about it. The house of three women. Just women. *(He laughs.)* There is actually a scent of women here! *(Becoming serious again.)* What was the use of earning money in the mill and buying myself a smart gray tweed suit, if my soul was growing sad? I like to sit down and meditate; to reduce complicated things to their simple terms. I like to read, as well; I like to close the book with my finger between the pages. I don't mind if I fall asleep then. Later, when I wake up, I find that my thoughts have moved further. I know that the young lady is fond of good reading, too. Isn't that true?

SILVIA: *(A little embarrassed.)* Yes.

ANGELO: And how about the shutters - I know that the shutters take the young lady's sleep away. Eh? I know a lot, don't I?

SILVIA *(As above.)* True.

ANGELO: And how about your studies? How are they going? The university must cost a lot.

SILVIA: Quite a lot.

ANGELO: But it's nice to know the nature of things. And now? Are you on vacation?

SILVIA: I have not been too well this year; my mother wanted to keep me here until I get better.

ANGELO: And that's what happened, judging from the color of your cheeks. (*To the other women.*) Do you know what I like more than anything else in the world? - Talking.

PIA: We have noticed. You haven't stopped for a second.

ANGELO: (*Gently.*) I know. I'd give up food in order to talk. All the nice arguments, the lovely descriptions. To talk and find ourselves in harmony; or in disagreement at first. Then gradually, talking and responding, step by step, in a calm voice, with a certain shrewdness as well, slipping in a little joke from time to time - do you know what you eventually discover? That you were in complete agreement all the time. And do you know why?

PIA: (*Jokingly.*) You tell us.

ANGELO: Because men and, naturally, women, are always in agreement. We are in complete agreement and we don't know it. We are brothers and sisters. (*He now takes on the voice of a severe interlocutor.*) "Ah, brothers and sisters, eh? Brothers and sisters. And what about the sin? How do you explain sin between brothers and sisters?" (*As if replying.*) We cannot avoid sin; the black yeast of the earth is fermenting. I am a big sinner myself. The black yeast is driving me towards women many times in a day, but I despise that. My soul wants only the innocent closeness of brothers and sisters. But what if this innocent closeness becomes sin? Well, it won't mean the end of the world. It was the Creator himself who created the material world to give pleasure to the eternal soul which craved for desire and love and needed an object for its passion. And what is sin then? It becomes the tool by which we satisfy and gradually overcome the "falling in love" of our souls. These things are hard to grasp for women; even the educated ones find

it difficult. But one thing is certain: our salvation lies in sin; it's only our damned pride that thinks the opposite.

SILVIA: Sir, have you really been with my father?

ANGELO: Of course, I have.

SILVIA: Sorry for asking, but many families have been deceived.

ANGELO: *(With a sudden and completely unexpected burst of anger which makes his voice sharp and gives it a falsetto note.)* You don't believe me? You don't believe me?

SILVIA: *(Timidly.)* Did you really talk to him, Sir?

ANGELO: All the time. For three long years.

SILVIA: And what did you talk about?

ANGELO: We talked about many things. As many as were needed to fill the three years day by day. He opened his heart to me. You see, it was he who told me to come here. When he realized that he would not be able to return, he seemed to want me to come in his place. *(Silence.)* And so I started my journey. I have seen the most beautiful places in all of Africa and Europe - but this house continued to call me. I would like to have come here in a good suit. And I knew that a stranger is no longer a stranger if he comes bearing gifts. With gifts one becomes much more welcome. *(To PIA.)* In fact, I have chosen for you a length of silk in one of the finest shops in Algiers. And what a silk that was! The merchant cried at the mere idea of having to part with it. And it wasn't even too expensive. *(To SILVIA.)* As for you, young lady, I have chosen two big gilded bottles of Parisian perfume. Everyone told me that they were the best you can find. *(To AGATA.)* And for you, my lady, who are the mistress of the house, I had to find a more valuable gift: so I chose a pair of earrings, each one with a lovely black stone set in it. Then I looked for some sweets, the ones that stay fresh and soft for months. And then, finally, for a small animal to be kept in a cage, a harmless little pet nibbling nuts, holding them between its little hands. Oh, I've taken the greatest care to choose the right gifts that will no doubt please you. I chose them... but I never actually bought them, because I was completely out of money. I hope you'll take the will for the deed.

(He laughs for a long time, amused by his own facetiousness which, however, fails to amuse anyone else.) I am sorry for this joke, but I think a man should keep women always cheerful. When a man makes a woman laugh, she then feels protected. You must have been very sad here, the three of you, without a man to joke with, and with that shutter that makes noise at night. *(He laughs.)*

AGATA: Excuse me, but I think we should get to the point. Did you have a particular reason for coming here?

ANGELO: Yes, a very important one.

AGATA: Were you really present when my husband died?

ANGELO: Yes, I was there.

AGATA: And did he give you any message for us?

ANGELO: He did.

AGATA: Well then, tell us.

ANGELO: I would have done so before, but it doesn't concern all three of you.

AGATA: Whom does it concern?

ANGELO: *(After a moment.)* You. *(There is a silence. PIA and SILVIA get up and leave.)*

SCENE IV

AGATA: *(Looking at the ground.)* What does my husband still want of me?

ANGELO: I am sorry to see you so distressed.

AGATA: I am not distressed.

ANGELO: Are you afraid of something?

AGATA: I am not afraid of anything. Then you really know nothing.

ANGELO: About what?

AGATA: You are here because of my husband. But I am certain that he hasn't told you the truth. He rarely did tell it, although he thought he did.

ANGELO: What truth?

AGATA: (*With a sort of indifference.*) Well, it's simply that I have a reason for feeling resentful towards my husband; I would prefer not to hear anything more about him.

ANGELO: (*With curiosity.*) I didn't know that.

AGATA: (*After a moment.*) Do you know why my husband left from here, why he was taken prisoner and why he died down there?

ANGELO: Because of the war.

AGATA: No. My husband wanted to run away from me. (*Almost derisively.*) I am an abandoned woman. On the other hand, I was alone even when he was here; I've come to realize it after a while.

ANGELO: Do you regret your condition here, your solitude?

AGATA: No. I still have some relatives; I could probably go there. But I don't want to. Things have already happened this way and life doesn't start over.

ANGELO: Why did your husband leave you?

AGATA: (*Indifferently.*) Because he was ashamed. Because he was a liar full of rhetoric.

ANGELO: Why did you marry him?

AGATA: (*As above.*) I believed in him, I shared in his work. I married him against everyone's advice. (*Ironically.*) Oh, all his girl students were crazy about him. He was sort of a saint down in the city.

ANGELO: And how come you came to live here?

AGATA: It was me. It's quite a long story. It was me. Perhaps you ought to know. Enrico was beginning to come up against some opposition... I was proud of the fact at first: it was still the two of us against the whole world. Then I realized that this envy and the petty worries, were wearing us out, staining the beauty that used to be inside. It was me. (*With sadness.*) Ever since I was a child I always wanted all or nothing; if there was a drop of ink on my page, I preferred to tear it out; I was a victim of rhetoric. I suggested to him - I had some money of my own - I suggested that we leave everything behind: the city, the compromises - a revenge against the world. He embraced me; we were both

quite moved. What a farce. The two of us alone, far away from everything; our aspirations, our tenderness, our sincerity. And so we came here. That's all.

ANGELO: And what happened here?

AGATA: There is only desert, and silence.

ANGELO: What do you mean?

AGATA: Every day is the same. There is no distraction of any kind. Perhaps even the feelings - always the two of us alone - begin to wear out. They burn themselves up and become empty. I began to notice that my husband hardly worked any more.

ANGELO: And what was he doing?

AGATA: He was lying down all the time. He began to talk less and less. Hours, days, without a word. We had nothing more to say to each other. Everything became... terribly simple: the day, the evening, the supper, the wind... and the two of us. My husband began to avoid me. This solitude, this distance from everything, the wind... (*She laughs.*) ...and the goats.

ANGELO: The goats?

AGATA: (*Laughing.*) Yes, all we could hear in the silence was the distant bleating of the goats. Goats are important here; we live off them.

ANGELO: (*Interested.*) Milk and cheese and goat meat?

AGATA: Yes. Goats. They have those eyes... unfriendly and melancholy at the same time. They stare at you.

ANGELO: They recognize people. I was born in the land of shepherds.

AGATA: I told you how my husband and I began to talk less and less. Then a complete silence fell between us. I believe that our thoughts need words, that they run along on words as if along a thread. If they lose this habit of words, they slowly became shapeless and die. The only words I was beginning to hear... (*A slight laugh.*) were the bleating of the goats. I used to hear them while lying hour after hour on the grass. (*A pause.*) Then one day my husband ran away and I never saw him again. He ran away. Everyone thought that he had just gone away. I never told anyone the truth. I was too proud.

ANGELO: (*Curiously.*) What do you blame him for?

AGATA: (*Indifferently.*) For having deceived me. For having made me believe in things he didn't really believe himself.

ANGELO: Deceived. You wanted to be deceived. You wanted to marry a superior man.

AGATA: (*Lowering her voice.*) You have no idea what my husband did after he ran away from here. Old... friendships, cheap women... degrading incidents. That's what he wanted. (*With a sudden trembling in her voice.*) I was terrified by the thought of the immense credulity, the great trust I had! An entire life! What a sacrifice! And now, I'm here... waiting for the years to pass. (*A silence.*)

ANGELO: But the dead do forgive us, and we forgive the dead.

AGATA: (*With gloomy indifference.*) I don't believe in these things. Forgiveness doesn't exist in nature. (*With a shadow of a smile.*) That's how I see things. When a body becomes just a milligram too heavy it sinks - and that's it. And even God: it's ridiculous to imagine him as an impulsive gentleman who first gets very angry and then surprisingly calm. No. Everything is determined and final.

ANGELO: (*Almost amused.*) Even Hell?

AGATA: (*Half smiling.*) I used to dream about it as a child. I still do...

ANGELO: Even now?

AGATA: I prefer to imagine punishment rather than chaos. Inevitable punishment. That way, one can stop thinking about it. (*A silence.*)

ANGELO: It looks like you suffered a lot when he left.

AGATA: Not really. That's what's so strange. I swear I haven't suffered at all. It was something else. My faith has been shaken.

ANGELO: Your faith?

AGATA: It's hard to explain. It was...

ANGELO: It was?

AGATA: My husband was already gone. I was lying on the grass as I often do. The goats were cropping around, looking at me and going "beeh". It was a very calm day. I wasn't watching the goats any longer; I could just hear their "beeh" and I could smell them. I wasn't sad at all; just indifferent. That was all. I was aware how little it mattered to me

what was going on with my husband, I didn't care much about his running away, about his dying. I no longer cared about the house here, about the wall falling down, or even about my daughter or anything else for that matter. And then I felt so good, stretched there on the grass, and I stopped thinking. I felt this moment of rest... I was glad to feel my weight on the grass. There was nothing else in the whole world... And then I felt a strange desire... you know the funny things that come to your mind when you are all alone? I suddenly wanted to go "beeh, beeh" myself and to munch the grass with the goats. One of them looked at me and I went "beeh". (*She laughs.*) Well... (*A pause.*) I don't know why I'm telling you all this. It's stupid. (*Silence.*)

ANGELO: Madam, prepare yourself for a surprise. Did you know that in spite of everything, your husband's thoughts returned here, to this house? Yes. He talked so much about it that little by little I began to feel as if I lived here myself. He realized that he could trust me. And then he himself told me: "Go, Angelo; those three women are alone, go and help them. Go back in my place."

AGATA: (*Harshly.*) Do you think that this is enough to earn you room and board?

ANGELO: Madam, these were your husband's words. A man would be useful here. Your husband spoke about his books, as well, and about his work. He thought I might be able to go on with them.

AGATA: So this must be the surprise you mentioned?

ANGELO: (*After a pause.*) No. It's something else. I was trying to find a way to tell you without offending you.

AGATA: I can imagine what my husband must have told you about me. A foolish woman, unbearable.

ANGELO: (*Laughing.*) No, Madam. But he did tell me a lot about you, as a matter of fact. He talked about you more than he did about the house, more than about your daughter or anything else. I could almost say that he didn't talk about anything but you. However, he never mentioned the things that you've spoken of. You see, Madam, those things have no importance, they are trifles. He talked about other things. (*Changing his tone.*) You know, Madam, memories are like stones, time and distance erode them like an

acid. Your husband has completely forgotten certain aspects of you, and remembered others instead. And when two men are alone, as if on an island, you can imagine how it is - I know nothing about you, you know nothing about me - and it's immediately permissible to talk about anything. Even about the most intimate things. And there is always a way to touch upon the most delicate subjects: you laugh at first, you pretend that it is of no importance. But instead... you are sharing some astounding things. Of course, while talking, he wouldn't always say it was you he spoke about. He would speak in general, about some woman. He was clever, but so was I. I merely observed, but I was putting the pieces together, and I understood it all. It was you. All the time. Your husband did nothing but talk of you, as if he were possessed.

AGATA: *(In a low voice.)* So what was he saying about me, after all?

ANGELO: Well... *(He laughs timidly.)* Madam, down there... you had no clothes on. You were naked among us, if you will pardon me. Your husband remembered of you only what you have been to him on certain occasions, with an extraordinary clarity. His nose would sweat as he used to recollect. Everything, even your slightest breath, was there. I have to confess that I was not hiding my interest. There weren't any women around, and everybody used to talk a great deal about them. But our case was different. *(He laughs.)* As I was coming here, I didn't know your face, but I knew very well... the rest... I can understand if you feel insulted.

AGATA: *(Scornfully.)* It's so common among certain men to confide certain things.

ANGELO: But this was different. Madam, when a man and a woman embrace and when they make love - after a while there is no world any more, there is no memory, there is nothing! They become, for an instant, something anonymous and isolated. As a stone might be. Then some sort of a scream breaks out of this stone. As if the stone was making a painful confession. The act of love is something solitary, extraordinarily solitary; a secret - meant to be unheard and to remain unremembered. But your husband has disloyally spied and told me what he had seen.

AGATA: It's disgusting to listen to you. What are you getting at?

ANGELO: That I know you. You may not know who you are, but I do.

AGATA: And who am I?

ANGELO: Why do you suppose your husband, when he was about to die, forgot the woman you were during the day and remembered only the other? Because one of them was the true woman and the other not. You have behaved up to now like a dead child in a coffin.

AGATA: So tell me then, what should I really be?

ANGELO: *(He laughs as though he were ashamed; then, as if quoting.)* "Love runs through the forest with hair on end, invoking the black, monstrous boar." *(He laughs.)* There is no religion in the world that doesn't have legends on that. I have studied these things. It's called Pasifae in your country: she turned into a beast, and gave herself to a bull. You see, that was not the matter of reason, but a matter of soul! The restless and furious soul that wants to tear itself apart and cure itself of being human. And that is sacred, not shameful. *(A long pause. He lowers his voice.)* That's what you are, Madam.

AGATA: *(She remains motionless for a long moment. Then she takes one of the wet rags and slaps him across the face with it.)*

ANGELO: *(With his hand on his cheek, slowly, without anger.)* I'll pay you back for this, my dear. All this time you were the only thing on my mind; it was you that I desired. That's why I came here - to find you. I would have been unhappy in any other place. Night after night it is you who come to my bed, undress and we stay together. We shall continue to do so here. It is right and reasonable. And you want it as well.

AGATA: *(Calling.)* Pia! Silvia!

PIA: *(Enters and looks at them. A moment later SILVIA follows.)*

SCENE V

PIA: *(Taking a bowl and putting it on the table.)* You must be hungry; here is some milk and cheese, if you'd like some. And bread.

ANGELO: (*Coming to the table and sitting down.*) Of course I'd like some. I would have asked for it myself. But what about the rest of you? Don't you eat supper? It's getting dark already.

PIA: We eat much earlier. We have taken the custom of the countryside. In half-an-hour we shall be in bed.

ANGELO: (*Tapping the bottle.*) Well then, at least you'll have a drink; you must try this with me. (*Eating.*) Bring some glasses, it won't hurt you for once. It was put down there by my friend and he will be glad if we drink it together.

PIA: Shall I really bring some glasses?

ANGELO: Of course.

PIA: (*Goes to get glasses.*)

ANGELO: (*Still eating.*) And light a lamp as well.

SILVIA: (*Lights a lamp and brings it to the table.*)

ANGELO: It doesn't matter if you don't have a spare room. I can sleep there perfectly well, (*He points to the pile of goatskins.*) better than in a bed. I'll just spread them out a bit. I am used to much worse.

PIA: (*She has uncorked the bottle.*)

ANGELO: (*Pouring.*) Drink, my dear ones. You were a little flock without a shepherd. Just to have a man's voice in the house is already comforting. What a good cheese; excellent! (*Addressing AGATA, who remained on the side.*) We have countless stories about goats and goatherds in my country. I was thinking about our talk, Madam. They say that the goatherds, after being months and months alone with animals, they actually get tired of human language and customs. And when there is no one near, except the goats in the great prairies, these goatherds bleat. It's true. They try to keep it a secret, but you can tell, because when they talk with human beings they always seem distracted. (*He eats.*) And goats, you know, they fall little by little in love with the goatherd. They keep looking at him, they follow him around and they butt him gently. The goatherd starts to understand, and, after a while... they make love in the prairies, ending up closer than a

man and a woman. However, they say that the best goatherd is the devil. (*He tastes the liquor.*) This is good. Why aren't you drinking?

PIA and SILVIA: (*They drink.*)

ANGELO: (*He drinks again; he then goes over to the edge of the well. He speaks down into it.*) Thanks, Enrico. This bottle is excellent. Later on we'll try the others. (*He turns to the women, winks and then turns back to the well.*) Is it true, Enrico, that you want me to stay here? At least until the hay is all in? (*He pretends to wait for an answer.*) He said "yes". We can close it now. (*He puts a heavy, wooden lid on the well and then turns around.*) How did you manage without a man? How did you do your heavy work? How did you survive the winter? And how did you live without company? (*All of a sudden he begins to sing.*)

Esevi uttu sehe,

Bi be bo.

Esevi uttu sehe,

Bi be bo.

It's a song from my country, a very, very long one. It means: when a man comes, you, woman must take off his shoes and wash his feet. And after you've washed his feet, dry them off. And after you've dried them, give him some food. And after you've given him food, give him something to drink. And after you've given him drink, make him lie down. And so forth. Come on, sing with me; sing the refrain. (*He begins again.*)

Esevi uttu sehe...

(*He gives them a sign to join in the refrain.*)

PIA: (*With ANGELO.*) Bi be bo.

ANGELO: (*To SILVIA.*) What about you, Silvia? Come on, go ahead, sing along. (*He starts again.*)

Esevi uttu sehe...

PIA and SILVIA: (*With ANGELO.*) Bi be bo...

ANGELO: Esevi uttu sehe...

PIA and SILVIA: Bi be bo.

AGATA: (*Coming forward and interrupting.*) Listen, I have to tell you that you cannot stay here with us. I have no doubt that whatever you told us is true: you must have been my husband's friend. But we don't have the necessary resources, nor enough room. You have had some rest, and you have had a bite to eat, and I am kindly asking you to leave.

ANGELO: (*After a silence.*) Well... so I have to leave?

AGATA: Yes. You have said that you are not permitted to stay in this country. You could run into trouble here.

ANGELO: (*Without saying another word he gets up, slowly straightens his clothes and goes towards the door; here he turns and says politely.*) Good night. (*He disappears.*)

SCENE VI

AGATA: (*After a while she goes to the door, closes it and puts the chain across.*)

SILVIA: We couldn't have kept him. We are too remote here. There have been horrible cases: tramps or deserters being let in the houses and then, during the night, killing everyone and burning the place down. I didn't feel safe with him around.

PIA: (*Lighting another lamp, she starts out.*) I am going to bed. (*She stops; her voice becomes strident.*) I'd like to know why we don't go back to the city? (*To AGATA.*) It's all your fault. I've had enough. I don't want to be your slave here, and I am sick of working with my hands all day long. If you enjoy doing that, please go on. But I am leaving, do you understand? I'll manage to survive... (*She stops herself.*) What's that? (*She moves closer.*)

AGATA: (*Looking herself at ANGELO'S bag.*) He has left his bag behind. He did it on purpose so that he can come back. He will be back. (*Instinctively, she turns toward the door.*)

SILVIA: (*She does the same.*)

PIA: (*Runs to the window.*) No, there is no one here. (*She comes back.*) He's gone away. (*She moves toward the bag and searches it.*) Ah, just a couple of rags. They stink of

sweat. How disgusting. (*With excessive revulsion, hysterically, almost breaking down.*)

How disgusting! How disgusting! It makes me sick... (*She goes out.*)

SILVIA: (*Taking one of the lamps and leaving.*) Good night, Mom.

AGATA: Good night. (*She stands motionless for a moment; then she takes the lamp and leaves.*)

(The stage remains empty for a while. But the light of the lamp has not disappeared; it still shines from a nearby room. The someone re-enters cautiously in half-darkness. It is AGATA.)

AGATA: (*She comes into the room and stands motionless for a long time, listening. She then goes to the door, and, removing the chain, opens it. She comes slowly back. Then she goes to sit down on the pile of goatskins and wait there.*)

ACT II

SCENE I

(AGATA and PIA are busy sewing. In front of them, comfortably seated, is Angelo. A considerable time has gone by. The well is now covered.)

ANGELO: Have I told you the story about the bottle of Greek wine? A very rare Greek wine? Well, there used to be a shop... and in front of it a sign: "Exquisite Greek wine, come in and taste it..." And I had a desire to try it, without paying, of course... being completely out of money.

PIA: (*Laughs immoderately.*)

ANGELO: So one day I entered the shop and said grandly to the wine-merchant: "Sir, I have come to buy two dozen bottles of Greek wine... naturally, I'd like to taste it first." But the old pig behind the counter looked at me suspiciously. "Read what the sign says." "But I..." " 'Samples on payment only', that's what it says." "But a buyer..." "In my store, if you want a sample - you have to pay for it." And he sent me out.

PIA: (*Laughs again little more than necessary.*)

ANGELO: (*Going over to the window.*) The brute and I were now engaged in a mortal duel. Hasn't Silvia come back yet?

PIA: No.

ANGELO: Do you know where she went?

PIA: No.

ANGELO: Anyway, I let three weeks go by. When I showed up again in the shop, I was dressed as a kitchen-boy. (*Imitating.*) "Dear Sir, I am the Governor's kitchen-boy, and the Governor's butler has sent me to buy two or three crates of Greek wine for the Governor. And moreover, I'd dare to ask you for a favor: could you kindly call the Governor's palace so that I can ask whether they want three or four or five crates of wine."

PIA: (*Laughs.*)

ANGELO: I knew that by now the man was mine. He looked up the number himself, he then dialed it for me, and passed me lovingly the receiver. The words that I've heard from the other end were strange and offensive. But I ignored them. I pretended I was speaking with the Governor's butler. The wine-merchant was looking at me with such tenderness: "Have you talked to the Governor's butler?" (*As the kitchen-boy.*) "Yes. He says they want five crates... But first..." (*As the wine-merchant.*) "...but first you have to taste it, right? Of course, I'll take care of that, I'll let you have a nice big glass." Right in front of me, on the counter, was the bottle with the label: "Exquisite Greek wine. Sample." (*As the wine-merchant.*) "No, not that bottle, not that. I want you to try a drop of fresh one, uncorked just for you." He ran to the rear of the store... (*Pantomimes it.*) and came back with another bottle... (*Pantomimes it.*) which he put in front of me. He kept looking at me

all the time. I broke the silence: "Is it fresh?" "Fresh." "Greek wine, just uncorked?" "Greek wine, just uncorked." "Then I'd like to have some ice in it." "Some ice?" "Yes, some ice." "So you want some ice as well?" At this point he almost embraced me. "Bravo! You are fantastic! Ice it is! Straight away! On the double!" He rushed again to the rear of the store, and I heard him break the ice. He then came back and filled my glass to the brim... (*Pantomiming.*) ...he pushed it in front of me... watching me all the while. I drank... (*He mimes.*) Then I wiped the sweat off my forehead. "Did you like it?" (*Feebly.*) "Yes." "Would you like to have another glass?" I hesitated. It was then that the brute exploded. He started shouting in a terrible voice that I have to drink another glass immediately, or else he'll call the police. So I drank another glass and then I remarked (*In a thin voice.*) "It's not bad." "Ha-ha-ha. Being clever, eh? You came here to fool me! But you've fallen into your own trap! The number I dialed wasn't the Governor's number, but my sister-in-law's, the midwife's! And this is not Greek wine, that's seven-year-old vinegar!

PIA: (*Laughs.*)

ANGELO: (*Continues.*) "This is worse than sulfuric acid! You'll end up in a hospital tonight! And in the graveyard tomorrow!" (*Then in a flutelike tone.*) "Could I please have another glass?" (*A pause.*) "Another glass?" "Yes." "Do you want to kill yourself?" "Yes." So I drank. Then I drank again. Then I seized the bottle, emptied it, kissed the wine-merchant on the forehead and departed. (*Solemnly.*) A few moments later, I heard a terrible uproar behind my back. The brute had discovered that while he was getting me the ice from the rear, I had switched the two bottles. (*Pause.*) He had a stroke in that instant and he dropped dead.

PIA: (*After a laugh.*) You are a fraud, Angelo.

ANGELO: Why?

PIA: Because none of these things have ever happened to you. You are a scoundrel.

ANGELO: (*Pathetically.*) Yes, I am a scoundrel, I am the first to admit it. You smother me with attention, you work for me, you feed me, you even take care of my clothes and my shoes; and instead... (*Interrupting himself.*) You haven't seen Silvia, have you?

PIA: (*Harshly.*) No.

ANGELO: (*Continuing.*) ...and instead, do you know what you should do? You should take a whip and lash me.

PIA: That's right, that's what we should do.

ANGELO: Of course you should, because I am lazy. I waste my time on useless things, and I am a bit of a liar, too. (*He gets up and goes to look out of the window; then comes back and sits again.*) I am a parasite.

PIA: (*Shrilly, with aggressiveness.*) Yes, you are! You are! You are a good-for-nothing!

ANGELO: (*Gently.*) That's all right, my dear: everyone knows that some people are made for work, and others aren't. I went out this morning to chop the wood, and I felt the need for a little rest. So I set down and... (*He interrupts himself.*)

(*Silvia has appeared in the doorway. The two women turn and look at her.*)

SCENE II

ANGELO: (*Continuing as he hadn't seen her.*) ...And all of a sudden I found myself immersed in thoughts... thoughts so beautiful, so delicate that it would have been a crime to chase them away just to go back and chop the wood again! I have traveled on great ocean liners on which even the bowls and plates were made of gold. And? What good did it make? I am here now, thinking of America, thinking of eternity. There isn't an eagle that could fly so swiftly as a soul. Yes. Don't you agree with me, dear Silvia? Of course you do. I was observing how everything lights up whenever you enter the house; it strikes me every time I see you. But today you seem even more... sparkling and attractive than usual. What is it, my dear, don't you feel well? Maybe you didn't sleep well last night? (*To the other two.*) Yet, on the other hand she looks fine.

PIA: (*Harshly.*) Say something, you little fool.

SILVIA: (*She has come forward without looking at anyone and as if she heard nothing.*)

ANGELO: (*Still affable and unalterable.*) We were worried knowing that you were out in this heat. It's dangerous, you know. You must be all sweaty now, I can see. Of course you are. (*To the other two.*) This girl spends too much time outside. One might almost suspect that there is something here in the house that bothers her. In which case...

PIA: (*As above.*) Come on, open your mouth, stupid!

ANGELO: (*Continuing.*) ...In which case, we will all be glad and ready to help you out with that, to do whatever may be necessary to find a solution, won't we? Tell her, Agata, am I right? And you, Pia! Tell her.

PIA: (*She gets up and crosses to the door with obvious hostility.*)

ANGELO: (*With sudden anger.*) Pia! Pia, I am talking to you!

PIA: (*Leaves.*)

ANGELO: (*After a moment, he starts again with affability.*) I have taken the liberty to talk like this, although I am just a humble servant here, because I've been sorry to hear that these are the last hours Silvia will spend with us. She is going away, she's leaving, this very day, almost any minute, I gather. It hurts my feelings. Her studies... the university.

AGATA: (*To her daughter.*) Did you let old Edoardo know?

SILVIA: Yes. He will honk from the road. I'll go down with my suitcase.

AGATA: Is everything ready?

SILVIA: Yes.

ANGELO: (*From the door, quietly.*) However, old Edoardo won't be here before the evening. We would all be very glad if Silvia were to change her mind in the meantime. (*He disappears.*)

SCENE III

SILVIA: (*She comes slowly forward and points to something among the garments that PIA and AGATA have been sewing.*) I remember this. Dad used to wear it when he went hunting.

AGATA: (*Evasively.*) Yes, I believe he did.

SILVIA: (*With a strange calmness.*) You'll have a lot to work on. Angelo is fatter than Dad.

AGATA: These things started falling apart. They will be of use to someone now.

SILVIA: There was something else in Dad's closet. But it couldn't have been of any use to any of you. So I have taken it.

AGATA: What's that? What do you mean? What have you taken?

SILVIA: (*Does not answer; then, suddenly, with affection.*) Mom, I was bound to go away; I should have done it before, because of the school. I was getting tired of this heat and of this desert. The other night, there was the shutter again: I hardly closed my eyes. If I had to stay here any longer, I would be sick. (*She has begun to show signs of agitation.*)

AGATA: (*Clearly wishing to avoid her.*) I know, my dear. You'll see that going away for a while and being with your friends again will do you good. (*She is heading toward the door.*)

SILVIA: Where are you going?

AGATA: There are things I need to prepare for your departure.

SILVIA: No, Mom. Wait. I came here to talk to you. (*Pause.*) There is something I'd like to tell you before I leave.

AGATA: (*Without looking at her.*) Very well, I'm here.

SILVIA: You know, we haven't spoken much these last few days, Mom. Maybe we didn't have a chance. And so, we never discussed a subject which... I have to tell you that

I was disturbed, that I was upset with... some things. I felt uneasy, you see. You understand.

AGATA: (*Without looking at her.*) You don't like the presence of that man.

SILVIA: Yes.

AGATA: (*Evasively.*) We needed a man here. There are some things around that women can't do.

SILVIA: But this man doesn't work, he hasn't done a single thing.

AGATA: He probably needs a little time to get used to the place.

SILVIA: But he will never do a single thing, Mom.

AGATA: How do you know? In that case we'll send him away. As soon as the hay is in.

SILVIA: But this man will never go away, he'll never go away.

AGATA: Why shouldn't he? Besides, he is in this country illegally. If we want to, we could have him arrested. So there is no need to worry.

SILVIA: Mom.

AGATA: What is it?

SILVIA: I went to the post-office the other day, and then to the village shop.

AGATA: And?

SILVIA: Everybody was looking at me.

AGATA: (*Pretending to be patient.*) And why was that?

SILVIA: Later, I talked to old Edoardo.

AGATA: That was unwise, he's a fool.

SILVIA: He told me that everyone is gossiping about that man and us.

AGATA: And what do they say?

SILVIA: They say we are going into debt in order to give him money and keep him here.

AGATA: It's nonsense. You know it is.

SILVIA: They say... it isn't nice for three women to keep a man in the house.

AGATA: The same people were gossiping when I sent you to study in the city. A girl all by herself in the city, among all the men; that wasn't respectable either. Anyhow, you are going away now: at least your reputation will be safe. That's why I don't understand why

are you worrying so much? (*She goes toward the door.*) As far as I am concerned, I am aware that those people are mean and stupid. And I don't care about them.

SILVIA: (*With sadness.*) Wait a second, Mom, wait! You say you don't care about those people. But do you care about me?

AGATA: (*Comes back slowly and sits down; with a kind of weariness.*) Why do you ask me that?

SILVIA: Because I believe that you do care if something makes me suffer. Mom, I don't like that man wearing Dad's clothes and sleeping in his room.

AGATA: We couldn't make him sleep on the floor.

SILVIA: But I don't like it. Because of Dad: it used to seem as if we were almost waiting for him; now it's not like that any more.

AGATA: (*With her eyes lowered.*) Oh, because of your Dad. I've heard you laugh so many times during these months after his death. I thought you were the first to forget him.

SILVIA: (*Almost screaming.*) But I am only his daughter!

AGATA: And I am his wife, you mean. And that's why I mustn't forget him. (*Changing her tone.*) My dear child, the life that a man and a woman live together, my debts to your father and his debts to me make up an account that is almost impossible for an outsider to understand. And children are outsiders in that matter. They know nothing. They judge only by conventional standards. You'll see that soon many things will become insignificant. (*Attempting a cordial tone.*) You'll see your friends again, you'll have other things on your mind. It will do you good.

SILVIA: (*With sudden rebelliousness.*) For my health, you mean, right? For my health? Mom! I've wanted to talk to you for days; for days I've felt frightened, worried...

AGATA: (*Finally, with a kind of harshness.*) Then tell me! You've been worried. What for?

SILVIA: (*A long silence.*) Pia.

AGATA: Pia?

SILVIA: Yes. I think that Pia has an eye on that man.

AGATA: You think so?

SILVIA: Yes, I am sure.

AGATA: (*After a silence.*) Well, Pia is like that. Don't worry about it.

SILVIA: (*With anxiety.*) Mom, it's this isolation that frightens me... to be alone all the time, chained to the same thoughts... The most incredible things begin to seem... ordinary, within reach... inevitable... as in a dream... I believe this must be the way those horrible crimes happen, crimes we read about...

AGATA: (*Without looking at her.*) But you are going away tonight, my dear.

SILVIA: ...it feels like this whirl will swallow us all...

AGATA: (*Her eyes lowered.*) All of whom?

SILVIA: Mom. I think that that man... has something with Pia.

AGATA: What do you mean?

SILVIA: There is something between them.

AGATA: I don't think so. Angelo likes to tease people. (*Suddenly.*) Could we please change the subject, Silvia?

SILVIA: I have spied on them.

AGATA: (*In an outburst of exasperation.*) And why did you do that? Why? Why? (*Controlling herself.*) It doesn't matter... it's all too silly. I don't believe you.

SILVIA: I have heard them. Do you get it now?

AGATA: (*Roughly persuasive, determined to end the discussion.*) That can't be, my dear. I am telling you that it isn't so, you must be wrong. It must be all in your imagination. And I think you should stop it now. Will you, please? Let us not waste any more time on that.

SILVIA: (*Stares at her in silence.*) Mom, from the moment I entered this room, you keep pretending not to understand what I am trying to tell you.

AGATA: (*Bitterly.*) Very well then, what is it?

SILVIA: (*Almost crying.*) You know perfectly well, Mom, what it is. It's that man... even you are not taking the trouble to hide it! It's you and that man... it's you and that man! It's pointless that you keep pretending!

AGATA: (*Sadly.*) I was not pretending. I was begging you. I was begging you to spare us both certain words which are better left unsaid between mother and daughter. But you didn't want to. Why?

SILVIA: I have seen you. I've seen you and that man... A nobody, a tramp. That's why I'm going away, you see?

AGATA: Exactly: you are going away; you could have easily said nothing. (*A pause; sadly.*) Silvia, we shouldn't have started this conversation in the first place. You and I have grown up in a world in which many facts, many ideas are accepted without questioning. Our books, our education, our friends have taught us understanding. I have never asked you how you spent your time in the city. You are not a child any more and you are responsible for yourself. Have I ever asked you anything?

SILVIA: (*After a silence.*) You are right. It was silly of me. But still, Mom, we have not said everything yet. You know that I wouldn't have started this conversation if it weren't necessary.

AGATA: Please, Silvia. This is already a question of good manners; there is a point at which even those that are dearest to us should stop. Besides, I don't see that these things are of much importance. (*Bitterly.*) They are petty things.

SILVIA: Mom...

AGATA: Please, Silvia, that's enough! Leave me alone and stop it. I hope I at least have the right to be left alone. (*A silence. Then, more in an attempt to end the conversation, than in the expectation of being believed.*) You've got everything wrong, you've misinterpreted things.

SILVIA: (*Suddenly, with great tenderness.*) Oh, Mom, how you must have been suffering ever since we started this conversation! You, so proud and honest, to be forced to pretending and lying and humiliating yourself. Mom, what has happened to you, how could this be possible? You have asked me how dare I talk to you like this. Well, I am your daughter. And you're my mother.

AGATA: (*Pale, her eyes lowered.*) Your mother. A document signed in gold. A bond. Your mother, and therefore not entitled to life. Your mother. Embalmed.

SILVIA: (*As above.*) No, Mom, that's not true. I remember when I was a child, I was in love with you, I would have gladly sacrificed myself for you. I used to turn the pages of my book, and look at you every now and then, I looked at the lamplight in your hair...

AGATA: (*Bitterly.*) It's a pity that everything couldn't have stayed like that, like in a portrait, quietly yellowing with time; and no one would ever have had to worry about it again. (*Pause.*) Instead - what a pity - everything has changed, I am no longer the same woman. But neither are you, you know. I do remember your little voice. You've grown up since, Silvia, you are a woman, you are a different person and I don't know who you are. You don't need me any more, your voice sometime gets on my nerves. When a little bird grows up, its mother sends it away from the nest by pecking at it. Nature is honest, so unlike us: we embalm our dead.

SILVIA: But you've always been the best thing in the world to me! Everything on earth was perfect if you were there!

AGATA: But what did any of you know about me? I was alone and I have always been alone. Have you ever truly looked at me and talked to me? Have you ever asked yourselves what was I thinking while I was there with that lamplight in my hair, or when I woke up at night? Were you so sure you knew me?

SILVIA: But your life here, your beliefs...

AGATA: Yes, I've listened to lies and I have told them. I have been cheated and I have cheated back. Were you so sure you knew me? (*With a kind of despair.*) Were you so sure you knew me? (*A silence.*) Stop tormenting me, Silvia, that's enough!

SILVIA: And what about Pia? (*Almost screaming.*) What about Pia?

AGATA: Pia has nothing to do with it.

SILVIA: (*Stares silently at AGATA; then suddenly, almost frantically.*) "Pia has nothing to do with it." You know as well as I do that she has. You've known it from the start. But you've given up once again. You've let this horrible thing happen, you've let that man degrade you and Pia... as if you were two mares in the same stable! You've allowed him to take from you whatever distinguishes you as a human being! And if it were my turn tomorrow, you'd let him take me too!

AGATA: (*Subdued, but commanding.*) Lower your voice, Silvia. Pia is probably eavesdropping somewhere, and that makes the whole thing even sillier.

SILVIA: I've seen everything, I've heard everything, I know the exact number of your sighs!

AGATA: (*With repressed vehemence.*) All this rhetoric, all this fuss for such small and miserable things. (*Suddenly, with a kind of despair.*) What do you want from me? Leave me alone, stay out of it! Why do you keep shouting? Why are you here?

SILVIA: (*Imploring.*) Don't talk to me like that, Mom...

AGATA: In the end, what does it matter to any of you who I am or what I do? Yes, what? For half my life I've probably lived with my arms and legs tied up. All right, it was a mistake; it was tiring! And the lies we told! The important thing is to understand what you are and to be that: then everything becomes simple. (*As if distracted.*) Just like when you're tired and falling asleep and you let your thoughts slip away one by one. The thoughts fade away and you feel relieved because you realize how stupid they were! Foolish and useless! Then, finally, the rest, the rest of the grass, the rest of the beasts or of the stones. That's what I want: to find peace. I don't care about anything else.

SILVIA: (*Frightened, softly.*) Don't talk to me like that, Mom...

AGATA: It doesn't matter what you've said before. Those were just words - like the ones I've heard so many times from your father; you resemble him anyway. Silvia, I don't care - even about you. It was a mistake to make me speak; but it happens once in a lifetime. This is getting very boring and I want it to end soon. Go away, Silvia!

SILVIA: What has happened to you, Mom? It was he who has done all this. He came into our home like a beast...

AGATA: But dear, what if I enjoyed obeying him? His voice is so persuasive.

SILVIA: (*Shivering.*) I know. I've heard his voice; and yours with it. Do you think I don't understand? It's been in the air I breath for three months. You are unable to say no to him.

AGATA: (*With somber defiance.*) That's right, I am unable to say no to him. Whatever he asked. And then, one thing is the same as the other. Deep down, that was what I

wanted: I was so lonely. The wind was carrying me away. Others called me, but I did not answer... It's all so simple! I wanted this to happen.

SILVIA: This is unbearable, Mom. I can't stand it.

AGATA: And who is asking you to? You have nothing to do with it. Go away, Silvia!

SILVIA: *(Suddenly.)* Mom, do you know what they are saying down in the village? - That I've fallen, too! Me too, do you understand? All three of us, like a little flock. It's driving me crazy, I can't stand it. A little while ago I was looking in Dad's drawers. His revolver was still there. And I took it. I've got it here with me, here in my purse.

AGATA: *(Shaking her.)* Go away, Silvia! This has nothing to do with you. Your problems are easily solved: you just have to go away.

SILVIA: I can't go away any more... I've seen your face when you go to his room... I've seen Pia's face as well; I've heard your voices... You have frightened me. I think about it all the time. You've made me sick again. I feel ashamed if anyone looks at me! I feel this stain on me even when I'm asleep. *(On the ground, her arms around her mother's knees.)* Mom, let's leave, come away with me.

AGATA: *(Freeing herself.)* No.

SILVIA: Come away, I beg you!

AGATA: No. Let me go.

SILVIA: I will bring this to an end. *(Firmly, as if having a vision.)* I will kill him, Mom. I have thought it all out, step by step. I will call him in here, I will tell him to look there, among Dad's clothes. I will make him bend over. And then I'll shoot him in the head from close behind. I have the revolver.

AGATA: *(Looks at her, with intense calm.)* No, you won't shoot him; you won't do that, I know. *(Suddenly.)* Silvia, tell me the truth, why are you doing all this? Why have you come in here? Why have you been talking in that manner? Why have you spied? Why are you shouting? Why haven't you already left? Why don't you leave? Why? Why? *(She runs out.)*

SILVIA: *(Keeps staring at the door with wide open eyes; then turns.)*

SCENE IV

PIA: (*She is standing in front of her; she has entered some time ago and has slowly moved forward during the previous conversation.*) You look pale, Silvia. What has happened?

SILVIA: (*Absently, stiffly.*) Nothing. Do you know where Angelo is?

PIA: You need to talk to him?

SILVIA: I have something to tell him.

PIA: Now? Right away?

SILVIA: Right away.

PIA: (*In a lower voice.*) Do you already know what are you going to tell him?

SILVIA: Yes, I already know. (*She lowers her eyes toward her purse.*)

PIA: (*Catching her gaze.*) Sit down, Silvia. Your forehead is all wet. I'll go and call him for you. (*She makes SILVIA sit down.*)

SILVIA: (*Obeys her mechanically.*)

PIA: (*Goes out; her voice is heard calling.*) Angelo! Angelo! (*Then further away.*) Angelo... Angelo... (*And still further.*) Angelo... Angelo...

SILVIA: (*Shakes herself in that moment.*)

ANGELO: (*Has appeared at the other door and advances cautiously.*) My dear Silvia, I wasn't expecting you here. Someone was calling me, certainly not you. Well, let them go on calling. We run after one another all the time in this house, and I run more than your mother or your aunt; I'm a real cat around here. (*Laughs.*) My dear, Silvia, I wasn't expecting you here, but I was hoping I'd find you.

SILVIA: (*Slowly gets up.*)

ANGELO: Why are you getting up? Are you going away already? No? You've decided to stay; that's a good sign. I haven't been this lucky for a long time. My dear Silvia, I'll tell you frankly: I was looking for you. I was waiting until you were alone. I wanted so badly to talk to you before this damned departure. Oh, I know that you despise me; and you are right. And I know that you are proud; you've right to be that too. But I see that

you are hurt and offended as well; you are too young and sweet for that. And that's why I'm here. I needed to talk to you.

SILVIA: So did I.

ANGELO: You too? Oh, finally; I'm glad. I was waiting for that to happen. Tell me everything, my dear Silvia. I am anxious to finally hear... *(He interrupts himself.)*

SILVIA: *(Goes a little stiffly to the table where she left her purse, and picks it up.)*

ANGELO: My dear Silvia, I know that you want to reproach me. Well, I'll accept that and I'll try not to deserve any more reproach. I know I wasn't perfect in many ways. Or maybe your mother or your aunt weren't perfect? They can make mistakes as well sometimes. But we'll try to correct them. My dear Silvia, I am sure you won't depart. Tell me then what's wrong?

SILVIA: *(Stretches out her arm and points to her father's clothes.)*

ANGELO: Your father's clothes? You are right, you are right, my dear. It was inconsiderate of me to think I might wear them; this must have hurt you. My dear Silvia, they will remain only your father's: I won't touch them. Is that what you wanted? Is that all?

SILVIA: *(Breathing hard, pointing.)* Down there. Bend down and look at them. Look at them closely.

ANGELO: *(Surprised.)* Is there something in the clothes? Something I haven't seen? *(He bends down, moves one of the suits, then turns to the girl.)* I don't see anything. *(He resumes watching the clothes, this time going all the way down on his knees.)*

SILVIA: *(Comes toward him with her hand in her purse. She is now standing over him.)*

PIA'S VOICE: *(From outside.)* Angelo! Angelo!

SILVIA: *(Moves away.)*

ANGELO: *(Gets up and moves away as well.)*

SCENE V

PIA: (*Enters running, then stops to look at them. She now moves towards ANGELO.*)

ANGELO: What is it?

PIA: (*Whispering.*) She wants to kill you. She has a revolver.

ANGELO: (*Silences PIA with a gesture; he reflects for a moment without looking at SILVIA. Then, in a loud and friendly voice.*) Thank you, Pia. What you've told me is very important and you were right to run and tell me. You can go now.

PIA: (*Remains to watch, motionless.*)

ANGELO: (*Goes back to look at the clothes, bending over them again, this time in an entirely different way.*) Dear Silvia, I said I couldn't find anything among your father's clothes. I'll take a closer look. Is it all right like this? Or do you want me to bend over a little more? Would you like me to kneel down? Ah, now I see what I was to find here. A quick death. The death of a bull in a slaughterhouse. (*With a same amiable tone.*) Do you want to kill me?

SILVIA: (*Staring at him as if in a trance.*)

ANGELO: (*Suddenly, in a very loud, furious, falsetto voice.*) Did you want to kill me? (*With the same voice to PIA who doesn't move.*) Go away, Pia. You may go. (*To SILVIA with the same intensity.*) Did you want to kill me?

SILVIA: (*Almost voicelessly.*) Yes.

ANGELO: (*A little softer.*) Did you have a weapon?

SILVIA: Yes.

ANGELO: Give it to me.

SILVIA: (*Hands him the revolver.*)

ANGELO: (*Takes the weapon, staring at it; then, to himself, as if unable to understand what has happened.*) She wanted to kill me, to take my life. (*With enormous astonishment.*) She hates me! (*To PIA.*) She hates me, don't you see? As long as she's alive, my life is in danger, you know? She hates me. She hates me.

SILVIA: (*Begins to shake with occasional sobs.*)

ANGELO: *(Seized by a real terror.)* Oh, oh, oh, don't you see, Pia? I could have been there right now with my brains blown out. It was all wonderfully thought out. *(Showing it all in a kind of pantomime.)* I was here... I was going like this, down on my knees... and she... Eh? Eh? Where did you want to point the gun, my dear? On the back of my head, eh? Here. And I would have been down, with my face on the stones. Even my teeth would have been broken. And then... and then I would be there now like a smashed egg in a pool of blood and brains... *(Suddenly, with tremendous rage, in falsetto, like some kind of a trumpet.)* You worm! You filthy little worm! You bloody whore, you bloody whore! *(He runs at the girl, hits her, grabs her by her blouse and hair, and throws her on the ground shouting and babbling.)* You bloody whore, you could have... you could have... You wanted to kill me! Bloody whore, bloody whore! *(He lets go of her.)*

AGATA: *(She has appeared; uncertain and distressed, she goes to her daughter.)*

SILVIA: *(Lying on the ground, babbling through her sobs.)* I wish I were dead.

(There is a silence.)

ANGELO: *(Suddenly, with a sign of grief.)* I've given way to violence! And I was unjust, too! I am ashamed; such an ugly thing to do. *(To AGATA.)* Our little Silvia could have... *(His teeth almost chattering.)* She is sick. Really sick: we must do something, we must help her get better. Oh, I'd give anything in the world, except my life.

SILVIA: *(As before.)* I wish I were dead.

ANGELO: I didn't believe it, but this little girl actually hates me. Her loneliness is to blame; you have to be very strong to bear it. If you are not, a poisoned thought penetrates your blood stream... you become possessed and you end up committing... She could have... I escaped by the skin of my teeth. Poor Silvia. She is too sensitive for this sort of life.

SILVIA: *(Sobbing, still prostrate.)* I wish I were dead.

ANGELO: *(Lowering his voice a little.)* She wishes she were dead. And out of mercy that wish could almost be fulfilled, so that... Poor Silvia, such a delicate creature, yet

gnawed by such a horrible evil. Poor Silvia, the best one among us: a pretty flower - destined to go on and rot through the years and lose its purity. Yes, to rot and lose purity! To be deceived and mocked: swelling with fat and sin. One could truly wish... that some mysterious mercy would bend down and pick that flower, preventing the disgusting fall - by picking it, this mercy would save it from the loss. *(A silence.)* I don't know if I have dreamt it or if it was only a thought: it was evening, I think, as it is now, and our Silvia was crying. She was saying that... she couldn't stand another night with the unnerving noise of the shutter. Pim, pam. That noise at night was always our dear girl's nightmare. So suddenly, she says: "I'll go and take the shutter down." And I say to her: "But my dear Silvia, that is very dangerous, an accident might happen." She smiles at that; I swear, she smiles and says *(Lowering his voice.)*: "Dear Angelo, let Fate decide. One way or the other, I won't hear the shutter any more. And I'll be able to rest in peace." *(A silence. It is getting dark now.)*

SILVIA: *(She has raised herself a little; slowly.)* Mom!

AGATA: *(Disturbed.)* What do you want to tell me?

SILVIA: Mom, one day I was filled with despair and revulsion. And I went to him because I wanted to drive him away, away from the house... Mom, I am already lost!

AGATA: *(Turns slowly and moves away from her.)*

SILVIA: Mom! *(A silence.)*

AGATA: *(Without turning to her.)* I loved you so much when you were little. You were so delicate, and I used to feel pity for you.

SILVIA: *(Gets all the way up; then goes to the door and leaves slowly, somewhat stiffly.)*

SCENE VI

PIA: *(In a low voice.)* Where is she going now?

ANGELO: How dare you ask me, you liar? I know as much as you. It's possible that sooner or later she'll climb that damned balcony. *(He looks at the ceiling.)* It might be

that she's up there this very moment. (*He looks at the clothes.*) And I could have been there at this very moment; flies would have been buzzing around my corpse by now. (*He looks at the ceiling.*) Do we have the right to intervene? Only destiny has the right to give the answer... yes or no. (*Showing how he listens.*) You, what do you say, Agata? Now it's your turn to talk. Talk, talk for God's sake. She is your daughter.

AGATA: (*Stands motionless and gloomy.*)

ANGELO: Well, it may be that we are letting our imagination run wild... Or it may be all just in my head. Nothing has happened up there yet. (*He looks up and listens.*) Oh, of course nothing is going to happen anyway. But I can feel the heavy breathing around; I am a little worried. Tell me, what should have been done then? It was so hard to keep ourselves innocent and human... and alive. Why, why did our Silvia have to... How could she think of something so monstrous? Why? Why did she do it?

PIA: (*Exasperated, shouting.*) Angelo, what a fool you are!

ANGELO: What do you mean?

PIA: I am saying that your great fear has made you a fool! You are still asking why the girl did this? (*Contemptuously.*) Because she was in love with you.

ANGELO: (*Stands still, taken by this new thought.*) Human actions are so mysterious. Sometimes two different winds blow on the same sail. I think... (*Suddenly, frantically, to AGATA.*) Call your daughter. Go and get her. (*Shouting.*) Hurry up and get her! Quickly! Call her! (*He runs himself.*) Silvia! Silvia! Silvia! Silvia! (*He has gone out. The voice is more and more distant inside the house; now, from the change of his tone, it is obvious that he has found the girl and is bringing her back.*)

SCENE VII

ANGELO: (*Reappears, holding - almost carrying - SILVIA, who has half-fainted.*) I need a chair. She is so cold, she can't stand up. Hold her, help her out; moisten her lips. Give her something to drink.

AGATA and PIA: *(They start helping the girl.)*

ANGELO: *(Stands for a long moment to think.)* That's it! That's how it should be! It's so nice to see the three of you close together in love and harmony! This is so calming, this is a real consolation! We must have been blind. It was all so simple.

AGATA: *(Turning towards him.)* What was so simple?

ANGELO: *(Vaguely.)* Everything.

AGATA: What do you mean?

ANGELO: I mean that our dear Silvia will not go away: not tonight or any other night. Edoardo will come and go back by himself. The old devil. And Silvia will stay here, calm and happy. *(A pause.)* It will be the four of us. *(A silence.)*

PIA: *(Suddenly starts to laugh. Her laugh is strident, hysterical; her teeth chattering.)*

ANGELO: Would you be happier to see some blood here? Or out there, under the balcony? There goes your pride again. always your pride. your damned pride. - It will be the four of us. Why should we spoil everything; why do we have to hate each other?

PIA: *(With continuous, convulsive laughter, like a moan.)* Angelo, you are crazy...

ANGELO: I've never stepped even on an ant. All living creatures are delicate and last only for a short time: why should we be cruel then? Whatever our soul desires is innocent - like a child stretching out its hand.

PIA: You are crazy, crazy! Agata, do you hear what he says? *(Frantically.)* I'll go and throw myself from the balcony! I'll be the one to kill herself! You monster, you've ruined us! *(She becomes suddenly silent.)*

ANGELO: Pia, go and get my suitcase. It's better that I leave, instead. I'll go with old Edoardo when he comes. That will solve everything.

PIA: You are saying that you'll go away? *(Screaming.)* Don't I wish! Don't I wish!

ANGELO: You think I'm joking? I have no desire to stay here any longer with all the malice and spite... and with my life in danger. *(Heading towards the door.)* I'll be quick, I've only a few rags to pack. *(He is at the door.)*

AGATA: Angelo, what are you doing?

ANGELO: I am leaving.

AGATA: (*Pleading.*) Wait.

ANGELO: No, I am not turning back now that I've made my decision.

AGATA: But there was no decision made yet. Wait.

ANGELO: No, I want to go. I have to protect my life. You give more importance to your spite and your prejudices than to me. I am leaving.

AGATA: (*Begging him with increasing despair.*) No, Angelo, wait. We can explain everything.

ANGELO: But we have explained everything. It's pure luck that I am alive. And you are still suspicious of me, you still wish to humiliate me.

AGATA: No one is trying to humiliate you...

ANGELO: You are all so ungrateful, so malicious.

AGATA: I am begging you, Angelo, I am begging you. You can't go away just like that. You've been here for months... Wait, come back in...

(*A silence.*)

ANGELO: (*Slowly comes back into the room.*)

PIA: (*Suddenly, screaming.*) Tell me what's going on here? What has been going on? Have we all gone crazy? (*To ANGELO, attacking him.*) You monster! You scoundrel! You are a parasite!

ANGELO: (*With a kind of calmness, he slaps her hard across the face.*)

PIA: (*Becomes silent.*)

(*In the silence, old Edoardo's horn can be heard.*)

ANGELO: (*Pointing.*) There he is, Silvia. Old Edoardo and his truck. He will stop now; now it's up to you. You are free, Silvia. I will not take advantage of what has happened between us a while ago. You are free to stay or to go. It's your choice. There, he has stopped. He is honking his horn.

(The horn is heard again.)

SILVIA: *(Suddenly starts to run towards the door.)*

ANGELO: *(Grabs her as she runs past him; calmly to PIA.)* Pia, go and shout to him that she's not going away, that we'll talk about it later.

PIA: *(Goes to the window and shouts.)* She is not going away. No, she is not going away.

(The truck is heard departing. A silence.)

ANGELO: That was easy. *(Affably to SILVIA, as he lets her go.)* It's not that I forced you, you know. We have all agreed to that. Only, the three of you wanted to be compelled a little; I mean guided, protected. And that's how it is now: the four of us. Not here for the vile, material things, but here to be brothers and sisters. We have shouted and quarreled enough; and now there is a beautiful peace between us. It is already evening, the moon is rising.

AGATA: *(Suddenly begins to sing softly and without the words the refrain of Angelo's song.)* Esevi uttu sehe...

ANGELO: Close the door, Pia. Close everything and lock up. Who cares about old Edoardo and about the rest of the world? Only mosquitoes and doubts are coming from outside. Close everything up.

AGATA and PIA: *(They do so; AGATA continues to sing throughout.)*

ANGELO: Out with everything. It will be only us. As if this house were a walnut, black outside and sweet within. Or rather, an island. In the middle of the sea. An island with silver lining. And the four of us alone on the lovely grass, and in every blade of grass a soft whistling of the wind... and the clouds above us... and... Only us. Free from everything. Free! We must celebrate here tonight! Let's have the best there is in the house! I'll go down the well - there are still some bottles left. And Agata, you get everything ready and light the lamps. You too, Pia. Quickly, quickly. *(Pointing to*

SILVIA.) This little sister of ours mustn't show that she's been crying; you must comb her hair, wash her face, dress her up. This little party will be in her honor.

AGATA and PIA: (*Begin to comply, hesitantly at first, then with a sort of alacrity.*)

ANGELO: (*Getting ready to go down the well.*) Take out the best tablecloth, the best glasses. Oh, my dear sisters! If one of you suffers, the sun turns dark for me. Quick, Pia, take Silvia to tidy herself up. Pia is meticulous, a little harsh, but she is always at your service, and she always follows orders. Silvia is the flower...

PIA and SILVIA: (*They go out.*)

ANGELO: ... Pia, make her put on the dress she was wearing the day I came. And you, Agata...

SCENE VIII

AGATA: (*Setting the table.*) Me? I'm old.

ANGELO: (*Getting the rope ladder and putting it down the well.*) No, you are the real one. Because of you I came from far away, and because of you I'll stay. You remind me of how in my country women are never let out alone in the fields at night.

AGATA: (*Stopping her work.*) Why not?

ANGELO: Because they might meet the devil. And everyone knows that women want to make love with the devil. It is him who plays hard-to-get. (*He laughs.*)

AGATA: (*Interested.*) And?

ANGELO: Well, sometimes, you have to send them out, alone, at night - to call the doctor or for some other reason.

AGATA: And then?

ANGELO: Then, as they walk, suddenly, if there is a moon, the women see another shadow next to their own. It's a traveler who decided to go the same way.

AGATA: And what does he say?

ANGELO: Nothing. He smells them.

AGATA: He smells them?

ANGELO: Yes. To see if they smell of smoke. That's the odor of human beings - no other creature lights the fire and puts a pot to boil. So he smells.

AGATA: And what if they smell of smoke?

ANGELO: He leaves them at once. He knows they are petty little women, housewives, always ready to cry: the devil despises that. Yet, from time to time, he still meets one who doesn't smell of smoke.

AGATA: And what does she smell of?

ANGELO: Of nothing. They say in my country: she smells of the wind. The Creator must have made those women wrong. He has put too much essence in the making, as if for some other being, as if for something stronger, for something more important and closer to God. That's why these women are melancholy. They resemble you, Agata; disturbed by the presence of smoke, disturbed by its absence. Men love them passionately and say to them: "My soul." In return, these women often poison their men. And nothing is good enough for them, not even paradise. That is the kind of woman the devil waits for at night. That is the woman that has no fear; so she goes with him. *(The last words come from the well; ANGELO is going down.)*

AGATA: *(Stands still, thinking. Suddenly she starts: a noise has been heard from the well.)* What was that?

ANGELO: *(From the well.)* Nothing. The ladder has fallen in; it slipped off the hook.

AGATA: What shall I do now?

ANGELO'S VOICE: Throw me a rope.

AGATA: Yes, just a second. It will take a moment. *(She goes to get a rope and then starts back towards the well. She now stops hesitantly, and puts the rope down.)*

ANGELO'S VOICE: Have you found it?

AGATA: I am getting it, wait a moment. *(She turns around.)*

SILVIA: *(Comes in followed by PIA. She is in a light-colored dress, with flowers in her hair.)*

AGATA: *(Looks at SILVIA for a long moment.)* You look like a real flower now, Silvia.

PIA: *(Raising the lamp in her hand, so that it shines on the girl.)* Angelo? - Where is Angelo?

AGATA: In the well. *(Motionless, looking aside.)* We should throw him the rope now.

ACT III

SCENE I

(It is still dark - just before dawn. A lamp is burning on the table.)

AGATA: *(She is alone, seated to one side in half-darkness. She stays like that for some time.)*

SILVIA: *(Enters on tiptoe and stops.)*

AGATA: *(Whispering.)* Did you want something?

SILVIA: *(Whispering as well.)* Have you slept at all, Mom?

AGATA: *(Still in a low tone.)* I never sleep much.

SILVIA: Why don't you come in? We are going to have something to eat.

AGATA: I'll come later. Did you want something?

SILVIA: No, no, nothing. Why don't you come in, Mom?

AGATA: I'll come later. What's the matter with you? Don't you feel well? These mornings are quite cold. Go now; stay with Pia; there is no point in your coming here. *(A silence.)* Do you have everything you need in there?

SILVIA: Yes.

AGATA: Has anyone gone for the milk? *(Pause.)* We'll also have to do some washing one of these days. *(There seems to be a great sense of peace in her voice.)*

SILVIA: Yes. (*A silence.*) Mom, I am a little frightened.

AGATA: You know very well that it's only a joke.

SILVIA: Yes, I know it. (*Pause.*) Why don't you come in? We can't even talk here.

AGATA: I'll come later. (*A silence.*) You know what I was thinking about? - About the college; about my theology teacher; about the words he used to try to explain the concept of eternity to us. He used to say: imagine a butterfly which every now and then moves its weak little wings. This butterfly is placed on a bronze sphere. Now think how much time it would take for this butterfly to make the slightest mark in the bronze sphere, moving its wings every now and then. And think how long it would take for these weak wings to wear the whole bronze sphere away. And then imagine that bronze sphere to be the size of the earth and sun combined, or even larger - to be as big as the entire universe. And the little butterfly on that enormous sphere has to wear it away until nothing remains of it. And when it has finished, it has to wear away many others, as numerous as sand, so that it is impossible to even count them. And when it has worn them all away, well, eternity will still just have begun. The concept of eternity transcends human thought. Or maybe it is the opposite concept that transcends human thought.

SILVIA: Mom, has he spoken again? (*For the first time she casts a glance at the well.*)

AGATA: No. Very little. And that was about two hours ago.

SILVIA: Do you think...

AGATA: If you go closer and listen carefully, you can hear him perfectly. You can hear him breathing.

SILVIA: (*Takes two or three cautious steps toward the well.*)

AGATA: He is quiet only because he's a little angry. He gets like that from time to time. (*She laughs quietly.*)

SILVIA: He was still talking up to two hours ago?

AGATA: Yes.

SILVIA: What was he saying?

AGATA: Nothing. He was a little impatient. He was making noise. (*She laughs quietly.*)

SILVIA: What is he doing now?

AGATA: Thinking.

SILVIA: And why was he making noise before?

AGATA: Because he hadn't realized, he didn't understand.

SILVIA: Understand what?

AGATA: That... this is only a joke, a practical joke.

SILVIA: (*A little worried.*) A joke. I mean... it's been two days and two nights...

AGATA: Not quite, a little less than that. Besides, both of you have agreed and you even laughed.

SILVIA: That's right.

AGATA: (*Laughing quietly.*) What are two days and two nights, after all? It must have been much worse when he was in the war. And still, there are some bottles down there for him.

SILVIA: Bottles? What for?

AGATA: Every now and then I hear him brake the neck of one of them.

SILVIA: (*With a laugh.*) And does he drink it?

AGATA: Yes, he does. I've heard him. He said so, too.

SILVIA: (*With a laugh.*) Is he getting drunk? Down there?

AGATA: I think so. To kill the time. There is no need to worry - he's not so bad down there, after all.

SILVIA: Are you sure?

AGATA: Of course I am.

SILVIA: (*A little worried.*) There is nothing to be afraid of. After all... two days and two nights... two days and two nights...

AGATA: A little less than that. He could easily stay longer.

SILVIA: This will teach him a lesson; he needed one, didn't he?

AGATA: Of course he did.

SILVIA: Of course he did; he needed it.

AGATA: (*Vaguely.*) There was something wrong here. We felt so uneasy all the time. Oh, he has already changed, a little. Sometimes, when I hear him talk from down there, I feel like laughing. (*A silence.*)

SILVIA: (*Suddenly.*) Mom, why don't you call him? Just to hear him; to hear what he says. Call him, Mom.

AGATA: No, better not. I've noticed that he starts to show some courage if he knows that someone is up here. He begins to talk and he shouts in hope of an answer. But if he doesn't hear anyone... That's why I'm barefoot. If he doesn't hear anyone... he then becomes a little frightened. (*There is a kind of peace in her voice.*) He needs to be a little frightened. That's what we have to wait for - his fear.

SILVIA: Fear of what, Mom?

AGATA: (*Evasively.*) Just plain fear. I see that you too speak in a low voice and walk on tiptoe. Why do you do that?

ANGELO'S VOICE: (*Coming from the well - hollow, echoing and magnified.*) Silvia!

SILVIA: (*Moves away from the well, frightened.*)

SCENE II

ANGELO'S VOICE: (*Calmly.*) Silvia. I know you are there. Answer me. I've heard you, you know. Answer me. Come on, answer me.

SILVIA: (*To her mother, softly.*) You answer him...

AGATA: (*Whispering.*) He isn't calling me.

ANGELO'S VOICE: (*Calm as before.*) Pia. Is that you, Pia? I can hear you magnificently. You are all walking barefoot up there. Pia! Silvia! (*A long silence. Then his voice begins to sound slightly excited.*) Pia! Silvia! Pia! Silvia! Pia! Silvia!

PIA: (*Coming in and whispering with anguish.*) I can't stand that any more! It's dangerous if we wait much longer. Throw him the rope and let's put an end to it.

AGATA: Throw him the rope yourself.

PIA: I am afraid. He sounds so fierce; he sounds like he's gone mad. I'm afraid.

ANGELO'S VOICE: Pia! Silvia!

PIA: I can't stand him calling me like that.

AGATA: Why did you come down then? I told you to stay upstairs; you can't hear anything from up there.

PIA: You are wrong: you can hear him from there or from anywhere in the house. You can hear him even from the road. If anyone goes by, they'll certainly hear him.

AGATA: I don't think so; besides, no one goes by.

PIA: All night long he continued to...

AGATA: It's not true. It's you who want to hear him, even when he's quiet.

ANGELO'S VOICE: (*Almost completely discouraged.*) Pia! Silvia! Pia! Silvia!

PIA: But why does he call only the two of us? (*With sudden excitement.*) Why does he call only the two of us, and not you?

AGATA: Because he knows that you are easier to deal with; you are younger.

ANGELO'S VOICE: (*Now again in a normal tone.*) Pia, Silvia.

AGATA: If you want, you can cover the well. The lid is right there.

SILVIA: Sure, we could...

AGATA: Then we wouldn't hear him that much.

SILVIA: (*Immediately regretting.*) No, no, let's not cover it.

ANGELO'S VOICE: (*Calm; too calm.*) Oh, Agata is there, as well, isn't she? I know she is. (*A silence; then a long, amiable, echoing laugh. His voice is now cordial and amused.*) You are good. There are times when I get angry, down here, but there are times when I have fun, too. You are fantastic. Your joke is fantastic, I have to admit it. You are good. Even in my country they once pulled a joke like this; then it all ended with a supper. It was a nice evening, eh, I still remember it. And the wonderful meal - I was there, too.

AGATA: (*Panting slightly.*) There. Did you hear him? What sort of voice was that?

SILVIA: (*Surprised.*) Calm.

AGATA: Do you know what that means?

SILVIA: What?

AGATA: *(Slowly.)* Terror. It's beginning. The chill of terror. *(With a strange sadness.)* He has realized that he is in danger, but refuses to admit it. He is trying to control himself and to control us.

ANGELO'S VOICE: My dear ones, you have punished me a bit, but I don't blame you - I deserved it because I was becoming arrogant. *(He laughs.)* My beard has grown thick - there wasn't a razor down here. Luckily, there were some bottles instead. I'll bring the unused ones up with me. *(He laughs.)* You better hurry up, or I'll empty your cellar and get really drunk. Do you mind if I sing? *(He starts to sing "Esevi uttu sehe"; but shortly his song becomes deprived of any passion.)*

AGATA: *(With a strange compassion.)* My God, he really is frightened.

(The song has stopped.)

PIA: *(Aggressive and distressed.)* Why are we doing this to him? Why?

AGATA: He said it himself: he was a little arrogant. I thought we'd all agreed about that.

SILVIA: *(Almost as if in a dream.)* But now it's enough: we'll let him come up now, won't we?

AGATA: *(Laughing.)* Yes.

PIA: Now! At once! At once!

AGATA: *(Laughing.)* Yes.

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Suddenly terrified, imploring, unrecognizable.)* Silvia... for God's sake, the rope... Throw me the rope, for God's sake... They want me to die... Your mother... she wants me to die in here. Hurry up, I have no strength left, I am going to faint. If I faint, I'll drown. Hurry up... Silvia, Pia. I'll leave, I'll go away, I'll do whatever you want. Don't let me die in here... For God's sake... *(He stops; there is a silence.)*

SILVIA: *(Suddenly starts to run. She takes the rope and carries it over to the well, struggling to untie various entanglements.)*

PIA: *(She runs as well to help SILVIA; they are now by the well, and they both stop.)*

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Suddenly transformed into a wild epileptic scream; completely inhuman.)* You murderers! *(Pause.)* You murderers! I'll come up and eat your hearts alive! I'll cut you all in pieces! *(Pause.)* I'll take you to court! I'll see you all hanged! Hanged! Hanged! Murderers!

PIA and SILVIA: *(Frightened, run away from the well; the rope has fallen from their hands.)*

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Continuing.)* You did it all together! Murderers! I'll make you pay for that, all three of you! It was the three of you to unhook the ladder. The three of you, the three of you! You did it all together!

AGATA: *(Almost to herself.)* It isn't true. It just happened.

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Now horribly raucous.)* Murderers! I'll make sure that you hang! Murderers! I'll eat your hearts alive! I'll cut you all in pieces! *(His voice is no longer a voice, but a kind of atrocious howling, mixed with convulsive babbling.)*

PIA: *(Terrified, forgetting to speak in a low voice.)* ...The lid! Let's put the lid back on, quickly!

SILVIA: He's climbing up... Oh my God. I am afraid...

PIA: Let's throw something... let's throw something on him... a stone...

(All the noise dies away first in a kind of a death rattle, then in heavy breathing. Finally, a silence sets in again.)

SILVIA: He has fallen.

AGATA: *(After listening for a moment.)* He's breathing. *(To the others, again with the same sadness as before.)* He can't climb up. He already tried to climb last night.

PIA: He tried?

AGATA: Yes, more than once; I've heard him. He can't get a good grip on the stones.

PIA: But as furious as he is...

AGATA: No. As the time goes by, his fury is increasing, but his strength diminishes. If he hasn't managed to climb by now... I don't think he ever will.

SILVIA: (*Her teeth chattering.*) But... what shall we do then?

(*A silence.*)

AGATA: (*In a very low voice.*) Nothing. There is nothing to do.

(*The light of dawn is getting brighter. It will soon be day.*)

SILVIA: But what will happen now?

AGATA: Nothing.

SILVIA: What do you mean, nothing?

AGATA: I am afraid that it's...

SILVIA: That it's... what?

AGATA: That it's too late.

SILVIA: Too late... What do you mean to say?

AGATA: Oh, I hope I'll never see him come out of there! It would be like seeing something frightful... crawl up out of the earth; a demon. He would really cut us to pieces; or he would denounce us just to see us hanged. All three of us. Nothing could save us then, do you understand?

SILVIA: What shall we do?

AGATA: (*Monotonously.*) I don't believe any more that he'll manage to come up again.

(*A silence.*) You two go in and try to eat something. I'll come in a moment. (*A silence.*)

PIA: (*Babbling.*) It is not my fault. I had nothing to do with it. I have done nothing...

AGATA: None of us has done anything. It just happened. (*A silence.*) It happened that he came here. Who asked him to come? It happened that the ladder slipped off the hooks. Nobody touched it; it happened by itself. And then he gets this idea that it's all our fault. What can we do to help him? This was just a strange chain of events. It was obvious that something was wrong here. There was such a confusion in the house, everything was out of balance. And it couldn't last. (*Pause.*) It was as if he had discovered a sort of root that

linked us to the earth, a piece of gut, a bloody navel - a string which he twisted around his fist and dragged us along by. We almost sprouted hair like goats and ended on all-fours. But it was all beyond our control. This whole thing... had to happen. And now it has happened.

SILVIA: (*Trembling.*) Mom, you knew what was going on. You could have stopped it...

AGATA: (*As if lost in her thoughts.*) No, I couldn't.

SILVIA: You realized long ago...

AGATA: And you didn't, I suppose? It just happened. Now we need someone here to remain calm and think. It's an ungrateful task and I'll take it upon myself. (*Losing control for an instant.*) Do you think that I am not afraid? (*Regaining control; whispering.*) We shall leave this place. It won't be long before the house and the well will both collapse. And as for the stranger that used to be here, everyone will think that he has departed; just as he came one day. Anyway, the two of you should go in.

SILVIA: (*With a scream.*) But I... I can't stand... This thing down there... I can't stand it...

AGATA: (*With suppressed vehemence.*) There are so many things that you can't stand. Fortunately, I am here to take that burden. Besides, in a little while he will calm down as well, because at a certain point, when things become inescapable, we regain our calm. (*Lost in thought.*) It will all be very quick. A dizzy spell - and the water, though shallow, will cover everything. And the surface will then be still again.

PIA: (*Distressed.*) Oh my God... Oh my God... Oh my God... I'm going away! I'm going away!

AGATA: That's fine, go. And you too, Silvia; the two of you should go. No one will hold you responsible.

PIA: I won't stay here a minute longer. My things are already packed. This house has always been a prison for me!

AGATA: Yes, you are right, my dear. You should go to Vienna. You should go out and dine in an evening dress.

PIA: Of course I'm going to! You are frightening me!

ANGELO'S VOICE: (*Suddenly.*) Throw her on the ground, tie her up, she's gone crazy! Pia, Silvia, don't let her commit this crime... She has always laughed at you; she has despised you! Please help me; I am feeling the chill of death. It was her: she is the one to blame. It's all her fault!

PIA: Yes, yes, it was her.

SILVIA: It was you!

ANGELO'S VOICE: You! You!

AGATA: (*Suddenly, almost shouting.*) All right, yes. It was me. I've been lying all this time.

PIA: It was you from the beginning. And you unhooked the ladder!

AGATA: Yes, I did it! I wanted to do it. This thing had to be put to an end. Like when a window keeps slamming at night. Someone has to get up.

ANGELO'S VOICE: No! Silvia, she did it out of jealousy! She was jealous of you!

AGATA: It could be. This man would have gotten tired of me pretty soon, and would have humiliated me. He would have preferred you, Silvia. It could be that I was jealous. (*Almost ironically.*) We were rivals. And as you see, I've won.

ANGELO'S VOICE: Silvia, she has killed your father! She has killed him more surely than if she had strangled him.

AGATA: Even that could be. He had cheated me and oppressed me so much. It was a long and sad show. And it's only now that I finally breathe. What a pity that you are dead now, buried down in Africa, my dear Enrico. You can't see how it all turned out.

PIA: You've always frightened me, you ugly, evil creature! You made everyone unhappy!

AGATA: And myself most of all. Perhaps I could have been better if there had been someone around who needed me. But no one ever did.

ANGELO'S VOICE: You've gave yourself to a man you never met, just like that, on a pile of goatskins!

AGATA: Yes.

ANGELO'S VOICE: (*Getting louder.*) And then you sent your sister-in-law to my bed!

AGATA: Yes.

ANGELO'S VOICE: (*Louder still.*) And then your daughter! All three of you!

AGATA: I could object to some details, but they don't matter: it is basically true.

ANGELO'S VOICE: All three of you! All three of you!

AGATA: Yes. And it was clear this couldn't last. (*A silence.*) This thing will end today.

SILVIA: (*Hoarsely.*) Mom.

AGATA: What is it?

SILVIA: (*She begins softly, but gradually gets louder.*) I can't go away and leave him there. I don't care about anything any more. I don't care about myself, or about you, or anyone else. I just want him to come up. I can't stand to live without him.

AGATA: (*Energetically.*) That's not true, Silvia. The two of you did nothing but follow after me; I dragged you into this. Perhaps I wouldn't have let you stay immune. I feel pity for you. (*Lowering her voice.*) And a little disgust.

SILVIA: (*Distressed.*) I want him to come up! When he calls me I want to leave everything else in the world. I want to obey him!

AGATA: Those are my words, not yours! It was me who infected you.

SILVIA: I want him to come up! I'll throw myself down into the well! (*Crying and throwing herself forward.*) Mom, in this very moment I could... I could be carrying... I could be...

AGATA: (*Grabbing her and shaking her desperately.*) Shut up, you idiot! You are out of your mind, you are imagining things. "You may be pregnant", is that it? Well, that happens to women, and you are a woman. I was pregnant with you and disgusted at the fact. (*Pause.*) It can't be true, Silvia. You are imagining things, you are hysterical. Ah, why do you exist; why did you have to grow up? You were so sweet... why didn't you die that summer when everybody expected you to? (*Controlling herself.*) Be quiet and go away. (*In a voice that gradually builds up with subdued authority.*) There is nothing here but disorder and real chaos. I am the only one to have a clear head and think. I am calm. And I take all the burden. He has finally understood everything by now; we have

understood it as well. There is nothing else to say or do; it's too late now. This thing will end today. *(A silence.)*

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Suddenly, with unexpected calm and almost melancholy.)* Agata, I'd like to talk to you.

AGATA: *(She too is suddenly quiet and tender.)* I can hear you, Angelo. Speak.

(A silence becomes very present.)

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Still with the same kind of melancholy.)* Agata, does it mean then that I have to resign?

AGATA: *(With the same tone.)* I have resigned myself as well.

ANGELO'S VOICE: It was you who wanted all this.

AGATA: To be honest, I don't know. It seems to me that I was only obeying.

ANGELO'S VOICE: Am I to stay down here and die?

AGATA: *(Lowering her voice.)* Angelo, I am afraid it has to be that way now.

ANGELO'S VOICE: It hurts me, it frightens me to have to die down here in this darkness. I was still young.

AGATA: Do you think this is any less painful for me?

ANGELO'S VOICE: I beg you, Agata. I implore you to come and free me. You have in your hands everything that is good and pleasant in this world for me.

AGATA: I would like to free you as well.

ANGELO'S VOICE: Then why don't you do it, Agata? You used to like to be with me and obey me.

AGATA: That's true. Nothing else mattered to me.

ANGELO'S VOICE: Without me, your life will be nothing again.

AGATA: That's true; nothing.

ANGELO'S VOICE: Then why don't you get me out of here? Why are you doing this?

AGATA: Because... I was frightened and I could no longer stand it. Only worse things would have happened if this was to continue.

ANGELO'S VOICE: We could have changed everything.

AGATA: Except for me. I wouldn't want to change, either. A drop that has fallen, a thought that has been thought, remain so throughout eternity. *(Pause.)* Angelo, there is no way we can go back. I could not stand to see you leave.

ANGELO'S VOICE: But you are now committing the worst crime of all.

AGATA: I had to. To bring us peace again!

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Still calm.)* You'll never find peace again! Poor Agata. You'll be damned and cursed for all eternity!

AGATA: That's precisely what gives me peace: to get what I deserve.

ANGELO'S VOICE: *(Almost fading away.)* Poor Agata... Poor Agata...

AGATA: I don't believe in divine mercy: it would only confuse me, it would turn me into a black stain in the pool of light. I love my burden. *(Pensive.)* There is a point in life at which we chose what are we going to be. It happens at the very beginning. when nothing yet exists and everything is free. At this point the eye turns to give thanks and rejoice; or it turns the other way. That's where everything starts. And there is always afterwards a kind of peace in being what we are and in being it completely. The condemned man has that joy, the joy of accepting. *(Pause.)* Silvia, one day - you were this big - the goat-boy brought a lovely kid here to be killed. *(As if seeing it.)* He slit its throat over there, on the stone, thrusting the knife right in. He skinned it, he slit it open and he took out the intestines. There was a basin of steaming black blood nearby. I was helping the goat-boy, and my hands were all red. The kid's eyes were still open. Suddenly, I turned around... *(Really frightened.)* and you were there, Silvia, there at that door. You must have been standing there for the last half-hour! You were stiff and pale, and your eyes wide open! You had never seen anything like that before; you were too small! You began to cry: what a terrible cry that was. And I couldn't comfort you, I didn't know what to do. At first I couldn't even embrace you because of my hands. You cried for hours, convulsive. I was begging you to stop, I was promising you the most incredible things, I was down on my knees, I was telling you that it wasn't true... Then you finally fell asleep. It was now my turn to tremble. It was my turn to cry; I was

sweating, I was frightened. I don't remember exactly what it was that I promised to myself, what it was that I cried out! It was all with the same thought: not you! Not the baby; the baby must stay clean. The baby must be safe. The red hands, the basin filled with blood, the death, the flesh, the dirt, and the sweat should be mine alone. Mine should be this punishment... this odor of the beast... and the well. My child should be out of that, safe and far away. Go away, Silvia. And if you are really... *(She comes closer to her daughter and caresses her tenderly.)* I was a bit disappointed to see you grow and change. We always hope that our children... that everything will be better for them. That's what children mean. *(She interrupts herself.)*

(All three of them turn towards the well. A noise - the sound of panting, of scraping fingernails is coming from the hole.)

PIA: *(Screams like crazy.)* He's climbing up! He's climbing up! *(The noise is increasing, as if climbing up the well. It's becoming more desperate, much closer and enormous: a hand grasping the edge is expected to be seen at any moment. The three women keep looking, petrified. All of a sudden, there is a silence in that panting. No scream is heard, though. Then, a noise of a fall. Afterwards, a long silence.)*

(Strong, distinct, repeated honks of a horn are coming from the outside.)

PIA: *(Runs to the door and calls desperately.)* Edoardo! Edoardo! Come up here! Quickly! Come here!

(There is a longer pause; then the old EDOARDO appears in the doorway.)

SCENE III

EDOARDO: *(Entering.)* What is it?

SILVIA: *(Breaks into sobs.)*

EDOARDO: What happened?

PIA: *(Breathing heavily.)* Listen, you must be thirsty. Would you like to drink something? *(She repeats hysterically, almost screaming.)* Would you like to drink something? There. *(She points to the well.)* There. Draw yourself some water.

EDOARDO: *(Bewildered.)* Of course I'm thirsty; of course I am. *(Coming closer to the well, in a tone of lamentation - as someone who repeats the same things hundreds of times.)* I am getting too old to drag that broken-down truck back and forth in this heat. - Of course, I'm thirsty. *(He has reached the well, and automatically bends over to look down...)*

AGATA: *(Coming close to him; in a calm voice.)* Here you are. *(She is just behind him and hands him a glass of water that she has filled from the pitcher.)*

EDOARDO: *(Turns around and drinks it; he asks for more.)* What's happened?

AGATA: My daughter is leaving and my sister-in-law is going with her. Wait for them at the road. They are almost ready.

EDOARDO: *(Suspiciously.)* And what about their things?

AGATA: Later on.

EDOARDO: And what about you?

AGATA: I'll stay here.

EDOARDO: And the stranger?

AGATA: Gone away.

EDOARDO: *(Going.)* It's not only the sun, it's this air, this wind that burns right into you. *(To PIA and SILVIA.)* I'll wait for you at the road then. Don't be too long. *(He exits.)*

SCENE IV

AGATA: *(Suddenly, with a kind of rage, screaming.)* Go away!

PIA: *(Runs after EDOARDO.)*

AGATA: *(To PIA.)* Go away, the two of you! Leave me alone!

SILVIA: *(Runs out too, frightened; we hear her steps fade away.)*

AGATA: *(Stands listening. As soon as there is silence again, she runs to the well.)*

Angelo! Angelo! Angelo! Wait... *(She turns back frantically, grabs the rope and throws one end to the well.)* Grab hold of it! Come up! Angelo! Angelo! *(Gradually, her voice becomes detached in way.)* Angelo. Angelo. Angelo. *(She straightens up and remains motionless by the well; her hand lets go of the rope. She goes slowly to the window and to the door, bolting them both. The room is now dark. She calmly sits down by the lamp which is still burning on the table. She quietly talks to herself.)* Come, my dear Angelo. Come even to punish me, if you want. We have all the time in the world now.

(An echo of the horn can be heard from very far away. Then again the silence sets in.)

AGATA: It's just the two of us now, and everything is simple. Of course you will not be able to leave, and neither will I. So we'll go on calling each other and fighting through all eternity.

THE END

June - August, 1998