

THE W. OF BABYLON
A Baroque Burlesque in Two Acts
Music by Charles Wuorinen
Libretto by R.C. Bruce

The setting of this opera is the small chateau, La Foret, in the departement of Gers, in southern France, owned by the Marquise of Babylon. The events unfold between Wednesday afternoon and Thursday afternoon, in the summer of an indeterminate year around 1685 A. D., that is, during the reign of the Emperor K'ang Hsi.

THE CHARACTERS

ELEANOR DE MONGUILHEM, MARQUISE DE BABYLON - A woman of some beauty, much charm, and great intelligence; in her middle forties.

COUNT ROBERTO ANTONIO DONNELLO - A man of no beauty, great charm, and some intelligence, her cousin; in his middle forties.

PRINCESS Wu TSE TIEN - A young woman of great beauty, some charm, and not much intelligence; about eighteen.

BARON JEAN DELAGE DU BOIS - A young man of great beauty, not much charm, and some intelligence; in his early twenties.

CLAUDINE - The Marquise's majordomo; in his middle thirties.

AGAMEMNA - The Marquise's personal maid; in her middle thirties.

ALBERTINE - The Marquise's footman; in his early twenties.

SUCRETIE - The Marquise's downstairs maid; about eighteen.

THE SPIRIT OF MORAL SENSIBILITY - An *agent provocateur*.

ACT I

Scene 1. *The salon. In the flickering initial lighting, the Marquise is seen reclining on her chaise lounge. She holds a large, ornate hand mirror before her and is consulting it. Slyly she looks over her shoulder to see if the audience is seated.*

Marquise

[Looking sadly a way from the mirror, but not now toward the audience] Oh, life on the Grand Phantasma goes so fast *(She again considers herself in the mirror, this time tracing the lines on her face with her fingers.)* Ah, Norrie... Norrie... Norrie. Are you, then, time's encomium? Is your whole life become another sorry contrafactum? It has all ceased being glory to me.

(Suddenly, she starts up, pretending for the first time to be aware of the presence of her audience. She looks toward it. The stage instantly floods with light.)

(Directly to the audience) But you are here to be amused,
And I must not, by such musing,
Earn your indignation.

There! *(She hurls the mirror offstage, where it shatters with an enormous sound, as if a plate glass window had broken.)*

... so much for self-indulgent self-examination! *(She pauses to look disarmingly at the audience.)* I am your heroine.

I joyfully celebrate
Everything of the sensate,
With sex my particular pleasure and will.
While *all* men are grist for my mill,
My gratification is best achieved with strong-thighed youth.

By now I tire of multiplying their mere number.
I shall focus on just *one* boy I hope to enjoy, at least through a whole summer.

(She makes a "V" with her fingers.) In hoc signo vinces!

Vivat, vivat, vulva triumphalis!
You were the first image of our world!
Before man conceived himself as beauty's object,
He knew all wonder was within you!
All symbols were of you, you were all art!
Great, Ever-Rising, Ruling Phallus, Hail!
I salute Thee, as Thy Godhead has so oft saluted me!
You penetrate from the known to the unknown!
You fill the void: ev'ry man's identity and future!
I have spent my life making images of You, my God.

(During her aria, the Marquise has moved Stage Front. Now, she returns as participant to the action of the play.)

Scene 2. *The same. The Marquise, coming forward, introduces the four servants, who have gained Stage Front Left unobserved. They are lighted thus: first, Claudine; then Agamemna (it seems, at first, they are singing to each other); then Albertine, who answers Claudine; and Sucrette, who answers Agamemna.*

Marquise

Now, I shall introduce to you
The unnatural lower orders of this chateau.
Claudine...

Claudine

You conquer now, my dearest, my heart's longing,
Asserting your inflexible dominion unto me.

Marquise

Agamemna ...

Agamemna

(With menace) I shall drown you, my supplicant beloved,
In the limitless flood of my juices.

Marquise

Albertine ...

Albertine

(to Claudine) I conquer now, my dearest, your heart's longing,
Asserting my inflexible dominion unto you.

Marquise

Sucrette ...

Sucrette

(to Agamemna) You shall drown me, my masterly beloved,
In the limitless flood of your juices.

Claudine and Albertine

Ours be the primal motions of the world,
The rhythmic thrusts and counter thrusts of Man
Who seeks a role beyond the Self and his release into eternity.

Agamemna and Sucrette

We shall lick and kiss to warmth and life,
Once more, the pulsing mouths of our renewing fires
'Til they release their passions and we fall satiate upon them. *[The four servants, each twosome encoupled with arms, exit Stage Left, still singing. The Marquise, annoyed, looks after them, claps her hands, and they fall silent.]*

Marquise

(To audience, in explanation) Being servants, they must be content
With duets of mercifully abbreviate extent.

Scene 3. *The same. The Marquise moves back into the salon proper, positioned so she may either look out into the garden through the French doors at Stage Left or through the large window, showing another part of the garden and the fields beyond, at the rear of the salon.*

Marquise

Now, thankfully, shall higher sensibilities be put in play. First ... *(The Marquise condescendingly gestures, inviting the audience to observe.)* Count Roberto Antonio Donnelo. *(The light falls upon the Count, nobly though a little shabbily dressed, pacing anxiously to and fro in the garden- peering repeatedly Stage Right into the fields. He is clubfooted and scrapes about, holding in one hand an obviously plastic bush.)*

(To audience) A distant cousin ... pampered by lechery.

He, for the moment,
Loves, but is despised by... *(The Marquise turns and grandly indicates)...* the Princess Wu Tse Tien. *(The light now illuminates, through the large window, the Chinese Princess, elaborately and exotically dressed and carrying a bow.)*

(To the audience, turning away from the window) That yellow bird of passage, unexpectedly guested here,
She intends, on ludicrous embassy to the Bishop of Leeds, toward Yorkshire. *(Turning back toward the window)*

See ... she returns from hunting in my muskeg, with my radiant, though beggarly, beloved...

(The Marquise lovingly gestures. Through the same window the light now falls upon the Baron-in courtly hunting regalia and standing not far from the Princess.) ... the Baron Jean Delage Du Bois!

(To audience) My maturity's beauteous youthful fancy!
His forwardness in arms does not, as yet, extend to me...
Still, a few days steeped in my lap's luxury
Will cripple his resistance. *(She once more looks toward the window and indicates the Baron.)* Only
noblesse oblige, I'm sure,
Enables him to endure
Her non-Caucasian company.

(During the Marquise's introduction of the Baron, he and the Princess have pressed close to each other; their hands clasp and they gaze intently into each other's faces, and begin to move slowly past the window-view into the garden Stage Left.)

(Badly shaken) Oh! What treacherous business is this?
Their hands joined in guilty complicity together.

(In quick-rising anger) By Saint Dionysius! I think we are due for an ugly change in the weather!

(The light darkens on the salon and on the area seen through the window. The Marquise remains by the window, clenching the draperies.)

Scene 4. *The garden. The Baron and the Princess are now in the garden, still holding hands. They sit down on the marble bench. The Count has darted at their approach into the background and raised up the bush before him: he remains unobserved by them. The Baron and the Princess fondle gently and kiss.*

Baron

We know by spoke and unspoke dialogue we love, and truly so...

Princess

Faithfully through all eternity in eclogue we'll go,
Hand in tender interracial hand, blissfully bounding
To th' intrepid golden trumpets sounding,
As graces dances about us and cool zephyrs blow.

Baron

(He sinks to his knees) In heated sylvan glades
Of conjunct bamboo shades
Thou richly gifted fair,

Who cannot... *(He pauses, and questions.)* ... dare? ... bear? ... declare?

Princess

(without hesitation) Spare.

Baron

Who cannot spare
A moment's selfish joy
To congress with love's *(Again he pauses, and suggests alternative.)* ... toy? ... cloy? ... alloy?

Princess

Boy.

Baron

To congress with love's boy,
And rapturously embrace

The sought-for pleasures of the sacred ... *(He hesitates once more and wonders.)* ... place? face? ... trace?

Princess

Race!

Baron

The sought-for pleasures of the sacred race
Of lovers with emflambent hearts,
Before age stiffens--life ... *(He reveals some assurance, because it seems the only possible choice, but is still a little tentative.)* ... departs?

Princess

Of course!

Baron

Then, let's coda this convention and da capo by yon tree. *(He gestures toward the hedge and the tree towering beyond.)*

Princess and Baron

In heated sylvan glades
Of conjunct bamboo shades,
Thou richly gifted fair,
Who cannot spare
A moment's selfish joy
To congress with love's boy
And rapturously embrace
The sought-for pleasures of the sacred race
Of lovers with emflambent hearts,
Before age stiffens-life departs.

(Then walk arm in arm toward the hedge opening Stage Left. The garden darkens.)

Scene 5. *The salon. The rising illumination reveals the Marquise in exactly the same position by the rear window as she was at the end of Scene 3.*

Marquise

(Sadly) Holding hands... they were holding hands.
(Distraught) But would he dare ... here,
Beneath my disapproving shrubbery, go truffling about in hers?
Oh, God!
I know she will come to spasm In forbidden
Knowledge of my beloved Jean.
(Resolutely) Plunged be I into that warm, delicious bath
Of all-tormenting jealousy and Scorned Woman's wrath!
(In great rage) By great Polyprepostronothermokliptylinikifitipsyganastaletronomiou's
Ruddy prepuce,
I shall have revenge!

Scene 6. *The same. The Marquise claps her hands three times and Sucrette appears and curtseys.*

Marquise

Go, fetch that pernicious golden casket confided me by my Portuguese toxicologist.

(Sucrette exits Stage Right scampering and immediately reappears with a small golden casket. The Marquise opens it and elevates a small vial. She then takes a large goblet from the sideboard and pours part of the vial into it.)

Now, let Arsenicia's distilled bloom
Hustle her Imperial Jaundice to her sulphuric doom.
Place this on the console near the Yellow Peril's room.

(Sucrette exits Stage Right with the large goblet. The Marquise, still holding the vial, looks from it to the sideboard, on which there is another, smaller goblet.)

I wonder if all that rice she eats could act as an antidote? *(The Marquise selects another vial from the casket and pours it into the smaller goblet.)*

(Craftily) This shall supplement the other brew.
Together let them serve as final solvents of her cow'rdly hue:
And Spectrify her Yellow Orient to Occidental Blue.

Scene 7. *The garden. The Count is now fully illuminated in the garden. He moves toward the audience somewhat, still holding in his hand the bush he had been hiding behind. He glances once or twice toward the hedge opening.*

Count

(to audience-with bonhomie) Ragazze! Ragazzi!
My hugeous lust, my monstrous machine and matchless mastery
Of all techniques and uses of lascivity
Have let me lead ten thousand... *(proudly)* *ten thousand!* furry creatures of Italy And France to water by means
of the potency
Of my divining rod.

As be my certified accountant, God! *(He becomes somewhat reflective. In his following remarks, he looks toward the house.)*

My involuted cousin ... if she would but *try*
My properly animal yet always lovesome sexuality...
The answer to *her* soul's insoluble puzzle
Stands here! In me and my famed bull-puzzle! *(He pauses again, and his face lights with a visionary smile.)*
But then ... in delightful, awful, unexpected measure
Came *love* -- whose pains and perils spoil all forms of pleasure.
But the Yellow Princess has rejected me, as husband or as lover...
And thus I skulk about behind this cover...

(In frustration, he brandishes the bush. He turns to face the hedge and sees, at that moment, the clothes of the Princess and the Baron being thrown on top of the hedge.)

Oh, my warriors! *(Rushing Toward the hedge and trying to part a spyhole.)*
They're stript to elemental armor,
Loins ungirt for coming encounter.

(JANIZARY MUSIC)

(Failing, he rummages about in the shrubbery for a stepladder-which he finds and quickly erects. With a great clatter, he positions it against the hedge and clambers up to peer over.)

Battaglia! Battaglia! To arms! Mars to the fore! `Bella' is quite rightly both for beauty and for war. The General leads the assault; his aids-de-camp swag along behind. (Aside) (The General is scarcely of imposing stature-my cousin will be disappointed.)

Tremble and weep, defenders! Now surges forth the general, engorged with rage. Attackers, try to broach the castle keep. Bastion battered, bashed, blasted. The Great Wall falls! The swordsman now belabors wildly about. The motion blurs my eyes. Piteous cries and the defendress is clapt to the wall. Impaled! Nailed fast! Skewered! Run through! *(Aside)* (Not really, considering it's a penknife.) What sanguinary slaughter!... He rides too hard... too fast. What? Already? The battle comes too quickly to a head. Her army was not emptied; scarcely tapped. *(Aside)* Ah, the course of true love is never smooth. His bankrupt bugle sounds retreat!
(Throughout the "battle" in greater and greater agitation, the Count has been rocking the ladder until, at his final words, it topples down and he falls off. Perspiring, he concludes.)

Poor Baron ... only once! Why do I sympathize?
However ill-gained, he gained the cherished prize. *(He pauses, during which the Marquise, in the unilluminated salon begins,)*

Marquise

(Declaiming) Droop, decline, and decaying die,
Thou gaseous immensity, from pathic shame:
To my tragic Cosmos sun no more, in purpose or in name:

Count

(With mischievous resolution) But kindness bids me swift as leopards go

To my poor cousin, who none of this must ever, ever know! *(He speedily tramples through the Garden to the French doors leading to the salon.)*

Scene 8. *The salon. The Marquise is seated on the chaise longue lovingly evaluating her tragic fate: the betrayal represented by the Baron and the Princess holding hands. The Count has lurched through the French doors and pauses listening to her conclusion.*

Marquise

Today I abrogate thy warmth, thy light, thy reign.
Alone in my new Universe, I revolve 'round Sorrow.

(The Count brings a chair close to the chaise. The Marquise looks at him for the first time.)

You! I'm sure you have not gimped hither to offer me commiseration!

Count

(Eagerly...brokenly) The Princess... the Baron... the most scabrous betrayal that ever there was.

Marquise

(Calmly) I know all...

Count

(Amazed) You know ... ?

Marquise

(With complete assurance) Of course! I saw them holding hands.

Count

Holding... *hands?*

Marquise

You chortle over the exactions of my anguish?

Count

No... No... over their irrelevance. *(The Count bends over and whispers the whole sequence of events in Scene 7. The Marquise's eyes widen, but she is not upset. The Count concludes and they sit in silence for a moment. Consolingly, he rests his hand on her knee. Presently he speaks.)*

Where now, dear cousin, where now your chilling rage,
As did in other times intemperate our stage?

Marquise

Imaginings are always more painful than realities--
Whatever they turn out to be.

Count

(Not wanting to deal with understanding her remarks)
I cannot believe you really love the Baron.
For you, it is all so much *déjà vu*.

Marquise

Do I love the Baron? Can I love him? Let us say I will to love him.

Count

(Aside) Thy will be done.

Marquise

Because I will an emotion shouldn't I feel it - if I want to? Why should I be denied the glorifying experience of suffering from jealousy and jeopardized love merely because my emotions are self-induced? *(The Count takes his head in his hands, and wags it about.)*

Count

Another of your incomprehensible harangues.

Marquise

(Ignoring his remark) I think I know how to disaffiliate
The Baron from his trans-Himalayan mis-mate.
I will provide new partners to reduce them to carnal incoherence.
They may thus learn how easily lust's anonymous interference
Destroys fidelity.

Count

And...?

Marquise

And in the resulting climate of whorish cynicism we'll net them in. *(The Marquise bends over and whispers into the Count's ear. Horror spreads over his countenance, and he almost starts up. Then a smile appears.)*

Count

Monstrous enterprise...
But before we this dark fantasia mount...
I'm sure I yet can bring my Princess to account.

Marquise

You show at times aptitude for mindless optimism...
But I, too, should one final chance accord *him*. *(The Marquise leaves the room through French doors at Stage Left and enters the garden. The Count remains seated and the light darkens on him as it illumines the garden. As she exits, she says.)*

I must remember to remove the poisoned wine,
Lest it abort my Grand Design.

Scene 9. *The garden. The Marquise moves grandly into the garden. The Baron is seated on the marble bench, absorbed in a book. The Marquise, with open clutching arms, passionately advances upon the Baron who recoils at her furious approach and leaps atop the bench.*

Marquise

(Declaring, as she looks up at him) Thou art Apollo! Consummate lover, consummate! Love me, in return, as I love you--eternally.
Marry me!

Baron

(Denying her, rhapsodically) Love will not heel to will's demand!
It must spring up tempestuous, passionate,
Unheralded, unknowable, inevitable as fate!
Beyond your age, I spurn your very nature. *(as if settling the entire matter)* Furthermore, I love... a *ferne Geliebte*...
Surely you find understandable
The irresistible
Call young flesh Makes to young flesh?

Marquise

(She grimaces) Of course. But as I am --older--I am also vastly richer.
Attend the call ageless money makes for your ambitious flesh.
Think on Versailles. See... *(She limns the prospect in the air.)*
Royalty the game!
Fame
The aim!

Baron

(Tempted, he gazes off into the dream, but soon recovers himself) Money may be ageless, but Versailles could scarce have forgot,
Though you be sufficient old, your name and fortune are not.

Marquise

My child, you'll find that, new or old,
Versailles remains responsive to my gold.
(Changing her tone to one approaching supplication) I only wish I had more, Jean, to pour
Out at your feet.

Baron

(Offended) You talk as if I were set up at auction!

Marquise

(Reasonably) Buying love is far more self-satisfying
Than risking earning it from others' variable affection

Baron

(Turning on her) However obtained,
Love for you is just a body count in bed!

Marquise

(Realizing she has gone too far) Though long abused to wickedness and from goodness estranged, I now--you *must* believe-- live *only* for the possibility of change.
If kindness were not so bourgeois, I'd beg you to be kind.

Baron

(Outraged) I cannot be an incarnation of your egotoxic will.
Omnivore!

Marquise

(In full repentance) I see now, Jean, emotions and affections outlive
All the corruptive workings of the cognitive.
I want so to feel!
I want so to be real! *(She almost sobs.)*

Baron

She that was given to pleasures, that dwelt carelessly, that in her heart said, 'I am, and there is none beside me,' she is cast down! Drunk with the wine of her fornications! Babylon is fallen! *(Confident, rejoicing over her defeat, the Baron leaps from the bench and exit-stalks Stage Left. The Marquise looks after him and turns toward the house.)*

Scene 10. *The salon. The Marquise slowly reenters the salon. She is not as light-hearted as before; indeed, perhaps, there is the play of pain about her features.*

Count

(Somewhat disturbed by her manner and compassionate) You seem to have been deeply affected ...

Marquise

I am shattered ... in a way. Oh, not that what he *said* mattered--
(with more understanding of why the encounter's residue troubles her) It was that outpouring of emotion...
Though my feelings, of course, were completely unfelt,
Their expression seems to have given them life within me. *(She pauses and then, as if to comfort herself, speaks directly to the Count, moving toward him.)*
But what of your bootless suit to Her Imperial Slant-Eyed Sex?
Go! Stress your obvious pathetics.
Urge her abrogate ev'ry possible law of eugenics.

(The Count resolutely rises, goes to the French doors and enters the garden.)

Scene 11. *The garden. The Princess is shown seated on the bench where the Baron had been in Scene 9. The Count impetuously hurls himself through the garden and prostrates himself at her feet.*

Count

(Panting) Principessa de gloria!
Principessa de gioia!
Your beauteous yellowness scorches like the sun at noon!
(He sways back and forth on his knees, clutching heart.)
The mad discouragement of my blood brings on a swoon.

Princess

(Calmly, but with rising irritation) Please, Count, please!
Your aging bodily case repels; your manner scarce enchants.
For this I had to come to France?

Count

France? Bah! Let me bear you off in bridal triumph to Italia!

Princess

Where?

Count

Italia! Italia! Italia!
The fount of Western thought and humanism!
Canvas of art and seed of song and seat of moral dualism!
Here all the Great Ones lived; here culture's sacred home./

Michaelangelo ... Machiavelli ... Dante ... Titian ... Galileo ... Monteverdi ...

(The Princess shakes her head wonderingly at these names. The Count grows more and more grandiloquent.)

Moise et Aron ... Abraham and Isaac ... Castor and Pollux ... Shakespeare ... Wotan ... Isolde ...

Princess

Those names are meaningless to me. They have a quaint and alien sound, And may enjoy barbarian renown...

Count

Ignore *Italia!* Consider this instead:
The ancient greatness I'd bring our nuptial bed.

(The Princess smiles)

Count of Pooleo, Baron of Lianioni and of Jesi,
Suzerain of Speluchi and Monte Bomboloni.

Princess

(Beginning to smile again) Count! *Basta, basta!*
All your titles sound like types of pasta.
Tell me, instead, if great wealth supports your blatancy?

Count

Alas, only proud mediaeval poverty.
My family demesne is vast, but heavily entailed.
We have olive orchards...
When they grow, we grow oats, kohlrabi and kale ... zucchini ... turnips *(The Princess begins to laugh, softly, behind her fan,)* ... and ... er. . . . radishes. We also raise chickens.

Princess

Oh Count, spare me your sorry catalog of less is more,
Your pride of nothing,
Your old man's enchantment with the minor.

Count

Then scorn my envelope and all I am ancestral!
Despise my shaving in matters agricultural, Artistic or intellectual,
I still proudly hail as true
(Achieved by a magnificent part not now visible to you)
My mastery of a folk art I make *professional*. I speak of the pleasures of the animal-sexual. *Principessa!*
I know I can kindle to reciprocal salacity
Every throbbing ventricle of your young body.
That is why I so hard press my suit upon thee,
As it now so hard presses mine upon me.
Give it me! *(The Count grabs the Princess' foot and begins rapturously kissing it. She attempts to snatch it back.)*

Princess

A podiatrist yet!
Forfend Count! Let me be!

Count

Be mine
Divine!

Princess

No! No! No! No! No! No! No!

Count:

Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

Princess

Stubborn old man. Let me give my 'no' in an idiom harder to ignore;
And lay my uninflected non-Indo-European answer squarely at your door.
(With a little dextrous application of kung-u, the Princess twists the Count off his slavering knees and sends him flying through the French doors at Stage Right, where he falls flat on his ass before his cousin, seated decorously in the chaise lounge. The Princess exits Stage Left through the hedge. The garden stays lighted.)

Scene 12. *The salon. The Marquise gazes compassionately down at her cousin, sprawled on the floor.*

Marquise

Goodness... Do I take this to mean you failed to find the chink in her armor?

Count

Yes!

Marquise

And we proceed with our imposture?

Count

(Scrambling up) Yes!

Marquise

I will prompt and costume our actors and then win over that grotesque Asiatic.
You shall convince the Baron that
Royal Favor will soon be automatic.

(The Count exits Stage Right.)

Scene 13. *The same. The Marquise claps her hands twice and Agamemna appears. She is dressed simply, severely, and is taciturn almost to the point of discourtesy. She speaks--when she does--slowly, reluctantly.*

Marquise

Ah, charmless Agamemna -
Darest thou metamorphosis?

Agamemna

Huh?

Marquise

In this world where anyone might just as well be someone else,
Would not you enjoy being *something* different?
I am outraged against *La Princess Jaune!*
She has exchanged *fricatives* with the Baron!
Here in my chateau!

Agamemna

The worst crimes are always committed in the home, Madame La Marquise.

Marquise

Of course, my child, none must know it better than you. But forget your lugubrious and disordered past. Joy... fulfillment...transcendence...

(Agamemna is expressionless. The Marquise reacts to this nonreaction briefly and resignedly goes to the sideboard and takes from within it a long, elaborate wooden box, which she extends to Agamemna.)

This is my mandate for her debasement.

(Agamemna opens the box and, in spite of herself, lets out a chortle of delight, reaching into it and fondling the invisible contents.)

Agamemna

(For an instant forgetting herself) But when shall I enjoy it?

Marquise

In men's regalia, you shall become the noble Briton, o'Cunbr, offspring of the great Bishop of Leeds. It is in embassy to him she journeys for her Mandarin Father.

Agamemna

How far into China am I to go?

Marquise

As far as *it will* go! Plunge, plunge far into the interior! I want her Middle Kingdom ravaged!

Agamemna

(Muttering as she cradles the box) I'll rend her limb from limb...

Marquise

(Making the sign of the Pentagram-but affectionately-almost.) Begone, thou awful Dorian criminal!

(Agamemna exits.)

Scene 14. *The same. With a single clap of her hands, the Marquise summons Claudine. He has a few, and then only slightly, effeminate mannerisms; he is not a caricature.*

Marquise

Could you, in the shadowed fastness of a curtained bed,
Attain nobility?

Claudine

(Startled) But...but, in what connection, Madame?

Marquise

For reasons touching on the very footstool of the Throne of France, you must connive at Royal Masquerade. Become a Princess of the Blood! *(Claudine almost swoons and the Marquise instinctively reaches out for him and then, remembering herself, lets him reel on his own for an instant.)*

Claudine

What are to be the uses of my scarce counterfeit charms?

Marquise

To lead the Baron Delage to as many aspects of Ecstasy as your inverted aspirations will permit
Perform with inspiration!
Never allow the Baron to discover you are other than you seem. I demand full *penetratio*.

Claudine

(Trembling at the challenge and the conquest) Of course! My God! On every score, I shall outdo Woman. None will have ever surpassed me... (Claudine rushes off Stage Right and the Marquise looks after him and then exits through the other doorway Stage Right, as the light dims on the salon.)

Scene 15. *The garden. The Count and the Baron enter the fully illuminated garden through the opening in the hedge on Stage Left. The Count's arm is persuadingly around the Baron's shoulders.*

Baron

A Princess of the Blood concealed hereabout?

Count

The Royal Line is not entirely straight in her;
Still, she can call the King
'Cousin'-or something-
And give Royal Etiquette the lie
When they encounter daily at... Versailles!

Baron

Oh, God in Heaven, see how seraphic flames
Envelope in reiterated glory that name of names!
How comes she know me... ?

Count

Her second largest appetite is learning!
A year's close study of this op'ra bred this yearning.

Baron

Improbable.

Count

Er... a year or so ago she saw you near Bayonne.
She then determined to have your body for Her Own...
I mean jointly, of course...

Baron

Ah! You said Her Highness *saw me*. I had hoped... *(Turning to the Count and isolating his doubts)*
Do you know what a curse
This is... this beauty?

Count

Me?

Baron

Of course you don't, thwart and misshapen as you be;
But there is no joy for me in my beauty,
No magic in my youth.
I have always, since I can remember,
Been pursued by men and women for my face... and member!
But, I am more ... I *am* more!

Count

Please, Baron! Her Humid Royalty champs at the bit!

Baron

What of your unspeakable cousin? Isn't she jealous?

Count

Unspeakably!
But she'll do whatever's asked and, smiling through her tears, obey.
A Royal Command is not imparted to her every day.

Baron

True! Obedience is Oil of Royalty
Without which they always rust.
I, for my part, will do what I must:
Sacrificing true love selflessly.

Count

Her Highness must be introduced to you, outside Her Royal Frame,
But you will feel between the sheets the solid substance of Her Claim.

(The Count and the Baron exit by passing through the garden and around the house; they then are glimpsed through the salon window as the lights dim on the garden and brighten on the room.)

Scene 16. *The salon. The Princess and the Marquise enter from Stage Right.*

Princess

The son of the Bishop of Leeds in this petit chateau...
Seeking me... speaking of affinity... can it be so?

Marquise

It can and is!

Princess

It is a fabulous occurrence!

Marquise

He is a fabulist's delight! As you shall learn tomorrow.
Young, handsome, stalwart: manly in bone if not in marrow.
In acts of love possessed of inhumane size and inhuman staying power!
Ecstasy in his animal arms is measured by the sand and by the hour.

Princess

You say this O'Cunbr controls his powerful father?

Marquise

He has him in a veritable arm-lock of his will.

Princess

But I love another...*(She glances quickly toward the Marquise to see if she reacts to this and thus reveals awareness of her affair with the Baron: but the Marquise is serene and calm.)*

I am being trisected by this great opportunity...
My father... My beloved... My me.

Marquise

(Aside) After being impaled on the horn of Aagmemna
She'll be hectored by a far more provocative dilemma.
(To Princess) My dear...the call of young love *(she sighs mockingly)* I fully understand... But the conquest of O'Cunbr is the matter in hand.

(In answer the Princess goes slowly to the window Stage Rear and gazes out upward, as if at the sky)

Princess

Oh, lovely moonbird of Szechwan...
The skydrum powders the mountain with silken light.
Distant silver bells discourse softly with the night.

Black stormclouds thunder; winds beat down the spirits' spell.
A human master, drawing near, whistles you to his hands.
Trembling you perch there: only the silence understands.

Marquise

Divinité du Yangstze! Primal Radiance!
Think on your father. Get thee about his business!
Is not ten thousand years of familial success worth a soupeon of unhappiness?

Denied honors which are his right
at the Temple of Supreme Harmony,
You, you alone can restore him to his glory.

Princess

I will do what my Father's blood declares I must,
Though it may cost me Cupid's future trust.
(She rushes to the Marquise eagerly.)

Marquise

With as great a store of Wisdom as of Beauty are you blest!
In O'Cunbr's arms shall you awake to joy, thou Eastern soul, here in our West.

(Happily now, though still with lingering regret, the Princess returns to the window and adds a third stanza to her song.)

Princess

The heavens brighten! Imprisoned dawn slips from its well.
The sacred bones are cast for you; they prophesy:
'Love may offer wings, but destiny will never, never let you fly.'

Marquise

(Aside) Now shall my jealous, jealous mind be pacified and be returned to rest.
Our Yellow Primary is muddled and *Novissima* Whore *Est!*

Curtain

ACT II

Setting: The entire Act is played in the upper hallway of the Marquise's chateau. The bedroom of the Baron, Stage Right, and that of the Princess, Stage Left, each have two doors opening onto the hallway.

Scene 1. *The curtain rises to reveal the Marquise standing imperially in Center Stage alone. She half turns toward Agamemna who enters from Stage Left in men's clothing (vaguely clerical) with dildo case seen in Act I. Agamemna stands close to the Marquise, darkly, sullenly holding the dildo case.*

The Count now enters Stage Right and on his arm Claudine in regal drag. There is a suggestion of seductiveness about him as he keeps brushing up against the Count as she moves across the stage. The two groups, however, remain apart.

The Baron and the Princess now enter (simultaneously, slowly) separately, the Baron from Stage Right-closest to Claudine and the Count-and the Princess through Center Stage Rear-closest to Agamemna and the Marquise.

With great charm, the Marquise brings Agamemna toward the Princess. Agamemna makes a leg; the Princess inclines herself, but studies Agamemna with great curiosity.

The Count brings Claudine close to the Baron. The Baron performs such a low obeisance that the Princess, observing him out of the corner of her eye, is puzzled. Claudine, enjoying his role, slightly nods his head.

With a thunderclap, two cupids lower a huge view of Versailles, which serves to screen the Baron and Claudine and the Count from the others.

The Marquise, who has returned near the Princess and Agamemna, inclines herself toward them and rushes her speech.

Marquise

Now, new lovers, your perfect chance... (While they discuss the politics of harmony in France.)

(To Princess) Hie thee with your dour Episcopacy behind your Golden Door
And there, in dishabille,
Discover what it really means to *feel!*

(Agamemna grabs the Princess and drags her through the bedroom door Stage Right. The Marquise smiles beneficently on them and exits slowly Stage Left. The Count, peering around the edge of the view- Claudine and the Baron meanwhile merely gazing lovestruck at each other-sees them go, and signals the cupids to remove the view. It disappears.)

Count

They're gone! Now to your privates go you both as well.

(The Baron and Claudine, his arm around his waist, exit through the bedroom door Stage Right.)

(Almost as an aside to the Barons back) And learn he uses the French tongue far better than you'll ever tell.

(Exit. The stage stands empty)

Scene 2. *The Marquise and the Count rush wildly back on stage through their former separate exits. The Marquise goes to the wall of the bedroom into which Claudine and the Baron have vanished and, pushing aside a painting, reveals a peephole (which enables her to observe the activities in the bedroom). She is now seen to hold a small ivory baton and a score of the opera. The Count is situated at a similar peephole in the other wall, which conceals the Princess and Agamemna. He takes up a tablet and pencil and is as if a music critic.*

During this scene, at irregular intervals one, two, or three, or all four together-the voices of those behind the walls (Agamemna, Claudine, the Baron and the Princess) are heard singing the word: "Joy" or "Gioia" or "Freude" or "Kwaile" or "Joie." Sometimes they are tentative, or broad and ecstatic,

or sobbing, or in pain. Naturally, these ejaculations must be related both to the activities in the beds and the musical movement, so that, as the scene builds to the climax, they become more wholesome.

Marquise

(Conducting-she first raps her baton on the sideboard or on the chair) Messieurs: Into the

...ah...delightful...exposition of the subject. No counter exposition for Claudine, naturally.

Nice episode. Expert tonguing. Splendid phrasing.

Roll those hemisemidemi-quavers down the scale.

Groppo. Tremante. Arache. Vibrato. Portamento. Morbido.

A bene placito...

Claudine plunges down to sub-contra C and settles firmly in the minor key.

Claudine spans the subject's full octave. *(The Marquise peers intently into the peephole and then examines the score. Aside)* (Alas! Quite far from an octave! It is only a minor third.) All those ritardandos!

Count

(Writing) The Greek instrumentalist's performance, on her rare "Princess" oboe, is *frettevole*, con slancio.

Aspramente. Iratamente.

Fingering superb. Extraordinary command of double reed.

Now single tonguing, double tonguing, triple tonguing, flutter tonguing. Wild oboe modulations. Attempted imitation. Volente. Furioso. Fingering the bottom register. *(Aside)* (*Ars nova*, no doubt.) Heavens... Like Paganini the Greek now plays her instrument upside down!

(At a shriek from the Princess, the Marquise rushes to the Count's peephole, and he, dislodged rushes to hers.)

Marquise

(Now watching the Princess and Agamemna-gleefully) Since the Chinese are known to be unmusical

This added twelfth should prove quite painful-

To her ears.

Count

(Now watching the Baron and Claudine) Claudine had done all this and brought the ignobaronus along -

Without his sensing something missing... something added ... something wrong? *(At another piercing shriek from the Princess, the Count rushes back to "his" peephole; the Marquise and the Count jostle a moment, both trying to look through at the same time.)*

Count

(To Marquise) Another day. I'd like to squeeze your ring upon my finger...

I guarantee an engagement whose memory would linger. *(The Marquise looks at him with great interest for a moment and then returns to "her" peephole.)*

Marquise

(Conducting) Splendid *renversement*, Claudine. Inverted mordent. Subject in the dominant. Inverted, of course.

Oh, Claudine, I'd love to show you how that passage should be handled. Now begins the *Grosse Fuge*. Lento,

Moderato. Now Allegro. Vivace, Modus Lascivious. Good ostinato. Con gran gusto, Schwungvoll, Intrepido.

Polyrhythms! Frenetico. Marcato. Accelerando. Now, Focoso! Crescendo! Focoso, signori, focoso! Forte, fortissimo!

Now, Tosto. Piu Tosto. Tostissimo.

Count

(Writing) The Greek seizes a new stromento. Nun's fiddle? Stravagante! Tremendo! It outmeasures my entirety.

Attacca subito. Col legno. Energico. Con violenza. Stretto. Lutto-so. Agitato. Con brio. Con fuoco. Accelerando.

Affrettando. Precipitando... piu... piu... motto... motto... troppo... troppo... troppo.

Marquise and Count

Oh, Harmony and Melody, return, return to us-we scorn all dissonance.

Tonality, in whom we trust, provide a perfect, perfect cadence. *(The Marquise and the Count stagger backwards to lean, exhausted, against the walls.)*

Scene 3. *The Baron and the Princess reappear simultaneously through the separate bedroom doors they entered in Scene 1. They are dazed, but not transfigured. Their sexual experiences have, however, moved them beyond their former involvement with each other. Throughout this scene they murmur or sing, in echo of their unseen*

employment of the word in Scene 2, "Joy"-sometimes quietly, sometimes more assertively, often interrupting with it each other's brief statements, or those of the Marquise and the Count.

Baron

Joy... joy... joy!
New worlds unfold! Lubricity my sole contention!
I am released... transformed... reborn through Royal Copulation.

Princess

Joy... joy... joy!
With agonized, ecstatic wings I fly to love; rebound
In rhapsodies of hot delights... in lustfulness new found!

Count

Overhauled by raptures though you both may be...

Marquise

Stay them a moment to give truth that moment's scrutiny.

Marquise and Count

You have known the love which dares not speak its name-
Yet strangely manages conversions just the same.

Marquise

(To the Baron-with mockery) That was no crypto-Royal Female Personage whose intimacies you found subtler
Than any you'd experienced... it was Claudine, my salacious butler.

Baron

(Briefly emerging from his delighted reveries then shrugging his shoulders) Well... we're told the world's an
endless round of folly and deceit...
And any real distinction 'twixt Queen and Butler rests on glandular conceit.

Count

(Aggressively, to the Princess) And you ... so assiduously assaulted front and rear! May find it sacrilegious *l'èse
majesté*, I fear,
To learn the source of your debauch
Was - Agamemna - nor Bishop's son nor man as such.

Princess

(Startled, but quickly recovering) While I regret I did not indemnify my father 'gainst future political woes,
He would rejoice at all his former girl-child of Womanhood now knows...

Marquise and Count

(Astonished) Do you know what you have done?
Betrayed `true love,' and nothing won
Beyond a deviated orgasm or two.

(Claudine and Agamemna quietly open the rear bedroom doors and slip unseen through Center Stage Rear.)

Princess and Baron

(Sweetly, glancing but briefly at each other) We have gained ourselves, and false replaced by true,
We thus transcend our adolescent futures;
O'ercome love's limitations and our former nurtures.

(The Marquise and the Count are silent, regarding with curiosity the Baron the Princess. The latter, innocently and slightly bemused, gaze back at them.)

Marquise

Well...
Now that you have discovered sexual pleasure
is no greater
Because of
"True love,"
And that sexuality is an appetite
Delighting in its happy disregard of "right,"
Then entertain *(she indicates the Count)* our antique
Proposals.
Give us the chance to cap your liberate selves
With bells!

Baron

(Graciously-inclining toward the Marquise) Of course, Marquise.

Princess

(Graciously-inclining toward the Count) Of course, Count.

Marquise and Count

Now?

Baron and Princess

We will take a moment's recess
In tribute to newborn Venus:
Then shall our swollen lusts rise up again in spate,
And sweep you both away beyond your power to reciprocate.

(The Princess and the Baron-confidently, superbly-exit separately, as the Count and the Marquise gaze at each other in momentary astonishment and look after them.)

Scene 4. *The Count recovers himself and rushes over to the Marquise.*

Count

It's done.
Cousin,
We've won!

Marquise

The young man I sought so hungrily is mine...

Count

Where's your *élan*?

Marquise

I am having second thoughts about Jean.

Count

You are always having second thoughts...
Does this mean that you are not going to bed with him?

Marquise

I said nothing of the kind!
You are always fretful in the presence of a subtle mind.

(They exit together.)

Scene 5. *Onto the deserted and dimly lit stage, separately, from Center Stage Rear - moving slowly along the walls - come Sucrette and Albertine. They are deep in their Personal tragedies and unaware, at first, of each other.*

Albertine

Bitterly now my beloved scorn me, beloved another's, *noble* thrust.

Sucrette

Bitterly now has Perfidious Lesbos my sweet *white* form repulsed. *(Then see each other and move toward each other, consoling, touching.)*

Albertine

Amid this wealth of sorrows are we both rich in desolation... *(He tentatively reaches out and lightly touches her bosom.)*
Yet though thou be palpably Woman, I feel a palpitation.... *(He puts his hand to his heart.)*

Sucrette

(Touching his breast) Your heart? I feel a stoppage there - here *(Touches her heart)* for thee as well -
Though thou be amply Man - as your former lover used so oft to tell.

Albertine

Now that we know we truly love each other, let's change, let's change
to something two-sexed: something rich and strange. *(He looks toward the large goblet on the sideboard and reaches for it.)*

Sucrette

No! I witnessed wicked babylon transform it from *eau de vie*
To some Iberian poisonry.
Imbibe us this! *(She takes the small goblet and divides its contents into two paper cups taken from her pocket, one of which she hands to Albertine)*

Albertine

Thou cautionary paragon! This quaff be plighted troth to future strait-laced bliss. *(They link arms and drink together-then instantly, on their first sip, drop the cups and clutch their throats.)*

Sucrette

Intestinally besmirched by Babylon's perversity...

Albertine

I apprehend for us a fast-onrushing obsequy.

Sucrette and Albertine

With elegiac sackbuts the fatal hour now, now is struck;
Our souls do from their mortal clay too soon become unstuck. *(They begin, during this, to move about, almost involuntarily.)*

Albertine and Sucrette

(To audience) As fruit flies in late summer earthward dying tend,
We near what we must fear to be our dramaturgic end

(Totentanz of the Drosophilas)

(At this point they begin, separately, an agonized yet stately dance-bobbing and weaving up and down in circles around the stage. They continue to circle more and more widely until finally they literally buzz off stage, Left and Right.)

Voice of Marquise

(Offstage) Damn! Insects in the air-everywhere!

Scene 6. *The stage is fully illuminated as the four principals sweep on stage separately They arrange themselves in Center Stage the Baron beside the Marquise, the Count beside the Princess.*

Baron

(To Marquise) And thus, at last, Marquise, are we come together!
I'll fill to overflow the matrix of Magna Mater!

Marquise

(To Baron) Such boasts most often merely boast of inexperience.
I have proved capital punishment for half the headstrong youth of France.

Princess

(To Count) What shall I learn as I your fading sexual powers savor?
Does age atrophy, or quaintly alter love's rhapsodic flavor?

Count

(To Princess belligerently) You challenge me to lusty combat on this field of sexist war?
You've no idea, my green though yellow dear, of what's in store!

Scene 7. *Arm in arm the Baron and the Marquise and the Count and the Princess enter the bedrooms. Right and Left. Circumambulate the beds. During their progress, and just before they appear at the far bedroom doors, the beds collapse and the pictures in the hallway fall down. The stage is empty.*

(Congress Music)

Scene 8. *The Baron and the Princess reappear simultaneously from their respective bedroom (far) doors. The Baron is disheveled, his clothes half-undone, as if he had not had the strength to put them on properly. He is obviously exhausted and clutching weakly at the Marquise for support. The Marquise is cool and, as then say, collected. The Princess is in the same condition as the Baron, except that she now also drags her foot behind her, much as does the Count his clubfoot. She staggers, and is held upright by the Count, who looks completely in command.*

Baron

Twelve times the horn blew forth the summons:
He comes... he comes... he comes...

Princess

Twenty-seven times the gong was sounded:
And every time, though ever more feebly, she responded! *(The Princess and the Baron begin an endless, ecstatic rhapsodizing, address the Count and the Marquise, respectively. At times, the Marquise and the Count hold them off as they clutch at them. Toward the end of the scene, the lights on the Baron and the Princess dim-though they still sing-and moving Center Stage Forward the Marquise and the Count deliver their remarks.)*

Baron

Oh Good and Gracious Goddess of the Eternal Coming Forth! How dared I ever think you old! You were to me as Christ to Lazarus - the rigor not of mortis, but of life!

Princess

Great Master of the Skies! Celestial Master of the First Origin! God of Long Life! How dared I ever argue age and weakness 'gainst you! I worship you at your shrine of my extinction.

Marquise

(Sulking) I should by now have learned the lesson experience has taught so well: deficiency is expectation's *quid pro quo*.

Count

(Smirking) You found the young Baron lacking...

Marquise

Beyond the lacks of unformed youth?
Well... Yes.
Though I cried out again, again:
"No, no, I'll take no less than all to full excess!"
There was, in his short-winded thrusts, much less... much less.

Count

I, too, was left embezzled by *ars sexualis* in the Oriental vein.
She has considerable ambition, but too soon tired and then, peculiarly, went lame.

Marquise

I counted on their falling prey to post-coital loss:
The separate peace

Attendant on encompassing release.
But now they will want to marry us – as therapists and thaumaturgicals-
To care for them, instruct them and endow them with life-meaningfuls.

Count

After all *our* talk of marriage, *our* lovesick passion plays,
How can we not make sacramental these insubstantial lays?

Marquise

We must create some otiose
Obstacles they will find insurmountable.
We thus preserve integrity and, all lachrymose,
Hold luckless Fate accountable. *(By this time the Princess and the Baron, reanimate, determinedly move toward the Count and the Marquise. The Princess latches onto the Count's coat and, dragging her behind him, the Count exits Stage Left.)*

Scene 9. *The Baron throws himself at the feet of the Marquise. The Marquise looks down calmly at him.*

Baron

(Impassioned) Calliope! Paraclete! You arc the feast of life. *Verklärte Tag.* You are Divinities of incontinent flesh! Infinities of wisdom! Omniscient!

Marquise

(Correcting) Omnivorous, you once said.

Baron

Nothing said but can be gainsaid. Blindly, madly, I once rejected you. Forgiveness I implore. You are silent!
(Reproachfully) I know yesterday's *Ich... will... nicht!* pained you, but that was falseness spoken by a false child.

Marquise

What is true for you, or can you even tell?
Your earlier denial of my love in barbarous fashion?
Or today's excessive and consuming passion?

Baron

Let them both be truths! Let them both be lies!
All lies are merely truths disguised.
But what of you? Where is *your* everlasting love for me...?
Would saying you still love me be lying? *(The Marquise is silent. The Baron is momentarily taken aback by her non-response, but rushes on.)*
Then say the lie! And will not repetition Make it true?

Marquise

Implicate myself in deceptive practices? Never!

Baron

(Ignoring her statement) Unam Sanctam! Outside you I have no salvation. I have abandoned all pretenses to Versailles. I am content, nay overjoyed, to remain in this Arcadia-as your shepherd... your sheep... your goat... your little cow....

(The Marquise has looked away. She turns back and sees the Baron, fallen silent now and downcast. She moves toward him.)

Marquise

Ah! My ex-officio beloved
There is a large, though tawdry, obstacle...

Baron

What?

Marquise

Your poverty.

Baron

It didn't seem to trouble you before.

Marquise

Alas, 'twas love's profane madness that thus then spoke through me.
Now harken to the dicta of sacred sanity! Fill this room *(She indicates a level on the wall.)* to here with gold.
That is all I ask.

Baron

Aiiii ... fiendish Gods! Is that your final disposition?

Marquise

Alas, yes! *(The Marquise sweeps from the room. Stage Left, as the Baron-much crushed-his head sunk upon his chest exits Center Stage Rear.)*

Scene 10. *From Stage Right, the Count immediately reappears dragging the Princess who still clings to his coat. It is apparent that he has been thus dragging her throughout the entire chateau since their exit in Scene 8. He halts in Center Stage as the Princess, relinquishing her grip on him, throws out her hands to him, and heaven, in pathetic supplication.*

Princess

Magnificent Overcomer! All-conquering barbarous masterpiece!
Through you alone this immigrant can find release!
Without you I inhabit half a being.
I beg you, re-enslave me to your gigantic sex! *(The Count is taken aback at the intensity of her language.)*

Count

(Breaking in) Charming conceits, I'm sure. But are you, child, being wise.

In wanting to marry one you did previously despise?

Count

(Passionately)

I am still barbarian! I am still old!
I am still lame!

Princess

(Pedantically)

Biological determinism teaches that outbreeding...
Each year has yielded wisdom. There is no limpness
where it matters.

Count

I... my teeth are not my own. *(He shows her his teeth and gums.)*
They're made of wood and walrus bone.

Princess

The fish you are indentured
to does not require mastication.

Count

Well... yes. *(Gathering courage)* Although I hesitated to say so before... there are serious issues that render our union impossible.

Count

(pendantically)

First, you come from China. My family ...

Princess

(*passionately*)

Love knows no frontiers.

Count

But xenophobia does.
Second, you are crippled.

Princess

The effect of your white
magic in our bed of bliss.

Count

It smacked of caricature.
Third, you are... er...
Clearly yellow. My family...

Princess

Explain my complexion as a chronic liver ailment.

Count

They'd think you'd brought the plague.
Fourth, you are enormously rich.

Princess

Only an unnatural Italian would scorn living off his wife.

Count

(He has no answer to this.) Er...
Anyway,
Fifth, your eyes slant.

Princess

Western optick egocentricity.

Count

Sixth, if not biased there, you certainly are in your *beliefs!*
Idolatrous pagan!
I worship the One God!

Princess

He's really a troika. And since you worship three and I a thousand spirits, we can compromise on fifty.

Count

(In mock *enragement*) Blasphemy!
Until satisfied as to your every white, *Christian* bonafide
Never more cross my
sight!

Princess

Nevermore?

Count

No!

Princess

Never more?

Count

No!

(The Count exits Stage Left The Princess half rises to pursue him and then, hopelessly, collapses on the parquet.)

Scene 11. *The Baron, deep in gloom, shambles through the Center Stage Rear doorway. Walking slowly, he approaches the princess.*

Baron

Ironic it should be gold
Which prevents me from possessing all I hold
Most precious...

Princess

(His words dimly penetrating her despondency) Gold? The true bill brought against me is somewhat more substantive.

Baron

Than gold - that yellow Devil?

Princess

Don't use that word!

Baron

Devil?

Princess

(Now resigned to doom) Yellow.
No question of love or charm or worth;
Just every racist specificity of my birth.

Baron

Could we but transpose our qualities of race and wealth - we'd have the solution.

Princess

(She thinks for a moment and then electrically says, triumphantly) Solution?! Transposition?! Oh, Baron, I know exactly what to do
To castrate the dilemmas Donnelloni conjured up for me - and Babylon for you. *(They whisper silently together as the lights on them dim for a moment)*

Scene 12. *The stage becomes brilliantly illuminated as the Marquise and the Count enter together Stage Right arm in arm and the Princess and the Baron approach them with joyful resolution.*

Baron

Let this be a moment of high jubilation!
The Princess has achieved Love's Restoration,
And in his temple lit again the Lamp of Consecration.

Princess

(To Count) You have imputed China to me. It is now as nothing!
You are my only ancestor!
Abat Si-na! Vivat Italia!
As to my... color... this hideous conspicuity, *(She takes out ajar of cold cream and rubs it savagely into her skin.)* Messengers now scour Nubia for bleaches to blench more lastingly.
Then I will pass-if not as white-then at least as Italian sallow as thee.
I am still lame *(she frisks her leg about)*, but acupuncture will make less evident. My eyes still slant, but 'tis your sexual brilliancy that keeps me thus in squint.
You thought me pagan, but *(she flings out a 30 foot scroll)*
I have really always been of your very own religion!
A Tang ancestress is here scouted as Nestorian.
My wealth? The final flaw you brought to my attention.
All I had is now his... *(She drapes her jewels on the Baron.)*... thus fulfilling your intention.

(The Count is appalled.)

Baron

(Jangling his jewels and bursting out to the Marquise) Now do I nearly match the fabled wealth of fairest Babylon!
You will not need to face the terrors of advancing age alone. *(The Marquise and the Count are struck dumb with astonishment and dismay.)*

Marquise and Count

You both seem... to have... o'erlept each stumbling block...
To leave us in a state of joyousness not far removed from shock.

Baron and Princess

(Holding out their arms to their respective partners) Then must we progress to the great Bridal bed!
Again cementing each to each, together, forever, as solidly as lead.

Scene 13. *Lightly and not too persistently, the Princess and the Baron restrain the Count and the Marquise from separating from them and advancing Center Stage Front. Finally, though, they move free. As they talk, a kind of hollowness enters the Marquise's manner-to be brightened fitfully by returns of fancy. There is between the Marquise and the Count a short long felt moment of communication. The scene ends brightly with their asides.*

Count

(Expressing his disappointment with the Princess) My now penniless and uncultured Orient Pearl...

Marquise

I warned you on the perils of strange fruit. *(Thinking on the Baron)*
I'll soon tire of the Baron as he soon tires of me.
And there's his mind -
That pretentious rationality -
Which of my own is faint facsimile.
Ah-we submit; sanctify defeat as resignation. *(As though she lacked the force to resist dependancy)*
I have built my house of words for far too many years.
Within it are disarmed all feelings but not all fears.
Oh, why did I not lack the word?

(Darkly and sadly) There are moments, cousin, when

All our human being
Is to me empty, false and alien. *(She pauses.)*
It is no usual apprehension of mortality
Which now infects, denies and saddens me.
Rather, my endless close possession of myself has, simply
Come to weary me. *(Pause)*
You understand... *(During this, the Count has moved close to her and, for a brief moment, their hands touch. The Marquise and the Count now speak their following asides in a complete change of mood.)*

Count

(Aside) How noble, if long-toothed, a spirit! If no longer a nymphet,
She still has an undying fire in her burning bush.
Let me remain on Sinai and be her Sexual Witness.

Marquise

(Aside) He carries his age well and, while he may lack graces,
He offers substance where it counts-not the forte of pretty faces.
I shall propose he continue living here
As mine own, my Resident Satyr.

Scene 14. *The Baron and the Princess now resolutely rush to embrace the Marquise and the Count to begin the final noise of jollification. The panegyrics of the beginning, of course, belong to the Baron and the Princess alone, but their first verse, which would normally have been immediately answered by the Marquise and the Count, is not; and thus the Baron and the Princess each sing to a silent partner. It is only toward the end of the first verse that the Marquise and the Count respond.*

Baron and Princess

Hail, Great Parents, Hail!
Lords of Radiance,
Shine forth for love of us!
You aging Bacchite gods whose wisdom is the stock of our life store,
Slavat!
Forgive us our not being more; absolve us our present petty roles.
Forgive our empty hearts and thoughtless minds and hollow souls.
Forgive our childish ways and their useless attenuation.
Forgive us our lives which alone in yours may come to consummation.

Marquise and Count

Though you may be with us, you shall not be of us,
Your selves are yours to salve.
Now the last achievement of the nothings of yourselves demands you drain the cup:
For that's a thirst unslaked by giving or receiving, but alone by giving up.

(The Marquise and the Count move close together, their partners still reaching out ineffectually to embrace them. The Marquise and the Count tastefully fondle each other.)

Marquise

Thou art my Peter,
And on thy massy Rock
I shall build another
Church of Self!

Count

Thou be the Cleft of the Rock from which shall arise the final cloven Dove of Love!

(The characters conclude their quartet and remain in their earlier positions-the Baron reaching toward the Marquise, the Princess reaching toward the Count, and the Count and the Marquise embracing.)

Scene 15. *In the silence, the sound of a creaking chain.*

Marquise (and Echo)

Hark! Upon my ear the familiar groan.
The Spirit of Moral Sensibility descends to our zone.

(Wonder Music)

(The Spirit of Moral Sensibility descends from the roof in her half-shell. She is dressed as is the Marquise, with a few Olympian tidbits added to her costume. She is outraged; although reasonable, largely, and regretting; not merely railing and negative.)

Spiritual and Moral Sensibility

Disgraciata!

How can I possibly draw even a minor instructive moral from your tergiversations? Are not their lives (*She indicates the audience.*) filled with sufficient squalid self-deception without your adding to it? (*Exasperated*) As if there were not enough irresponsible depravity and unresolved filth in the world as it is! As if the vileness of all endeavor, of all being, were not adequate--without your supererogating *fraud!* (*Thinking on an ideal world*) Ah. . . if what was supposed to have gone on here actually had: contemptible lechery, unbridled debauchery, post-menopausal lust, inadvertent sodomy, tentative lesbianism-as well as homosexuality otherwise considered--despicable foot-fetishism and the cruel device of dildoism--then... then... I could have related this farrago to *life*.

(The Spirit of Moral Sensibility goes over and picks up the goblet dropped earlier by Sucrette and Albertine which has remained in a corner of the stage. She sniffs it and brandishes it.) There was no poison in this! Therefore (if anyone cares), Sucrette and Albertine yet live!

(Sucrette and Albertine stumble onstage and stand near Agamemna and Claudine, who have also gained the stage, imperceptibly, during the arrival of the Spirit of Moral Sensibility. The Spirit indicates the privates of Agamemna and Claudine.)

It would constitute Indecent Exposure... but *I could* provide you with proof that no transsexual japes have occurred here. These two are *not* what they so transparently seem to be. Naturally they *are* servants (look at their low brows)... but: (*indicating Agamemna*) *This* is a womanish man, preposterously accoutered as a mannish woman. (*Indicating Claudine*) *This* is a mannish woman, outrageously gotten up as a womanish man. (*She turns to Sucrette and Albertine and then pushes them into the arms, respectively, of Agamemna and Claudine.*) Therefore, you may each continue your backstairs affairs, restored to our salubrious norm.

(The Spirit then storms over to the set; she opens one bedroom door and peers within, then crosses the stage and peers into the other bedroom. She turns toward the participants and speaks, pedantically, having assured herself, as it were, of what she already knew.) There were no *beds* in those "bedrooms".

In fact, not a single sexual act has probably actually taken place here! (*Summing up*) And beyond your conglomerate deception, there was perhaps even more pernicious dishonesty of your particularities. (*She wheels on the Baron.*)

Your frontage of youth and beauty is not *even* skin deep!

At least ten years older than you appear under powder and paint, you have never experienced a larger emotion than adolescent self-despising. (*The Baron fidgets and looks abashed. She turns on the Princess.*) Your purely horizontal eyes are angled with tape and your pasty *white* face ochred. You are some indeterminate baker's daughter who has never been East of Marseilles and who has fornicated with every gentility she could cozen. (*The Princess bows her head in shame and discovery. The Spirit turns to the Count.*) And you, pretending to some extraordinary, if not unique, condition of potent sexuality and advanced senility, can only achieve relations which are *avuncular*, since a case of Neapolitan bone-ache unmanned you at thirteen. (*The Count reddens, trembles and almost faints. The Spirit rounds finally on the Marquise.*) And finally you, proposing a vast and comprehended usage of life and lust--you are no charming, elder voluptuary, but a virgin spinster whose only society is servants and trades people visiting your petit, *petit* chateau.

(The Spirit of Moral Sensibility returns to her half-shell and, as she begins to be hoisted up, she points at each and sans to the Baron) Petty and juiceless chorus boy!

(To the Princess) Common and colorless strumpet!

(To the Count) Brainless and ludicrous braggart!

(To the Marquise) Frigid and isolate celibate! (The Spirit of Moral Sensibility goes out of sight, and all the others stand about as the Spirit's excoriations left them-only the Marquise seems in control of herself. She half smiles.)

Marquise

Well, my dears, we've all been caught with our lies showing.
But - no single larger truth has ever yet acceded to man's knowing,
And all existence if it be but vanity,
Why should not each select his own reality -
And happily inhabit it within a scheme of stretched sanity? *(After the Marquise's declaration, all the participants understandingly turn to each other and reaffirm their "new "identities.)*

Agamemna

(Embracing Sucrette) I love this woman as a woman.

Sucrette

(Embracing Agamemna) I love this woman as a man.

Claudine

(Embracing Albertine) I love this man as a man.

Albertine

(Embracing Claudine) I love this man as a woman.

(The Baron and the Princess return to their previous configurations, reaching out their arms toward, respectively, the Marquise and the Count.)

Baron

*(To Marquise) I am that young and beautiful noblesse
Who leaves my situation to confess
Myself alive alone within your wisdom's sensualness.*

Princess

*(To Count) I am that sweet Chinese Princess
Who seeks in your heroic alien excess
My yellow self's redress.*

Count

*(To Marquise, embracing her) I am that warm-blood Satyr who finds security
And peace in your humanity,
Which we shall savor as we age into a kind of sanctity.*

Marquise

*(To Count-embracing him) I am that rich combine of lust and love and mind of note,
Who suffers self-examination's rote,
And finds your arms an all-restoring antidote. (The participants then move all together for the final octroon.)*

All Participants

Freedom-bound, we upward fly on wings of beings late conceived.
The only real is what we feel, whatever is believed.
We shuck the old reality whose social roles we now disown.
Elect instead whatever springs from self alone.
We thus deny the existential view:
For what we will alone is true.

Curtain