

The New Ghost

by Roland Harris

An entertainment with songs, for a time of hope

Characters

The Angel
Witchmen
The Witchman
Death

Roman Captain
Officer
First Soldier
Second Soldier
Overseer
First Slave
Second Slave
Third Slave

The Miller
First Woman
Second Woman
Third Woman
Fourth Woman
Fifth Woman

First Madam
Second Madam

The Chairman
Istan Leader
Ulzan Leader
Delegates

The Young Wife
Husband

The Unborn Child

Scenes

A jungle totem

A Roman galley

A mill, circa 1500

Bedlam

A political conference

A family at home

The Day of Judgement

Songs

Dry Bones
Song of the Galley Slaves
The Jolly Miller
Boney was a Warrior
Political Song
Lullaby
The New Ghost

Prologue and Scene 1

A jungle totem

ANGEL: This is a story
of the forms of evil;
and of the inescapable
resurrection.
I, the Angel, will describe the scene.
Darkness. The Witchmen
by their totem Death.

Rhythmical clapping to a savage dance. Cries. The song 'The Dry Bones' follows (Rogers and Osborne)

WITCHMEN'S SONG:

Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,
Now hear the word of the Lord.

With your toe bone connect-a to your	foot bone,
Your foot bone connect-a to your	heel bone,
Your heel bone connect-a to your	ankle bone,
Your ankle bone connect-a to your	leg bone,
Your leg bone connect-a to your	thigh bone,
Your thigh bone connect-a to your	back bone,
Your back-bone connect-a to your	shoulder bone,
Your shoulder bone connect-a to your	neck bone,
Your neck bone connect-a to your	head bone,

Now hear the word of the Lord.

Dem bones, dem bones gonna walk aroun'
Dem bones, dem bones, gonna walk aroun'
Dem bones, dem bones, gonna walk aroun'
Now hear the word of the Lord.

Disconnect dem bones, dem dry bones
Disconnect dem bones, dem dry bones
Disconnect dem bones, dem dry bones
Now hear the word of the Lord.

When your head bone connect-a from your neck bone, ...
and so on to...

When your foot bone connect-a from your toe bone,
Now hear the word of the Lord.

The final repetition is punctuated by a long-drawn howl of lamentation

Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,
Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,
Oh, hear the word of the Lord.

ALL: (*terrified*) Hear the word of the Lord!

WITCHMAN: (*whispering*)

Hear
the word
of the lord.

DEATH: Shall these bones sing? Answer me, witchman.

WITCHMAN: Thou knowest, Lord.

DEATH: Shall these bones sing? Answer me, niggerboys.

ALL: Lord, thou knowest. Lord, thou knowest.

Scene 2 ***A Roman galley***

ANGEL: You may be expecting to find me
astounded at this exhibition.
To tell the truth, my feathers
do droop a little as if rain were near.
But I am less astounded at the difference
than at the sameness of all men
from age to age.

And now
the Roman stars divide the cloak of night;
the sea-rocked ship watches the hostile harbour
lest a fleeing pinnace, like a weed,
escape between the pavements of their vigilance
and crack the streets of Rome.

CAPTAIN: A windy day. Will they risk it, d'you reckon?

OFFICER: Can never tell, sir. We've been slogging it out here for ten days now.
Men slack and filthy; but slaves may last another week, if we flog 'em hard
enough. So they may risk it.

CAPTAIN: And if they do, will we catch 'em before they run by the headland – with this
rabble as oars? I tell you, I should like to get my sword sharpened on one
or two of the gentlemen who sit with their wine-cups and women and send us
on this wild-goose chase.

(He shouts down the ship to the overseer. The sound of oars has become irregular.)

Keep those dogs going! No need for ragged blades even at ease.

(The whip cracks. A bell rings.)

Very well, lieutenant, let them rest.

OFFICER: Aye aye, sir. Let go for'ard. Lay to on the oars. Keep a sharp watch from the bows. Ten minutes.

FIRST SOLDIER: Flamin' luxury, ain't it!
Come on, throw me two sixes. *(They dice)*
Nao, that's no cop. 'Ere, try again.
'Allo- 'ere's Mr perishin' Overseer with 'is whip again.
Well, what do you want?

OVERSEER: To see 'ow me betters pass the time.

SECOND SOLDIER: Get for'ard to yer own stinking 'old. We don't wan' any truck wiv the likes of you.

OVERSEER: Huh. *(He is heard spitting)*

FIRST SOLDIER: Got you again! That's fifteen you owe me.

SECOND SOLDIER: Get for'ard, you bug-ridden scurvy porpise-guts, get for'ard with yer flaming equals, you lousy scum!

FIRST SOLDIER: *(laughs)*

OVERSEER: Orl right, orl right, no need to lose yer wick. Bit nervy, ain't yer?

(He cracks his whip at the slaves as he walks away. The sounds of his shouts and his whip diminish.)

FIRST SLAVE: If I had my hands free, that bastard wouldn't risk passing by here again.

SECOND SLAVE: Yes, your hands free, and your throttling-rope, and your dagger in your belt – a fine way of earning a living you had. But what about the likes of me? What wrong had I done, eh? Plough me land – was that wrong? Catch the rain, and store the fruits – was that, eh? You tell me. And me children ...

FIRST SLAVE: Children! Well, perhaps they'll come and revenge you.

(Laughter)

I've got no children – that I know of.

(Laughter)

SECOND SLAVE: They were cut in pieces. Black ants, that's what their columns were. Not a flower, not a plant, not a beast, not a man, when they'd been, except to rot. It's not that lout I'd willingly waste me strength on. It's them. Them gentlemanly murderers on the poop, and their like, who only obeyed orders.

THIRD SLAVE: Shut your trap, you bloody fool. They'll all hear you, and then you've had it.

FIRST SLAVE: Aw, stow it, they can only understand their own civilised lingo. they don't speak your language nor my language.

THIRD SLAVE: I don't speak your language neither, remember that. I wasn't a crawler by night, a sneak killer, nor a squeaker.

FIRST SLAVE: All right, Saint Christopher. Mind you don't lost yer bleedin' halo lookin' up so high.

THIRD SLAVE: Enough of your lip! Don't call me a saint or I'll smash yer face in.

(There is the noise of the chained men attempting to fight)

CAPTAIN: Whip! Whip! Leave your gossiping for'ard and attend to your duties or by God you'll taste your own medicine at one of those benches.

(Sound of the whip)

Keep your men in better order, lieutenant.

OFFICER: Sir. Sergeant! You there! *Stand* easy. No need to sprawl all over the deck like a cargo of drunks from the Metropolis.

FIRST SOLDIER: Now, Mr Overseer, get to your own quarters, scum, and keep out of the reach of this javelin.

OVERSEER: Orl right, orl right. *(His whip cracks)*

Wake up, you ship's rat! Wake up, you. You're not on a rest cure.

(The sound of the whip leads into the following song, Kipling's 'Song of the Galley Slaves'):

SLAVE'S SONG:

We pulled for you when the wind was against us and the sails were low.

Will you never let us go?

We ate bread and onions when you took towns, or ran aboard quickly when you were beaten back by the foe.

The Captains walked up and down the deck in fair weather singing songs, but we were below.

We fainted with our chins on the oars and you did not see that we were idle, for we still swung to and fro.

Will you never let us go?

The salt made the oar-hands like shark-skin; our knees were cut to the bone with salt-cracks; our hair was stuck to our foreheads; and our lips were cut to the gums, and you whipped us because we could not row.

Will you never let us go?

But, in a little time, we shall run out of the port-holes as the water runs along the oar-blade, and though you tell the others to row after us you will never catch us till you catch the oar-thresh and tie up the winds in the belly of the sail. Aho!

Will you never let us go?

VOICE: Ahoy! Galley fine on the starboard bow!

OFFICER: By God, there they go! Just out of the harbour mouth. They're running for it!

CAPTAIN: In two minutes they'll be in the tide, and there's no turning back for them then. We'll give 'em that long in case they change their minds. They're beginning to turn now.
That'll do. After them!

OFFICER: Stand to arms! Get those men rowing!

(The whip flourishes. The slaves strain at their oars.)

Scene 3 **A mill, circa 1500**

ANGEL: The Roman galleys have slipped out to sea
on a wave of anger past the Cape of Storms;
chaser and chased, their hands have dipped under
the whipcrack of waves, and the spit of time
obscures their valour like white hair.

Consider these Romans, stiff with *furore virtutem*,
that Stoic libertine
which gives the mind permission to inflict
distress on others, provided you endure
the same yourself.

Ask: was that vigil necessary or good?
Is the tense flicker of evil of their mood
quiet now, at peace now, now relaxed?
I do not judge, but ask a question only
which you must answer here or afterwards.

Now with the Middle Ages at the mill
incarnate economics in the sturdy miller
exemplifies survival's natural law
and the stern logic of Economy
in those mild days of individual
rape and slaughter.

(There is the sound of a windmill's sails, turning gently)

MILLER: Round you go, beauties. Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty gold pieces this week. And not a friend in the village, they tell me. Ha, these are my friends. Rabble!

(He sings the following two verses of the 'Jolly Miller', with Britten's setting)

There was a jolly miller once lived on the river Dee;
He worked and sang from morn till night, no lark more blithe than he.
And this the burden of his song forever used to be
I care for nobody, no, not I, if nobody cares for me.

I live by my mill, God bless her well, she's kindred, child and wife;
I would not change my station for any other in life.
No lawyer, surgeon, or doctor e'er had a groat from me:
I care for nobody, no not I, if nobody cares for me.

FIRST WOMAN: I've brought along my goodman's last sack o' wheat. Little enough it is.
You'll grind it for us so that we can have bread this barren harvest?

MILLER: Grind it? What else am I here for? Aye, I'll grind it good and small for you.
Leave it there.

FIRST WOMAN: When will it be ready?

MILLER: Call tomorrow, same time.

FIRST WOMAN: Well, make what you can of it. We've no one else to rely on, you know.

MILLER: Aye, aye, I'll make the best I can out of it, never fear.

SECOND WOMAN: Have you my flour ready as you promised for today?

MILLER: Have you ever known me break a promise? Here you are.

SECOND WOMAN: But ... that'n was a full sack I left you, a man's weight to carry on my
bent back.

MILLER: And if it was? D'you think a man's weight of wheat makes a man's weight of
flour, ground as fine as that? See how it flows! And does the miller get
nothing for all his labour? That's the best that can be done with the rubbishy
stuff you brought me.

SECOND WOMAN: Dust! It's the sweepings off your floor you're giving me, in exchange
for the rain and the sun and the good earth and a season's toil. That's no
wheat flour at all.

MILLER: There's as much wheat in it as there was in that bag of straw you left me.

SECOND WOMAN: Listen, miller, for it's a fine man you are.

(He laughs)

In the fat years did we not pay you well? Who gave you fine new sails for
the mill that swings so proud there in the wind and sun? Wasn't it the women
of the village, when you were a fine thick-thighed fellow new in the hills here,
and no knot-limbed labourer?

MILLER: And why did they let the stones of my rival's mill crumble? Because I gave
them good value. Because they liked my work.

SECOND WOMAN: Aye, your work pleased 'em, sure enough. But never again. You've
grown bent, yes, as they have; but you've grown fat as they've grown skinny.
Will they be pleased to see their infants drop withered in this stony summer,
while you are paunched like a full sack? Drop your prices now times are lean:
give back a little of the trust they gave you, when the world was young for them.

MILLER: Am I unjust? D'you think it takes less work to grind a sack of bad wheat than one of good? I can't make a full ear out of a husk o'chaff.

SECOND WOMAN: There's plenty in your granary, and to spare.

MILLER: And isn't it for sale on the open market?

SECOND WOMAN: Look, old woman, look what he's given me for a field's harvest! Pay for it, he says – do we have jewels to hang at our throats and ears, like court women? What there was in every hovel you've stolen and stored away, or sold. What is there left to pay with, except the labour of our bones and blood, that are already brittle and thin? We have nothing left to offer.

MILLER: Oh be off with you to your labour, the three of you. To them that have, it shall be given – isn't that the word of the Lord? And it's the word of nature, too. Nature's too hard for you, but I'm as hard as she is – hard as a grindstone, strong as a mill, and all your pleadings and anger won't soften me. It wouldn't be right if they did – it would mean the world was getting soft at the centre. Now here they all come to you caterwauling!

(Other women's voices heard)

THIRD WOMAN: *(she is old)* Isn't there any difference for you between the softness of rot and the softness of mercy? Were your mother's arms so hard to you when you woke at night and cried at shadows?

MILLER: My mother's arms were a doorstep, if you want to know, But I'm not a baby now, you may be sure of that.

FIRST WOMAN: No, nor will have one that'll miss you, if any woman's wise.

MILLER: I'll say no more to you. Give me a man to speak to that can understand the logic and rights of things and doesn't wail over a plough when a stone breaks it. If I was to listen to you, you'd be sitting at your gossip by your looms, laughing at my folly in giving you the thrift of years to squander on your forethoughtless ways.

SECOND WOMAN: Weren't you born and bred in the village as much as we was? When you went away to follow the soldiers in your trade, did you never recall the ways of your own folk and think kindly of some stranger because of it? Would you see your own birthplace starved as a riddle is of soil, that you belong to as much as us?

MILLER: I belong to! I belong to nobody, nothing. It's the village as belongs, and belongs to me. Don't you forget that, none of you!

FIRST WOMAN: Forget it! Are we likely to! There's my only copper pan in that sack o'your'n, in the form of a gold piece.

FOURTH WOMAN: *(a painted slut)* And my bracelet and bangle, the like of which didn't exist in the whole neighbourhood, and which were brought me from the wars.

FIFTH WOMAN: And my child's heart, that was born this day week, and died an hour past because I could not feed him.

(There is silence a moment. The miller starts to speak, but is cut short by the second woman's voice.)

SECOND WOMAN: Shall this black devil live?
Shall this black devil live?

ALL: *(staccato)* No!
No! No! No!

(There is the sound of struggling as they beat him down)

SECOND WOMAN: Sisters! Shall he die so easy? Shall he die so easy?

ALL: No, not so easy.

SECOND WOMAN: No, let him carry a full sack to Hell. He's a heavy harvest to reap.

FOURTH WOMAN: How shall we kill him?

MILLER: Don't kill me! I swear I'll grind fairly. I'll grind all your corn free, and give you full measure, overflowing.

SECOND WOMAN: So you shall. You shall grind it till your bones splinter, and terror unflashes you with its sweat. Take ropes – tie him hand and foot!
You – stop the sails.

(The sound of the sails, till now always in the background, ceases)

Now, you other, carry him to the sail door, and bind him to the great vans.

MILLER: *(as he is carried off, fainter)* Kill me! Kill me! Ah! Kill me! For pity's sake, kill me!

THIRD WOMAN: God have mercy, God have mercy!

(The sound of the women returning, triumphant)

SECOND WOMAN: Now let him grind the corn. Release the brake.

ALL: Let him grind the corn!

(The sound of the mill recommences with increasing speed and weight as each sail sweeps down. The women call out to the beat of the sails:)

FIRST WOMAN: Grind fairly, miller!

ALL: Ah! Ah! Ah!

THIRD WOMAN: God have mercy!

SECOND WOMAN: No skimping now!

FOURTH WOMAN: There's a turn for my bangle!
FIFTH WOMAN: There's a bone for my bone!

ALL: Ah! Ah! Ah!

Scene 4 ***Bedlam***

ANGEL: There goes one like a broken sack
on the world's patient shoulder.
I must describe but not interpret
these various tumbles into error
and skeleton-evils wrapped in virtue's cloak.

How should I distinguish to interpret?
One man, another; and one age, another...
Only the very great, and very small
know hair from hair as individual.
But do not think me hypocritical
nor this high mask deliberate to deceive
because it does not crack to show
the interesting vices men call character.
Madness, in Bedlam locked, appears next;
and to me this too seems only human.
See how both pick for fleas in hair and rags;
agitated, or with patient indifference.

FIRST MADMAN: Ah! I have one! World!
Crack! Ugh – end of a world! So easy.
What's that you've got there? A soul?
Give me!
Soul... little soul... Ha! Ha! I have a soul!

SECOND MADMAN: *(laughs) (His laughter continues in the background from the beginning, arising to prominence only when indicated by 'laughs')*

FIRST MADMAN: I am to go there tomorrow. Where? Where!
Tell me. Tell me!
Tell me, little soul...
Dead.
I could do it. Madman! Madmen – maker of souls – give me
another soul.
Ask me who I am. Ask me ask me ask me
Ask me!

SECOND MADMAN: *(laughs)*

FIRST MADMAN: I am – Prince Lucifer!
Madman, don't be afraid of Prince Lucifer.
I will make a soul in your hair.
That's a snake! That's a face of stone!
But that's a soul. See.
Thief! He would steal my soul from me.
There. You can have it.
Prince Lucifer can make a thousand
and pack them in boxes, like fiery beads.
You will do what I told you?

SECOND MADMAN: *(laughs)*

FIRST MADMAN: Do what I told you! Say: who are you. Who are you. Say it.

SECOND MADMAN: *(haltingly)* Who are... are...

FIRST MADMAN: Who – are – you?

SECOND MADMAN: Are... you. Are... you.

FIRST MADMAN: Shoot him! Not to know his Emperor!
Take him away! Bang bang bang bang.
Poor fellow.
They have a song about him, y'know.

SECOND MADMAN: Who... are... are... you? *(he laughs)*

FIRST MADMAN: General Wellington is my name. They say Bluecher was there.
But he wasn't. I was there. That was enough.
Get up, you madman! Stand there and conduct the orchestra.
One two three four. One two three four.

*(beating time heavily, they sing repeatedly the following two lines of the song;
the effect should be chaotic but rhythmical, and the second madman goes on
after the first has finished)*

BOTH: Boney was a warrior, way eh ah
Boney was a warrior, John François....

FIRST MADMAN: Stop! Stop! Imbecile! Imbecile!
Sit down. Down. Down.

(He bursts into a fit of sobbing and whimpering)

Crack! So easy.

SECOND MADMAN: *(laughs)*.

Scene 5

A political conference

ANGEL: So that is the way the old world ends,
a whimper fatal as a bang.
Will the new err just the same?
Scratch your head to find the blame.

Here round the table
the social powers assemble
their public faces:
the State of Istan's representatives;
the State of Ulza's.
They are as they were in other places,
and both have long forgotten why they came.
That is a question that does not seem important.

(A noise of animated and irritable discussion)

CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, gentlemen! I need not remind you that we are a committee representing the highest interests, and I may add, powers, of the States of Istan and of Ulza, and that it has been our responsibility over the past three years to decide a matter already at that time's commencement vitally affecting the future not only of the States intimately concerned, but of the whole civilised world.

So much is history.

Need I remind you that matter involved the chemical reorganisation of a toxin developed from the skin of a very rare mammal, the *Pipistrella* bat, which so far has been found to breed only in one fragment of the Earth's surface (men of science are however working to breed it everywhere; that will be a genuinely happy time for us, gentlemen, when this powerful poison is available to all the nations equally.) In one fragment, I was saying – where, by chance, the frontiers of Istan and Ulza, owing to some error of the cartographers of one side – or the other – overlap. The organisation which I represent, the Society of the United World (from which you, gentlemen, have while the matter is *sub judice* been necessarily excluded) being uncertain to which State the *Pipistrella* (when flayed) belonged --

ALL: To us! To us!

CHAIRMAN: -- felt it just (considering the potentially enormous value of the animal for warfare, and, incidentally, for medicine), felt it just, I say, to temporarily invest the area in question with forces which, being of varied and indubitably foreign extraction, could keep peace without fear or favour, and shoot equitably any individuals engaged in piracy of the *Pipistrella*. Unhappily, a number of Units of unnamed Powers in unidentified uniforms were found there, and in the resultant pacification, none of the natives remained alive. So they cannot tell us to which side the territory belonged.

ALL: Shame! Shame!

CHAIRMAN: Pray, gentlemen, do not be annoyed with me. I am nobody. A mere cipher, representing a land without frontiers, a body with several hearts, all beating at variance.

Meanwhile, time has flown, and that future we were so urgent to control has become the past. With the decease of the inhabitants, the Pipistrella too seems to have lost heart, and is now itself on the verge of extinction, if not actually extinct. There is thus every reason to hope, at last, for an amicable settlement of our differences. There is no Pipistrella – civilisation is the poorer for that. The region is barren, mountainous, and uninhabited.

Gentlemen of Istan, gentlemen of Ulza, staunchly as I realise you will wish to uphold your national pride and, my dear Istans, my honoured Ulzans, no pride rests on a firmer basis than does yours – yet I am sure that you both have the same sense of our common humanity too much at heart to leave any stone unturned in searching for a mild and pacific solution of the present problem.

Whatever we decide now, nothing, absolutely nothing, can happen.

In a world where every human action carries with it some disgrace, some accident, some inherent dilemma, let us remember that with thankfulness. Let it be said of us that for three years we have guarded the frontiers of peace, by containing within this small room all the toxin of our time, as the Pipistrella, the late Pipistrella, contained its poisons – and now they, as it, are gone.

Here is a map of the region. Let us agree to draw a line on it, and say, for all time, that this desert is Istan, and this desert is Ulza, - or the other way round – friends and neighbours in a new amity. Thus out of suffering we win through to ease, and out of war and sorrow, to peace.

Gentlemen, the decision rests with you!

(There is the noise of animated discussion)

ISTAN LEADER: Mr. Chairman, we would not wish it said in any, even in the most hostile and perverted histories of our time, that Istan hindered the attainment of a genuine and lasting settlement by friendly and rational discussion. We therefore suggest, subject to your approval and that of our government, that a line be drawn from the peak of this mountain to the peak of that one, and that are east shall be acknowledged by all the world as Istan, and the west, as Ulza, until time immemorial.

ULZAN LEADER: Mr Chairman, only the fact that it is not customary for two voices to be heard at once anywhere but in classrooms has prevents my proposing, with my dear friend and associate, the leader of the Istan delegation, the very same resolution. Let us draw the line now. So, I will myself write in the title 'Istan' to the east.

ISTAN LEADER: And I will set down 'Ulza' to the west.

CHAIRMAN: Then that is settled. Gentlemen, you have my sincerest thanks, and heartiest congratulations, over this notable conclusion to our business.

BOTH: Sir, we could not have had a chairman more impartial, wise, and deserving of respect.

CHARIMAN: And now, gentlemen, I have taken the liberty of adding the cartographical details of our resolution the following academic but none the less fitting addendum that we hereby submit to the International Court the above proposals, agreeing to abide by its decision favourable or unfavourable, confident as ever in the genuine and competent justice of its lawgivers. There is no doubt, I need hardly add, that the Court will confirm our agreement.

ISTAN LEADER: Agreed!

ULZAN LEADER: Agreed, unhesitatingly!

ISTAN LEADER: Mr Chairman, and fellow delegates... I feel that a suitable close to our three years' earnest discussion would be the singing of the anthem of the Society of the World, to whose principles we all adhere.

ALL: Bravo! Bravo!

(Noise of chairs, after which all sing:)

Peace, peace on earth, and good will to all men,
That is the message united we bring;
We sadly regret the necessity when
Justice, and duty, divide us,

Peace, peace, nearest to each of our hearts;
Peace, peace, dearest and richest of arts;
We sadly regret as united we sing,
Stern duty should ever divide us.

(Noise of chairs subsiding)

CHAIRMAN: A message? For me? Thank you.

Gentlemen, I have just received a most important communication: 'A vast underground network of caverns, dating from prehistoric times, and of an extent at present unascertained, had been discovered in the disputed area, in which an innumerable colony of the Pipistrella bat has established itself and is breeding.' It is fortunate, is it not, that we have already reached agreement.

ULZAN LEADER: Could you perhaps give us the exact locality of the caverns?

ISTAN LEADER: Yes, that would be most interesting to know.

CHAIRMAN: Unluckily, when the message was sent, the area was still disputed, and so no name is shown for the location. However should any grave anomaly exist in the apportioning of the two halves of the previously disputed area, you may rest assured that the High Court will make a suitable and carefully considered revision of the apportionment.

ISTAN LEADER: It is a pity that my government has not yet ratified the informal agreement between us; for I doubt whether, in the circumstances, it will now do so.

ULZAN LEADER: I too am afraid that the matter cannot be considered finally closed. Our arrangement was a gesture, the symbol of a wish, rather than a reality. The greatest idealists among us have to face reality.

CHAIRMAN: I think I understand you, but I must categorically insist that the International Court is alone competent to uphold or alter your decision. You would not wish for more than justice, I presume.

ISTAN LEADER: So vital is the cause at stake, that Istan cannot afford the risk of an unfavourable decision.

ULZAN LEADER: The attitude of the invaders of our land must make it clear, to any impartial observer, that Ulza likewise must rely upon the strength of its patriots and the staunchness of its allies.

CHAIRMAN: I appeal to you as men of honour to abide by your bargain.

ISTAN LEADER: You would rob us of justice!

ULZAN LEADER: You would oppress our people!

CHAIRMAN: I appeal to you, as men of peace, not to plunge the innocent of your nations into ruinous war!

ALL: What is peace without justice and without honour!

CHAIRMAN: What can I do?

ALL: Resign! Resign! Resign!

Scene 6 *A family at home*

ANGEL: Resign yourselves – there is not far to go.
The family waits at home;
though not all marriages, they tell me,
fare as ill as this, which you shall see.
After the wisdom of statesmen,
love in a private residence
may offer more of hope.
But what is love?
That is not my province.
I ask only; is it for you to judge?
The unborn child sits curled under a cloud;
this childlike woman is fresh with its rain.

YOUNG WIFE: (*she sings*)
Baby sleep on my arm,
Have no fear;
Hurt nor harm, evil charm,
Come not near.
Dream of restless danger,
Spirit of adventure,
Until day
Keep away,
Come not near.
Baby sleep on my arm,
Have no fear.
Sleep will come soon,
Sleep will come
Soon.
Soon. Oh! What shall I say? How shall I tell him?
It will be like this –
Hallo! hallo, darling! Welcome home! O, I'm so happy today. Tell me why.

(In the answers, she mimics her husband)

(he) – It's because I'm home, of course.

(she) – Silly! Tell me why.

(he) – It's because outside, I saw the first sticky bud of spring, and the air is soft and glistening, tenderly pure, and full of hope.

(she) – Two good reasons, but not the proper reason. Tell me why.

(he) – It's because I love you.

(she) – Right at last. Say it again, so that next time you don't need three guesses.

(he) – Alright – I love you.

(she) (*seriously*) – Do, do, do. You see, three guesses is all you ever get – all the story books are agreed about that. With the first one, you wish for something that is wrong to be put right. Magic does not work for those whom everything is comfortable and easy – they cannot conceive of an alteration; nor for those whom things are terribly, desperately wrong – they wish things not to alter, but to end.

(he) – But with us...(*laughing*)

(she) – Please don't interrupt me – the second wish is for lots and lots of good things to make this existence, which is now right, especially pleasant, varied and delightful – things like cakes, castles, charabanc rides, and children.

(he) – In all these things I'll wish with you. And the third?

(she) – The third is to keep all this happily ever after.

(The sound of someone entering the room as she says this)

HUSBAND: (*ironically*) Happily ever after!

SHE: (*tentatively doing as she rehearsed, is frozen off*)

Hallo – darling. Welcome – home.

HE: Thank you. Have you been rehearsing again?

SHE: I did have something especially nice to say to you.

HE: Do say it. We can't have too much of such things. But say something real. None of your eternal fairy stores. Your world of fantasy and make believe, with its impossibly infantile third wish.

SHE: It was something quite real, I assure you. Only I hadn't quite reached saying it when you arrived.

HE: As real as... ?

SHE: As dreams come true.

HE: As a fall in the market prices?

SHE: Much more real than that.

HE: Hm.

(the rustle of the newspaper is heard)

SHE: I'm so happy today. Can't you feel as I do?

HE: What a child you are! Y'know, I often feel I ought not to have married you, but to have adopted you.

SHE: O, but I'm quite grown up.

HE: You're eighteen. I'm thirty-seven. Old enough... and so on. Indeed, it's the child in you that I wanted by me, I suppose. The golden-haired child – anxious to please, anxious not to be left out; anxious to be loved; and so simply a child that you could not feel degraded by that need to feel dependent.

SHE: Do you never feel that you depend on anyone, not at all?

HE: On myself, you understand, on myself. Any other support would – constrict me, choke me. But for you it was different – you were only a child. And you were dependent on me. God, what a ravishment of my heart that was six months ago, when first I saw you. You had been taking part in a play – you were always acting, imagining yourself in some splendid situation – a fairy tale princess. And that long evening dress of some silvery, sophisticated material – by its very elegance it emphasised your naturalness, your warmth, your childlikeness. My own lost youth came to light at the sight of you, as the heap of embers, when you turn it with your stick, burns bright in a new wind.

SHE: And you proposed to me there and then!

HE: I think you would have accepted anyone who proposed to you just then.

SHE: Oh no! I had seen you in the audience. I acted for you. I said to myself ...

HE: 'Here is someone who will say the right things when I make my speeches to him.'

SHE: But he has seldom said them since. Has he?
Has he! Well?
Has he done more than support you and not enquire what you do with your days?
Don't! don't spoil it.

HE: I'm sorry. You were carrying a book on the scene, I remember.

SHE: Yes, a prayer book. I was a pious and devout young lady, in the play. You kept it as a memento.

HE: There it is, on the shelf. Go and bring me your prayers. Thank you. Old men are always jealous of young wives, you know.

SHE: Jealous?

HE: Of their youth, I mean. It's like being at a fancy-dress ball, at which in a mirror you see your reflection: say, a splendid cavalier, sword, ruffles, and feathers; and by his side a young lady of fashion, the fashion of a new world with the entire old world in her eyes. And then you pass close by the mirror, and find only a young lady and an old chaperon.

SHE: Chaperons do not propose to their charges!

HE: Hallo, what's this? Is this letter yours?

SHE: No. That is, it's not a letter.

HE: But is it yours?

SHE: Yes, it's mine. Where did it come from?

HE: Does that matter? From your prayer book. May I read it?

SHE: Yes. But I'd rather than you didn't. –

HE: You read it to me, then.

SHE: No, please.

HE: But I insist.

SHE: But it's something you might not understand.

HE: What! Have you written something too deep and subtle for me?

SHE: It's something you might misunderstand.

HE: Try me, then, and see.
Try me.
Try me!

SHE: 'My ... hero ...'

HE: *(laughs)* Fortunate young man, yours and a hero too.

SHE: 'I have longed for you all my life, ever since I could think and hope. And now I have seen you, and spoken with you, and, once, kissed you. Now, I can never lose you; and yet, you know (it is because you know it that I can love you, ultimately) in the end it is not you alone that I love, but some voice in you that I find; an echo of the sky, that says more even than you, and more than me, and more than us together. I am sure you hear it too, otherwise you could not really love me. I wonder if you will ever read this. I do not know where to send it, to which country, town, street, even to which name.'

HE: About whom have you been thinking since we were married? Answer me that! Not a word. May we not have that one reality in our relationship? Why for God's sake why did you marry me and turn me into this sham which is neither husband nor lover? You are a child, I thought ... No, you are a fantasist, a witch – and everything you touch turns into fantasy, unreality. This is the illusion of family – a room in a theatre. Witch! Witch! You have made – what you have of me; but your lover shall never read that letter.

SHE: *(in tears)* Never, never.

HE: When was it written? Say at least that it was before ... before ...

SHE: Would you believe me?

HE: Then why should you have kept it so long? But after ... is it possible? Say only that it was before. Say it. Say it, and I swear I'll never speak of it again. Even if it's false, say it.

SHE: It is true. It was written before.

HE: And the memory of him?

SHE: Fading, ever since, fading, fading.

HE: Thank you, thank you! That was all I wanted to find out, when I first saw that letter.

SHE: When you first saw it?

HE: Early this week; and ever since, I've not been able to get it out of my mind.

SHE: So you knew what was in it before I read it! You've been rehearsing too!

HE: I – just wanted to make sure

SHE: One of your sureties, your truths! How despicable! Fading, I said. Faded. What has my “hero” become! What have you become. What folly mine was! Now I can see it. Now I am grown up, a woman. My fantasy, and your truth; my dreams, and your reality – all only ourselves pretending. Don't you see the evil that is between us flickering like black lightning and the tongues of snakes, from one to the other, and back to the one, reflection and doubling its own dreadful truth? I have not deceived you – that schoolgirl's letter to her imaginary wish – nor have you deceived me: all the time, we have deceived ourselves.
I'm – not well. Something's happened. Fetch the doctor.

HE: What is it?

SHE: Fetch the doctor.

Scene 7

The Day of Judgement

ANGEL: So what was not, the child unborn,
is gone with much that had a sort of life.
When such a spirit touches on the world
and tastes in foretaste the keen air
of winter and the strength of winds
in the nostrils of the sky, and glimpses
the decisive etching of the trees,
how shall it forgive
the unwelcoming hearth?
At judgement, when everyman meets
the spirit's accusation,
what grace shall he expect,
what pity from the embryon heart?
I ask only; you are the judges.
See them all gathered on the fringe of time,
the forms of evil much like human habit
come to the mercy of the second death.

CHAIRMAN: I shall protest to the authorities. Indeed, I have already composed
a strong note. Why, that is all I ask, why should I have been set with a convict,
an avaricious swindler, and a madman – and that foetus there. I just do not
understand it. My passport is in order, and I would have you, sir, that look like Death,
carefully scrutinise its contents, especially the passage giving warning of the
protection which my government offers its subjects in any territory whatsoever.
I came from a civilised, a highly civilised country; and this cavalier treatment of one
of its citizens will not pass unnoticed. The postal facilities in this barbarous place
are, to say the least, primitive.

FIRST MADMAN: Why bother to post your letter? I am the Authorities.
You need only hand it over.
Thank you!
We will call a committee. Committee, assemble! Come here, slave –
and you, Mr Goldthumb Miller. Yes, yes, that's right.
You have heard this gentleman's complaint. Should official notice be taken of it,
do you think?

MILLER: Well, what's in the envelope, first of all? We've got to know, officially, what the
case is about. He can't expect us to attend to anything that is not in writing.
There would be nowhere to file it away. What's in the envelope?

CHAIRMAN: Just a short but carefully worded statement of my position.

MADMAN: Page one ... twenty ... fifty ... seventy ... shooooooooo!

(the sound of papers being thrown about)

CHAIRMAN: Hey! Hey there! Pick them up! Help me!

MADMAN: Well, there you are, gentlemen.

FIRST SLAVE: Well, my view is...

MADMAN: They can't be correct.

SLAVE: What can't? You've not heard it yet.

MADMAN: What is that to the point? We shall never agree. Let us appoint a sub-committee to give us expert opinion.

MILLER AND SLAVE: O, very well. Who shall it be?

MADMAN: I will be the sub-committee.

CHAIRMAN: Where shall I find justice?

MADMAN: I am justice. Here are my blind eyes. Here is my sword. Whom have I hit? Ah! You! Justice has spoken!

CHAIRMAN: This is intolerable. I shall dictate another letter.

SLAVE: You are a queer old geyser. Why do you think you're here?

CHAIRMAN: That is precisely what I am trying to find out. I have never, to my knowledge, been in such company before.

SLAVE: I'll tell you. This is your day of judgement, and my day of judgement, and his, and its. That johnny behind us isn't saying anything, but he isn't just a decoration. When your time comes, and it may be first or last or anytime – it may be now – he'll haul you off to judgement before what you might call a supranational court, and then you'll know why you're here. I've been through the same sort of thing in other places, so I know the ropes, see.

CHAIRMAN: But I've done no wrong, that I know of.

OTHERS: *(laugh)*

SLAVE: Listen – I'm a realist. I know what I've done. Sometime maybe I imagined that it was worse than it actually was, just to be on the safe side. But I've stabbed in the dark. I've stolen and not only to eat, but for the fun of it. I've tortured, I've had – all I wanted. And in return I've been tortured – and don't think I've forgiven anyone for that. I hated 'em all. I wished the sun black and the mist poison, and the hours to be one long splinter to drive into everyman's heart. And I still wish it, I'm none of your death-bed repenters. I was evil, you'll say, and I am evil, and I wish evil, and evil was done to me. So it's a long drop for me, down to the burning pit. As for you

CHAIRMAN: Hey! Hey there!

SLAVE: Ha! Ha! What's that you've got? His passport?! Stone the ruddy crows, he's got a passport instead of a heart.

(He and the Miller laugh)

MADMAN: Do you hear voices? I hear sounds in my head. Do you hear anything?

(sounds of approaching death) (a heavy footstep with each of Death's utterances)

DEATH: The most evil.

SLAVE: Me again.

DEATH: The most evil.

SLAVE: D'you mean – it mightn't me me?

DEATH: The most evil.

MILLER: It will be one of us, that's certain.

SLAVE: What've you done to earn your dying?

MILLER: Made poor bread out of good wheat. That's my trade. I was successful, and they envied me for it. And it was too easy. They didn't know their job, and I knew mine. They wasted time and harvest in feasting – I stored the grain. They threshed their coarse souls into chaff with labour – for me the wind worked and the stones ground in the mill. The famines came – they had nothing. I had everything that mattered. I sold them food, while they could afford to pay. My mill caught acres and years and turned them into gold. Those who could not pay starved. That was a law of nature, and a good economy. So they hated me. But I shut my doors. Why should I have cared for them? I do not know how many died, or were not born, because my mill ground small. I was made to win, with wits patient and heavy. I was one of Nature's magnates. And then this fellow came. I know when I'm beaten. Let him judge me, who made me.

MADMAN: Do you hear voices? My head is full of jangled sounds. Do you hear anything?

(Death's step is hard)

Which of us did you say?

DEATH: The most evil.

MILLER: It must be as you say.

DEATH: The most evil.

MILLER: Do you mean – not me after all?

DEATH: The most evil.

UNBORN CHILD: I think he means me.

SLAVE: An unborn child! That's a good one! You're not even alive.

CHILD: No – it will not hurt me to die and to be judged. But although I have no history to tell you of my deeds, I may still be the most evil of you all. Curled up in my membranes here, I feel your guilts starting, like buds, on all my limbs. I am the seed and origin of you all. I am the prophet, am what is written.

SLAVE: Don't be silly. You're only a kid; and even if what you say is true, it still wouldn't be fair.

CHAIRMAN: I should have expected you to be the last to be worried about that.

MADMAN: Look! He's coming forward! What do you hear?
(Death's approach is heard more plainly)

SLAVE: No! Take him! He's the worst of us all!

MILLER: Take me! You're a fine one! A murderer confessed, a traitor, a criminal, and black as hell with hatred. Take that slave!

CHAIRMAN: Yes, I agree with the manufacturer here. Take the criminal who has always been a lawbreaker. I've kept to and upheld the law.

SLAVE: It's alright, he wouldn't hate you, that's certain.

CHAIRMAN: The law will uphold me. You are a scoundrel.

MADMAN: Listen! What do you hear? I hear the jangling bells, now tolling deep, now ringing gaily; and I do not know which is predominant.

CHILD: Take me! I wish to be. Let me be with you.

MADMAN: Listen!

SLAVE: I hear the splintering timbers and the splash of oars confused in the thickening water.

MADMAN: It is the voice of your death.

MILLER: I hear the grinding of great stones in the granite heart of the mill.

MADMAN: It is the voice of your death.

CHAIRMAN: I hear the voices of committees, crying resign! Resign! Resign!
(The steps of Death dominate now)

CHILD: Take me! O take me!

ANGEL: *(sings the song 'The New Ghost' by Fredegond Shove/ Vaughan Williams)*

And he cast it down, down, on the green grass,
Over the young crocuses, where the dew was.
He cast the garment of his flesh that was full of death,
And like a sword his spirit showed out of the cold sheath.

He went a pace or two, he went to meet his Lord,
And, as I said, his spirit looked like a clean sword,
And seeing him the naked trees began shivering
And all the birds cried out aloud as it were late spring.

And the Lord came on, He came down, and saw
That a soul was waiting there for Him, one without flaw,
And they embraced in the churchyard where the robins play,
And the daffodils hang down their heads, as they burn away.

The Lord held his head fast, and you could see
That He kissed the unsheathed ghost that was gone free
As a hot sun, on a March day, kisses the cold ground;
And the spirit answered, for he knew well that his peace was found.

The spirit trembled, and sprang up at the Lord's word –
As on a wild April day springs up a small bird –
So the ghost's feet lifting him up, he kissed the Lord's cheek,
And for the greatness of their love neither of them could speak.

But the Lord went on to show him the way,
Over the young crocuses, under the green may
That was not quite in flower yet – to a far distant land:
And the ghost followed like a naked cloud holding the sun's hand.

MADMAN: D'you remember - he said he was the most evil.

MILLER: If that's true, there is heavy shame for us all, and not death only.

SLAVE: You cannot doubt that music: it was a calm water, after many whippings.

CHAIRMAN: Not shame only, and not death only, but even for us, there is an unexpected answer to long neglected correspondence.

The End