

In the Heart of the British Museum

a play by

John Spurling

“Burning books and building fortifications are activities common among princes.”

Jorge Luis Borges, The Wall and the Books

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IN THE HEART OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM was first performed at the Traverse Theatre Club, Edinburgh, on 5 August 1971 by the Traverse Theatre Workshop. The play was directed by Max Stafford-Clark and the cast was as follows:

JARVIS, OVID, SUN, CHIANG KAI-SHEK,

NARRATORTony Rohr

TEZCATLIPOCA, LAO SHENG (as scholar), MAO TSE-TUNG,

GINA, BAUCIS, OVID'S WIFE.....Amaryllis Garnett

VULCAN, QUETZALCOATL, KUOMINTANG,

AUGUSTUS, PHILEMON.....Kevin Costello

LAO SHENG, VENUS, XOCHITQUETZAL, RED ARMY,

TINA, A GOD.....Linda Goddard

CORINNA, RED GUARD LEADER.....Angie Rew

HEMINGWAY,

LAO SHENG (as Hero of Danansky Island).....David McNiven

MARS, LAO SHENG (in Szechwan), KUOMINTANG,

COTTA MAXIMUS, A GOD.....Sabin Epstein

All members of the cast played Red Guards and Goths.

The music was composed by David McNiven and Angie Rew.

Scene 14 was omitted from the Traverse production.

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A glossary to some of the people, places, books and gods in the play is provided at the end.

IN THE HEART OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Hanging over the back of the stage, against a gold background, the Aztec skull mask of Tezcatlipoca. Stage left, drums and other musical instruments. Near the instruments, seated on an upright chair, JARVIS. Stage right, the mask of Quetzalcoatl. Beside it, on another upright chair, asleep with a flute in his lap, HEMINGWAY.

JARVIS. Wonderful world we live in, when you come to think of it. Infinite riches in a little room. I owe that quotation to Christopher Marlowe – a profound thought which had occurred to me independently, but he happened to have the word for it. We're all capable of profound thought, but some people have the knack of writing it down. I'm a writer myself. I have the thoughts and I have the talent, but unfortunately I've never had time to develop the technique. That's all it is, between me and C.Marlowe, the technique. Same thing about the world. If you think about it, it's wonderful, but if you don't, it's nothing at all. Everything's in the mind.

Low drums

I haven't a doubt that looking at me you're saying to yourself, what a ghastly boring job, I wonder how any normal man can stand it. It's like Pavlov's dogs, isn't it? If you touch the exhibits, I bark, and if they ring the bell for closing time, I salivate. That's all I have to live for, you say to yourself. Do you know about Pavlov? I'm entirely self-educated, but intelligence is what counts, the rest is just social engineering. Ask Shakespeare! He didn't go to Oxford. No more did Winston Churchill.

Low drums

The answer to your unspoken question: how could any normal man put up with such a boring life, is simple enough. He couldn't. Ergo, the man you're looking at is not normal. Or, on the other hand, and this will alarm you, he is a normal something, but not a man. Now you're on the track.

Drums louder

Take that object there! (*indicates Tezcatlipoca's mask*) A priceless work of art, a cultural object of such rarity and magnificence that just to stand in front of it sends shivers down your spine. Whether you actually like it or not. But it's not a question of liking it, is it? The question is, does it like you?

Drums joined by low bells

What are you worth, really and truly? Do people get shivers down their spine when they look at you? Are you guarded night and day by men, dogs and electronic devices? Would you be any loss to the world if somebody

flogged you to a crooked dealer? And what would a crooked dealer give for you if he was offered you?

Drums and bells louder

That's on the purely cultural plane. But this object wasn't made for cultural purposes. Not cultural in our sense. Blood sacrifices and savage rites, this was made for. A horrible and filthy witness of horrible and filthy deeds, is what this was in days gone by. I can promise you and I know – I'm the one that sits here day after day in the same room – if you come to look at him as a cultural object, that isn't how he looks to me. I love him, you see, I love him and he loves me, and we look at each other over the heads of the little people that come wandering in here as if they didn't know A from B, little innocents, pathetic and vulnerable little nothings with baby faces, and we exchange views, he and I, we talk to one another over their curly little heads, the god Tezcatlipoca and I, we speak strange inaudible things to one another in a strange, savage tongue, all day long in the heart of the British Museum.

Drums and bells very loud, with gongs and other instruments, but not the flute. JARVIS smiles complacently, while HEMINGWAY continues to sleep. Then, as the noise continues, the following conversation takes place, the syllables thrown like darts into the chinks of silence left by the instruments:

Tezcatlipoca!

TEZ. *(woman's voice, its whereabouts vague)* I hear you calling, Mister Jarvis.

JARVIS. Tell me what sort of god you are!

TEZ. I am a true god, true god, true god.

JARVIS. What is a true god?

TEZ. A true god is invisible, enters everywhere, enters the heavens and the earth and the place of the dead.

JARVIS. Tezcatlipoca!

TEZ. I hear you calling, Mister Jarvis.

JARVIS. Your name means smoking mirror.

TEZ. My images are painted with a paint called shining smoke. With Quetzalcoatl I am creator of the lesser gods, creator of the world, and of men.

JARVIS. What is the purpose of your obsidian mirror?

TEZ. In my obsidian mirror I see all things. Like the darkness, like the mind. Quetzalcoatl is light and I am darkness.

JARVIS. What are the wonders that you work for men?

TEZ. I incite men to war. I make enmity. I sow discord. I cause anguish, pain, anxiety, misery. I set people one against another. I am the enemy on both sides.

JARVIS. What are your powers?

TEZ. I can give fame and courage and command and dignities and honour. I can take them away, just as I will. I raise up and I cast down. Like the darkness, like the mind.

The noise stops suddenly and JARVIS falls asleep. HEMINGWAY wakes. He plays a quiet, delicate tune on his flute, then recites:

HEMINGWAY.

The Toltecs, the people of Quetzalcoatl
 Were very skilful
 Nothing was difficult for them to do.
 They cut precious stones,
 Wrought gold
 And made many works of art
 And marvellous ornaments of feathers.
 Truly they were skilful.
 All the arts of the Toltecs,
 Their knowledge, everything, came from
 Quetzalcoatl.

HEMINGWAY puts his flute on his lap and falls asleep. JARVIS wakes.

JARVIS. Did you ever see an old hippie? Eh? I never say anything to them. I never make fun of them. I'm not censorious. You're only young once. Who said that? It's my own thought, whoever said it. But did you ever see an old hippie? Eh? The museum world is a funny world. I'm not joking. There was an old fellow in charge of the entrance hall, kept an eye on the postcards, directed the public to pygmy blowpipes, Greek nudes, Egyptian mummies – you name it! – and this old fellow always walked with a stick. Came the day he was transferred to the chess collection. Off he went, stumping up the stairs - no lifts in those days - and sat himself down in front of an absolutely unique set from as far afield as China. Quite apart from the set itself and the board, all made in lovely shades of jade, there were two life-size ivory monkeys sitting there and supposed to be playing the game. Rather grotesque, you'll say. Quite so, but after a time our old fellow realised that these ivory monkeys were actually moving the pieces. Horrible! Anyway, one of these monkeys suddenly turned round and said to him in what he claims was a particularly nauseating sort of Edwardian accent: "I say, old boy, your stick is rotten". What would you have done in the circumstances? Our friend struggled wildly to his feet, leant on his stick and blast it! – the whole thing disappeared under him in a little puff of dust. Several people saw him coming down the stairs on his hands and knees, but nobody knew who he was. This is the point of the story: that man was one hundred years old when he got back to the entrance hall. Yes.

THE BLACK GANGSTER

A RED GUARD runs in at the back of the stage with a large placard bearing a portrait of Mao Tse-tung

GUARD. The struggle has begun. The struggle has begun.

Enter LAO SHENG. He is barefoot, hits a broken gong and intones continuously:

LAO. I am black gangster, Lao Sheng. I am black gangster Lao Sheng. I am black gangster Lao Sheng.

Other RED GUARDS enter. They put a dunce cap on LAO SHENG and a placard round his neck bearing a red cross and the slogan: "Reactionary Academic Authority Lao Sheng". They tie an old broom, old shoes and dusters to his back and hang a bucket filled with stones round his neck. They throw ink at him and put a large red nose on his face. They knock him down and open little red books from which they read the following litany:

LEADER. Everything reactionary is the same: if you don't hit it, it won't fall. This is also like sweeping a floor. As a rule, where the broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish by itself.

1ST GUARD. A revolution is not a dinner-party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery.

2ND GUARD. It cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous.

3RD GUARD. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.

LEADER. Our enemies are all those in league with imperialism.

1ST GUARD. The warlords...

2ND GUARD. The bureaucrats...

3RD GUARD. The big landlord class...

4TH GUARD. The reactionary section of the intelligentsia attached to them.

LEADER. The number of intellectuals who are hostile to our State is very small.

1ST GUARD. They do not like our State and yearn for the old society.

2ND GUARD. Such people are to be found in political circles...

3RD GUARD. And in industrial and commercial...

4TH GUARD. Cultural and educational...

1ST GUARD. Scientific and technological and religious circles.

2ND GUARD. And they are extremely reactionary.

LEADER. Poverty gives rise to the desire for change, the desire for action and the desire for revolution.

1ST GUARD. On a blank sheet of paper, free from any mark, the freshest and most beautiful characters can be written...

2ND GUARD. The freshest and most beautiful pictures can be painted.

3RD GUARD. Not to have a correct political point of view is like having no soul.

4TH GUARD. The intellectuals can overcome their shortcomings only in mass struggles over a long period.

SONG: THE RED SUN IN THE EAST

CHORUS.

Chairman Mao, O Chairman Mao,
Like the red, red sun in the east,
Your thoughts light up the whole world now
And the new times dawn
Bright red in the east.

SOLO. (*while CHORUS interjects "Ho, ha"*)

All men must die	Ho, Ha!
But all deaths are not equal	Ho, ha!
For death may be heavy	Ho, ha!
Heavier than Mount Tai	Ho, ha!
And death may be light	Ho, ha!
Lighter than a feather	Ho, ha!
Death for the people	Ho, ha!
Is heavier than Mount Tai	Ho, ha!
Death for the imperialists	Ho, ha!
Is lighter than a feather.	Ho, ha!

It's a hard task to build a better life,
Hard to build for eight hundred million people,
But everyone must build for eight hundred million people,
Everyone must change and put his old self out the door.

CHORUS.

Chairman Mao, O Chairman Mao,
Like the red, red sun in the east,
Your thoughts light up the whole world now

And the new times dawn
Bright red in the east.

LEADER. *(to LAO SHENG)* I confess that I have been a reactionary...

LAO. *(kneeling)* I confess that I have been a reactionary...

LEADER. A running dog, bourgeois opportunist...

LAO. A running dog, bourgeois opportunist...

LEADER. I have not studied the words of Chairman Mao...

LAO. The words of Chairman Mao...

LEADER. The masses...

LAO. The masses...

LEADER. The workers, the soldiers or the peasants...

LAO. Workers, soldiers, peasants...

LEADER. Pardon my unpardonable crimes, Chairman Mao!

LAO. Pardon my unpardonable crimes, Chairman Mao!

LEADER. Beat him!

RED GUARDS beat LAO SHENG and leave him lying on ground

Professor Lao Sheng, you know very well what has happened to your colleagues, the other reactionary academic authorities who have been brought to book according to the instructions of Chairman Mao. Professor Han Wong, previously principal of the university, is now weeding the paths in the heat of the midday sun. Professor Peng Chi is having a rest from the torment of mathematics and is sweeping the courtyards and corridors and cleaning the latrines. Professor Li Chao grew rather fat teaching music; we have satisfied his insatiable appetite with black beetles and his own shit. These men were all active enemies of the people and are being punished in appropriate ways. What is your punishment to be, Professor Lao, for being passive, for shutting yourself away to pursue your own concerns, for forgetting the people of today in your study of ancient classics?

GUARDS. Lao Sheng is a poisonous weed. Lao Sheng is a rotten egg. Lao Sheng is a running dog. Lao Sheng is a paper tiger. Lao Sheng is a black gangster.

LEADER. Your punishment is to go on a long journey, to the northernmost limits of China, to an island which lies in a river. The island is covered in snow and the river is frozen hard. Our soldiers are defending the island against revisionists and imperialists from Russia. You will clean the soldiers' huts, fetch their water and work for them day and night in every possible way. You will learn then that no man is an island, that every man belongs to every other man, and you will learn what it is to struggle against the forces of imperialism.

Singing THE RED SUN IN THE EAST, the RED GUARDS go out, half-carrying, half-dragging LAO SHENG.

LEADER. *(to audience)* In every society there are certain classes more disposed to crime than others. But the crimes are different in different societies. Thus in the societies where capitalists rule, the chief crimes are those against property, and the chief criminals are those without property, the ordinary people. In our society, however, it is the people who rule, and the chief criminals are those who think themselves superior to the people, whether by birth, or by possessions or by intellect. The classes disposed to crime in our society are likely to be the landlords, the capitalists and the intellectuals.

LEADER goes out.

3

OVID AT SULMO

Thunderous applause. Enter OVID in dark glasses and the gear of a rock-singer or pop-poet. He acknowledges applause and stands centre stage.

OVID. Ah Sulmo! *(writhes)* Sulmo!

Shouts and whistles. He smiles and raises his hand for silence

Your running rills and liquid streams!

Shouts

Your leafy shade, your dappled ways!

Mounting excitement

Your corn, your vines, your olive-trees, your fruitful abundance!

Riot. OVID drops to his knees

Ah Sulmo! Your turf, your moist, your luscious earth!

Catcalls and whistles. OVID lies down full length

Your still water! Your pools! Your reflections!

Ovation. OVID smoothes his hair, turns his head to show his profile, smiles, moves shoulders about from side to side, then stills ovation with a gesture

Cool! Cool! Sulmo, birthplace of the poet Ovid!

Roars of applause. OVID lies on his back. Enter CORINNA with hand-mike and sings:

CORINNA'S SONG; SURELY YOU'LL ADMIT

Surely you'll admit that you are hot for me,
Surely you'll admit that it is true,
Surely you'll admit if it was not for me,
Nothing else would matter much to you?

Walk about in the windy mountains,
Sail the terrible sea,
Driving your ship through spouts and fountains,
All for the sake of me!
Roads are long and deserts are endless,
People are savage, you'll see.
Life is hard for those that are friendless,
Lucky for you you've got me!

Surely you'll admit that you are hot for me,
Surely you'll admit that it is true,
Surely you'll admit if it was not for me,
Nothing else would matter much to you?

CORINNA goes out. OVID smooths hair, looks in pool, pulls down corners of mouth in disappointment

OVID. Ah Corinna! Reflection of a reflection!

4

MARS AND VENUS

Dance for MARS, VENUS, VULCAN (who moves with a stylised limp), SUN and FRIENDS with musical accompaniment. In the Traverse Theatre production the lines were accompanied by descriptive or semi-descriptive gestures; e.g. every time VULCAN or MARS mentioned 'gold', all the actors made the sign for gold, the same for 'three-legged tables', 'handsome mansion', 'matchless wife', and so on.

SUN. The sun is rising.

VULCAN. Early in the morning the smith leaves his handsome mansion and...

VENUS. His matchless wife...

VULCAN. And enters his forge. He is making a set of twenty-three three-legged tables to be placed round the walls of his great hall...

ALL. And astound his friends.

VULCAN. Each of the three-legged tables is to stand on small golden wheels, so that the tables can glide about easily over the highly-polished floors and...

ALL. Astound his friends.

SUN. The sun shines...

VULCAN. Through the open doorway of the forge and illuminates the finicky business of fitting ornamental gold handles to the three-legged tables.

MARS comes forward

SUN. The light is interrupted.

VULCAN. The smith looks up and recognises...

MARS. His visitor...

VULCAN. With a quick smile.

MARS. The visitor places an order for a complete suit of armour to be made of gold.

VULCAN. The smith explains that a suit of armour made of gold alone would be no protection. He undertakes, however, to give the armour the appearance of pure gold.

MARS. The visitor leaves with a friendly wave of the hand.

Giving a friendly wave, he retires

VULCAN. The smith puts aside his three-legged tables and tackles the suit of armour. Using twenty bellows blowing at variable intensities he creates an alloy of bronze, tin, gold and silver. Holding the hot alloy with tongs and delicately wielding many sizes of hammer, he beats out a helmet, cuirass and a pair of greaves. The *chef d'oeuvre* is the shield. The shield is made in five circles and seven segments, the whole area minutely decorated with animated scenes in low relief, so as to offer five variations on the themes of creation, love, peace, war, parting, loss and the power of the gods.

SUN. The sun flashes from the helmet, the cuirass and from each of the greaves, but in a peculiarly complex way from the shield.

MARS comes forward

MARS. The visitor returns...

VULCAN. And is shown the finished work.

MARS. The visitor thanks the smith and leaves with a friendly nod, his arms full of the astonishingly beautiful armour.

VULCAN. The smith bows and returns to his three-legged tables.

MARS retires

SUN. The sun is at his highest point.

VENUS. The smith's matchless wife is yawning in her garden.

VULCAN. The smith has completed his thirty-fifth ornamental handle.

VENUS. The smith's matchless wife is dozing...

SUN. In the afternoon sun.

VULCAN. The smith has completed his thirty-sixth ornamental handle.

MARS moves towards VENUS

VENUS. The smith's matchless wife is woken from her sleep.

MARS. Her visitor is wearing a new suit of golden armour.

SUN. The sun flashes from the helmet, the cuirass and from each of the greaves, but in a peculiarly complex way from the shield.

VULCAN. The smith looks up from his thirty-seventh ornamental handle. He goes to the door of his forge and notes the direction...

SUN. From which the flash came.

VENUS. The smith's matchless wife...

MARS. And her visitor...

BOTH. Enter the smith's handsome mansion. Together they remove the visitor's new suit of golden armour and lay it aside piece by piece...

VULCAN. The smith puts aside his three-legged tables and using his twenty bellows makes an alloy of bronze, tin, silver and gold.

VENUS. The smith's matchless wife..

MARS. And her visitor...

BOTH. Lie down together on the smith's spacious bed.

VULCAN. Holding the hot alloy with tongs and delicately wielding his hammer, the smith beats out golden rings by the thousand. With the golden rings he fashions a golden net, so fine as to be scarcely visible, too strong to break under any force.

VENUS. The smith's matchless wife...

MARS. And her visitor...

BOTH. Are now asleep.

VULCAN. The smith takes up the golden net and enters his handsome mansion.

VULCAN stands behind MARS and VENUS

The smith observes his spacious bed...

MARS & VENUS. And its two sleeping occupants.

VULCAN. He throws the golden net over bed and all. He goes out and summons...

FRIENDS. His friends.

FRIENDS come forward

MARS & VENUS. The sleepers wake up and struggle to escape. But the golden net holds them fast.

FRIENDS. The smith's friends are far more astonished than they would have been by the twenty-three three-legged tables with their golden wheels and ornamental handles.

SUN. The sun is sinking.

5

OID'S SIESTA

Enter OVID wearing his dark glasses and rock gear

OVID. *(stretching)* Noon. Roma.

Enter ACOLYTES from all parts of the stage

ACOLYTES. Noon. Roma.

OVID. *(moving head from side to side like a tortoise)* Noona. Roma.

ACOLYTES. *(clustering round him, fingering his clothes)* Roma.

OVID. *(scratching chest)* Noona.

ACOLYTES. *(pulling at his clothes)* Roma.

OVID. *(rubbing thigh)* Roma.

ACOLYTES. Noona.

OVID. *(wiping brow)* Heat. Humidity. Sultry Roma.

ACOLYTES. *(fanning him)* Sultry Roma.

OVID. *(removing shirt)* Siesta time in sultry Roma.

ACOLYTES. *(helping him)* Sultry Roma.

OVID. Ah, Dio! *(collapses into arms of ACOLYTES)* An afternoon in ancient Roma.

ACOLYTES lower him to floor

The shutters.

ACOLYTES lift him up and float him across stage

One will be open for the air. One will be closed for the shade. My room will be dark, will be twilight, will be woods, a forest of shadows, cool, secret, silent, dark. My room in Roma.

ACOLYTES. Roma.

They carry OVID back to centre

OVID. *(lolling head)* Siesta time in sultry Roma.

ACOLYTES. *(covering him with sheet)* Sultry Roma.

OVID. Roma.

ACOLYTES remove his dark glasses, then all his clothes, then replace dark glasses

OVID. City of love. City of the poet Ovid. City of Ovid, poet of love.

ACOLYTES. Roma.

They lay OVID on the floor under his sheet, then curl up around him, like clouds and cupids in a baroque painting. Enter CORINNA with hand-mike and sings

CORINNA'S SONG: ALL I REMEMBER IS

All I remember is, my feet were bare,
Yes, and I had loosed my hair,
The tiles were cold,
Then you caught hold
Of my dress which began to tear.
All I remember is, my feet were bare.

Suddenly a small breeze blew,
Thin gauze curtains fluttered and flew,
The door was open and my feet went through,
Yes, and then I came to you.

All I remember is, a curtain stirred,
In the garden cicadas whirred,

No birds sang
No bells rang,
Everything I saw was blurred,
All I remember is, a curtain stirred.

Suddenly a small breeze blew,
Thin gauze curtains fluttered and flew,
The door was open and my feet went through,
Yes, and then I came to you.

All I remember is, I shut the door,
Clothes of mine were lying on the floor,
You looked at me
For an hour or three,
Waves were beating on a distant shore,
All I remember is, I shut the door.

CORINNA goes out

OVID. *(half waking)* Corinna. Afternoons in sultry Roma. Gods give me siesta on siesta in the eternal city. *(sighs and falls asleep)*

ACOLYTES. *(in heavy, sleepy voices)* Siesta on siesta in the eternal city.

6

AS MANY ERRORS AS A SIEVE HAS HOLES

Enter RED GUARDS with poster of Mao

LEADER. The black gangster and reactionary academic authority Professor Lao Sheng has left for his new life in the frozen wastes of the north. We are pleased that he has gone and have expunged his memory from our minds. Nevertheless, since Lao Sheng committed as many errors as a sieve has holes, it is up to us to examine those errors so as not to fall into them ourselves. Even the most poisonous weeds can be put to some good use. Now which of us has had, at any time, the secret desire to gain personal glory for his intellectual attainments?

Silence

None?

RED GUARDS push forward 1ST GUARD, who tries, without success, to melt back into the group.

You?

1ST GUARD. No. Not me.

2ND GUARD. He wrote a poem.

3RD GUARD. More than one.

4TH GUARD. Love poems.

1ST GUARD. They were poor attempts.

2ND GUARD. He was proud of them. He showed them round.

3RD GUARD. He showed them to Professor Lao.

4TH GUARD. Professor Lao praised his literary style.

2ND GUARD. Professor Lao told him he showed promise.

1ST GUARD. No.

ALL. Admit it!

Silence

LEADER. You'd be wiser to admit it.

1ST GUARD. I admit it.

LEADER. Then you are the one to play Lao Sheng in his study.

RED GUARDS dress 1ST GUARD in Lao Sheng's robe. They seat him behind a low Chinese table, then stand back in a group

The first error of an intellectual such as Lao Sheng, the error which paves the way for all the others, is his desire for personal glory. Speak your thoughts aloud, Lao Sheng!

1ST GUARD. *(as LAO SHENG)* I have mastered the Chinese classics. Long hours, long years of solitary meditation and study have made me a wise and skilful connoisseur of the Chinese poets in particular. I know them as I know my own face. *(looks in hand mirror)* My face bears the marks of great thought. Anyone seeing me would immediately recognise me as a man of extraordinary learning. Good. *(puts down mirror)* Not good enough, however. There are unfortunately other scholars in China as well read and learned as I am in the Chinese classics. There have been such scholars in the past. I can never hope to surpass their reputation. *(bows head)*

LEADER. Wouldn't you be satisfied to be a great teacher, Lao Sheng? To share your wisdom and learning with others?

1ST GUARD. A teacher helps others to grow in stature, but does not grow himself. Even great teachers are not remembered once their best pupils are dead.

LEADER. Then how do you plan to make yourself thoroughly memorable?

1ST GUARD. I shall study a foreign language and master its classics.

LEADER. How will this gain you personal glory? In the first place, other Chinese scholars have already mastered foreign languages, and in the second place, what reputation is there in the knowledge of barbarian classics?

1ST GUARD. In the first place, I shall study a dead language. I shall study Latin, which is little known in China. In the second place, I shall show that the Latin classics are almost as civilised as the Chinese.

RED GUARDS bring in piles of Western books and lay them beside desk

I have now mastered the Latin classics: Horace, Virgil, Ovid, Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus, Cicero, Pliny, Seneca, Livy, Tacitus and more besides. My knowledge of the Latin classics is unsurpassed in China. Good. (*bows head*) Not good enough. There is no one in China capable of appreciating my skill and learning in the Latin classics. I shall be forgotten. At best a footnote in some obscure history: "It is said that Lao Sheng was the greatest Latin scholar ever known in China, but who was Lao Sheng and how can his claim be proved?" (*bows head to table, then raises it*) I shall overcome this obstacle. By this means: I shall translate the Latin classics into Chinese, thus demonstrating not only my unique knowledge of Latin but also my extraordinary mastery of Chinese. I shall begin work at once, translating the Latin poet Publius Ovidius Naso, known as Ovid.

LEADER. Lao Sheng's second error arises from the first. Although he is paid to be a teacher, he considers his private studies too important to be interrupted. Lao Sheng's wife! (*points to 2ND GUARD*) Two of Lao Sheng's pupils! (*points to 3RD and 4TH GUARDS*)

The three GUARDS come out and stand in front of the table. 3RD GUARD makes knocking noise on floor

2ND GUARD. (*as wife*) What do you want?

3RD GUARD. (*as pupil*) We want to consult Professor Lao.

2ND GUARD. Professor Lao is busy.

4TH GUARD. (*as pupil*) But we need his help.

2ND GUARD. He has given orders that he is not to be disturbed.

3RD GUARD. Please ask him to see us!

2ND GUARD. (*going to 1ST GUARD as LAO SHENG*) Lao Sheng!

1ST GUARD. Go away!

2ND GUARD. They need your help.

1ST GUARD. Tell them to go away!

2ND GUARD. But they are very anxious.

1ST GUARD. (*banging table*) Go away! Go away! Go away!

2ND GUARD. (*returning to 3RD and 4TH GUARDS*) He refuses to see you. So sorry!

2ND, 3RD and 4TH GUARDS bow to LEADER and return to their places

LEADER. But even Lao Sheng's precious work is full of errors. Let us take an example! This is an actual text written by Lao Sheng.

He gives text to 1ST GUARD

1ST GUARD. (*reading from text*) "Any discussion of the Latin poet Ovid must begin with his most famous and influential work: the great poem in fifteen books called Metamorphoses. In this work lies the key to both the man and his art, namely the principle of alteration, the transformation of one thing into another, of god into man, of man into god, of man into animal, bird, fish, plant or stone. All elements of earth, air, water, belong to one another, partake of one another, life in all its manifestations is at the same time one and infinitely diverse. The changes that come about are wrought by magic. And yet, since everything is subject to magic, magic is quite ordinary, magic is the normal basis of life. Emotions such as love, hate, ecstasy and terror are magical, appearances are magical, behaviour, both human and divine, is magical..."

1ST GUARD is entering into the spirit of the text, while the others begin to murmur with disapproval

"And naturally the art of the poet or painter, reflecting as it does the life of the gods, men and things, is itself magical, itself works by the transformation of one thing into another, of real events, real things into words, phrases, colours, shapes, giving off magical emotions of love, hate, ecstasy and terror, magical appearances, magical behaviour and eliciting a magical response from its devotees.

Louder murmuring

"We see then that of all the poets in the West, Ovid comes closest to the thought of the East. He celebrates passivity rather than activity, he shows man to be part of nature rather than its master. He is the poet of softness, of love, of acceptance, of the Golden Age before man lost his innocence..."

The murmuring has become barracking

LEADER. No, no, no, enough! Stop!

GUARDS. Lao Sheng out! Lao Sheng out! Lao Sheng out!

They surround 1ST GUARD menacingly

LEADER. You were only to read Lao Sheng's text.

1ST GUARD. I was reading it.

LEADER. With too much enthusiasm.

1ST GUARD. I tried to put myself in his place.

LEADER. Wrong.

1ST GUARD. I wanted to express his crime more profoundly.

LEADER. In order to express his crime there is no need for you to share his sentiments. Just suppose that you had succeeded in communicating to your audience the enthusiasm Lao Sheng felt for his subject, what would happen? The audience would cease to notice that Lao Sheng was in error, that his enthusiasm was in error. The next thing would be that the audience would fall into the same error. *(to GUARDS)* Take off his robe!

They do so

Now expound some of the many errors in Lao Sheng's text! Come on!
First the subject-matter.

1ST GUARD. The subject-matter is a foreign poet, long dead.

LEADER. What should it be?

1ST GUARD. It should be the living people.

LEADER. *(turning to the others)* Why?

2ND GUARD. *(with little red book open at page 229)* "In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines."

3RD GUARD. "There is no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics."

LEADER. *(turning back to 1ST GUARD)* Secondly?

1ST GUARD. The principle of change is incorrectly stated.

LEADER. *(turning to others)* Because?

4TH GUARD. *(with little red book open at page 214)* "In a suitable temperature an egg changes into a chicken, but no temperature can change a stone into a chicken, because each has a different basis."

LEADER. *(turning back to 1ST GUARD)* Thirdly?

1ST GUARD. The idea of magic is false.

5TH GUARD. *(with little red book open at page 147)* "What really counts in the world is conscientiousness, and the Communist Party is most particular about being conscientious."

LEADER. Fourthly?

1ST GUARD. Passivity and acceptance are not virtues.

2ND GUARD. *(with little red book open at page 5)* “It is an arduous task to ensure a better life for the several hundred million people of China and to build our economically and culturally backward country into a prosperous and powerful one with a high level of culture.”

LEADER. So the teaching of Lao Sheng is entirely contrary to the teaching of Chairman Mao. Lao Sheng was not only a selfish and reactionary individual, but his views were stupid and incorrect. Where do Lao Sheng’s foreign classics and his own texts belong?

ALL. In the fire!

LEADER. Correct.

They fetch a brazier

We have sent Lao Sheng to correct his faults among the ice and snow. Now we will send his work to correct its faults among the flames.

GUARDS throw books and scrolls into brazier

How will Lao Sheng be remembered? As a poet?

ALL. No.

LEADER. As a scholar and man of letters?

ALL. No.

LEADER. Then how?

ALL. As a black gangster, as full of errors as a sieve as holes.

7

OVID AT DINNER

Enter OVID in background, CORINNA with letter in foreground

OVID. Adorable Corinna!

CORINNA. *(reading)* “So you’ll be at the dinner tonight...”

OVID. Thank God!

CORINNA. “So you’re bringing your husband...”

OVID. You must be out of your mind.

CORINNA. “Do you really expect me to lie opposite and watch him making free with you...”

- OVID. And not give myself away?
- CORINNA. “This is what you have to do. Kindly learn by heart...”
- OVID. God, what a word to use!
- CORINNA. “Your heart, Corinna...”
- OVID. The parts adjacent to it... the thought’s driving me mad.
- CORINNA. “If your husband puts his paws within three feet of your heart or the parts adjacent to it...”
- OVID. I’ll jump on the table and make an embarrassing scene.
- CORINNA. “Kindly commit to memory, Corinna, the following instructions for tonight...”
- OVID. Number one...
- CORINNA. “When your hideous husband has stretched his loathsome carcass on his couch and just before you go to join him, touch my foot with yours...”

Both make gesture of touching foot

- OVID. I beg you, Corinna!
- CORINNA. “Number two...”
- OVID. When I open my eyes wide, it means I’m bursting with love for you.

He opens his eyes wide

- CORINNA. “If you do the same, it means the same for me.”

CORINNA opens eyes wide

- OVID. Please do that!
- CORINNA. “Number three. If you want to kiss me, draw a circle on the air with your forefinger!” *(draws circle in air)*
- OVID. My God, when I think of your forefinger... I’ll do the same. *(draws circle in air)*
- CORINNA. “Number four. When you remember what it was like last time we were in bed together, put our thumb to your cheek!” *(she does so)*
- OVID. I’ll touch the tip of my nose to show what I remember. *(he does so)*
Number five.
- CORINNA. “If you can’t stand any more of your horrible husband’s turgid conversation, put your hand flat on the table!” *(she does so)*
- OVID. Your hand, my God! I’ll put my fist on the table if I feel like pushing his face in. *(makes gesture with fist)*

CORINNA. “Number six. If he tries to get any nearer to you, to touch your leg with his, put his hand anywhere at all, least of all attempt to kiss you, make a circle with your forearm and I’ll throw my wine at him.”

CORINNA makes circle with forearm, OVID makes gesture of throwing wine

OVID. Number seven. Give him too much to drink, get him drowsy, then break up the party! I’ll create a diversion and we’ll meet at the exit.

CORINNA. “Burn this!”

OVID. I burn for your gorgeous... your incomparable... and above all your absolutely unclassifiable... Burn this!

CORINNA. “Your own poet and white-hot lover...”

OVID. Ovid.

CORINNA. “Ovid.”

CORINNA goes out. OVID remains in the background. GUESTS come in with cushions and lay them in two rows down stage. GUESTS recline, leaving cushions at either side front for OVID and CORINNA, and a cushion next to CORINNA for her HUSBAND. Gentle guitar music throughout

1ST GUEST. the Coliseum...

2ND GUEST. ... horses, lions, tigers, elephants...

3RD GUEST. gladiators...

2ND GUEST. ... buckets of blood...

4TH GUEST. ... finished up with one arm and both legs missing...

3RD GUEST. ... Augustus Caesar...

2ND GUEST. ... with the Empress...

1ST GUEST. ... furious...

3RD GUEST. ... unlicensed promiscuity...

1ST GUEST. ... picking up loose women in the colonnades...

2ND GUEST. ... ideal place for it...

OVID comes forward and reclines on his cushion

1ST GUEST. ... senators in compromising situations...

3RD GUEST. ... Marcellus Tertius...

2ND GUEST. ... and a couple of centurions...

3RD GUEST. ... yes, the forty-fifth legion...

1ST GUEST. ... goes without saying...

2ND GUEST. ... the temple of Venus...

1ST GUEST. ... Vestal Virgins...

Laughter. Enter HUSBAND and reclines in his place opposite OVID

HUSBAND. this morning in the forum... bebies of clients... speech for the defence... vast expenses... he can afford it... lex Julia... yes, adultery punishable with death...

Enter CORINNA and stops before reaching cushions

... you can say that again... by and large... on the face of it... no laughing matter... speaking personally... not my cup of tea... time they put a stop to it... come here, Corinna!

CORINNA touches OVID's foot with hers, goes to cushion beside HUSBAND and reclines opposite OVID

2ND GUEST. ... Lesbia... Catullus...

1ST GUEST. ... Samian wine...

3RD GUEST. ... Quintus Horatius Flaccus...

2ND GUEST. ... but inferior to the Aeneid...

1ST GUEST. ... goes to pieces in the middle...

4TH GUEST. ... Lucretius writes better Latin...

2ND GUEST. ... two or three times a day at the baths...

OVID opens eyes wide at CORINNA. She does the same at him

HUSBAND. *(to CORINNA)* ... this morning in the forum... bebies of clients... speech for the defence... I'm not saying... lex Julia... punishable with death... in flagrante delictu... only reasonable, in my view...

CORINNA draws circle on table with forefinger. OVID does the same

... you can say that again... by and large... hardly a matter that concerned him... taking it at face value... happily I'm not...

CORINNA puts thumb to cheek. OVID touches tip of his nose

3RD GUEST. ... how many legions in Gaul?

2ND GUEST. ... Dalmatia...

1ST GUEST. ... the German frontier...

2ND GUEST. ... the Parthian menace in the East...

3RD GUEST. ... remember Crassus!...

HUSBAND. ... putting two and two together... left me speechless... couldn't help laughing... you know what I mean... makes you think... all over the shop... profit and loss... the cost of living... exports and imports... the economic situation... in my humble opinion... simply a matter of increased trade with the East... price of timber...

CORINNA puts hand flat on table, OVID puts fist on table

3RD GUEST. ... little place in Baiae...

2ND GUEST. ... pines and sand... lovely...

1ST GUEST. ... last year in Pompeii...

2ND GUEST. ... without his toga in the Campus Martius... mad about exercise...

1ST GUEST. ... putting it mildly...

Laughter. HUSBAND puts leg against CORINNA, tries to kiss her. CORINNA makes circle with forearm. OVID throws wine at HUSBAND

HUSBAND. What the bloody hell?

OVID. Do forgive me! My elbow slipped.

CORINNA. Have some more to drink, Lentulus!

3RD GUEST. ... little villa in Tuscany...

2ND GUEST. ... five or six slave-girls and a young Sicilian shepherd...

1ST GUEST. ... the Greek tutor...

CORINNA. Have some more to drink, Lentulus!

2ND GUEST. ... political situation in Syria...

3RD GUEST. ... Cleopatra's illegitimate grandson...

CORINNA. More to drink, Lentulus!

1ST GUEST. ... from Britain...

3RD GUEST. ... never been there...

2ND GUEST. ... wearing fur leggings...

1ST GUEST. ... disgusting!

CORINNA. More to drink, Lentulus!

HUSBAND falls asleep

CORINNA. *(getting up)* I'm going to be sick.

OVID. *(also getting up)* Dear lady, take my arm!

OVID falls over nearest guest, contrives to knock into others. During the confusion, CORINNA moves away

A thousand pardons, ladies and gentlemen! What a clumsy fool I am! All that wine down your toga! Put salt on it, while I call for a damp rag! Do forgive me!

GUESTS mill about. OVID leaves them, finds CORINNA. They look at one another, take hands, kiss, walk out pressing against one another and staggering with excitement.

8

XOCHIQUETZAL

Light on HEMINGWAY's chair. HEMINGWAY is absent, but his coat is over the back of the chair and his cap and flute are on the seat. QUETZALCOATL, invisible off-stage or in darkness, sings:

QUETZALCOATL'S SONG

I am the Lord of life and death,

Quetzalcoatl.

God of the wind, I sweep the dust

Before the rain.

When I breathe

All trees, all grass, all maize,

The earth's green covering sways

And dances like a serpent of green feathers,

Waiting for the rain.

I am the Lord of life and death,

Quetzalcoatl.

I teach men the arts of peace,

To plough, to sow, to reap, to grow,

And make ornaments of feathers,

Make buildings of stone,

Make palaces and jewels and jade-green thrones,

To be peaceful, kind and gentle, good and honest,

Waiting for the rain.

Light off HEMINGWAY's chair, on JARVIS, sitting on his chair

JARVIS. Tezcatlipoca!

TEZ. I hear you calling, Mister Jarvis.

JARVIS. Why do you walk on one foot only?

TEZ. Long ago there was only water under the sky. The earth was an alligator below the surface of the water. Then I drew the earth out of the water with my foot. The alligator's jaws closed on my foot, but my foot was not torn off until I had raised the alligator's back above the water and created dry land for men to live on.

JARVIS. Are you jealous of Quetzalcoatl?

TEZ. I do not care to share the earth with Quetzalcoatl.

JARVIS. Tezcatlipoca!

TEZ. I hear you calling, Mister Jarvis.

JARVIS. Tell me how you drove Quetzalcoatl out of Mexico!

TEZ. Yes. I sent for Xochiquetzal, goddess of sensual delight.

Enter XOCHIQUETZAL, wearing only feathers

Xochiquetzal agreed to tempt Quetzalcoatl.

JARVIS. Yes, yes, I can easily imagine how she tempted him.

Light on QUETZALCOATL, sitting on floor near HEMINGWAY's chair. He wears a shining collar and sits cross-legged in meditation. XOCHIQUETZAL dances slowly round QUETZALCOATL and recites or sings as she dances:

XOCHIQUETZAL'S SONG

Quetzalcoatl!

Look at me, Quetzalcoatl!

I'm a lovely creature.

Look at my arms, look at my hands, my fingers!

I'm a lovely creature.

Look at my mouth, my red tongue!

Look at my breasts, my belly!

I am Xochiquetzal.

Look at my thighs, look at the curve of my back,

Look at my knees, my calves, my feet, my toes!

I'm a lovely creature.

Look at my eyes, my red tongue,

I am Xochiquetzal.

QUETZ. *(mildly, not looking at her)* Go away, Xochiquetzal, you don't tempt me!

- JARVIS. Tezcatlipoca!
- TEZ. I hear you calling, Mister Jarvis.
- JARVIS. Surely Xochiquetzal didn't leave matters there?
- TEZ. Are you impatient, Mister Jarvis, anxious and full of anguish?
- JARVIS. I'm all worked up, Tezcatlipoca.
- TEZ. Xochiquetzal, Xochiquetzal! Go again to Quetzalcoatl! Take him this bowl of fermented maguey! Take him also these magic mushrooms and dance for him again! His planet is setting. His strength is much diminished.
- XOCHI. *(very soft and demure)* Quetzalcoatl, you're looking tired and pale. Drink this bowl of fermented maguey! I brought it for you.
- QUETZ. *(taking bowl)* Thank you, Xochiquetzal. *(he drinks)*
- XOCHI. You're feeling better already.
- QUETZ. Much better, thank you. *(drinks again)*
- XOCHI. All your limbs feel stronger, your body is tall and straight, your face is like the red sun.
- QUETZ. *(drinks again)* Thank you, Xochiquetzal.
- XOCHI. Look at me, Quetzalcoatl! I'm a lovely creature.
- QUETZ. You are lovely, Xochiquetzal. But you don't tempt me. *(drinks again)*
- XOCHIQUETZAL dances again, reciting as before:*
- Look at my arms, look at my hands, my fingers,
Look at my mouth, my red tongue!
- QUETZ. Don't stop dancing!
- XOCHI. *(smiles and stops dancing)* Look at my mouth, my red tongue!
- QUETZ. *(loudly)* Dance! Dance!
- XOCHI. Eat this, Quetzalcoatl! I brought it for you.
- She give him magic mushrooms*
- QUETZ. *(eating and speaking with mouth full)* Thanks, Xochiquetzal. Now dance!
- XOCHI. *(dancing slowly)* Look at me, Quetzalcoatl, I'm a lovely creature!
- QUETZ. You are lovely. Dance!
- XOCHI. Look at my arms, my hands, my fingers!
- QUETZ. *(thumps floor)* Dance!

XOCHI. Look at my mouth, my red tongue!

QUETZALCOATL stands up and sways. XOCHIQUETZAL begins to dance faster, reciting or singing as before:

Look at my breasts, my belly!

I am Xochiquetzal.

QUETZ. *(also dancing)* Xochiquetzal!

XOCHI. Look at my thighs, look at the curve of my back,

Look at my knees, my calves, my feet, my toes!

I'm a lovely creature.

QUETZ. *(following her)* Lovely creature.

XOCHI. *(leading him on)* I am Xochiquetzal.

QUETZ. Xochiquetzal, Xochiquetzal.

XOCHI. Quetzalcoatl.

QUETZ. Xochiquetzal.

XOCHI. I am Xochiquetzal.

QUETZ. Lovely creature.

The dance gets faster and faster, until at last QUETZALCOATL catches XOCHIQUETZAL and they fall to the floor together

JARVIS. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!

XOCHIQUETZAL goes off. QUETZALCOATL sits up

QUETZ. I am ashamed. I have broken my own laws. I must leave Mexico and give my power to Tezcatlipoca. I will sail over the shining paths of the sea to the far edge of the world where the red sun waits for me. My heart will burn in the sun and rise again as the Morning Star. Quetzalcoatl is leaving Mexico. At the end of time he will return to his people.

TEZCATLIPOCA takes off QUETZALCOATL's collar and puts it on. QUETZALCOATL goes off.

TEZ. Quetzalcoatl is leaving Mexico. His power is mine. I am Tezcatlipoca and I rule alone.

JARVIS. Tezcatlipoca!

TEZ. The earth is mine, Mister Jarvis.

THE BRONZE IMMORTALS OF HAN

HEMINGWAY lying on floor, JARVIS seated on his own chair

JARVIS. Our friend there is rather pathetic. *(to HEMINGWAY)* Why don't you sit on your chair? You don't look your best down there. You don't look like a proper warden. *(to audience)* Truth is, he isn't a proper warden. Not now, though he was in days gone by.

HEM. *(hoarse, breathless voice)* Days of yore.

JARVIS. Don't tire yourself, Mister Hemingway! Used to be my predecessor in the Mexican treasures, but they retired him years ago.

HEM. Mists of time.

JARVIS. Shut up, Mister Hemingway! His doctor told him not to speak more than necessary because of his heart condition. Not that he's got anything to say, in any case, since he's soft in the head.

HEM. Gaga.

JARVIS. Well, a few weeks later he was back, wearing his old uniform. Couldn't take it, couldn't take retirement. People came and explained things to him. I mean he was getting his pension, he didn't need to work any more.

HEM. Christmas Day in the workhouse.

JARVIS. It never seemed to get through to him, he continued to turn up day by day, so finally we took the decision to tolerate his presence. He has his uses, after all. I mean, if I want to nip out for a pee or a cup of tea, he's there to keep an eye on things. Not that he could do anything in practice if the need arose, but to the uninitiated he looks like a proper warden. Not at this moment he doesn't, of course. Why don't you sit on your chair, Mister Hemingway? You'll give the department a bad name.

HEM. *(mutters inaudibly)*

JARVIS. What's that? *(to audience)* Couldn't hear a word, could you?

HEM. *(mutters)*

JARVIS. *(stooping over him)* Speak up, you poor old monster!

HEM. If Heaven had any feelings...

JARVIS. You're always saying that.

HEM. ... Heaven too would grow old.

JARVIS. About a hundred years ago, he worked in the Chinese department. Yes, quite so, Mister Hemingway, but it isn't your feelings that make you old, is it? It's your age.

HEMINGWAY struggles up from the floor and flops on to his chair

HEM. The story of the Bronze Immortals.

JARVIS. Stifle your groans! He can't tell a story to save his life.

HEM. *(in completely flat voice)* Once there was a Chinese Emperor – name was Wu – Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty.

JARVIS. *(yawns ostentatiously)*

HEM. He wanted to live for ever... for ever... for ever... *(his head nods, he seems about to drop asleep, then abruptly pulls himself together)*... So he made bronze statues. Bronze immortals holding pans to catch the dew... to catch the dew... to catch the dew...

JARVIS. Don't ask him why Wu wanted to catch dew! It takes hours.

HEM. But Emperor Wu died. The Han Dynasty died. And Emperor Ming of the Wei Dynasty sent horses and carts to take away the bronze immortals of Han.

JARVIS. Are you following this?

HEM. But when they were loading the statues on to the carts, tears ran down the statues' faces... tears...

JARVIS. *(after brief pause)* That's not the end.

HEM. The bronze immortals were weeping for Emperor Wu because he was dead and wanted to live for ever. Heaven... if feelings... Heaven also old... they said...

HEMINGWAY falls off his chair and lies on the floor

JARVIS. Thank you, Mister Hemingway. His timing's terrible, isn't it? He doesn't understand the first principles of public speaking.

IN A SUITABLE TEMPERATURE AN EGG CHANGES INTO A CHICKEN

Enter RED GUARDS

LEADER. Extraordinary news!

GUARDS. What's happened?

LEADER. You remember Professor Lao Sheng?

1ST GUARD. The reactionary academic authority?

2ND GUARD. The black gangster?

3RD GUARD. The bourgeois individualist?

4TH GUARD. We sent him to the north to work for the soldiers in their struggle against the Russian imperialists.

5TH GUARD. He was a poisonous weed.

GUARDS. What's happened to Lao Sheng?

LEADER. *(to audience)* Now that we have examined the negative aspects of the reactionary academic authority Lao Sheng, it is a pleasure to move on to something more cheerful and positive.

4TH GUARD now becomes LAO SHENG, the other GUARDS soldiers, while LEADER remains at back as Narrator

Lao Sheng was travelling north with a company of soldiers.

They march on the spot

Lao Sheng refused to eat or drink and was wasting away.

LAO SHENG mimes refusal and wasting

The soldiers tried to force him at first, but then they said:

1ST GUARD. To hell with the old fool!

2ND GUARD. Let him die!

3RD GUARD. He is a wasted growth.

LEADER. Lao Sheng grew weaker and weaker.

LAO SHENG mimes growing weaker

By this time the soldiers were passing through the mountains of Szechuan, and there, on a precipitous road high above the rocky gorge of the River Tatu, they were caught in a storm.

5TH GUARD. It grew dark.

1ST GUARD. Lightning ran about the sky.

2ND GUARD. Thunder shook the mountains.

3RD GUARD. Rain stifled the air.

LEADER. Suddenly Lao Sheng fell down in the road and lay like a broken branch across the rivers of brown mud.

LAO SHENG falls and lies in stylised position

1ST GUARD. The soldiers stood around him.

2ND GUARD. Not knowing what to do.

3RD GUARD. Thinking he had been struck by lightning.

5TH GUARD. Looking uneasily for the next stroke.

LEADER. But the rain stopped. The storm vanished over the mountains. The sun shone and Lao Sheng sat up in the road among the puddles and said:

LAO. *(sitting up)* What's the delay? We must hurry to the north. Long live Chairman Mao, the Red Sun in the East!

LEADER. Then Lao Sheng ate rice and drank water and the company of soldiers continued northwards.

1ST GUARD. But when the soldiers asked Lao Sheng what had happened to him, he would only say:

LAO. I became a new man. I saw in a vision what happened at Luting Bridge.

LEADER. The place where Lao Sheng fell down in the road was only a mile or two from Luting Bridge.

GUARDS. What happened at Luting Bridge?

They all sing:

SONG: THE LONG MARCH

The Long March, the Long March,
This is the story of the men who marched
Six thousand miles and more,
Cutting a scar on the map of China,
A dragon's tail of two years' war.
Kiangsi, Kwangtung, Hunan, Kwangsi,
Kweichow, Yunnan, Szechuan, Kansu, Yenan.
The Long March, the Long March.

LEADER and RED GUARDS now split into two parties and march to opposite sides of stage, becoming MAO TSE-TUNG and the RED ARMY on one side and CHIANG KAI-SHEK and the KUOMINTANG on the other.

MAO. I am Mao Tse-tung, General of the Red Army.

CHIANG. I am Chiang Kai-shek, General of the Kuomintang.

RED ARMY. Red Army.

KUOMIN. Kuomintang.

MAO. The Red Army is concealed in the hills of Kiangsi. Our numbers are small compared to the enemy, but we are not dismayed.

CHIANG. It is hard even for a large army to destroy a nest of bandits concealed in broken country. However, one must remove a thorn from one's foot, even if the thorn is small and negligible in itself.

MAO. We say:

RED ARMY. Pit one against ten, pit ten against a hundred!

MAO. To the rulers of China, to the imperialist warlord, Chiang Kai-shek, we say:

RED ARMY. We are using the few to defeat the many.

CHIANG. I am sending one hundred thousand men to winkle out the bandits in Kiangsi.

MAO. We have only forty thousand men. But a single spear can kill an elephant. We shall concentrate all our strength on one small part of the enemy.

RED ARMY and KUOMINTANG fight. They can use acrobatics, mime, wrestling, judo or dance

Victory!

CHIANG. Defeat!

RED ARMY dances in victory, KUOMINTANG weep, bite hands, etc.

I am sending two hundred thousand men to pull out the thorn in Kiangsi.

MAO. The enemy advances, we retreat. The enemy camps, we harass. The enemy tires, we attack. The enemy retreats, we pursue. We have only thirty thousand men, but the enemy gropes in the dark, while we walk in daylight.

The armies fight and the KUOMINTANG is again defeated

Victory!

CHIANG. Defeat!

RED ARMY dances in victory, KUOMINTANG weep, bite hands, etc.

CHIANG. I am sending three hundred thousand men to smoke out the wasps' nest in Kiangsi.

MAO. We have only thirty thousand men. But we shall strike at the weakest point, between the links of the chain.

The armies fight and the KUOMINTANG is again defeated

Victory!

CHIANG. Defeat!

RED ARMY dances in victory, KUOMINTANG weep, bite hands, etc. Enter MESSENGER to CHIANG

MESS. Unpleasant news, General Chiang! The Japanese are menacing you in the north.

CHIANG. Disaster on disaster! *(weeps)*

Enter SECOND MESSENGER to CHIANG

2ND MESS. But there is also better news. Two German military experts have arrived to help you.

MESSENGERS become GERMAN MILITARY EXPERTS

SEECKT. I am Von Seeckt.

FALK. Und I am Von Falkenhausen.

CHIANG. Tell me how to destroy the bandits in Kiangsi and I shall never forget you!

SEECKT. This is simple.

FALK. Child's play.

SEECKT. You must build blockhouses.

FALK. Between the blockhouses you must insert barbed wire entanglements.

SEECKT. In this way you will encircle the bandits.

FALK. Cutting their supplies and hampering their freedom of movement.

SEECKT. And you will catch them like poor little rabbits in the trap.

CHIANG. Build blockhouses! Make barbed wire entanglements!

KUOMINTANG mime blockhouses and barbed wire entanglements

MAO. The enemy is trying something new. Break the blockade!

RED ARMY attacks the encirclement, but fails to break it

CHIANG. Victory!

KUOMIN. Victory! Victory!

MAO. Defeat!

KUOMINTANG do victory dance, MAO and RED ARMY weep, bite hands, etc.

Now we must escape. We must abandon Kiangsi and head for the north. There we will defend China against both the Japanese aggressors and the Kuomintang warlords. Begin the Long March!

All the RED GUARDS now become members of the RED ARMY, except for the GUARD playing CHIANG. All except CHIANG sing:

SONG: THE RED ARMY HAS NO FEAR

The Red Army has no fear
Setting out on the Long March.
One thousand mountains,
One thousand hardships,
Ten thousand rivers,
Ten thousand dangers,
The Red Army has no fear.

The Red Army is not tired,
Setting out on the Long March,
See the great Five Ridges
Are little wavelets,
And the heights of Wumeng
Are little mud-pats,
The Red Army is not tired.

The Red Army sings for joy,
Setting out on the Long March.
On the burning banks
Of Gold Sand River,
On the icy chains
Of the Bridge at Luting,
The Red Army sings for joy.

MAO. We have captured the city of Tsunyi, we have crossed the River Wu, we have stormed the Loushan Pass, but our greatest obstacle lies ahead. We must cross the Tatu River.

CHIANG and MAO with RED ARMY take up positions at opposite sides of stage

CHIANG. Now the rats are in the trap. Seventy years ago when the Taiping bandits fought against the Emperor, they were trapped at this very spot and wiped out. History repeats itself.

MAO. Tatu River...

CHIANG. Tatu River...

MAO. Tatu River rushing swiftly...

- CHIANG. Tatu River rushing swiftly in your steep rocky gorge...
- MAO. Tatu River rushing swiftly in your steep rocky gorge, help us to reach the other side!
- CHIANG. Tatu River rushing swiftly in your steep rocky gorge, prevent them crossing to this side! *(to invisible KUOMINTANG army)* Defend the City of Luting!
- MAO. March on the City of Luting!
- CHIANG. To reach the City of Luting they must cross the suspension bridge over the Tatu gorge. Tear away the planks from Luting Bridge!
- MAO. March faster towards Luting Bridge! Faster!
- CHIANG. Nothing remains of Luting Bridge but thirteen iron chains. On this side of the river we are defending the city with mortars and machine-guns. How can the Red Army cross the Tatu River now? The rats are in the trap.
- RED ARMY. Look! Thirteen iron chains. All that remains of Luting Bridge. How can we cross now under the fire of the enemy? We are trapped.
- MAO. Make new planks! Twenty-two men with swords, machine-guns and hand-grenades must cross the swaying chains. Others will lay planks behind them. The Red Army will cross Luting Bridge!
- RED ARMY. We will cross Luting Bridge!
- MAO. Advance!
- Moving in line across the stage, the RED ARMY mime crossing the chains of the bridge, their hands stretched out, their feet wide apart.*
- CHIANG. Fire!
- The front man of the RED ARMY falls. The rest continue over him.*
- MAO. Advance!
- CHIANG. Fire!
- The next man falls, his feet at the first man's head*
- CHIANG. The bandits are more than half-way across. Set fire to the planks that remain this side of the bridge!
- MAO. Advance through the flames!
- CHIANG. Fire!
- The next man falls, his feet to the second man's head*
- MAO. Capture the City of Luting!
- CHIANG. The Red Army has crossed Luting Bridge. Defeat!

MAO. The Red Army has crossed Luting Bridge and captured the City of Luting.

He cuts down CHIANG

RED ARMY. Victory!

MAO. Now nothing will stop us until we reach the Great Wall of China.

RED ARMY. On to the Great Wall!

They all reprise

SONG: THE LONG MARCH

The Long March, the Long March.

This is the story of the men who marched

Six thousand miles and more,

Cutting a scar on the map of China,

A dragon's tail of two years' war.

Kiangsi, Kwangtung, Hunan, Kwangsi,

Kweichow, Yunnan, Szechuan, Kansu, Yenan.

The Long March, the Long March.

They all march out.

OVID ON THE ISLAND OF ELBA

Enter OVID, GINA and TINA in bathing costumes, with bathing towels, dark glasses, fruit, wine, sun-tan lotion, straw hats, etc. They lie down on the towels, centre-stage, while a GUITARIST enters and sits some way off, strumming gently

GINA. It must be wonderful to be a poet.

OVID. *(swats fly)* Oh, I don't know.

TINA. A creative genius.

OVID. *(rubbing lotion on her back)* It has its moments. This is one of them.

GINA. A name on everybody's lips.

OVID. Oh, yes, that appeals to me.

GINA. Ovid!

He kisses her

OVID. But seriously, genius is nothing without hard work. Think of all the books I've written!

GINA. Lovely books! My favourite is The Loves.

TINA. "Aestus erat, mediamque dies exegerat horam."

GINA. What a line of bliss!

OVID. But thousands upon thousands of such lines, mined like diamonds from the depths of my spirit, cut and polished and polished again, set in gold to last for ever. It's hard work, not to speak of the emotional strain.

He lies face down

TINA. You must sometimes wish you were just an ordinary person.

OVID. *(with a sigh)* Constantly.

GINA. A face in the crowd.

OVID. Oblivion! *(buries head in arms)*

TINA. Where's Cotta Maximus?

GINA. Up at the house. Working in his office.

TINA. It must be wonderful to be as rich as Cotta.

OVID. Not at all. Imagine being in his office on a day like this! Half this island of Elba belongs to Cotta, but it's we who enjoy it.

Distant rumble of thunder

TINA. Thunder!

GINA. Is there going to be a storm?

TINA. Too exciting!

OVID. Heard the news from Rome?

GINA. No.

OVID. A five-star scandal.

TINA. Do tell us!

OVID. Remember Julia?

GINA. The Emperor's daughter?

OVID. Yes, the lady who was caught having it off with Mark Antony's son in front of the Temple of Venus one dark night.

TINA. Wasn't she exiled?

- OVID. I think so. Some small island.
- GINA. Doesn't sound too bad.
- OVID. Nice for a holiday – not for ever.
- TINA. And the fellow?
- OVID. Committed suicide. I was in some danger myself at the time.
- GINA. What did you do?
- OVID. I'd just published my Handbook on the Art of Love
- TINA. Oh, yes, I've read that.
- GINA. Who hasn't?
- OVID. The Emperor was livid, even more so the Empress. Anyway the whole thing's blown up again. This time it's poor Julia's daughter, the Emperor's grand-daughter, also called Julia. Naturally she was attracted to the Temple of Venus...

He turns over and lies on back, wriggles toes and watches them

- GINA. Go on!
- OVID. This time she was actually inside the temple.
- TINA. Who with?
- OVID. Quite a party.
- TINA. One after another, or all together?
- OVID. Several variations, as I recall.
- GINA. You were there!
- OVID. No more than a spectator. Frankly, I've seen much better.
- GINA. And what will happen to this Julia, do you think?
- OVID. Who knows? In a funny way, one's really more sorry for the Emperor.

Loud rumble of thunder

- GINA. The sky's quite black.
- TINA. Too threatening!

Enter COTTA MAXIMUS

- COTTA. Ovid...

OVID. Dear Cotta, rest from your labours awhile on the golden sand! Dear Cotta, your tame poet and your pair of golden beauties await your company beside the golden sea.

Very loud rumble

COTTA. Ovid, you are to go to Rome!

OVID. Dear Cotta, nothing would induce me to go to Rome in the middle of the summer.

COTTA. The Emperor has summoned you to Rome.

Lightning, thunder, drops of rain, the stage becomes dark

TINA. Here comes the storm!

GINA. Run for cover!

TINA. Take my hand, Cotta!

GINA. And mine!

TINA. Isn't this too unexpected?

GINA. A bolt from the blue.

Exeunt COTTA, GINA, TINA and the GUITARIST, pursued by storm. OVID falls to his knees, his hands protecting his head as AUGUSTUS CAESAR appears, holding his baton like a thunderbolt and speaking in a loud, terrifying voice:

AUGUSTUS. I am Augustus Caesar, first Emperor of Rome. For one hundred years the Roman people tore themselves to pieces in civil war after civil war. At last, after so much blood and destruction, the gods gave Rome a man able to bear on his broad shoulders the whole weight of the civilised world. I found Rome clay, I made it marble. I built temples and circuses, I subdued enemies, I tamed the earth with roads and aqueducts, I trained legions, I nourished poets, I shipped corn, I made laws. Amongst all my other tasks, I set myself to correct my people's morals, twisted and perverted by the years of civil war and public licence. My own daughter betrayed me. I sent her away. You wrote a foul and immoral book, but I told myself that books were only books, poets no danger to the State. Now my daughter's daughter betrays me. It seems that you were in the habit of reading her passages from your book, further that you witnessed on at least one occasion immoral acts committed by her. This cannot go unpunished, Publius Ovidius Naso. Your sentence is exile. Because you are only a poet and I do not wish to punish your heirs, you will not forfeit your property in the ordinary way. But because you are a danger to my State and because you have ruined my family with your filthy writings, you will never return to Rome. You will live out your days on the very edge of my Empire, at Tomis on the Black Sea, a town inhabited by Goths, a place where they speak no Latin, where it is cold and barbarous, where savages from beyond the frontier make armed raids over the frozen Danube, where you will learn by bitter experience of its absence to appreciate the civilisation which I have created and which I maintain in the face of enemies within and

without – and which you have attempted to undermine after your small smutty fashion. Your books will be removed from the public libraries and burnt.

Thunder and lightning. AUGUSTUS disappears.

OVID. *(raising his head timorously)* But I only wrote books. I never did half the things I said I did. Mere words.

He lifts his hands in prayer

You yourself, Emperor Augustus, have committed adultery. More than once. No, no, forget that! All poets write about adultery, it's the standard subject. What about the gods – Mars and Venus? Burn my books, but let me stay in Rome! I don't deserve exile.

Thunder and lightning

I do deserve it, but I appeal for mercy. Spare me the Goths! Send me to Egypt, Greece, Spain, Israel, even to Britain, but spare me the Goths!

He begins to crawl off stage

Ah, Rome! Ah, miserable Ovid, poet of the city of love! Filthy city, foul love! Why didn't I write about war? Why didn't I celebrate your great victories, Augustus? Wretched Ovid, poet of filth!

He crawls out.

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

A ballet for PHILEMON, BAUCIS and TWO GODS, with NARRATOR and music. In the Traverse Theatre production this was danced in more-or-less classical ballet style, with a more-or-less classical ballet score

NARRATOR. From time to time the gods visit the earth in disguise. They have been known to travel in pairs.

Enter the pair of GODS, arm-in-arm or hand-in-hand. They are never parted, but act throughout the scene as a single entity

NARRATOR. This particular pair of gods is touring a stretch of fertile farming country.

All day the sprung turf of rolling pasture has caressed the smooth soles of its four divine feet, the warm smell of arable valleys has assailed its four distended nostrils.

But as the day has lengthened, the gods' two throats have grown dry with dust, its two bellies sharp with hunger and its four legs heavy with fatigue.

Already it has knocked at the doors of a thousand mellow homesteads and a thousand fat farmers or their wives have denied it a night's lodging.

Now, tightlipped, steely-eyed and yellow with rage, the pair of gods comes to a small dilapidated cottage set in a triangle of waste ground between somebody's wood and somebody else's duckpond.

Enter PHILEMON and BAUCIS

The cottage belongs to an old couple, partly deaf, partly blind, largely rheumatic, but still in good condition for their age, their tempers sunny and their dispositions kindly.

The cackling of their single goose warns the old couple that someone is about and they come out of their cottage.

The GODS with PHILEMON and BAUCIS enter the cottage

With smiling faces they welcome the pair of gods and make it free of their frugal resources.

The old man sets a bench for the pair to sit on.

The old woman blows up the fire under a large black pot.

The old man brings in vegetables from his diminutive kitchen-garden. The old woman peels them.

The old man cuts a slice of gammon which the old woman boils in the pot.

The old woman brings a wooden bowl and a towel. The old man fills the bowl with warm water and the pair of gods gratefully washes its two sweat-stained faces and its four grimy hands.

The old man sets a table and the old woman covers it with a worn but spotlessly clean cloth. The old man pushes a flat stone under the short leg of the table.

The pair of gods begins its meal with an *hors d'oeuvre*: wild cherries preserved in wine, endives, radishes, cheese, and eggs lightly roasted in the ashes.

For the main course, the old couple have decided to sacrifice their goose.

PHILEMON and BAUCIS pursue the goose round the stage

However, the goose eludes them and, cackling with terror, takes sanctuary in the lap of the gods.

The pair of gods expresses itself content to eat boiled gammon and mixed vegetables.

The old man plies the pair with home-made wine, whilst his wife keeps the table groaning with nuts, figs, dates, plums, apples, grapes and a dripping honey-comb.

The pair of gods is replete, the old couple flushed with the pleasure and anxiety of serving. And now the old man notices something odd: his pitcher of wine is not getting any emptier. He looks at his wife. He and his wife look at the pair of gods and at the goose sitting quiet and sleek in the lap of the gods.

The pair of gods smiles and nods its heads.

“We are gods. All the people in this fertile but disgustingly inhospitable stretch of country are about to be punished severely. You alone will be safe.”

The pair of gods takes the old couple up a nearby hill.

Looking down, they see the rivers overflow their banks, the fat farmers, their wives and their animals drown, the crops and pastures turn to an oozy marsh.

But the triangle of ground on which their cottage stands remains dry, as though covered by an invisible, inverted bowl.

Then the cottage turns into a temple, supported on marble columns, with carved doors and a golden roof.

“Now you may ask what you want of us.”

“We would like to be priests in your new temple... “

“And we would like not to outlive one another.”

The GODS nod

Their wish is granted and the pair of gods returns to heaven.

13

THE NIGHT OF EXILE

OVID and his WIFE seated on upright chairs at either side of the stage, facing front. Standing behind each chair is an actor who acts as puppet-master. OVID and his WIFE speak in almost expressionless voices

OVID. I remember that night...

OVID'S PUPPET-MASTER lifts OVID's right hand to his temple

... the black memory of it creeps upon on me without warning... that night my last night in the city, that night I last saw everything I loved... even now it brings tears to my eyes, when I remember that night.

PUPPET-MASTER lowers OVID's hand. WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER turns her to face OVID, so that she remains sitting in profile to audience

WIFE. It's nearly morning.

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER turns OVID to face WIFE

OVID. Not quite yet.

WIFE. Have you decided what you'll need to pack?

OVID. No.

WIFE. Warm clothes you must have.

OVID. No doubt.

WIFE. And books. There'll be no books in Tomis.

OVID. I haven't begun to think of packing.

WIFE. It's nearly morning.

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER helps him to stand and turns him to face front. He lifts both OVID's arms, spreads them, palms to the audience, away from the body at about waist height

OVID. The time has come... to say goodbye to all of you... my friends... those few of you who still dare to be my friends now that Caesar is my enemy... and you, members of my household, loyal in spite of my disgrace... to say goodbye... to thank you... the time has come.

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER lowers his arms to his sides and turns him to face WIFE. WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER helps WIFE to stand, turns her to face OVID. PUPPET-MASTERS stretch out OVID's and WIFE's arms towards one another, then move them together and help them to embrace, supporting them from behind while they do so

My dear wife!

WIFE. My dear husband!

OVID. Listen to them crying and howling inside the house.

WIFE. Even the dogs. It sounds like a funeral.

OVID. The Fall of Troy.

WIFE. My dear husband!

OVID. My dear wife!

PUPPET-MASTERS unclasp OVID and WIFE. OVID's PUPPET-MASTER takes OVID a few steps away, turns him to face front, raises right arm above head and sets head to look upwards. WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER sets WIFE to look at OVID

Marble temples of the Capitol, protectors of the City, great gods of Rome, I am leaving you. Please explain to that living god, Augustus Caesar, that what I did was a mistake, not a deliberate crime. It would take a weight off

my mind, if you'd be so kind, great gods of Rome, in your marble temples on the Capitol.

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER helps WIFE to kneel on floor, facing away from OVID. OVID's PUPPET-MASTER lowers OVID's arm and head and turns him to look at WIFE. WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER bows WIFE's head to floor

WIFE. Little gods of the house, keep him here by some means! Don't let him go away, change something, perform a miracle! We kept your light burning all these years, do this for us in return, little gods of the house!

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER helps her to stand up, turns her to face OVID

Now it's really time.

OVID. Don't say so!

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER moves her across stage in front of OVID, who remains motionless

WIFE. Bring out the packing-cases!

OVID. Don't hurry me!

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER moves her across stage behind OVID

WIFE. Where's the food for his journey?

OVID. Slowly, slowly!

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER moves her across stage in front of OVID

WIFE. Fetch his coat, fetch his purse!

OVID. Think where I'm going and don't hurry me!

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER moves her to face OVID

WIFE. It's really time.

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER takes him to edge of stage, turns him to face WIFE

OVID. Goodbye, my dear wife!

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER raises OVID's arm in farewell gesture, then slowly lowers it, pause, then moves OVID back to chair and seats him

I'm not going yet. Good Heavens, I can spare another ten minutes. I shall never see you again, but I have ten minutes. I'm not going yet.

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER helps WIFE to kneel at OVID's feet

WIFE. Take me with you! I can't let you go without me. There's room for me in the ship. Caesar's anger makes you an exile. My love for makes me an exile. My love is my Caesar. Take me with you!

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER moves OVID's hand to stroke WIFE's hair

OVID. You have to stay. First, to look after my estates. Second, to work for my return, to move Caesar's friends to move Caesar. You have to stay.

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER helps OVID to stand up. WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER helps WIFE to stand. They stretch out OVID's and WIFE'S arms and help them to embrace as before, folding their arms round each other's necks

Now I'm leaving.

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER tears OVID from WIFE's embrace. WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER tries to make his WIFE cling to him

Burn all my books!

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER moves him away to edge of stage and turns him to face WIFE

Now I'm leaving.

OVID's PUPPET-MASTER takes him off stage. WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER lays WIFE on floor and tousles her hair, then picks her up and takes her to place where OVID left stage

WIFE. Ovid!

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER hurries WIFE about stage, this way and that, in short runs

Ovid!

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER makes her kneel

Little gods of the house...

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER makes her stand and repeat OVID's gesture to the Capitol

Marble temples of the Capitol...

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER bows WIFE's head, bends her back and makes her roll her body round from the waist

WIFE. Caesar, Augustus Caesar!

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER takes her towards place where OVID left stage

Ovid!

WIFE's PUPPET-MASTER lays WIFE's limp body down on floor and stands at attention behind her.

ARIADNE AND THE BACCHIC ROUT

Ballet for ARIADNE, BACCHUS, and his ROUT with NARRATOR and music. ARIADNE lying alone

NARRATOR. It was still cold on the island when she woke. Eyes still closed she put out her hand to touch his face. The birds were beginning to sing.

ARIADNE with eyes closed stretches her arms over the stage around her

She opened her eyes. He had gone.

ARIADNE gets up and begins to run about the stage as though in loose sand

Running along the shore, crying, calling, her feet sank heavily in the soft sand. The rocks echoed his name. The sea splashed, rushed, washed away her foot-prints.

Sound of sea

A path wound like a thin scratch up the face of the cliff. Without stopping for breath she ran to the top. Brambles and sharp bushes scored her legs.

ARIADNE runs up the cliff

The sky behind her was bright with the rising sun. In front of her the stars still glittered in the darkness and the sails of his ship were bright against the crimson sea.

ARIADNE looks out to sea

She waved her arms, then cupped her hands and shouted. "Man overboard... stop!... your crew is short by one." She tied her handkerchief to a tree. The strong breeze streaming the handkerchief towards him filled his sails and carried him out of sight.

A moment of silence, then loud music as BACCHUS and his ROUT enter

Then strange things happened. Incense and music. A chariot drawn by leopards. Women, satyrs with the ears of goats. Snakes and cymbals. An old man on a donkey. Ivy leaves and goat feet, a donkey, an obscene old man, clashing cymbals, writhing snakes and women dancing figures of eight; tambourines and satyrs with tufted ears, stamping and staggering, an old man reeling from his donkey, legs of women and torsos of satyrs, cymbals, snakes, thighs, pounding feet, the torn limbs of animals, trees with broken roots, ivy leaves and a pair of leopards, and from the chariot, unwinding his scarlet cloak, his long hair tangled with ivy leaves, leapt the drunk and naked god...

ALL. Bacchus!

ARIADNE sings:

ARIADNE's SONG

On the island of Naxos
Day was breaking
On the island of Naxos
Birds were waking
Colours in the air
Wind in my hair
My heart was aching
On the island of Naxos.

ALL. Bacchus!

BACCHUS sings:

BACCHUS' SONG

Call to me when you are lonely,
Poor girl, poor boy,
I'll bring you joy.
Call to me, but only
When you need me,
If you need me,
For instead of sadness
I will bring you madness
And you'll ride high,
Colours will burst in the sky.
You'll never go home
Where you came from,
Poor girl, poor boy,
If I bring you joy.

Bacchus, the red god Bacchus,
I come from the East,
With music and incense,
With wine for the feast,
With drugs for your senses
To make your limbs loose
And your head spin.

Listen to the din
Of the tambourine,
Of the cymbal and drum,
In a scarlet cloak I come'
Bacchus, the red god Bacchus.

Call to me when you are hopeless,
Poor girl, poor boy,
I'll bring you joy,
Call to me, but not unless
You need me,
If you need me,
For I come at a nod
And I am the wild god,
Dancing and singing,
Loving and clinging,
You'll never say no,
You'll never let go,
Poor girl, poor boy,
If I bring you joy.

Bacchus, the red god Bacchus... etc.

They all go out with ARIADNE.

15

THE HERO OF DANANSKY ISLAND

Enter RED GUARDS

LEADER. Astonishing and heart-warming news!

GUARDS. What's happened?

LEADER. You remember Lao Sheng?

1ST GUARD. The former black gangster?

2ND GUARD. The former reactionary academic authority whom we sent to the frozen wastes of the north?

3RD GUARD. Who fell down in the road during a storm in the mountains of Szechuan?

4TH GUARD. And saw in a vision what happened at Luting Bridge?

5TH GUARD. Whereupon he became a new man.

LEADER. That's the man I mean.

5TH GUARD. Did he ever reach the frozen wastes of the north?

LEADER. He did.

4TH GUARD. Did he work for the soldiers?

LEADER. He did.

3RD GUARD. In their struggle against the Russian imperialist warmongers?

LEADER. He did.

2ND GUARD. Was his change of heart lasting?

1ST GUARD. Or did he revert to his old ways?

LEADER. It was lasting. He did not.

He turns to audience

What Lao Sheng did was in itself a small thing. He conquered no territory, he killed no enemies. Nonetheless, considering his age, his former way of life and the class to which he belonged, his action holds great promise for the future and takes on truly heroic proportions. For this reason we shall cease to refer to Lao Sheng as the former reactionary academic authority, poisonous weed and black gangster, and we shall remember him as the Hero of Danansky Island.

3RD GUARD becomes LAO SHENG and goes to one side of the stage. The other GUARDS sit on the floor in a ring at the opposite side of the stage

On reaching Danansky Island where the River Issuri marks the frozen boundary between imperialist Russia and Red China, Lao Sheng worked diligently for the soldiers...

1ST GUARD. Share our meal with us, Lao Sheng!

2ND GUARD. Yes, you're always serving us, Lao Sheng, why do you refuse to eat with us?

LAO. I'm not worthy to eat in your company.

LEADER. And he swept the floor of their hut instead.

LAO SHENG sweeps floor

4TH GUARD. Come nearer to the fire, Lao Sheng!

5TH GUARD. It's bitter cold outside and the wind comes under the door like a scorpion's tail.

LAO. I'm not worthy to take up room by the fire.

LEADER. And he lay down to sleep against the crack under the door.

LAO SHENG lies down

1ST GUARD. Will you never stop punishing yourself, Lao Sheng?

LAO. I am already sixty years old. The remnant of my life will not be long enough to weigh in the balance against the life I have already lived. Therefore I must try to make every action ten times heavier. I must balance ten years with one.

LEADER. And he turned over and kept out the icy draught until dawn.

LAO SHENG turns over

Snow fell that morning and brought with it across the frozen river a nasty horde of Russian imperialist warmongers, their hearts black with hatred for the People's Revolution.

4TH and 5TH GUARDS become Russian soldiers and go to one corner of the stage

But the Red Soldiers went out to meet them without fear.

1ST and 2ND GUARDS take up positions in opposite corner of stage

And in the meantime Lao Sheng made himself useful, cleaning the latrines.

LAO SHENG cleans latrines

1ST GUARD. The confrontation on the ice began with words...

RUSSIANS and RED ARMY move slowly across stage towards each other

4TH GUARD. Mao Tse-tung is a Chinese warlord.

2ND GUARD. Kosygin is a running dog of American expansionism.

5TH GUARD. Genghis Khan rides again as Mao Tse-tung.

1ST GUARD. Brezhnev and his guided missiles are paper tigers.

5TH GUARD. Then there was jostling...

They jostle one another

4TH GUARD. And wrestling...

They wrestle

2ND GUARD. And struggling with rifle-butts.

They struggle with rifle-butts

LEADER. The Russian imperialists were getting the worst of it. They slid about on the frozen surface of the Issuri River and lost their footing.

2ND GUARD. Suddenly they ran back to the bank, showing their scuts like frightened rabbits.

4TH and 5TH GUARDS run back to their corner

1ST GUARD. But as the Red Soldiers raised their arms and shook their fists in triumph...

They do so

4TH GUARD. Shots were fired.

1ST GUARD. And one of the Red Soldiers fell down on the ice, his blood reddening the snow.

2ND GUARD falls

LEADER. The Red Soldiers were ordered back to safety. They had to leave their comrade lying on the ice.

1ST GUARD. Let me go out and fetch him!

LEADER. That would only put another life at risk. I'm sorry, but he will understand.

1ST GUARD. At that moment, his slop bucket in his hand, Lao Sheng came out of the latrines.

LAO. I am not a soldier. My life is of no value. I will bring him to safety.

LEADER. And before anyone could stop him, Lao Sheng dropped his bucket and ran out over the ice towards the wounded soldier.

LAO SHENG runs on the spot

1ST GUARD. The cowardly aggressors on the far bank of the river did not open fire at once. They were astonished to see such an old man coming towards them over the ice.

LEADER. But as Lao Sheng neared the wounded man, two or three shots rang out in the cold air.

1ST GUARD. Lao Sheng seemed to stumble, clasping one hand to his side, but he went on running.

LEADER. He reached the wounded man. His left hand seemed to be useless, but with the strength of ten he took hold of the soldier and lifted him on to his back.

LAO SHENG picks up the wounded man and carries him on his back

1ST GUARD. The aggressors did not fire again. They were too astonished and ashamed.

LEADER. Lao Sheng carried his burden back across the ice to safety. And he laid the man gently down beside the fire in the hut.

LAO SHENG carries man and lays him down

1ST GUARD. *(kneeling by wounded man)* I thought you were hit by one of the shots, Lao Sheng. You seemed to stumble. Did the bullet wound your hand?

4TH and 5TH GUARDS come and stand behind LAO SHENG, transforming themselves from Russians to soldiers of the Red Army

4TH GUARD. There's blood on your hand, Lao Sheng. Is it yours or the wounded man's?

LEADER. Then Lao Sheng looked down at his hand, lifted it slowly away from his body, and a warm river of blood ran out of the hole in his side.

LAO SHENG sinks to the ground, where his head is supported by 4TH and 5TH GUARDS

5TH GUARD. How could you do it, Lao Sheng? You, an old man, sixty years old, all that way across the ice, with one hand, and wounded to death?

LEADER. Lao Sheng smiled.

LAO. When I was a young man I mastered the Chinese classics. That was good, but not good enough. When I was a little older I mastered the Latin language and the Latin classics. Good, but not good enough. How did the Red Army cross Luting Bridge? That was good enough. How did I cross the ice at sixty years old, with one hand and wounded to death? Was that good enough?

LAO SHENG dies

LEADER. *(to audience)* This was the death of Lao Sheng, the Hero of Danansky Island. A revolution is not a dinner-party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery.

Tableau.

OVID'S DEATH AMONG THE GOTHS

A fur coat is laid front-stage to represent OVID. All the GOTHS wear fur, sheepskin or other heavy outdoor coats. As they come in, they form a line stretching diagonally up-stage from down left by OVID to somewhere up right. Enter 1ST GOTH, stoops beside coat, shakes head and goes out. He returns with 2ND GOTH

1ST GOTH. He's talking Latin, poor old man, he's gone back to talking Latin.

2ND GOTH kneels beside fur coat

What does he say?

2ND GOTH. “Springtime in Italy. Children are picking fresh violets.”

Enter 3RD GOTH

3RD GOTH. (to 1ST GOTH) What’s up?

1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) Sssh! The Roman poet’s talking Latin.

2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) “Children, violets, birds, swallows, eaves.”

Enter 4TH GOTH

4TH GOTH. (to 3RD) What’s the trouble?

2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) “Rivers are bubbling in Sulmo.”

3RD GOTH. (to 4TH) The Roman poet says, in Latin: “violets, birds, eaves and children.”

2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) “Athletes are rubbing themselves with oil.”

1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) “Rivers bubbling, athletes rubbing oil.”

3RD GOTH. (to 4TH) “Oil, rubbing rivers and bubbling athletes.”

2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) “In the city of Rome, people are going into the theatres.”

1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) “People and theatres in the city of Rome.”

2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) “Crowds in the forum, beautiful women in the colonnades.”

1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) “Crowds of beautiful women in the colonnades of the forum.”

3RD GOTH. (to 4TH) “People, beautiful women, theatres, colonnades, the forum in Rome.”

Enter 5TH GOTH

4TH GOTH. (to 5TH) The Roman poet is talking in Latin: “Birds, children, bubbling oil, rivers, athletes, beautiful women and violets in the forum.”

2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) “In this benighted spot the ice is just beginning to crack.”

1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) “The ice is beginning to crack at one spot overnight.”

Enter 6TH GOTH

5TH GOTH. (to 6TH) The Roman poet is picking violets in the forum, beautiful women are in the rivers with athletes and bubbling children.

3RD GOTH. (to 4TH) He could spot the ice cracking at night.

2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) The poet says he is nearly sixty years old.

1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) “Nearly sixty years old.”

4TH GOTH. (to 5TH) The ice was cracking during the night.

- 3RD GOTH. (to 4TH) At sixty years old.
- 4TH GOTH. (to 5TH) Sixty.
- 5TH GOTH. (to 6TH) “The ice was cracking for sixty nights.”
- 2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) “You are already dead, Emperor Augustus, and you forgot me.”
- 1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) The Emperor Augustus forgot him, but he’s dead.
- 3RD GOTH. (to 4TH) “The Emperor Augustus, dead and forgotten.”
- 2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) “But I never forgot you. Here in Tomis I kept your image in my house with my other household gods.”
- 4TH GOTH. (to 5TH) The Emperor forgot he was dead.
- 1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) He never forgot Tomis or the image of his household gods.
- 5TH GOTH. (to 6TH) The Emperor forgot. He was dead.
- 3RD GOTH. (to 4TH) He didn’t forget. His household god is in Tomis.
- 4TH GOTH. (to 5TH) He didn’t forget his household god, but Tomis.
- Enter 7TH GOTH*
- 7TH GOTH. (to 6TH) The Town Council has held a meeting...
- 5TH GOTH. (to 6TH) The god didn’t forget Tomis, or his household.
- 6TH GOTH. (to 5TH) A meeting of the Town Council...
- 2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) “You were right. Your great Empire is more important than my poor books.”
- 7TH GOTH. (to 6TH) The Council considers it an honour that such a great poet should be living in Tomis.
- 6TH GOTH. (to 5TH) The great poet does honour to Tomis.
- 5TH GOTH. (to 4TH) The Town Council honours the great poet of Tomis.
- 1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) “The great Empire is more important than the poor books.”
- 3RD GOTH. (to 4TH) “Poor books are less important than the great Empire.”
- 4TH GOTH. (to 3RD) The great Empire honours the poet for his poor books. (*and turning to 5TH*) Books are more important than the Empire.
- 3RD GOTH. (to 1ST) The great Emperor honours the poet’s books.
- 5TH GOTH. (to 6TH) The Empire is nothing to his books.
- 6TH GOTH. (to 7TH) The Empire is in his books.

- 1ST GOTH. (to 2ND) Tell the poet that the Emperor honours his books.
- 7TH GOTH. (to 6TH) The Council has decided to remit all his taxes and confer on him this laurel wreath. (*gives wreath to 6TH GOTH*)
- 6TH GOTH. (to 5TH GOTH, *giving him wreath*) Confer this wreath and remit his taxes!
- 2ND GOTH. (to 1ST) The poet's dead.
- 1ST GOTH. (to 3RD) The Roman poet's dead.
- 5TH GOTH. (to 4TH GOTH, *giving him wreath*) Commit his taxes and refer this wreath!
- 3RD GOTH. (to 4TH) The poet's dead.
- 4TH GOTH. (to 3RD GOTH, *giving him wreath*) Submit his taxes and inter this wreath! (*turning to 5TH GOTH*) He's dead.
- 3RD GOTH. (to 1ST GOTH, *giving him wreath*) Augustus. This wreath.
- 5TH GOTH. (to 6TH) Dead.
- 1ST GOTH. (to 2ND GOTH, *giving him wreath*) This wreath from Augustus.
- 6TH GOTH. (to 7TH) Dead.
- 2ND GOTH *lays wreath on fur coat.*

HORRIBLE AND FILTHY DEEDS

JARVIS. Hemingway. You remember Hemingway? "Nothing to be done," they said. Bloody quacks. "Nothing to be done." The man was alive, his heart was definitely beating when he left my hands. Ten minutes later, dead. Whose fault was that? All that bloody equipment and nothing to be done. Science! Progress! The world's full of people like that now, bloody quacks with their technology, their highly sophisticated machinery, heart-machines, stomach-pumps, X-rays, atom-bombs, astronauts circling the moon in bloody washing-machines, spin-driers, computers, public-opinion-polls, pornographic literature, obscenities in public places, communists on television, people blowing up airliners, frontal nudity on the stage, homosexuals as blatant as you like, and those women – Women's Libyans – people with long hair, drugs, Chairman Mao, Russian spies... They've got us where they want us, selling filth to children, depravity and corruption, turning bird sanctuaries into airports and nothing to be done! Was it my fault, then, was that the implication? And sex, we're wading in filth right up to the eyeballs. This country is rotten... Immigration has been the ruin of this country, black, brown, yellow, Free French, Poles, Jews, wops, wogs, krauts, the Common Market, Yanks. I'd rather be in this country than America, I'll tell you that – that's a country you can smell the rot off right across the Atlantic Ocean. These people sailing round the world, why do

you think they do it? Desperation, sheer bloody desperation. Normal human-beings! What is a normal human-being? The Aztecs used to cut out human hearts by the thousand with stone knives. Would you call that normal? It was normal to the Aztecs, it was bloody commonplace. Nothing to be done! I promised Hemingway I'd do this for him, when no one was looking. His last request, in the place he loved so much, right in the heart of the British Museum.

He takes a paper bag out of his pocket and scatters ashes about the stage, then crumples bag and jumps up and down on it

Tezcatlipoca!

TEZ. I hear you calling, Mister Jarvis.

JARVIS. What sort of god are you?

TEZ. I am a true god, true god, true god.

JARVIS. Then do something, Tezcatlipoca, do something about this horrible world we live in!

TEZ. A true god is invisible, enters everywhere, enters the heavens and the earth and the place of the dead.

JARVIS. But what can you do for living men, Tezcatlipoca?

TEZ. I will create a new heaven and a new earth in place of the old.

JARVIS. Yes, yes!

TEZ. Three times the human race destroyed itself through pride. Three times the gods made a new sun.

JARVIS. How will you make a new sun, Tezcatlipoca?

TEZ. I will call the gods to the place of sacrifice at Teotihuacan. We will build a great fire there.

Music begins and the gods enter at the edges of the stage

JARVIS. Have you built the fire?

TEZ. One of the gods must cast himself into the fire. We are waiting. We are waiting.

JARVIS. One of the gods must do it.

TEZ. Out of the distance comes a small god, ill and old, poor and wretched. Having nothing to live for, the small god throws himself into the fire.

JARVIS. And then? And then?

TEZ. His hair flames, his flesh shrivels, his bones crack, but now blue with magic power he is rising into the sky. Now he becomes the Lord of Fate, the Great Red Sun.

- JARVIS. *(looking up with rapt expression)* The Great Red Sun, the Lord of Fate!
- TEZ. But the Sun is thirsty, he is scorching the earth with the heat of his thirst.
- JARVIS. What are we to do, Tezcatlipoca, for the Great Red Sun, the Lord of Fate?
- TEZ. He must have blood to drink. You must give him red cactus-fruit to quench his raging thirst. If you want him to move across the sky day by day and give life to the new earth, you must nourish him and cool him with the hearts of men.
- JARVIS. How are we to do that, Tezcatlipoca?
- TEZ. You must make wars, you must take prisoners, tens of thousands of prisoners. You must sacrifice nations, races, peoples to appease the thirst of the Sun.

The GODS dance round JARVIS, who is now standing on his chair, and sing:

SONG OF THE AZTEC GODS

I am the King who beats the drum
And gives the word for battle,
I am ten thousand soldiers who come
To die in the field like cattle.
I am the man who strikes with the spear,
I am the man with red eyes.
Your face is pale, heart full of fear,
Your wounds are black with the flies.

I am the steps of the pyramid,
The temple is white and high.
Up you must walk, you cannot hide,
Up you must walk to die.
I am the man who holds the stone knife,
I am the priest of the Sun,
I am the man that takes your life
And holds up your heart to the Sun.

As the song ends, they raise one of their number, with breast bared, in the position of the Aztec sacrifice, to JARVIS. He performs the sacrifice, then the GODS take JARVIS on their shoulders and dance with him until they drop dead one by one around him and lie like the petals of a flower at his feet. As the music reaches its climax, JARVIS speaks:

JARVIS. The earth is mine, Tezcatlipoca!

The End

GLOSSARY

- ARIADNE.** Daughter of King Minos of Crete, half-sister of the Minotaur, the monstrous result of her mother's liaison with a bull. When Theseus came from Athens to kill the Minotaur in its specially constructed labyrinth, he was helped by Ariadne, who then escaped with him from Crete. Theseus, however, abandoned her on the island of Naxos, whence she was rescued by the opportune arrival of Bacchus, the god of wine, and his Rout. Bacchus carried Ariadne off to India and she eventually became a constellation. See Titian's famous painting, Bacchus and Ariadne, in the National Gallery, London.
- AUGUSTUS CAESAR.** Born 63 BC. Adopted son of Julius Caesar. With Mark Antony defeated Caesar's assassins at Philippi in 42 BC, then defeated Antony at Actium in 31 BC. Pretending to re-establish the old Roman Republic with himself as Princeps (First Citizen), he actually gave the Roman Empire a new form of autocratic government which lasted, through many vicissitudes, for several centuries. He lived simply and attempted to restore many of the lapsed republican virtues, including moral rectitude. One of his least successful measures was the *lex Julia de adulteriis*, which imposed harsh penalties for adulterers caught *in flagrante delictu*, including death and exile. His own daughter and grand-daughter were both exiled under this law. He died in AD 14.
- BRITISH MUSEUM.** A large building in London housing books, manuscripts, works of art and objects of historical, anthropological and ethnographical significance – the choice and curious bric-a-brac left behind by lost tribes and buried civilisations.
- CHIANG KAI-SHEK.** Born 1887. After a coup in 1926, became leader of the Kuomintang and the most powerful man in China. Led resistance to Japan in the war of 1937-45, but was then defeated by the Communists in the civil war of 1946-9 and retired to the island of Taiwan (sometimes called Formosa), whence he still claimed to be the ruler of China. He was still alive when this play was first performed. He died in 1975.
- CORINNA.** The supposed subject of Ovid's love-poems. Almost certainly a figment of his imagination.
- CULTURAL REVOLUTION.** Attempt, inaugurated in 1966 by Mao Tse-tung's celebrated swim in the Yangtse River, to re-activate the Chinese Revolution from within and below. Students and Red Guards set upon and harassed their superiors in the hierarchy (teachers, bureaucrats, etc.) so as to destroy for ever the last vestiges of authority possessed by the old and established (parents, ancestors, the Civil Service) and underpinned by the teachings of Confucius. The Cultural Revolution degenerated into vicious and unproductive anarchism and was called off when it began to arouse the determined opposition of the army.
- DANANSKY ISLAND.** A small unoccupied island in the middle of the Ussuri River, which marks the boundary between part of northern China and the then USSR. In 1969 there was fighting here between Russian and Chinese border guards, which led to some loss of life and considerable coldness between the two major Communist powers.

- ELBA. A small island off the north-west coast of Italy where Ovid was staying when news reached him of Augustus' anger.
- KUOMINTANG. Chinese Nationalist and anti-imperial party whose leader was Sun Yat-sen. After his death in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek became its leader.
- LONG MARCH. The 6000 mile trek from Southern Kiangsi to Yen-an, 1934-6, which paved the way for the eventual victory of the Chinese Communists over the Kuomintang.
- LOVES. Amores. Ovid's first book of poems.
- MAO TSE-TUNG. Born 1893. One of the thirteen delegates at the First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. Enthusiastic supporter of co-operation between Communists and Kuomintang 1922-7, then broke with Kuomintang after Chiang Kai-shek's massacre of Shanghai workers in 1927. Established Communist military base in Southern Kiangsi which withstood Kuomintang attacks until 1934. Led Long March to Yen-an. 1935 Tsunyi Conference put him in control of Chinese Communist Party. Collaborated uneasily with Chiang to resist Japanese 1940-45, then, after civil war with Chiang, founded People's Republic of China in 1949. He was still alive and ruling China when this play was first performed, but died in 1976.
- MARS AND VENUS. Story told by Ovid in The Metamorphoses. The god of war and the goddess of love deceive her husband Vulcan, the god of craftsmen. Vulcan takes his revenge, but only at the expense of publishing his own shame to the other gods.
- METAMORPHOSES. Ovid's masterpiece in fifteen books, beginning with the Creation and ending with the apotheosis of Julius Caesar. A continuous narrative weaving some 250 stories, mostly drawn from mythology, around the theme of transformation.
- OVID (PUBLIUS OVIDIUS NASO). Born 43 BC in Sulmo. His father belonged to the local gentry and Ovid was intended for public office. His books of verse include The Loves, The Art of Love, The Fasti, The Heroides, The Metamorphoses and The Tristia. In AD 8 Augustus banished him to Tomis for his connection with the scandal involving Augustus' grand-daughter Julia. The exact nature of his crime is unknown. He died in exile in AD 18. He was one of the greatest and most popular poets of his day and has exercised an enormous influence ever since, on painting and sculpture as much as on literature. His most ardent disciples among writers include Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Tasso, Ronsard, Cervantes, Calderon, Lope de Vega, Montaigne, Spenser, Marlowe, Jonson, Milton, Moliere, Dryden, Congreve and Goethe. Shakespeare was steeped in him, scarcely one of his plays fails to show Ovid's influence. Racine planned to write a play about Ovid.
- PHILEMON AND BAUCIS. One of the rare stories in The Metamorphoses which demonstrates the reward of piety to the gods. Most of the stories demonstrate the penalties of offending them, as of course this one does too. Philemon and Baucis appear in the vision of life at the end of Goethe's Faust.

QUETZALCOATL. Aztec god of the wind, also the morning star, he taught a philosophy of gentleness and asceticism, encouraged agriculture and the arts. After falling to the temptations of Xochiquetzal, he left Mexico, but was expected to return sometime in the future. When Cortes entered Mexico at the head of his Spanish troops, the Aztecs took him for the returning Quetzalcoatl and for that reason failed to resist him until it was too late.

SULMO. A town some one hundred miles east of Rome, set in a small fertile plain enclosed by the Apennines. Ovid's birthplace. Now Sulmona, with a statue of Ovid.

TEOTIHUACAN. The place where the Aztec gods held a sacrifice to make a new sun at the beginning of the present creation. The new sun required human hearts to appease his thirst, otherwise he would stop moving across the sky and burn the earth to ashes.

TEZCATLIPOCA. He and Quetzalcoatl were the Aztec creator gods, to whom the supreme being had entrusted the creation of the lesser gods and men. The god of government, power, war, "the enemy on both sides". One of his attributes was the obsidian mirror in which he could see all things "like the darkness, like the mind".

TOMIS. A town on the Black Sea coast, near the mouth of the Danube, in what was, in Ovid's time, the land of the Getai or Goths. The Danube marked part of the north-east boundary of the Roman Empire. Ovid spent the last ten years of his life exiled in Tomis. Now Constanta, in Romania, with a statue of Ovid.

XOCHIQUETZAL. The Aztec goddess of sensual delight, temptress of Quetzalcoatl.